



POPRTNIK

*Baking Christmas Bread:
A Handbook*



POPRTNIK *Baking Christmas Bread: A Handbook*

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Introduction

Poprtnik as a ritual Christmas bread used to be a sign of prosperity and a bountiful harvest. Even nowadays during Christmas, the enriched dough is kneaded and this festive bread decorated with various dough ornaments that represent people's longing for the reawakening of nature and its fertility, as well as the hope brought to Christians by the birth of the Saviour.

Poprtnik invites us to take the time out of our busy everyday schedule for festivities and to spend time with those close to us, those who need us, and will cherish these beautiful moments all their life. It teaches us to take the reins of our life and decide what really matters, as everything else can wait.

This handbook is the result of the years-long systematic monitoring of baking Christmas bread in Slovenia. Although our large heritage community is dominated by women, men and children also play an important role. Every year, these joint projects bring us closer together as we improve, cooperate, respect our differences, discuss and critique, solve challenges, and overcome obstacles. There are as many recipes, methods of

preparation, and stories to be told as there are people making Christmas bread. And for sure some are still missing, a fact that should serve as inspiration for new projects.

The Parnas Institute is a privately owned institute working in the public interest on culture and the protection of cultural heritage. Its mission is to guide the tradition bearers to find the most appropriate way to preserve intangible heritage in their local environments. The institute is bound to preserve the diversity of this tradition all around Slovenia, to systematically monitor and record the intangible heritage of poprtnik on films and videos, photos, in handbooks, and on websites, as well as on social media. It also promotes collaboration on projects, establishes links with experts and educational institutions, and ensures a broad understanding of the tradition of baking Christmas bread as a part of the fond of intangible heritage in Slovenia and Europe.

Each year, poprtnik is welcomed as a part of preparations for the Christmas celebrations by more and more schools, preschools, local communities, and the media. The tradition bearers are forming NGOs and the heritage community of Christmas bread baking has blossomed. Experts from the Slovene

Ethnographic Museum provide guidance and act as coordinators. For many years, the Ministry of Culture has been supporting our work by approving our intangible cultural heritage projects. The response and collaboration of all 15 tradition bearers in making this handbook as well as their engagement in the entire project is also a telling sign. However, I am especially grateful for the many volunteers who understand that the importance of preserving the heritage of poprtnik lies with each and every individual in their local community.

We Slovenians have a solid connection with our roots through this tradition of baking poprtnik, which is still very much alive. But we shouldn't be under the illusion that our intangible heritage of baking poprtnik is no longer endangered. The range of regional names given to Christmas bread, such as poprtnik, župnek or župn'k, demonstrates that this was a widespread tradition throughout the area of modern-day Slovenia (except in Prekmurje and Primorska); however, it has only been preserved in central Slovenia and in the regions of Dolenjska, Notranjska, and Posavje. Therefore, the Festival of Christmas Bread that takes place in December is especially important to bring together all tradition bearers and to display



*Metka Starič
(Photo by Iztok Ilich)*

their innovative ideas and this rich heritage altogether. Let this Christmas be the time when you too can affirmatively answer the question Who still bakes Christmas bread?

*Metka Starič
Project Manager at the Parnas Institute and
tradition bearer of baking poprtnik*



Dobrepolje. Predstruge



POPRTNIK FROM DOBREPOLJE

Dobrepolje is one of the rare areas in Slovenia where the local variety of Christmas bread as well as bread rolls in the shape of doves were already described and sketched in detail in the early 20th century. Poprtnik was described by Tone Ljubič, a teacher, ethnographer, poet, folklorist, puppeteer, illustrator, and publicist, who left a lasting mark in the Dobrepolje Valley. He collected this area's folk traditions from 1930 to 1942: "Artistically speaking, poprtnik is more picturesque than the dove. The loaf has a braid around it, and is decorated with dough petals and fruits. It is also decorated with small doves facing the centre of the loaf, where there

is a bigger dove and the year is written in dough. Don't be fooled into thinking that all these elements have a merely decorative function – the birds, fruits and flowers represent the living world and bring magical intentions from the old world of the fertility of spring. Some ethnographers believe they may be an allegory of the ancestors' souls that visit their former homes on sacred evenings."

In the ethnological collection at Jakličev Dom in Videm, curated by the ethnographer Anka Novak, poprtnik has had its own display case for many years. It was baked by Nada Lunder using the template described by Ljubič.

POPRTNIK FROM DOBREPOLJE

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Nada Lunder):

- 1 kg flour
- 100 ml oil
- 1 egg and 2 egg yolks
- 500–600 ml milk
- 80 g sugar
- 1 cube of fresh yeast (42 g)
- Heaped teaspoon of salt
- Egg for egg wash



Method:

Put all the ingredients into a stand mixer bowl and make a smooth dough. Leave to rest for at least 30 minutes. Use 2/3 of the dough and shape it into a round loaf, push it down a bit, and leave to prove on a baking tray. Use the rest of the dough to make ornaments. First brush the loaf with water and decorate it with ornaments, then brush the decorated bread with egg wash. Bake for 50 minutes at 180 °C.



Nada Lunder began baking poprtnik when she got married and moved to Dobrepolje, where the ladies of the rural women's club taught her how to make it. Her poprtnik is decorated with small floral and animal motifs. She enjoys sharing her knowledge at various workshops and exhibitions.

BRAID



1. Roll the dough out very thin. Use the wheel cutter to cut three strips and briefly roll them to make three strands.



2. Pinch the ends together on top and start braiding.

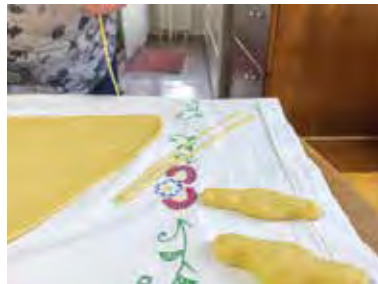


3. Take the outer strand and cross it over the middle one, alternate crossing the left strand over the middle and the right strand over the middle.

SMALL DOVES



1. Roll the dough approx. one centimetre thick. Shape it into an oval and press on both ends to make a dove-like shape.



2. Make a very thin three-stranded braid.



3. Cut the braid into smaller pieces and attach a piece of the braid onto the small dove with water.

BIG DOVE



1. Shape the dough into a long strand with your hands.



2. Tie the strand into a knot and shape the smaller end into a bird's head with a beak.



3. Flatten the tail part with your fingers and evenly cut it with scissors to shape the tail.

PINE



1. Take some dough and make a strand. Fringe it at an angle evenly on both sides.



2. Shape the dough in minuscule balls with your fingers. Add some water and attach them to the pine-shaped ornament.



3. Alternatively, you can roll out the dough, cut it into a triangle, and then make slits on both longer edges of the triangle to make a pine.

FLOWERS



1. Stamp circles into a well-rolled out dough using any kind tool, a bottle cap will do nicely.



2. Cut along the circumference to shape petals and place a small dough ball in the middle.



3. You can make a different kind of flower by pinching together each cut out petal.



4. According to Ljubič's drawing, some flowers are just circles with small balls on them (use water as glue).



5. You can also make flowers with leaves using scissors.



6. Thinly-rolled out dough can easily be transformed into ornaments with scissors – use your own inspiration.

SUN



1. To make the sun, cut out a circle using a round cutter (or a similar tool). Hollow it out and fringe it around the circumference with a knife or scissors.



2. Alternatively, cut out a dough strip and fringe it on one side.



3. Roll the cut strip into a circle and brush both ends with water, so they stick together.

HOLY FAMILY



1. Shape the figurines by cutting the dough into tall triangles.



2. Cut along the longer side to create an arm and bend it over the body. Make a dough ball for the head.



3. You can add a stick to Joseph, some cuts to shape Mary's skirt, and for baby Jesus make a cut along the middle. Additionally, make thin strands to shape the stable.

The Nativity scene on poprtnik

*Mateja Lunder starts making her dough Nativity scene for her poprtnik well ahead of Christmas. This takes a long time to make, as individual pieces have to be dried before adding more parts. And also ensures that the created ornaments, which are always a true work of art, are stable and durable. She puts the well-dried out Nativity scene onto the baked poprtnik, which is decorated with a braid. The process she uses is described in the book *Božičnik: Testene Jaslice* by Marija Korošec, published by Mohorjeva Družba Celje in 1994.*



CHICKEN AS THEY USED TO MAKE IT



1. Chickens are made of thick dough strands. Flatten the strand on one side and shape a tail with a few cuts.



2. On the other side, shape the chicken's head with a beak.



3. To decorate the bread with the chickens, brush them with some water or egg white.



Poprtnik se peče pred praznikom svetih
treh kraljev. V mraku, ko začne kooriti, gremo
okoli poslopja pokropiti. Naradnje pokropim o-
se poprtnik, ki je na miri lepo nad petom pripre-
vjen. Kraven so se golobičke ka darila otrokom
damašim. Poprtnik se vedno okraši. Na sredino
se najprej naredijo letnica, tistega leta in
se okoli okraši z venčkom. Nato se pa
naredi piščančke ali ptičke lahko tudi maj-
hne golobičke. Pri najni hiši se krasi iz iste-
ga testa. Na spodnji strani se naredi križ in
ga vedno razreže gospodinja na praznik lahko
tudi ob žaju. Pri najnik hišah gre vedno iz
rada v rod. Pri nas smo ga zmeraj imenovali
poprtnik in nikoli drugače. Dali smo ga
pa vedno goveji hivali in nobeni drugi

sta pripovedovali; Milka Padar
in Fani Limerman

Klara Debeljak and Beti Lunder also used a guided written interview as a research technique. The pictured text on baking poprtnik was written by Milka Padar, and is still keenly kept as part of her legacy by her daughter-in-law Tončka Padar from Mala Vas in Dobropolje. As it displays Milka's neat and legible handwriting the text is published in its original form.



The photos of poprtnik breads made by women from Dobrepolje for early national exhibitions in Dobrepolje. Lojzka Jamnik, Marta Dešman, Marija Rotar and Beti Lunder baked and brought their breads for the evaluation.





These Christmas breads were also made by women from Dobropolje for various occasions: Tanja Tekavčič, Štefka Tekavčič, Marija Žnidaršič from Zagorica, and Olga Novak from Kompolje.





Velike Lašče. Rob

POPRTNIK WITH THREE WISE MEN

Beginning.

Star.

*A modest inspiration,
and the joy of cutting
the first poprtnik made together
with Metka at Parnas.*

*Like the trails of the Star of Bethlehem,
new groups emerged.*

*Poprtnik was baked in more
and more homes.*

*When you embrace the essence
of this tradition, you become the star
that shines and leads the way.*

*Majda Tekavec, representing the tradition bearers
from the area around Velike Lašče and Dobrepolje*

Majda Tekavec from Rob decorates her poprtnik with a crown made of three different-length rails – strips that are toothed on one side. There are the three wise men in the centre of the loaf. In between there are dough birds, as many as there are children in the family, the coming year to forecast a good harvest, and sometimes also the Star of Bethlehem that led the three wise men. She learned the art of baking poprtnik from her mother Marija Sterle from Rob (born in 1937) by watching her and only started baking poprtnik herself after her mother's premature passing. What's the secret to her two-coloured bread? The way it is baked. First, the bread is baked without ornaments. When almost fully done, she decorates it and then finishes the baking.



POPRTNIK WITH THREE WISE MEN

Ingredients

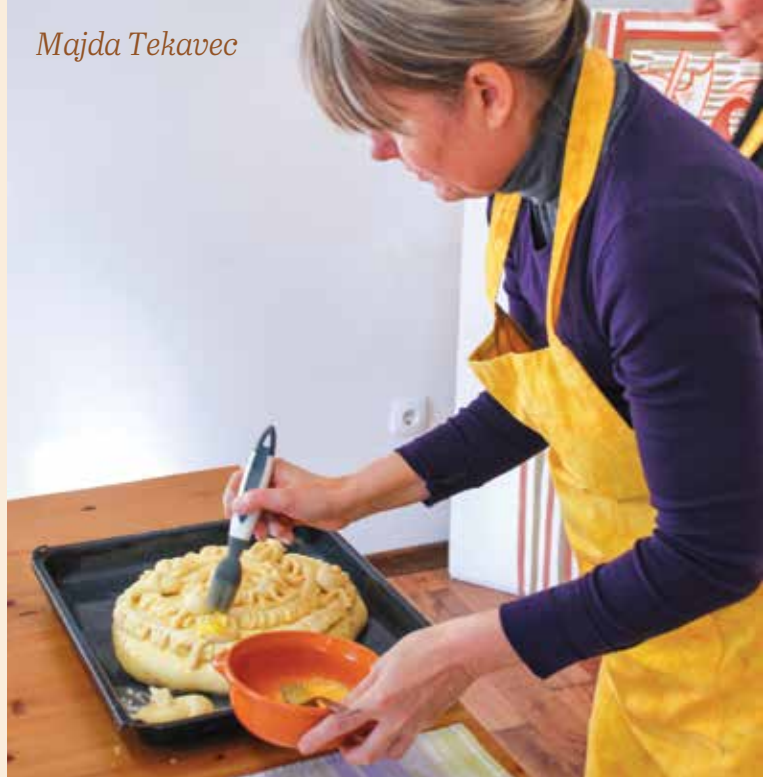
(according to the recipe
by Majda Tekavec):

- 1 kg flour (half can be strong flour)
- 20 g yeast
- 2 tbs sugar
- 1 tbs salt
- 1 egg and 2 egg yolks
- 100 g butter
- 300–500 ml milk
- Egg for egg wash



Method:

Knead a smooth dough, it should be slightly firmer than *potica* dough. Cover and leave to rest in a warm place. Knead it a few times, so it becomes more elastic. Use 1/3 of the dough for the ornaments and shape the rest into a round loaf.



The secret of lightly baked ornaments

This method requires a little more skill. Place the loaf on a baking tray and make a few holes with a wooden skewer, then brush it with egg wash. Bake at 200 °C for around 10 minutes, then lower the temperature to 180 °C. While the bread is baking, make the ornaments. After around 35 to 40 minutes, remove the loaf from the oven, brush it with water, and arrange your decorations on top. Brush the ornaments with egg wash and bake for another 15 minutes.

THREE RAILS AND THE THREE WISE MEN



1. For the rails, hand roll the dough into a long, inch-thick strand.



2. Evenly fringe one side of the strand using a plastic dough scraper or knife.



3. Cut three even pieces of dough from the strand to make the three wise men.



4. Shape a crown from three rails of different lengths, and check whether it fits on your Christmas bread.



5. Lift the dough on all sides and form a small ball, then shape the bottom part into a base.



6. You can cut the balls to resemble a crown and add a small round or fringed ring around its base.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM AND THE BIRDIES



1. Hand roll the dough into a long, pencil-thick strand. Evenly cut a few pieces of the strand to make the star. Cross the first two pieces using water to stick them together.



2. Add two more pieces to shape a star.



3. Cut the rest of the strand into four pieces and pinch them together on one end to create a comet tail.



4. The star should be placed on the bread last on top of other ornaments.



5. To shape a bird, tie a knot at the end of the strand to avoid having any leftover dough. Leave a bit of the strand for the tail and then cut it. Make additional cuts for the tail.



6. Arrange your ornaments on the table in the same way you are later going to place them on the bread to make sure they are the right size.

NUMBERS FOR THE YEAR ON *POPRTNIK*



1. Hand roll the dough into a thin strand. If there are any cracks in it, brush with water and roll again.



2. Shape each number from one piece of dough so it doesn't crack during baking. The year is put on the bread to forecast a fruitful year.



3. Ornaments can be placed on the loaf before or during baking. Use water to attach the ornaments to the loaf.

BIRDS AS A TYPE OF BREAD ROLL



1. Use the rest of the dough to shape bread rolls like birds. Use scissors to cut out a beak.



2. Cut a crown on the bird's head and add juniper berries or peppercorns for the eyes.



3. On the left is a bird-like bread roll and on the right a bird ornament for your *poprtnik*.



Velike Lašče. Dolščaki

ŽUPNEK WITH BIRDS AND BABY JESUS

Magdalena Peterlin from the village of Dolščaki near Rob uses her knowledge and skills from her youth to decorate her poprtnik. She has a large family, so her bread is always tall and baked in a large cake tin. She places a three-stranded braid around its edge and, in the middle, there is baby Jesus, which she shapes as a baby in a cot. She also places some birds around – one for each child in the family. When Magdalena got married and moved to Dolščaki, her mother-in-law didn't decorate the poprtnik at all; she called it "the good" bread and simply scored it with a cross. But Magdalena feels župnek should be as tasty as it is good-looking, so she bakes it the way her mother, Marija Tanko from Nemška Vas near Ribnica (born in 1926), did. Both her parents were into design

and made their own clay moulds for baking. Since she was 5 years old, Magdalena helped her mother in making župnek. She clearly remembers wearing a headscarf and an apron, and always having to wash her hands first. Her mother Marija didn't place baby Jesus in the middle, but simply two bigger birds and some smaller ones – one for each child – around. She would bake župnek at Christmas and cut it under the braid. The lower part was eaten, while the upper part was placed near the Nativity scene and kept there up until Epiphany, when all the members of the family and the cattle got a piece. As she put the bread into the oven, she would say, "Holy Cross of God, let it bake well," and "Eat it with happiness" when she shared it.

BIRDS – ANOTHER VARIETY



1. Prepare a flat dough square and turn it so a corner is pointing upwards. Cut a slit at an angle from the edge on both sides towards the middle.



2. Slightly cut the bottom tail-part on both sides to resemble a triangle.



3. Using a knife, make 3 or 4 cuts into the tail.



4. Lift the upper part to shape the head.



5. Pinch together on both sides of the bird's neck.



6. Smooth the neck part, shape a beak, and draw eyes using a toothpick.



7. You can bring the bird's wings slightly upwards, if placing many birds on your bread.



8. You can even join the wings together as if the bird were praying.



9. However, the wings can stay fully open. If necessary, tweak the beak a little.

BABY JESUS WITH CROSSED LEGS



1. Roll out a dough oval and fringe it around the edges to make a cot. Make a thick strand for the Jesus, and a dough ball for the diaper.



2. Using a knife, shape the neck and head, and slightly flatten the rest of the dough.



3. Cut a slit on both sides for arms and at the bottom for legs.



4. Cross one leg over the other.



5. Shape the remaining dough into a long rectangle and place it on the figurine as a diaper.



6. Using a toothpick and some water, add flaxseeds for the eyes and mouth.



7. Join baby Jesus's hands together.



8. Brush the oval cot with water and attach the figurine onto it.



9. Make a three-stranded braid, which represents familial ties, and put it around the edge of your *župnek*.



*These poprtnik breads
were baked by Ana
Andolšek from Gradež,
Ciril Žužek from Dvorska
Vas, and Polona Tomažin
from the restaurant
Gostilna pri Kuklju.
A photo of Magdalena
Peterlin (down right).*



Velike Lašče. Dednik

ŽUPNEK, TOVARŠ, AND CHRISTMAS BREAD ROLLS

During Christmas in the villages around Rute, mothers would bake for their children two-headed bread rolls decorated with a birdie or braid. Godparents would also gift their godchildren a bread roll for Christmas and cakes for Easter. In other villages around Velike Lašče and Dobropolje, birdies or doves would be baked for this occasion. Zofi Grčar still bakes Christmas bread rolls and poprtnik according to the tradition of her mother Marija Mestek, born in 1914 in Mohorje near Rute. She never had the chance to observe her mother baking, as poprtnik and the rolls were always already baked when the children got up. Her mother started kneading in a traditional bread trough at 4 o'clock in the morning, then baked the rolls and poprtnik in the wood-fired oven. The Christmas rolls were relatively big, as the

children always eagerly looked forward to eating white bread, which was hard to find in those days.

In Rute, birdies and a braid or rail were also typical poprtnik ornaments. Sometimes they would also use little balls and knots to decorate the bread, but the meaning of these ornaments has been lost. In Rute, they would bake two decorated Christmas breads, a large one – poprtnik, and a smaller one called tovarš. According to Rute's tradition, young singles had to eat 9 Christmas breads if they wanted to get married in the coming year. For poprtnik, they had a special clay cake pan, which could be ribbed, and used it for baking through the year, for example to bake sweet breads for new mothers.



CHRISTMAS BREAD ROLLS

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Zofi Grčar):

- 1 kg white flour
- 42 g yeast
- 500 ml milk
- 100 g butter
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 large tbs sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- Egg for egg wash

Method:

Knead an enriched bread dough with milk and butter. Use only egg yolks to make a lighter dough. Leave to rise well. After you shape the rolls, put them onto a baking tray and leave them to prove. Brush the rolls with egg wash and bake at 180 °C for a good 30 minutes. To avoid overbaking the crust, cover the rolls with parchment paper during baking. When you put them in the oven, leave the oven door ajar for a couple of minutes so the dough doesn't crack if it is still proving. Optionally, make smaller rolls.



Zofi Grčar holding a Christmas bread roll.





1. Divide the risen dough into four parts – three for the bread rolls and one for the ornaments.



2. Mark the dough on both ends for two heads of approximately the same size.



3. Press the dough on marked lines all the way to the surface.



4. Make two strands and pinch their ends together to make a twisted strand.



5. Brush the twisted strand with water and place it on top of the bread roll.



6. Decorate the other bread roll with a bird – make a strand and tie it into a knot.



7. Cut the bird's tail in half and spread the two pieces.



8. Leave the rolls to prove and brush them with egg wash just before baking.



9. The secret to keeping their shape during baking is to leave the bread rolls to prove well.

TWO-HEADED BIRDS OF RUTE



1. Prepare a long strand of dough and roll it out an inch-thick.



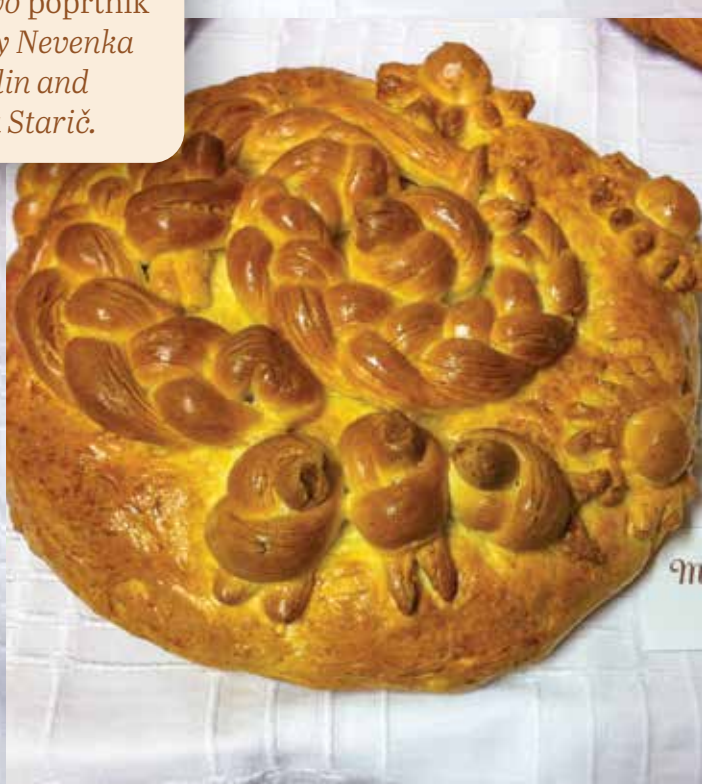
2. To make the birds, tie two knots – one at each end of the strand.



3. Be gentle when shaping the birds, and then join them tightly together. You can also add eyes.



*Poprtnik and tovarš
by Zofi Grčar, župnek
by Zdenka Škrabec,
and the two poprtnik
breads by Nevenka
Peterlin and
Metka Starič.*



*Milka Debeljak's župnek from
the exhibition in Rob (2011)*



Velike Lašče. Gornje Retje

TEPEŽNICE, BIRDIES, AND ŽUPNEK

Milka Debeljak remembers children in the village of Retje near Velike Lašče would be gifted braided rolls called tepežnice on 28 December for the feast of the Holy Innocents. She makes two varieties of tepežnice, namely as three- or four-stranded rolls.

For Christmas, children would be given baked bread birdies, and for Easter sweet bread rolls, while župnek would be baked for Epiphany. The custom of measuring children with poprtnik is still alive in the village of Gornje Retje. Children stand against the doorjamb and the piece of the poprtnik that they will eat is held above their head. The mark drawn on the jamb predicts how much a child will grow in the coming year.

The secret to Milka's baking is folding the dough rather than kneading it. She also makes ornaments gradually, so they rest a bit before baking, and makes sure she covers her dough so it doesn't dry out. Before baking, she brushes the bread and ornaments with a beaten egg and some sour or sweet cream, making the egg wash slightly thicker. If the poprtnik starts cracking, she brushes it again while it is baking. Milka is always happy to share her knowledge – to school children and tourists at the Christmas Bread Festival in Velike Lašče, to future bakers at the Biotechnical Educational Centre Ljubljana, and to students of hospitality and tourism at Grm Novo Mesto. She is also a member of various panels that judge breads and other baked goods around Slovenia.

TEPEŽNEK, BIRDIES, AND ŽUPNEK

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by
Milka Debeljak):

- 1 kg flour
- 1 cube of yeast (42 g)
- 1 large tbs sugar
- 50 g butter
- 2 tbs oil
- 20 g salt
- 3 egg yolks
- 500 ml milk
- Rum (optional)
- 1 egg yolk and some cream
for egg wash

Method:

First prepare the yeast starter – mix yeast, 100 ml of warm milk, and a teaspoon of sugar, then leave to rise. Sift the flour, and then add the yeast starter and all other ingredients. Knead into a smooth dough, which shouldn't be too soft or too hard. Cover with cling film and a tea towel to prove in a warm place. Before baking your *župnek*, brush it with egg wash with added cream or milk. Bake at 170 °C for around one hour. The birdies and rolls are done in a good half an hour.



Milka Debeljak making a tepežnica.

TEPEŽNICA – A FOUR-STRANDED BRAID



1. Roll out four strands and pinch them together at one end.



2. Start from the left-hand side: lift the second strand from the left and cross it over to the right side. Place it angled to the right.



3. Lift the first strand from the left and lay it in the middle between the two strands you haven't used for braiding yet.



4. Now go from the right-hand side: lift the second strand from the right and cross it over to the left side. Place it angled to the left.



5. Lift the first strand from the right and lay it in the middle between the other two strands.



6. Now continue with the second left strand and repeat steps 2–5 until you have used up all the dough. Finish the braid by tucking its ends underneath.

TEPEŽNICA – A THREE-STRANDED BRAID



1. Roll out three strands – thick in the middle and thin on both ends. Pinch them together at one end.



2. Braid the strands – the braid should be thicker in the middle than it is on the ends.



3. Cut the ends if necessary, and then tuck them underneath. Brush with egg yolk, and bake.



TWO-HEADED BIRD



1. Make two strands and put one over the other as shown on the picture.



2. Put one end of the upper strand through the loop – under and over.



3. Now do the same with the other end – thread it under and over.



4. Shape both threaded strands into a bird's head with a beak.



5. On the other end, shape the two strands into bird's tails using a fork.



6. Add some peppercorns or apple seeds for the eyes, brush with egg wash, and bake.

Cerknica



ŽUPNEK AND A FLOWER

In the area around Cerknica, župnek should be tall, so it is usually baked in a tall pot or cake pan. The taller it gets, the better the harvest in the coming year. It is decorated with birds and sometimes with a braid. It is important to prove it well.

Lili Mahne is an ambassador of baking poprtnik in Slovenia and Europe, actively collaborating with the Parnas Institute in building the poprtnik heritage community, as well as other project activities.

She learned how to make poprtnik and the birdies from women at different workshops. The secret of her recipe that makes her bread fluffier is using 10 per cent less fat for the dough including oil, butter, sour and sweet cream.

She innovatively incorporates poprtnik ornaments and bread rolls into catering along with other local products. Creating heritage products is a great form of meditation and therapy according to Lili.



"The members of the heritage community are very proactive tradition bearers who keenly promote the importance and value of this culinary heritage within their local environment in our modern world. And at the same time, they foster great awareness that their active involvement in education, culture, tourism, rural development, and intergenerational collaboration is an important part of preserving national consciousness and identity. Thus, the ritual Christmas bread has become an integral part of our modern community."

Lili Mahne, representing the tradition bearers from Cerknica

POPRTNIK IN A CLAY CAKE PAN



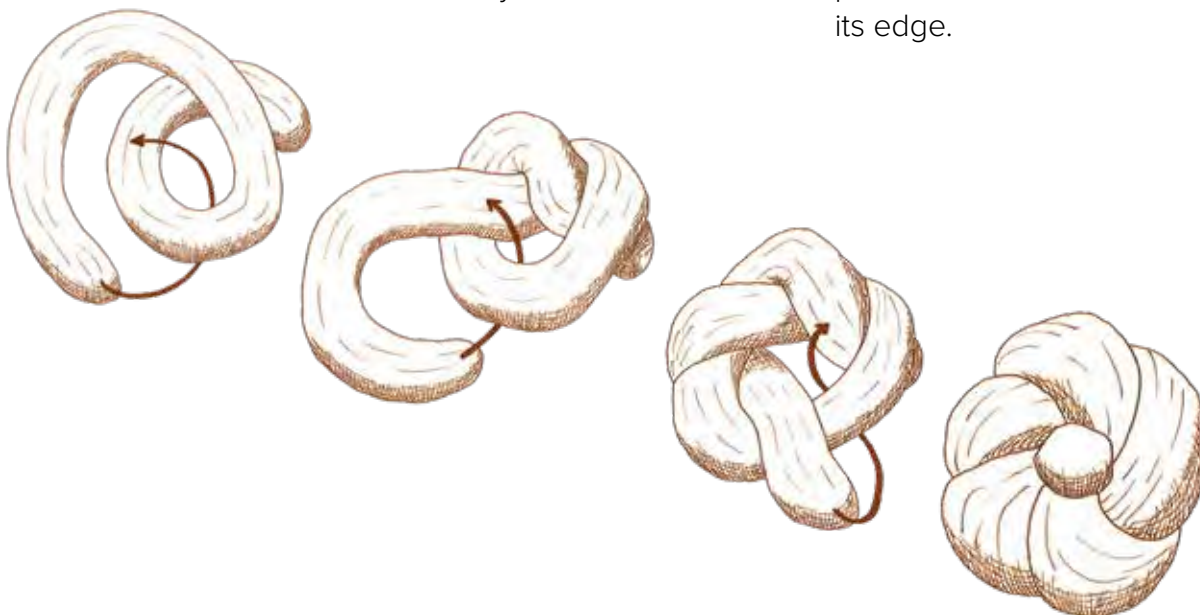
1. Butter a suitable clay cake pan or dish well.



2. Put half of the dough into the cake pan and punch it down a bit. Let it prove while you make ornaments.



3. Make a three-stranded braid. Brush the proven dough with egg wash and place the braid around its edge.



FLOWER



1. Prepare a long dough strand and tie it into a knot around your two fingers.



2. Put the loop around your middle finger and push the strand into it from underneath.



3. Make another loop and push the strand through it.



4. Finally, push the end of the strand through the middle to shape a flower.



5. Make birdies from knots and cut the end of the strand to make tails. If the dough is too sticky, use some flour.



6. Place the flower in the middle of your Christmas bread, and the three birdies on the braid, which should be brushed with egg wash. Make sure the bread is well proved.



Župnek breads made by women from Cerknica and Rakek. Lili Mahne holding a poprtnik decorated with a flower (bottom right).





Women from the areas of the Loška Dolina and Loški Potok who married and moved across the border to Prezid, Croatia, also spread this tradition in their new homeland. The Slovenian community in Prezid has kept alive the tradition of baking poprtnik (poprtnik breads at an exhibition in Prezid).



Žužemberk. Visejec

CIVKA ROLLS FROM SUHA KRAJINA

On Christmas Eve, each child in the Suha Krajina region was gifted a civka – a type of braided bread roll. The bigger the child, the bigger the civka, which they couldn't eat right away, but had to wait until it chirruped. So, the children would go to bed, and on Christmas morning the mothers would tell them how the rolls chirruped:

*Chirp, chirp,
at Christmas,
at holy braidness**

Peter Škufca is a baker. He enjoys making braided hearts and sharing his knowledge with his co-workers and the future bakers serving their apprenticeships at the bakery. At home, he bakes after his mother's (Pavla Škufca, born in 1943) and his grandmother's

(Pavlina Blatnik, born in 1920 from Visejec) tradition – civka rolls for Christmas and poprtnik, called "the good bread", for Epiphany. People in Visejec usually used white flour for baking, but mixed it with corn or buckwheat flour if they didn't have enough white flour. At Christmas, there were 6 to 7 loaves of bread in the wood-fired oven. After the bread was baked, they would place it on cabbage leaves. According to another tradition, a pinch of flour was always thrown into the oven to make sure it was not too hot. At Epiphany, they would additionally bake "the good bread", which was a round loaf decorated with a braid that they placed on top of the loaf as a cross to divide the bread into four parts. Three quarters were additionally decorated with birds, while the fourth one only had a cross scored into the dough.



CIVKA ROLLS FROM SUHA KRAJINA

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by
Peter Škufca):

- 700 g all-purpose white flour
- 42 g yeast
- 4 eggs
- 125 g butter
- 1 tsp salt
- Lemon zest
- 3 tbs sugar
- 250 ml warm milk

Method:

Mix all the ingredients to make 3 to 4 *civka* rolls or alternatively more smaller ones.

"As a child, I would watch my grandma making all sorts of delicious baked goods, so my interest kind of grew in this direction. I have been researching the traditions on my own, but have also been actively involved in preserving heritage. In all these years, bakeries have shown an interest in baking bread, pastry, and other festive goods to preserve the traditions of rural Slovenia. I think it is important that the traditions stay connected with the farmers and millers, and to have everything produced in Slovenia, and I really enjoy being a part of this."

Peter Škufca, representing the tradition bearers from Žužemberk

*Rolls in the shape of birdies
that were given to children
and poprtnik all at once.
Marija Pograjc from
Poljane 2*

*Photo by Marija Jagodic, Poljane near
Žužemberk, 1957 (documentation of SEM).*



1. Shape the dough into a long, flat bread roll. Take a small piece of dough and put it aside.



2. Lift a bit of the dough on one end to shape the head.



3. Make an angled slit on both sides to shape wings.



4. Roll the small piece of dough into a long strand using your hands.



5. Place the bread bird so that its head is facing away from you, and then put the rolled out strand around the head as a scarf.



6. Twist the strands into a braid, then spread the ends and tuck them underneath.



7. Roll the wings.



8. Lift them over the twisted braid, and pinch them together well.



9. Shape a beak and make a few cuts to shape a tail.



10. *Civka* resembles a bird lying on its belly facing forward. No two *civka* rolls are the same.

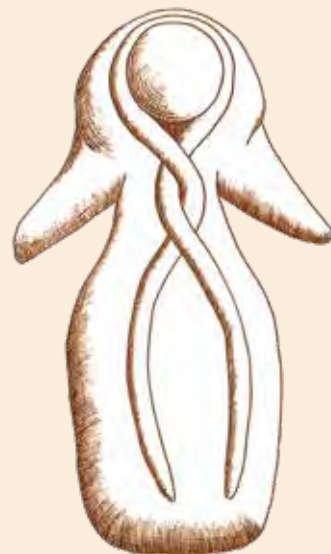
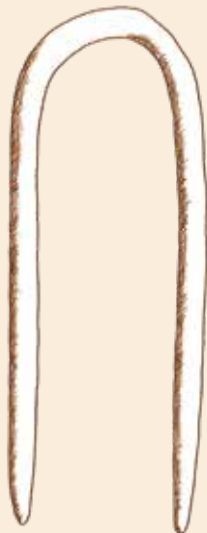


11. Add some juniper berries for the eyes. Optionally, you can make additional cuts on the sides.



12. After proving, brush with egg wash and bake at 160–170 °C for 30 to 35 minutes.

(Photo by Peter Škufca)



Loška dolina

ŽUPNEK FROM LOŠKA DOLINA

In Loška Dolina, poprtnik is a ritual bread that has to stay on the festive table from Christmas to Epiphany. It is called župn'k, and decorated with a braid on its edge and three doves with open beaks in the middle, as it is believed that the doves sang at midnight, and announced the birth of Jesus Christ on Epiphany. The baked bread is placed on the table and covered with an embroidered tablecloth. Blessed on all three holy evenings, the poprtnik is sliced on Epiphany and

shared with all family members. According to tradition, there should be as many doves on the bread as there are children in the family, and the children will grow taller depending on the thickness of their slice of župn'k.

Eva Sterle bakes her Christmas bread according to the recipe by Ana Zakrajšek from the book Okusi Loške Doline and the traditions of her husband's family from Vrhnika in Loška Dolina.

"I think it is important to hand down the heritage of poprtnik to younger generations, as, with modern consumerism, the holidays have lost their true meaning over the years. It has become all about shopping and presents, while the joy and expectation of Christmas, New Year's Eve, and the Epiphany has become lost. By baking poprtnik and the bread doves, we can bring the joy of Christmas to children and demonstrate how the holy eves used to be celebrated."

Eva Sterle, representing the tradition bearers from Loška Dolina and Babno Polje



ŽUPNEK FROM LOŠKA DOLINA

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by
Ana Zakrajšek and Eva Sterle):

- 1 kg flour
- 40 g yeast
- Salt
- 1 egg
- 4 egg yolks
- 500 ml milk
- 80 g butter
- 80 g sugar
- 1 egg yolk and tepid water for egg wash



Method:

In a bowl, mix yeast, a teaspoon of sugar, and 100 ml of warm milk, and leave to rise. Sift the flour in a bigger bowl and make a well in the middle. Add salt around the edges. Separately beat egg yolks, an egg, and sugar, then pour warm milk into this egg mixture. Pour the mixture into the well, then add the yeast starter and melted butter. Knead to make a smooth dough. Cover and leave to rise.

The recipe makes a good amount of dough for *župn'k* and some bread doves. Remove around 100 g of dough for a two-stranded braid, and another 40 g for three doves. Place the dough for the bread into a well-greased cast-iron pot (26 cm in diameter) and decorate it. Bake at 180 °C for 55 minutes. The bread doves are baked in around 35 minutes.



1. Turn the risen dough out onto a floured surface.



2. Put some dough aside for the ornaments and place the rest into a greased pot, then punch it down. Brush the edges with beaten egg and some water.



3. Roll out two strands and twist them into a long braid.



4. Place the braid around the edges of your bread, but not right against the edge of the pot.



5. Cut away any leftover braid and make sure to bring the two ends together as neatly as possible.



6. Roll the dough into strands to make little dove ornaments – tie a knot, make cuts to shape the tail, and add some raisins or apple seeds for the eyes.



7. Before attaching the doves to the bread, brush it with egg wash.



8. While the župn'k is proving in a warm place, shape additional bread doves.



9. Eva prefers using raisins instead of apple seeds for the eyes.



10. Brush the doves with egg wash and make cuts for the beaks before putting them in the oven.



11. The doves are beautifully golden yellow when baked.



12. Well-proved župn'k fills the entire pot. Brush it with egg wash. Finish the doves by making cuts for the beaks.



13. After baking, leave the bread in the pot for a few minutes to allow the edges to pull away from the sides so it can be easily removed.

(Photo by Eva Sterle)



14. One of the women from Loška Dolina also uses a special tool to stamp the IHS emblem on her bread.



15. IHS is a contraction derived from the Greek word for Jesus – ΙΗΣΟΥΣ.



Svibno

POPRTNIK FROM SVIBNO

Irena Sotlar feels it is important to bake the Christmas bread with your heart to make it beautiful and delicious. She bakes poprtnik after her grandmother's tradition. Her grandmother Albina Medved, born in 1899 to a house in Pristave with the oeconym Pri Povšetovih, who had 10 children, was a good cook, and also baked pastries for weddings. She would always make her poprtnik as a decorated round loaf, put it on the turning peel, and bake it in the wood-fired oven together with other loaves.

Poprtnik began losing its meaning due to urbanization, but in rural areas some traditions are still preserved. Like the one that sees farmers share the blessed bread with their cattle, and that every crumb has to be used. Another tradition still alive in Svibno is the jumping to get poprtnik: a mother raises a slice of poprtnik above her head and the children jump to grab it. It is believed the children will grow taller if they jump high. It was also said that you

have to taste nine different poprtnik breads, and drink seven jugs of wine.

Poprtnik is a bread that is shared and exchanged. It has always carried a special message, including being baked to bring a good harvest. If it is baked for other occasions, it is not called poprtnik but simply pogača, another word for a sweet bread.

In Svibno, the tradition of baking poprtnik is passionately preserved and promoted by the Arnika Women's Rural Club with its 55 members. Each year on the Twelfth Night (5 January), a blessing of the poprtnik breads is held, where the tradition bearers showcase their Christmas breads and present this tradition. Then, the poprtnik breads are blessed by a priest. One of them is sliced for tasting, while others are taken back home. The club's driving force is Marjana Dolinšek, an excellent organiser and motivator.



POPRTNIK FROM SVIBNO

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Irena Sotlar):

- 800 g white flour
- 3 tbs sugar
- 42 g yeast
- 15 g salt
- 2 eggs and 2 egg yolks
- 50 g butter
- 50 g oil
- 400 ml milk
- Vanilla sugar
- Some rum
- Lemon zest

Method:

Knead the dough for so long that it starts separating from your wooden spoon and the bowl. Cover it while it rises. Use 3/4 of the risen dough for the bread and put it into a round pot for proving. Add some more flour to the 1/4 of the dough you set aside for shaping ornaments and knead it well. Bake the well-proved *poprtnik* at 180 °C for one hour. If you notice that the crust is getting too dark, cover the bread with foil and finish baking.



On the photo from the left Marjana Dolinšek, Irena Sotlar, and Nada Brvar.



1. Turn the dough for the bread onto a tray and punch it down.



2. Roll the dough into strands, but not all at once – first roll out a strand, leave it to rest, then start rolling a second one, and then finish rolling the first one, etc.



3. Use three long strands to make a braid.



4. Brush the bread with egg wash around the edges.



5. Brush the braid as well and place it around the loaf. Make sure it is long enough and the two ends are neatly brought together.



6. Split a strand with a plastic dough scraper to make a cross. The two ends should be pinched together on the top.



7. Roll out the two split strands to make them of even thickness.



8. Hold the pinched end with one hand and make a braid with the other. Make two twisted braids.



9. Before placing the twisted braids onto your loaf, cut a cross in the dough using scissors.



10. Generously brush the cuts with egg wash.



11. Brush the bottom of the braid with egg wash as well before placing it onto your loaf.



12. To make four birdies, prepare four inch-thick strands that are as long as two hands stretched out.



13. Tie each strand into a knot to make a bird, and then shape its beak.



14. Use scissors to shape a tail and add apple seeds for the eyes.



15. Place the birds that represent the four seasons where the cross and braid intersect. Brush the whole poprtnik with egg wash before baking.

"Years ago, we were asked about the tradition of baking poprtnik. In our village and the nearby area, poprtnik and its traditions have been preserved in every house, such as the tradition of children jumping to grab the piece of poprtnik that predicts how tall they will grow. For many years now, we also bring poprtnik breads to our parish church for blessing. However, we shouldn't forget its meaning as a ritual bread with intercession to God for good harvest and goods in the coming year. These customs were respected by our ancestors and haven't been forgotten, as it is proven that poprtnik has been baked in this region without interruption for at least 300 years. Our get-togethers throughout the years revealed that we have unknowingly preserved this rich cultural heritage and passed it on to our descendants. This inspires us to continue sharing our knowledge and heritage outside our region and abroad."

Marjana Dolinšek, representing the tradition bearers from Svibno and Radeče



Loški Potok. Retje

ŽUPNEK AND DOVES



In Loški Potok, župnek is usually baked in a pot and decorated with a braid around the edges, baby Jesus in the middle, and some balls or sometimes birdies around it. It is baked at Christmas, blessed on all three holy eves, and eaten at Epiphany. Every year, the heritage group holds a series of workshops and exhibitions for various age groups.

The župnek pictured was made by Anica Car from Retje in Loški Potok, who also

recorded the deep religious heritage of five generations of Danila Benčina's family. The story was also made into the documentary "Župnek from Loški Potok" (Zavod Parnas, 2021). The braid around the bread represents Jesus's crown of thorns. Baby Jesus in the middle has crossed ropes to represent that he was tied up, the three balls are for the nails used to crucify Jesus, and there are doves, because they were said to have created a light breeze around Jesus.

"Nowadays, schoolchildren, but also those preparing for confirmation who take part in our workshops know a lot about our heritage and truly cherish its importance, probably even more so than did the generations before Metka and the Parnas Institute started reviving it and forming groups of tradition bearers. I have also learnt a lot through the Life Creates Stories and I Enjoy Tradition projects. And to preserve our heritage, I feel it is important to talk about it, to host workshops, and hold exhibitions on a yearly basis."

Marija Turk, representing the tradition bearers from Loški Potok

ŽUPNEK AND DOVES

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Stanka Kordiš):

- 500 g flour
- 20 g yeast
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 50 ml oil
- 1 egg
- 300 ml warm milk
- 1 egg for egg wash
- Apple seeds or peppercorns for the eyes

Method:

Mix 100 ml of warm milk, sugar, and yeast to make the yeast starter. Add all ingredients to the flour and knead a smooth dough. Leave it to prove. Divide the dough into 12 equal pieces to make the dove-shaped bread rolls. Before baking, brush the doves with beaten egg. Bake on parchment paper at 180 °C until golden brown (around 20 minutes). The recipe makes a good amount of dough for 12 doves, which weigh around 80 g and are 15 cm long and 8 cm wide.



Stanka Kordiš making dove bread rolls.

BABY JESUS FOR THE ŽUPNEK



1. Roll out a piece of dough for a cot, cut it into a rectangle and fringe its edges.



2. Make another rectangular piece of dough for the figurine's body, and place it on the fringed rectangle using some water.



3. By tucking the dough, shape a little ball for the head.



4. Brush it with some water and attach it to the body.



5. Make two slits for the arms.



6. Join the hands together as if praying.

TIED-UP BABY JESUS



1. Roll out two small strands and cross them over baby Jesus's body.



2. Use scissors to make the eyeholes.



3. Add some seeds for the eyes.

BLANKET-COVERED BABY JESUS



1. To make a blanket, cut another rectangular piece of dough, and tuck one of its corners.



2. Add another mini strand for a cap to finish the figurine of the blanketed baby Jesus.



3. The sizes of dove-shaped bread rolls and *župnek* ornaments for comparison.

BANDAGED BABY JESUS



1. Roll out a dough oval and fringe its edges to make a cot.



2. Punch down a small strand to make baby Jesus. Make two angled cuts on both sides of the neck. Join the corners to shape praying hands.



3. Put three strands over the body to represent bandages and attach them with some water. Shape the nose and mouth, and add some peppercorns for the eyes.

"At our workshops, we knead the bread, so our participants first get to know the ingredients. Then we make ornaments, and the bread turns into a ritual bread, which is only baked at Christmas and is full of symbolic messages. There is a large variety of ornaments, but they all refer somehow to Christmastide and the Nativity. It is important that the children preserve their family heritage and decorating customs, as these vary from house to house. We even have various shapes of doves, but their meaning is always the same."

Anica Car, representing the tradition bearers from Loški Potok



SINGING DOVE



1. Punch down or roll out an oblong-shaped roll, then pinch it to shape a neck.



2. Make slits on both sides to shape wings.



3. Make a few cuts to the wings to indicate feathers.



4. Do the same (in straight lines) on the bird's body using scissors.



5. Make one cut on the head to shape a beak.



6. Add apple seeds or peppercorns for the eyes.

FEATHERED DOVE



1. Roll out a dough oval and make cuts on both sides to shape a neck. Shape the two corners into a beak.



2. Make fringes around the edges, spread the wings, then make cuts in straight lines to indicate the feathers on the dove's belly.



3. Optionally, you can make random cuts instead of straight lines.

SINGING OR PRAYING DOVE



1. Shape a bread roll and make an angled cut on each side to shape the head.



2. Join the two edges as two wings. If they open up during baking, the dove is singing, but if they stay pinched together, it is praying.



3. Make additional cuts to shape the tail. Brush the dove-shaped bread rolls with egg wash before baking.

HALF-BIRD AND HALF-DOLL



1. Make a bread roll, and pinch together to shape the head. Make an angled cut on each side to shape the arms.



2. Join both arms in front of the body as if praying.



3. Use scissors to make cuts around the figurine's body as for the singing dove.





4. Shape the bottom part to resemble a bird's tail or a girl's skirt. Using your fingers, pinch some dough to shape a beak.



5. Use carob seeds, peppercorns, or apple seeds for the eyes.



6. Instead of shaping a beak, you can simply make a dent for the nose.

BIRDIE



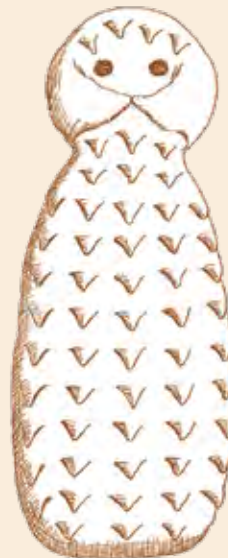
1. Using a knife, make small punctures into a rectangular piece of dough to shape a bird. Cut the shaped bird out with scissors.



2. From the side, make a cut in the dough to shape a wing.



3. Make some smaller cuts to indicate the feathers.



The photo was taken at the župnek breads exhibition in Loški Potok in 2015. Marija Turk, a representative of the tradition bearer group from Loški Potok, is second on the left. During the years of exhibitions, workshops, and exchange of knowledge, the aesthetics of Christmas breads have evolved. The dough has become richer, softer, tastier, and the ornaments more recognisable and skilfully crafted. It is important to preserve the traditional forms, local varieties, and customs, but also to cherish the inseparable part of the poprtnik, which are its messages and purpose. It is equally important to encourage the creativity of the bakers, and their initiatives in preserving the heritage and displaying it for everyone to admire. All this represents the immense variety of our precious intangible heritage.





Ribnica Valley. Kot pri Ribnici

SALT DOUGH *PICEK* ORNAMENTS

Poprtnik from Ribnica is one of rare examples of the Christmas bread described in texts from the 19th century. Slovenian National and University Library keeps documents of Jožef Rudež, a Lord of Ribnica, which were found and translated by journalist Ilija Popit. Rudež noted, "In Ribnica, at Christmas, mothers bake bread birds and other animals for the children. They also bake two loaves of white bread, a big and a small one. They decorate the bigger loaf with bread dough figurines representing birds and other four-legged animals. They put a little man with a red cap made of dough, known as the gospodarček (the Master), in the middle. At Christmas, on New Year's Eve, and Epiphany, all these breads are put on the table and covered

with a white tablecloth. They bless the breads with holy water, say grace, and then eat the bread. Lastly, they take care of the Master – they wrap it in a cloth and tie it to the seed planting basket thinking this will ensure a more successful seedtime."

Marinka Vesel from Kot near Ribnica bakes župnek after the tradition of her grandmother Angela Gornik, who was from the village of Jurjevica and moved to Kot after marriage. She shapes the ornaments from memory, but makes some changes. She remembers her grandmother making birdies (called picke), baby Jesus, pressed-down balls, and an IHS emblem for her župnek, as well as placing a braid along its edges. Then baking it in a big black pot.

SALT DOUGH FOR *PICEK* ORNAMENTS

Ingredients

(according to the recipe
by Marinka Vesel):

- 2 cups of flour
- 1 cup of fine salt
- ½ cup of water

Method:

Mix the flour and salt. While mixing, gradually add water to the mixture to make a smooth dough. You can add a teaspoon of oil or some more water if needed to make the dough easier to work with.



Marinka Vesel during filming of The Message of Christmas Bread – the Ribnica Valley (Zavod Parnas, 2022).

"When making poprtnik breads, women have always been very resourceful. They would use the ingredients they had at hand and were very innovative in making ornaments. Now we are trying to follow their example and preserve the heritage, while upgrading the process to make a more sustainable and aesthetically pleasing product."

Marinka Vesel, representing the tradition bearers from the Ribnica Valley

TWISTED BRAID



1. Fold the strand in half, then twist one end in one direction and the other one in the opposite direction.



2. Put the twisted braid around the proven loaf. Make sure it is long enough.



3. Neatly bring the two ends together. Use some water if needed.

PICEK BIRD



1. Make a dough strand and fold in half.



2. Lift the loop and cross it over both ends of the strand.



3. Pinch the folded parts together to shape a bird's head.



4. Shape the front part of the head into a beak using your fingers.



5. Punch down the dough of the tail. Use a wooden skewer to press the tail down.



6. Two *picek* birds made of yeast dough.



7. Alternatively, you can make the birds using salt dough, which is easier to work with. Mix the flour, salt, and water to make the dough.



8. Use scissors to make wings on both sides of your bird, and then add peppercorns for the eyes.



9. Place the birds on the inner edge of the braid facing the middle of the bread.

BABY JESUS IN A COT



1. Make a dough ball, and roll it out into a circle. Press down the edges with a fork.



2. Make a thin strand, cross it to make a loop, and then put a thicker strand through the loop to make the head.



3. Carefully braid the three strands, and neatly tuck the ends.



4. Roll two strands out to make strips. Put the first one around baby Jesus as a blanket.



5. Place the second, a bit wider one over it as shown in the picture.



6. Brush the underside of the cot with water, attach it to the *župnek*, then place baby Jesus on top.

CUT-OUT FLOWERS



1. Stainless steel cookie cutters also come in handy for making ornaments.



2. Use two different-sized shapes, then put the smaller flower on top of the bigger one, and pinch together with a dried clove.



3. Place the flowers onto the braid.



4. Lift one petal, pinch it into a beak, and there you have a little bird.



5. When making ornaments, thinly roll out the dough.



6. You can also create the flowers using two different shapes.



7. Place a small dough ball on top of your flower, and press down on all three shapes to finish the flower.

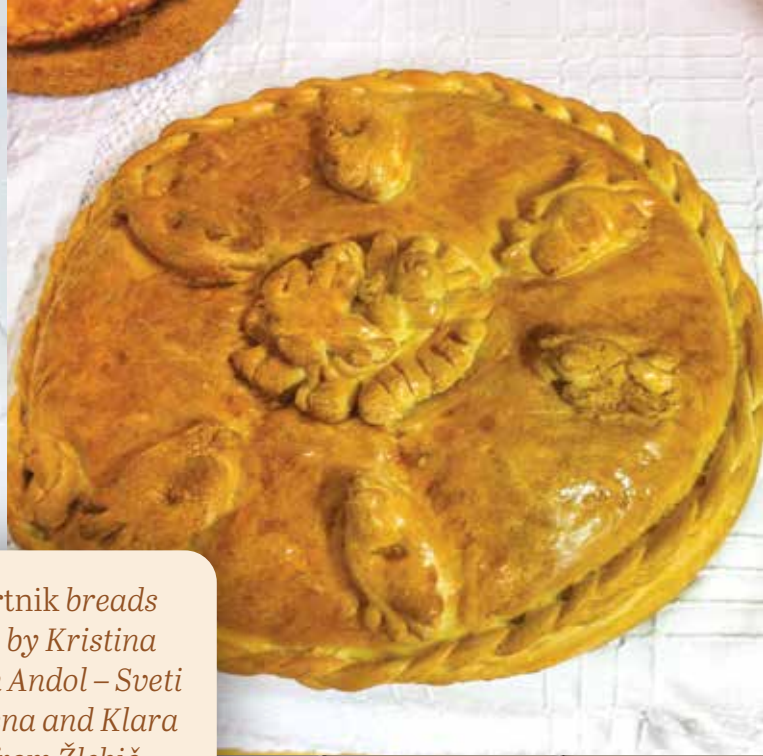
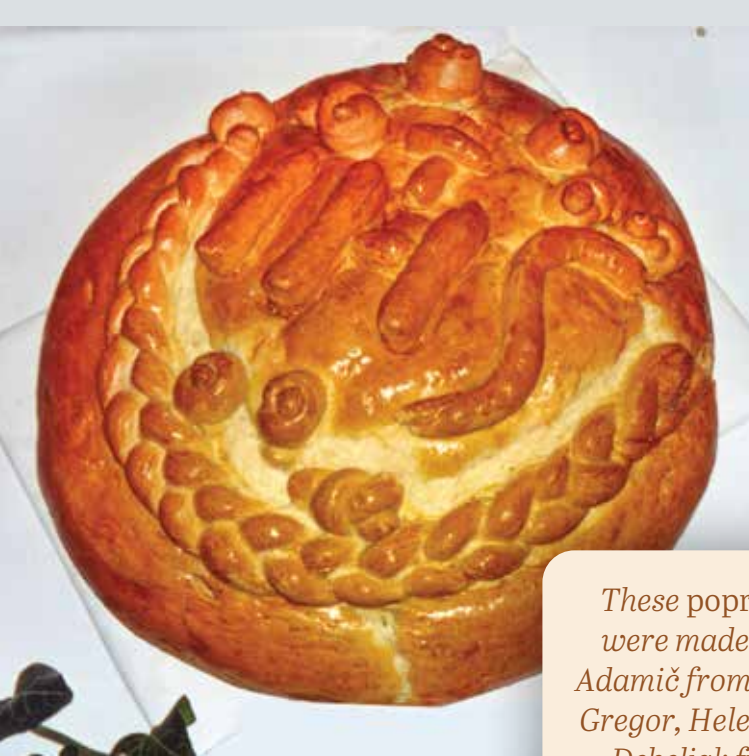


8. Use water as glue to attach the flowers to the bread.



9. Beat an egg yolk with some tepid water and brush your bread. Do not brush the ornaments, as they should remain white.



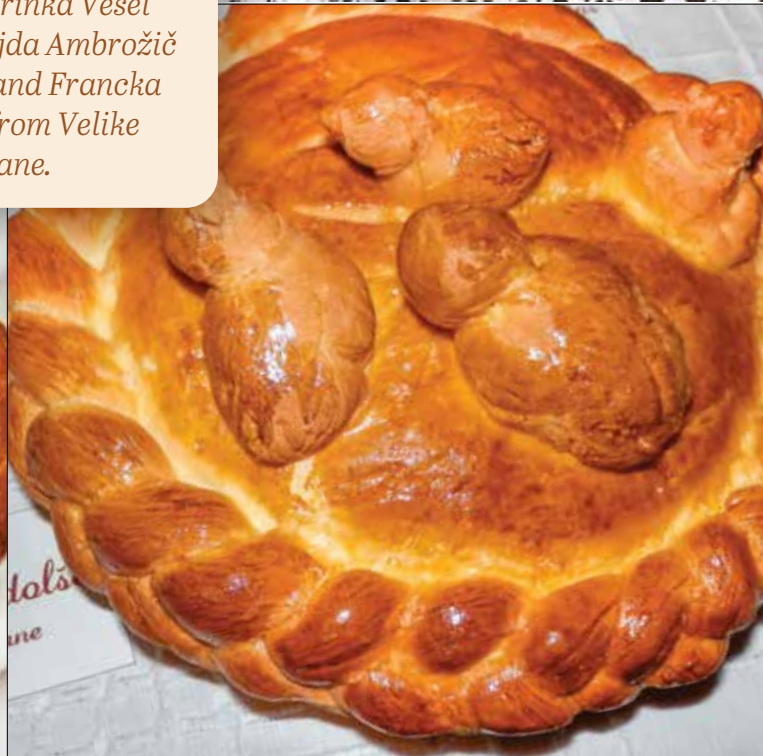
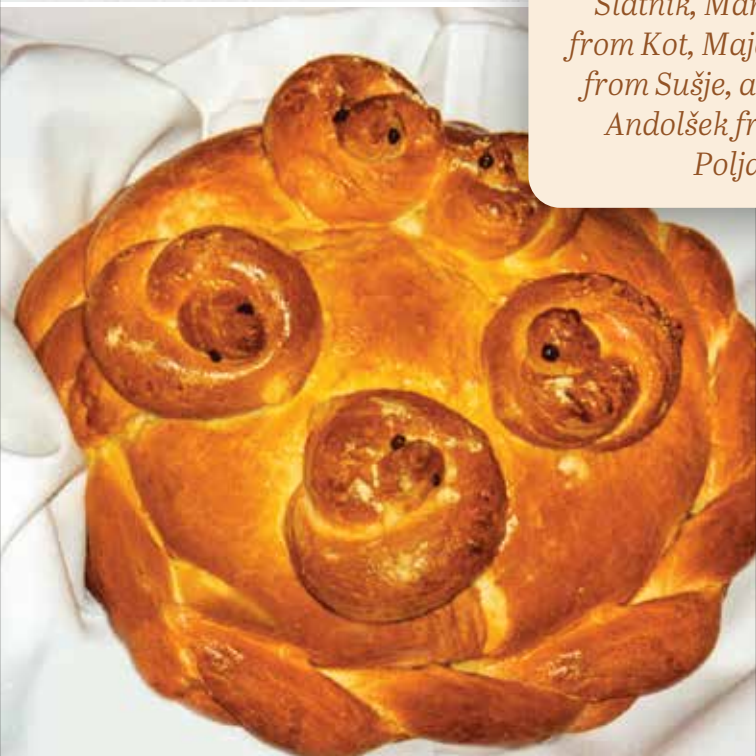


*These poprtnik breads
were made by Kristina
Adamič from Andol – Sveti
Gregor, Helena and Klara
Debeljak from Žlebič,
Milena Andolšek from
Breg, and Anica Mihelič,
who baked several
small breads.*





*The poprtnik breads
from the Ribnica Valley in
these pictures were baked
by Božena Krajec from
Slatnik, Marinka Vesel
from Kot, Majda Ambrožič
from Sušje, and Francka
Andolšek from Velike
Poljane.*



Ribnica Valley. Gorenja Vas

ŽUPNEK FROM RIBNICA WITH THE NATIVITY SCENE AND A HEN

Francka Maležič (born in 1936) lives in Ribnica (at Gorenjska Cesta which used to be the village of Gorenja Vas). At her house, they would bake poprtnik for Christmas and keep it on a table in the same room where they had the Nativity scene. The bread was kept there during all three holy eves, and on Epiphany, they would give some to the cattle, and soak the rest in an egg and milk mixture, bake it, and then eat it. The children were mostly looking forward to the figurines.

Although Francka's mother Frančiška was a good cook, she didn't make her župnek the same way Francka does. Her mother-in-law from Gorenji Lazi decorated her župnek simply with a braid and doves using the same bread dough. But Francka and her older sister Majda learnt how to make ornaments from a

mixture of flour and water from their father's sister, Ana Nosan (born in 1896), who remained unmarried and lived with them.

After she got married, Francka started baking župnek for her family the same way her aunt used to do. First, she makes the ornaments. Next day she kneads the enriched bread dough, shapes a loaf, adds a braid, and places her figurines in the middle, and then bakes the decorated bread. She passed this tradition of baking poprtnik to all her children, both sons and daughters, who added their own elements, and made some changes to the process as they carry the tradition and bake poprtnik for their own families. However, Francka still makes her župnek and the figurines exactly as she learnt in her youth.



ORNAMENTS MADE OF FLOUR AND WATER

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Francka Maležič):

- Wheat soft flour
- Water

Utensils:

- Small rolling pin
- Small kitchen knife
- Small plate with some water
- Scissors
- Two cutting boards, one for shaping the ornaments and another to place them on



Francka Maležič



1. Mix the flour and water, and knead well to make a dough that doesn't stick to the surface.



2. When you cut the dough in half, it should be smooth in the middle as well. Take a piece of the dough and shape your figurine.



3. Place the rest of the dough onto a plate and cover it with a cup or bowl, so it doesn't dry out.

BABY JESUS ON A BED



1. Take a piece of dough and roll it with your hands in a ball with around 3 cm in diameter. Then roll it out into an oval (thick as a knife).



2. Use a knife to make half a centimetre-long fringes all around the edge.



3. To make the baby Jesus, cut another piece of dough and shape it into a strand, which should be shorter than the bed.



4. Roll another thinner strip to shape the arms. Make cuts on both ends for fingers.



5. Brush the arms with some water, wrap them around the body, and join the hands together. Water works as glue.



6. Push every other fringe of the bed upwards and then pinch down with a knife to make the distinctive pattern.



7. To make a blanket and a head covering, roll out a small piece of dough into an oval. Cut it diagonally, making one half a bit bigger.



8. Fringe the edge of the bigger half and cover the body beneath the arms. The fringed edge of the bed should remain visible.



9. Similarly shape the second half into a head cover. Gently pinch together the bed and baby Jesus to stick together.

MARY AND JOSEPH



1. Cut a piece of dough and shape it into a thick strand with your hands.



2. Bend 2/3 of the strand upwards to shape a kneeling figurine. Straighten the legs and cut the flat part.



3. There is no need to shape the legs, as they will be covered with a coat, but make sure the figurine is stable.



4. Shape Mary's arms and hands the same way you shaped baby Jesus's arms. Attach the arms a bit lower on the back and higher in front as if praying.



5. Create the coat and headscarf the same way as the blanket and head cover for baby Jesus. Make sure the decorated edge is neatly shaped.



6. Lift the coat a bit in the front. Slightly pinch the headscarf and the head together as pictured.



7. Make a figurine of Joseph (the body, arms, coat) the same way as Mary, but a bit bigger.



8. Shape the hat from a small ball of the dough. With circular movements, pull out the dough and hollow out the hat.



9. Add some water inside the hat and attach it to Joseph's head.

OX AND DONKEY



1. Start shaping these figurines the same way as the kneeling figurines of Mary and Joseph. Fold the strand and cut it to make it stable.



2. Shape the animals' heads and ears. Pinch together at the neck and make eyeholes using a knife.



3. Shape little horns for the ox.

PALM TREE



1. Roll a strand into a long strip, approximately 10 cm long. Fringe it on one side.



2. Turn the strip in your hands, separating the branches, and shape it into a palm tree.



3. Place it on the cutting board.

HEN AND CHICKS



1. Shape a ball of dough and flatten it into a circle. Pull the dough in the middle upwards to shape the head and neck. Try to make the bottom part into a perfect circle.



2. Shape a beak and a comb using your fingers and scissors. Use a knife to make eyeholes.



3. Fringe the circle.



4. Lift every other fringe using a knife to create the distinctive pattern.



5. Attach some chicks around the hen using water. Shape the chicks as a teardrop pinched at one end to make a head with a beak.



6. Make as many chicks as there are children in the family. Compared to other figurines, the hen with chicks should be relatively big.



Dolsko

TWO-TONE POPRTNIK



In Dolsko, two types of dough are made, one using white flour and the other buckwheat flour. The white flour dough is wrapped around the buckwheat dough. The ornaments are made only of white flour dough. The loaf is divided into quarters with a twisted braid to represent the four seasons and prosperity in the coming year. The

birds are a sign of spring, and the twisted elements symbolize infinity.

The tradition bearers are a part of the Plamen Rural Women's Club of the Dolsko Tourist Society. Their Christmas bread is included in the catalogue of culinary products with the Heart of Slovenia quality certificate.

"Poprtnik could be a branded product from Christmas until Epiphany, and, as such, I think it could be offered during December festivities or at Living Nativity Scenes. On Epiphany, we held a Living Nativity Scene where tea and poprtnik were offered to visitors, and people were genuinely excited to taste it, and some others had never even heard about it. So this might be something we do again in the future."

Majda Peterka, representing the tradition bearers from Dolsko

TWO-TONE *POPRTNIK* FROM DOLSKO

Ingredients for the white flour dough:

- 1 kg white flour
- 150 ml oil
- 40 g yeast
- 1 tsp sugar
- 400 ml milk
- Salt
- 1 egg

Ingredients for the buckwheat dough:

- 500 g buckwheat flour
- 300 g white flour
- 40 g yeast
- 1 tsp sugar
- 50 ml oil
- Salt
- 400 ml water

Method:

Scald the buckwheat flour and let it cool down a bit. Add the yeast starter and white flour, and gently mix. Add oil, salt, and some water if necessary, then knead into a dough. Leave to rise. Mix all the ingredients for the white flour dough, then cover the dough and leave it to rise as well.

Take ¼ of the white flour dough and set it aside for the ornaments. Roll the rest out into a circle. Place the risen buckwheat dough on top and roll it out. It should be a bit smaller than the white flour dough. Start folding from the sides to shape a round loaf. Turn it around and put it onto a greased baking tray or cake tin with the tucked sides underneath. Decorate the bread with braids, birds, and swirls. Leave to prove, brush with egg wash, and bake in the preheated oven.





1. Cut $\frac{1}{4}$ of the white flour dough and set aside for the ornaments.



2. Roll the rest of the dough out into a circle. Make sure it is not too thin, especially in the middle, so the crust doesn't crack.



3. Shape the buckwheat dough into a similar but slightly smaller shape. Place it on top of the white flour dough and start folding it from the sides.



4. Fold it on all sides.



5. Turn the loaf around and place it onto a tray or into a greased tin.



6. Leave it to prove while you make the ornaments.



7. Make all ornaments (birds, twisted braid, swirls) out of strands, which you roll out one at a time.



8. Brush the bread with water before attaching the ornaments.



9. Cut the braid if necessary and tuck its ends, but don't stretch it.



10. The swirls represent infinity. Don't forget to brush with water so the ornaments stick to the bread.



11. You can additionally shape your ornaments when placing them on the bread.



12. Leave the decorated bread to prove. Brush it with egg wash and bake for an hour at 180 °C.



*The poprtnik
breads baked by
women from the
area around Dolsko:
Majda Peterka,
Nežka Čad, and
Nataša Rotar.*





Ivančna Gorica. Kriška vas

POPRTNIK BIRDS FROM KRIŠKA VAS

Jože Zupančič shapes his birdies according to his mother's tradition. His mother, Urška, born in 1907 to a house from Leskovec known by the pseudonym Pri Španovih, used to make cookie dough for shaping bird ornaments as it is easier to work with, while her poprtnik was made of sweet yeast dough. She placed the birdies on the well-proven bread and baked it. Jože's wife Ivica learnt how to bake poprtnik from her mother Nežka Normali, who was born in 1909 in Kriška Vas. Her mother decorated her poprtnik with birdies made of knots. There were always 12 birdies on her poprtnik, one for each apostle. She baked the bread on Epiphany Eve, made the sign of the cross on it before slicing it, and shared it with all family members and the animals – the cattle, dog, and cat. Their family was a big one, so the bread was baked

in an old stoneware cake pan with an IHS emblem, a cross, and tiny flowers, which has been in the family for almost 200 years.

Nowadays, Ivica and Jože make the poprtnik together – Ivica kneads the dough, while Jože makes the decorations using the cookie dough. Their pictured poprtnik was baked a decade ago for the Christmas Bread Exhibition in Rob, and now you can also try your own hand at making Jože's one-headed and two-headed birds, which are typical of the area around Višnja Gora.



COOKIE DOUGH ORNAMENTS

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Jože and Ivica Zupančič):

- 250 g butter
- 200 g powdered sugar
- 1 egg and 2 egg yolks
- 1 vanilla sugar
- Pinch of baking powder
- Up to 1 kg flour (adjust as necessary)

Method:

Knead the cookie dough for the ornaments, which shouldn't be too stiff, so it doesn't break. Keep it in the fridge until you start making your ornaments. Shape the birdies with a small knife on a wooden cutting board. Use some buckwheat grains or juniper berries for the eyes. Using a knife, carefully lift the shaped birdies and place them on your proven *poprtnik* in a cake pan. Bake the remaining birdies on a separate baking tray. Bake for around 40 minutes at 180 °C.



Nežka Normali with her poprtnik decorated with 12 birdies that represent the apostles.

(Photo by Leopold Sever)

ONE-HEADED BIRD



1. Lift one part of the strand perpendicularly and bend it back to shape a bird's head with a beak.



2. Pinch the top of the head together to shape the crest. Optionally make some cuts in it with the scissors. Shape the body in one of the following three ways.



3. Make a slit in the middle to shape the tail, then add additional cuts on both sides for the feathers. Spread the feathers apart.



4. Shape the bird's body with the flat part of the knife. Gently flatten it, then press on both edges to keep the rectangular shape.



5. Make several angled cuts to shape the wings and tail.



6. Make two long cuts to shape two wings, then spread them away from the body. Cut off the tail in a straight line.

TWO-HEADED BIRDS



1. Make a longer strand and lift it upwards on both sides.



2. Using your fingers, shape the heads and beaks.



3. Pinch the dough between the two heads with your fingers to shape the back. Make some cuts to shape the birds' crest.



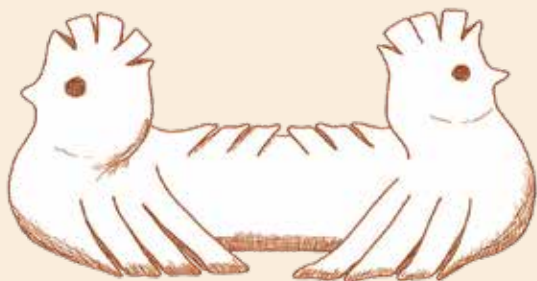
4. Use the scissors to make a few cuts on the body. On the sides put juniper berries or apple seeds for the eyes.



5. For another variety of the two-headed bird, repeat steps 1 and 2, then punch down in the middle and make several angled cuts on both sides.



6. Using a knife, separate the cuts on the body to resemble the feathers.



"Our grandmothers' customs and skills are getting lost in today's world of technology and social media. Without us our grandchildren won't know what a poprtnik is, so our mission is both to preserve our parents' customs and to pass on that knowledge to younger generations, as well as to collaborate and bring everyone together in preserving our ancestors' traditions."

Nada Seliškar, representing the tradition bearers from Ivančna Gorica



*Nada Seliškar
and Ivica and
Jože Zupančič
with special,
cookie dough
birdies.*



Stetin
Ivanč
Gorica
priznanje



The Ivančna Gorica poprtnik breads for the national exhibition in Dobrepolje (in 2013 and 2015) were baked by Joži Svetin from Ivančna Gorica, and Marjetka Meglen from Krka. The braided Christmas bread was baked by Lučka Škufca from Višnja Gora, and the poprtnik of the Ivanjščice Group was made by Nada Seliškar from Znojile.



*For a 2017 exhibition, the poprtnik breads were
baked by Rozi Podlogar, Vida Končina, Ani Us, Joži
Podlogar, Marija Jaklič, Mira Rugelj, Milena Rugelj,
Nadi Uršič, and Milena Zupančič.*





Šentrupert

POPRTNIK FROM ŠENTRUPERT

In the past, the poprtnik breads in Šentrupert weren't ornately decorated. They were simply scored with a cross on top, or maybe a bird would be added. However, as elsewhere, this was a ritual bread that forecasted prosperity and health. In Šentrupert, the tradition of jumping up to grab poprtnik in order to grow tall is also still alive. The tradition bearers now intricately decorate this festive bread and are proud to host exhibitions at the Land of Hayracks or in the parish hall.

The representative of the Šentrupert Group is Vida Končina, who brings the tradition bearers together and occasionally collaborates with Grm Higher Vocational School in Novo Mesto, where students of hospitality and tourism bake poprtnik in one of their classes. High school students and vocational school students also bring their poprtnik breads to the exhibition in Šentrupert.

THE SECRETS OF BAKING *POPRTNIK* WELL



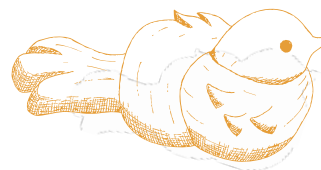
1. Mix an egg yolk and some milk for the egg wash. Brushing your bread with only a beaten egg can make it too hard or curdle too quickly or prevent further proving.



2. After brushing with egg wash and just before baking, make some holes with a wooden skewer, so the bread rises evenly, and the crust doesn't crack.



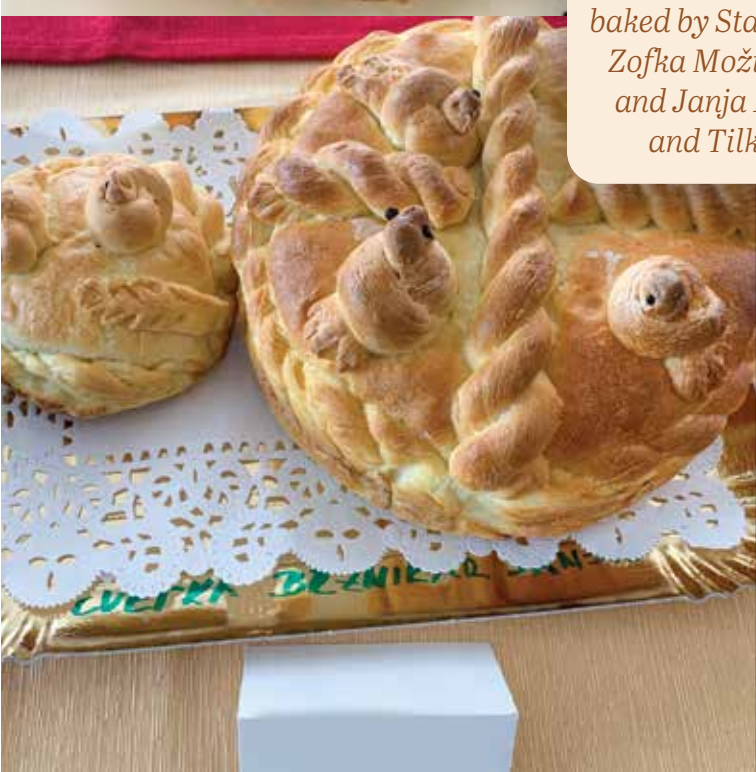
3. When using a stoneware pan, bake it for a good hour. When done, brush the *poprtnik* with a mixture of water and honey to get a nice shine.



Viktor Uhan, a baker's son from Šentrupert, and his wife are some of the greatest supporters of preserving this heritage in Dolenjska.



*The poprtnik breads
for the exhibition in
Šentrupert pictured were
baked by Stanko Okoren,
Zofka Možina, Cvetka
and Janja Breznikar,
and Tilka Ahlin.*





Sodražica

BIRDIES KNOWN AS PITKE, HENS, AND BABY JESUS

The combination of sweet yeast dough and noodle dough creates an amazing artistic bread that Ivanka Košir from Sodražica bakes from memory. As a young girl, she used to watch her mother Marija Rigler, born in 1903 in Breže, who moved to Gorenje Laze in the Ribnica Valley after her marriage. In 2016, Ivanka made her first birdies from memory after being encouraged to make them by Štefka Joras.

Hens and birdies made of noodle dough must be shaped the night before. The next day, they are attached to the well-proven bread rolls and baked. The same ornaments are also used to decorate the župnek. On the well-proven loaf, the baby Jesus is put in the middle, around him a twisted strand, and on the edges the ornaments of birdies and hens are placed in alternation.

“The search for an authentic poprtnik from Sodražica wasn’t successful. However, we found some women who brought the poprtnik traditions of their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts when they moved to this area after marriage. The festive bread is decorated with various ornaments that also have different meanings. These women now volunteer in hosting workshops and exhibitions for young women and older schoolchildren to spread the awareness and value of preserving this cultural heritage.”

Štefka Joras, Poprtnik Group from Sodražica

NOODLE DOUGH ORNAMENTS

Ingredients:

- 2 whole eggs
- Approx. 150 g all-purpose flour

Method:

Make sweet yeast dough for *poprtnik* and small loafs using any of the listed recipes (recipe with 1 kg flour makes around 12 birdies).



Ivanka Košir and Marija Levstik with students during the shoot of a short film.

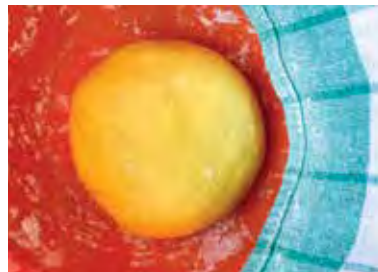
PREPARING NOODLE DOUGH



1. Gradually add two beaten eggs to the flour.



2. Knead a medium-hard dough.



3. Cover and leave to rest for half a day.

PITKA BIRD



1. Make a ball of dough, around 3 cm in diameter. Flatten it into an oval and pull the dough out on one end to make the head. Flatten the body again.



2. Make two cuts on both sides for the wings and lift them upwards with a knife. Fringe the tail.



3. Shape a beak and add apple seeds for the eyes.

HEN



1. Start with a ball of dough, around 3 cm in diameter. Flatten it in your hands into a circle and pull some dough out in the middle to shape the head.



2. Evenly fringe the edge of the circle and fold every other fringe upwards. Make sure to have the right number of fringes.



3. Shape the beak and comb, then add apple seeds for eyes.

BABY JESUS



1. Make a strand of dough and shape the head and neck in its upper part.



2. Make two slits on both sides for the arms and place them apart – as if giving a blessing.



3. Additionally, flatten the hands and optionally make cuts for the fingers.



4. Using a knife, make some horizontal cuts to the body to represent swaddling.



5. Make a smaller round piece of dough for a halo and place it around Jesus's head.



6. Fringe the halo with a knife to resemble sunrays. Use some seeds for the eyes.

TWISTED STRAND



1. Roll out two strands, approximately 50 cm long, and twist them together.



2. Roll with one hand in one direction and with the other in the other direction. Straighten a bit to make a neat twisted strand.



3. Neatly bring the two ends together to shape an oval and place it around baby Jesus.



*Ivanka's
birdies at the
exhibition in
Sodražica.
(Photo by
Štefka Joras)*



Sodražica

ŽUPNEK WITH A SWADDLED JESUS

Martina Pirnat from Sodražica bakes župnek according to the tradition and recipe of her mother Mimi Ruparčič (born in 1931), who adopted it after her own mother Frančiška Ruparčič (born in 1901), both of whom were from the village of Retje in Loški Potok. Martina bakes it at Christmas, around the same time they put up the tree and the Nativity scene. The Christmas bread is put next to the Nativity scene up until Epiphany, when it is sliced and everyone gets a piece (although it is pretty stale by this point), even the cattle.

When women married to a house that had no tradition of decorating the Christmas bread,

they kept their own traditions from their youth. The knowledge moves from village to village and is preserved even if it mixes with other customs and evolves. Therefore, in recording these traditional shapes, we wanted to know who the tradition bearers learned it from and what adaptations they made. Intangible heritage is living heritage. It changes and adjusts, which is what makes it richer and more accessible to a wider audience. There is no real answer to what a typical poprtnik from a certain area is, as heritage can never be uniform, nor do we want it to be. "This is how I make it," says Martina, "and my children bake it in their families as well, but a bit in their own way."

ŽUPNEK

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Marina Pirnat):

- 1 kg white flour
- 42 g yeast
- 500 ml milk
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 tsp sugar
- 50 ml oil
- Egg for egg wash



Method:

Sift the flour into a bowl, and add salt around the edges. Make a well in the middle, and crush the yeast into it, then add the sugar and some warm milk. Mix gently with some flour. Leave for a minute or so, then add the oil and milk and knead the dough. Leave to rest for about half an hour. Place about ½ of the dough into a well-greased cake pan and punch it down with your hands.

Shape the remaining dough into three strands and braid them. Put the braid around the bread, a bit away from the edges. Then shape your ornaments – the baby Jesus and three doves, which represent the three holy eves. Leave the župnek to prove for 10–15 minutes, then brush it with egg wash and bake for around 45 minutes at 180 °C until golden yellow. Cut along the edges of the cake pan and remove the bread.



Martina Pirnat represents the tradition bearers from Sodražica.

SWADDLED BABY JESUS



1. Make a ball out of dough for the head, and roll out a strand for the body.



2. Flour your hand and twist the strand around your finger to make the swaddling – representing the way babies used to be wrapped.



3. Take the dough from your finger and attach the head using some water. Neatly tuck the end of the strand below the body.



4. Make eyeholes with the tip of a knife and attach two peppercorns for the eyes with some egg white.



5. Using scissors, make cuts for the nose and mouth.



6. Shape arms from a small strand and put them on the body.





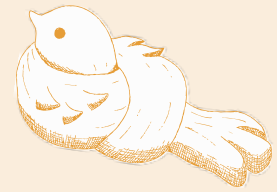
Sodražica

POPRRTNIK WITH A SPIRAL

Vida Čampa from Sodražica had never baked a poprtnik herself until she attended the first workshop, where she made one to match her early childhood memories (pictured left). Her grandmother, Anika Rus, born in 1908 in Dolnja Vas near Ribnica, always used to bake župnek, with the children gathering around the table to watch her make the ornaments. It was always baked in a wood-fired oven, every time a bit differently. Her bread was shaped as a round loaf with a braid around it and featured as many doves as there were children in the family. She made those decorations every time, but also added some others that could change. Sometimes she made an IHS emblem out of dough and attached it to the middle, or she would shape a triangle

to represent the Holy Trinity (the father, the son, and the holy spirit), or she would simply shape a cross. Another symbol that she always put on her poprtnik was a spiral made of a very thin dough strand. According to Vida's grandmother Anika, the spiral represents the infinity of life.

Marija Levstek, originally from Štajerska, also bakes poprtnik, although this was not her tradition growing up. Her husband advised her on how to bake it according to his mother's (Ivana Levstek, born in 1910 in Hrovače near Ribnica) recipe and instructions. Marija's poprtnik is shaped as a round loaf and decorated with baby Jesus on a blanket, three doves, and a braid.



Sodražica. Gora

CHRISTMAS BREAD WITH CLARIFIED BUTTER

Fani Lavrič lives in Gora above Sodražica and bakes her Christmas bread according to her grandmother Marija Zajc's (born in 1903 in Drašča Vas near Ivančna Gorica) tradition. They never called it a poprtnik, but simply a Christmas bread. It was always eaten at Christmas, and they didn't keep it until Epiphany, as it was a rarity to have such good bread on the table and so it was usually eaten quickly.

When Fani got married and moved to Gora, she first heard the Christmas bread being called župnek. Her mother-in-law similarly didn't bake župnek, but she remembered seeing such breads with a scored cross on top. When the children were young, Fani

started baking Christmas bread from memory, remembering her mother's descriptions of how her grandmother from Drašča Vas made the Christmas bread.

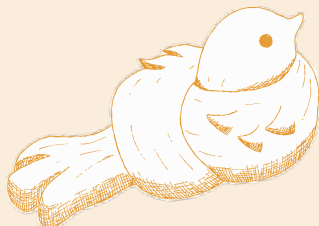
She shapes her Christmas bread as a round loaf with two crowns. She shapes the two crowns from a strand of dough that is fringed on one side. She attaches one crown on the edge of the loaf, making sure the fringed strand is a bit longer than the loaf, so the fringes keep their shape while proving. She adds the second crown when the loaf is already half proved. The fringes of both crowns are facing downwards. She attaches an IHS emblem made of a thin strand of dough to the middle.

CHRISTMAS BREAD WITH CLARIFIED BUTTER

Ingredients

(according to the recipe
by Fanika Lavrič):

- 450 g soft flour
- 2 whole eggs
- 125 g butter
- A bit more than half a cube of yeast
- Pinch of sugar for the yeast starter
- Salt (added to the flour)
- 200–300 ml warm milk
- No spices



Method:

The secret behind Fanika's tasty Christmas bread is in the clarified butter. In the past, the milk would be left in a pot, so the cream gathered on the top. Then they put the pan in the oven to slowly cook the milk, and the cream on top turned brownish. With this, clarified butter was made. The raw butter was called by the German loanword *puter*. Nowadays, Fani buys butter, which she first slowly cooks at a very low temperature, stirring for half an hour so all the water evaporates. The butter turns yellow, and the solid parts, known as *tropince*, fall to the bottom. She uses the clarified butter for her *poprtnik* and the *tropince* for *žgance*. According to her, the clarified butter has a nicer smell than oil, but it makes the proving more difficult. The same happens if you use too many eggs or egg whites.

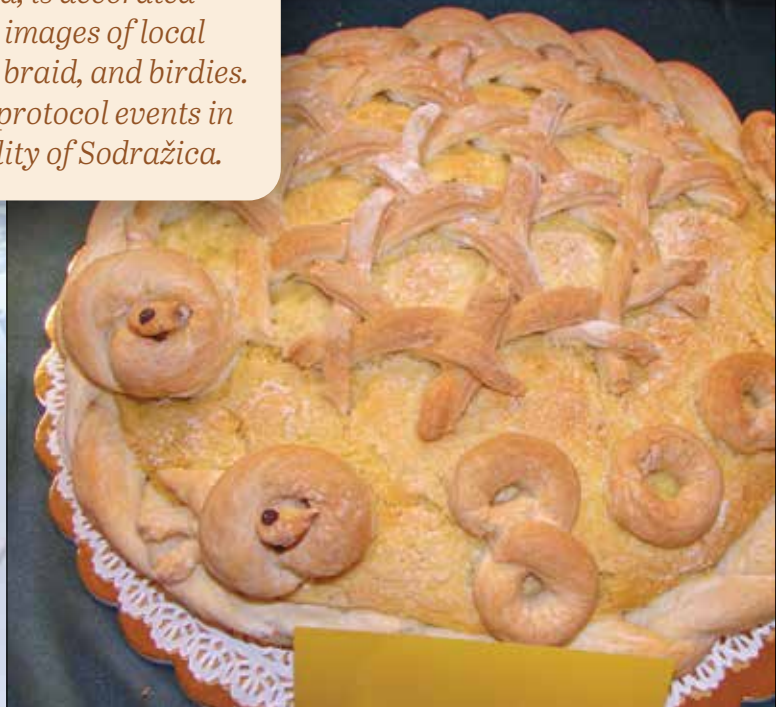
She always makes holes in the *poprtnik* with a wooden skewer before baking it, then brushes it with an egg wash made of eggs and some milk. She bakes it for around 45 minutes at 180 °C. If the crust is getting burnt, she covers the bread with a piece of white paper.



Every year, there are more and more poprtnik breads at the exhibition in Sodražica
Photo by Štefka Joras



The two breads for the exhibition in Sodražica were baked by Olga Košmrlj and Marija Evelin Lipužič. Irena Đorđević bakes Christmas bread according to her Serbian tradition. Šedržan, a decorated festive bread, is decorated with splints, images of local woodenware, a braid, and birdies. It is baked for protocol events in the Municipality of Sodražica.





*The poprtnik breads from
Sodražica were baked for the
exhibition by Petra Žgajnar,
Bernarda Osojnik, Andreja
Škufca, and Zina Lovšin
(Photos by Štefka Joras).*





Bloke. Studeno

ŽUPNEK AND PITKE BAKED IN A WOOD-FIRED OVEN

In Podklanec, where Marija Mic Jakopin was born, župnek has never been baked. When she got married and moved to the village of Studeno in Bloke, she started baking poprtnik according to the tradition of her mother-in-law, Julijana Jakopin, who was born in 1936 in Ulake in Bloke. Marija bakes her župnek in a large black pot. Around the edge, she puts a braid with four birdies to represent the four seasons. In the middle, she puts a cross, an IHS emblem, and some more birdies if there is any leftover dough. She mostly bakes her župnek in a wood-fired oven, but sometimes also in an electric oven. She also bakes some individual chickens called pitke for the children. Poprtnik is sliced on the morning of Epiphany and given to all members of the family and the

cattle, while the chickens get some crumbs.

Marija fires the oven before she starts kneading. She only uses dry beech wood. The wood burns to embers while the bread is proving, then she spreads the embers evenly around the oven. Next, she starts decorating the župnek. When the decorated bread is ready to be baked, she rakes the embers to the front of the oven. She wets a straw whisk broom, so it doesn't catch fire, and sweeps the floor of the oven. She puts the pot with župnek on the peel to transfer it to the swept floor of the oven. She swiftly pulls the peel from underneath the pot. She also uses the peel to remove the bread from the oven. Marija says everyone knows their oven best and how much wood is needed.

ŽUPNEK FROM BLOKE

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Marija Mic Jakopin):

- 1 kg soft flour
- 100 g butter
- 1 egg and 3 egg yolks
- 500–600 ml milk
- 300 g sugar
- Vanilla sugar
- 42 g yeast
- 10–15 g salt
- 4 g lemon zest
- 2 tbs rum

Method:

Knead the dough for 10 to 15 minutes.

Add the butter last to make a soft and silky dough. It is important that the dough doesn't stick to your hands or the table. Leave it to rise in a warm place for 30 to 45 minutes.

Turn your dough out onto the table. Do not knead it, but cut the pieces of dough as you need them. Grease the baking pan well, where it's best to use lard. Make a round loaf of 2/3 of the dough, put it into a deep pan, and punch down. Make a three-stranded braid and attach it around the edges. According to tradition, the four birdies represent the four seasons. Shape a small cross and an IHS emblem from small dough strands. Leave the decorated *župnek* to prove for a while, then brush it with the egg wash (add some milk to the beaten egg), leave to prove some more, and then bake for 45 minutes at 180–190 °C.



*Marija Mic
Jakopin with
her župnek.
(Photo by Milena
Vintar)*

DOVES



1. Evenly roll out a 35–40 cm long strand. It should be 1 cm thick.



2. Hold one end in your left hand, and start shaping a loop around the fingers of your left hand.



3. Make a full circle, and put the leftover end of the folded strand into the loop from underneath.



4. Pull the strand out of the loop with your fingers.



5. There is a bird's head on one end, and two almost equal strands for the tail on the other one. Place the shaped bird on the countertop.



6. Pinch the upper part of the bird's head to shape the crest and the front part to shape the beak.



7. Pinch the head on both sides with peppercorns or apple seeds for the eyes.



8. Use a small knife and cut the strands for the tail to be the same length.



9. Make 3 to 4 cuts into the tail.



10. Using scissors, make some cuts on the crest on top of the head. Arrange the crest feathers neatly.



11. To bake the *župnek*, first put the loaf into the pan, place the three-stranded braid around its edges, then decorate it with four birdies, a cross, and an IHS emblem.



12. The same way as the birdies for the *župnek*, you can also shape them a bit bigger to make bird-shaped bread rolls.
(Photo by Milena Vintar)

PREPARING THE WOOD-FIRED OVEN



1. Start the fire before kneading the dough. While you make the bread, check the fire in the oven.



2. When the fire dies down, punch down the embers with a poker and spread them evenly around the oven.



3. Pull the embers to the front of the oven with the poker, and sweep the oven with a wet straw whisk broom.



4. Brush the well-proven *župnek* with egg wash before baking it.



5. Put the bread and other rolls into the oven using a wooden peel. Bake directly on the oven floor.



6. It takes around 45 minutes for the *župnek*, and around 20 minutes for the birdies in a baking tray.



Tržišče

POPRTNIK WITH A CROWN

In Tržišče, the Christmas bread known as božičnik never used to be decorated intricately, but most often, only a cross was scored on top. On Epiphany, to share the poprtnik with the children, mothers would stand before the hearth with a piece of poprtnik raised in their hands, saying: "Grow, grow ..." The children jumped to grab the piece, and the more they jumped, the taller they grew in that year. A piece of the bread was also given, even handed to the cattle, but it was never shared with the chickens, as the bread should never be thrown on the ground. A small piece of poprtnik was also stuck under the roof to protect the house from fire.

In the neighbouring village of Gabrje, a custom known as čipkanje has been passed down for four generations. After dinner on the holy eve, the whole family gathers around the table. The lady of the house enters the room with a woven

basket and starts throwing treats on the floor. The treats used to be hazelnuts, walnuts, and dried pears, but nowadays they are usually wrapped candies and mandarins. Then, she starts clucking as if she were calling the chickens, and everyone starts grabbing treats from the floor. In the end, they count their treats – the number of treats women and girls grabbed means this is how many hens there will be in the coming year, and there will be as many roosters as the men grabbed treats.

In Tržišče, they also have two interesting sayings, namely: If the bread cracks, the way to heaven is opened, and the best bread is baked on the days that are perfect for planting leafy plants (according to the moon planting calendar). Fani Borštnar represents the group of tradition bearers from Tržišče with much support from the Tržišče Rural Women's Club and the local community.

POPRTNIK FROM TRŽIŠČE

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Karlinca Golob):

- 1 kg white flour
- 42 g yeast (sift the flour and make a yeast starter in the middle with the yeast, using some warm milk and a teaspoon of sugar)
- 1 egg and 4 egg yolks
- 500 ml milk
- 2 heaped tsp salt
- 4 large tbs sugar
- 160 g butter
- 1 vanilla sugar
- Lemon zest
- Some rum
- 1 egg for egg wash



*Karlinca Golob with a
round-headed bird.*

Method:

Sift the flour into the stand mixer bowl and make a well for the yeast starter. Add all other ingredients and knead the dough. Knead it some more on the floured board, then cover and leave to rest for an hour. Line the baking tray with parchment paper, and place your round loaf (use 2/3 of the dough). While it is proving, make your ornaments – a long braid, a crown, and birdies. Brush the loaf with egg wash to attach your decorations. Leave to prove for a bit, and brush with egg wash again before baking it. Bake on the middle rack in a pre-heated oven for around an hour at 180 °C. If the crust is getting burnt, cover the bread with aluminium foil during baking.

ROUND-HEADED BIRD



1. Make a long dough strand.



2. Fold it in half and shape the head at the folded end. Roll it out again.



3. While rolling it, place the part for the head upwards to make it a bit thicker.



4. Now the strand is ready to be transformed into a bird.



5. Tie a knot as close to the head as possible, being careful not to damage it.



6. Shape the beak, add some anise seeds for the eyes, and shape the tail with a fork.

BRAID AND A CROSS



1. Add additional cuts to the bird's body for the feathers, then make long tail feathers with a knife.



2. Make three long strands for the braid. Start braiding in the middle, then turn it and braid the other end as well.



3. Make a twisted braid with two strands and shape a cross with them.

WHEAT SPIKE



1. Roll out a strand, a bit thicker on one end to resemble a spike. Start making cuts on one side.



2. Continue making cuts on the opposite side – cut from the top towards the stem.



3. Finally, cut the front part to make a wheat spike.

CROWN



1. Roll out a strand of dough into a long rectangle.



2. Evenly fringe one side to make thick fringes.



3. Fringe the opposite side, but be careful to make the cuts in the middle of the existing fringe.



4. When placing the crown on the bread, you can leave the fringes facing upwards, or you can fold down every other fringe.



5. Attach other ornaments to your bread and leave to prove. Use a toothpick to attach the heavier ornaments.



6. Brush it with egg wash right before putting it in the oven and bake at 180 °C for 50 minutes.



Škofljica

POPRTNIK WITH WHITE ORNAMENTS

Jože Senegačnik's white ornaments are made of flour, water, and some salt. The ornaments are not made of salt dough, and so they are as salty as the bread itself. He attaches them to the bread 12–15 minutes before the bread is fully baked, so they remain white. To attach them, he brushes their bottom part and the poprtnik with a mixture of a beaten egg and milk. The ornaments are shaped in advance and covered with cling film, so they remain moist and bendable. Sometimes he dries them out to create a special flower, as, for example, a cup-shaped one. Thicker ornaments are pre-baked, but these can be difficult to attach to the bread as they become

stiff. He tries to roll the dough out to be thin (as noodle dough), so the ornaments are thin and baked in around 15 minutes.

Francka Jakič is representing the tradition bearers from Škofljica. Olga Marguč of the Škofljica Retirees' Club and Tončka Pal of the Škofljica Tourist Society support the group in hosting exhibitions and workshops. However, one of the most active motivators is Jože Senegačnik, who learnt to bake from the ladies, and who each year surprises everyone with his innovatively decorated poprtnik at various exhibitions and workshops around Slovenia.

THE RECREATION OF IVANKA KALŠEK'S BIRDIES

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Metka Starič and instructions by Jože Senegačnik):

- 500 g flour
- 20 g yeast
- 250 ml warm milk
- 1 egg and 1 egg yolk
- 50 ml oil
- 1 tbs sugar
- Vanilla sugar
- 2 tbs rum
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 egg yolk and some water for egg wash

Method:

Make a well in the flour, add yeast, around 100 ml of warm milk, and a teaspoon of sugar, then leave to rise for 10 minutes. Add all other ingredients to the rest of the milk. When the yeast starter has risen, pour the mixture of all other ingredients into it and knead the dough. Cover and leave to prove in a warm place for around 30 minutes. Shape the birdies and place them onto a tray covered with parchment paper. Brush with a mixture of a beaten egg yolk and water. Bake in a pre-heated oven at 180 °C for 25 minutes.



Jože Senegačnik
(Photo by Štefka Joras)



1. To make Ivanka Kalšek's birdies, shape two balls – a bigger one for the body, and a smaller one for the head. Roll out a piece of dough to fringe.



2. Using a glass, cut a circle out of dough. Flour it well on both sides.



3. Fringe the circle around the edges using a wheel cutter.



4. Brush the bigger ball of dough with water, and cover it with the fringed piece of dough. Arrange the fringes evenly.



5. Now attach the head. Shape the beak, make cuts for eyeholes, and attach peppercorns or apple seeds for the eyes using egg white.

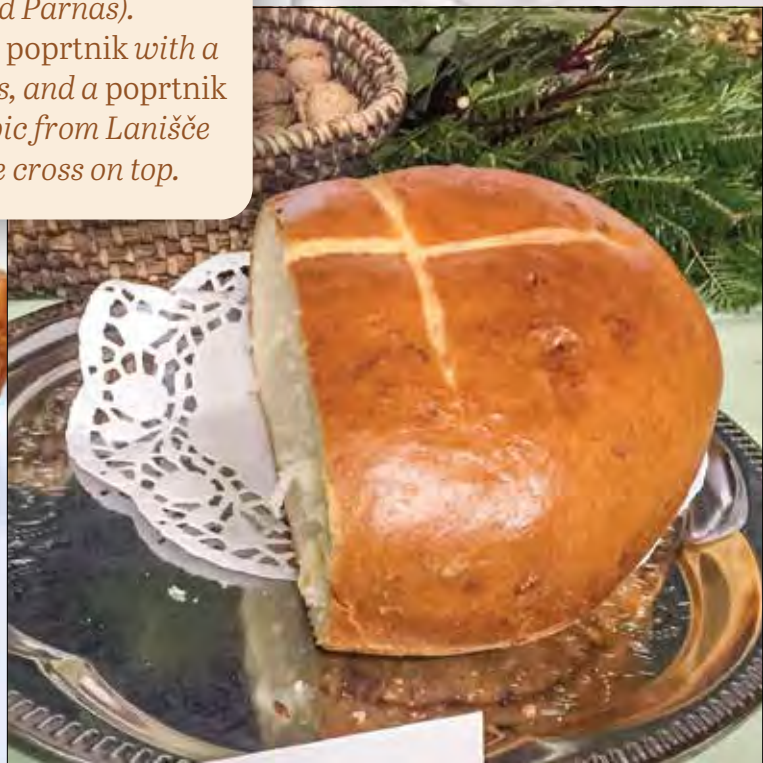
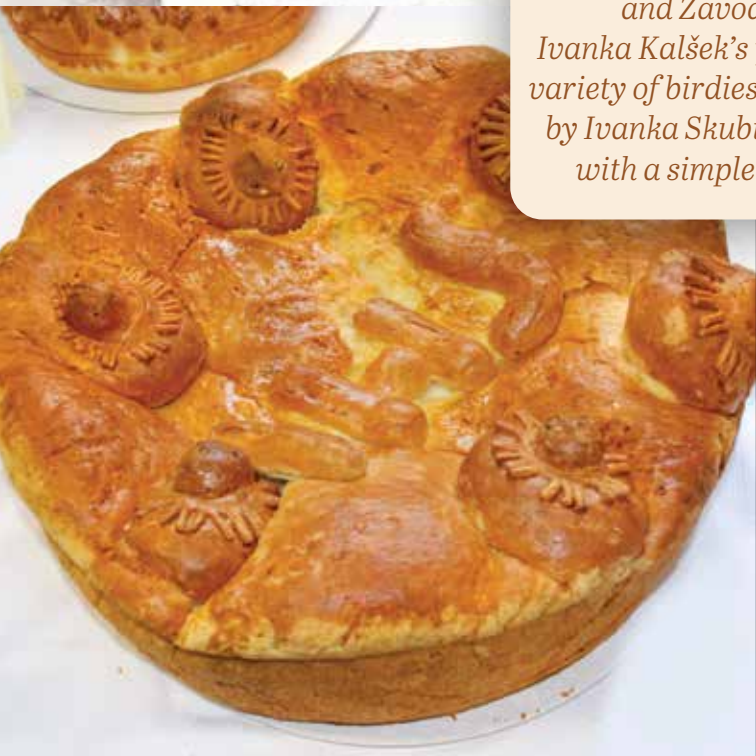


6. The birdie can be placed on your *poprtnik* as a decoration or you could simply bake it as a bread roll.



Gabrijela Modic and Slavka Kregar baked poprtnik breads for the Christmas bread and pastry exhibition in Škofljica (DU Škofljica, TD Škofljica and Zavod Parnas).

Ivanka Kalšek's poprtnik with a variety of birdies, and a poprtnik by Ivanka Skubic from Lanišče with a simple cross on top.





In 2016, the members of the registered tradition bearers of baking poprtnik and their support organisations visited the Slovenian parliament with poprtnik breads to wish a good year to all in Slovenia. From right: Metka Starič (Zavod Parnas), Majda Tekavec (the area around Velike Lašče), Marjeta Cevs (BIC Ljubljana), Nada Lunder (Dobrepolje), Slavka Legan (Žužemberk), Lili Mahne (Cerknica), Nada Bervar (Svibno), Tanja Lavrič and Marija Turk (Loški Potok), Nada Rotar (Dolsko), Ana Zakrajšek (Loška dolina), Iva Dimic (the member of the parliament), and Marinka Vesel (the Ribnica Valley). The first on the left is Milan Brglez, the then Speaker of the National Assembly of Slovenia. (Photo by Iztok Ilich)



Škofljica

GLUTEN-FREE POPRTNIK

The rich heritage and its messages won't fall short even if we substitute some ingredients to accommodate people with health restrictions. A gluten-free Christmas bread can be just as soft, nicely decorated, and have a golden yellow crust, as long as you follow Suzana Kranjec's secret tips in making it. Suzana first baked a gluten-free poprtnik a decade ago together with Nada Lunder at the Parnas Institute by adapting the ingredients and method of preparation. Her grandmother Frančiška Bučar from Škofljica also used to bake a sweet festive bread with a scored cross on top for every Christmas and Epiphany.

Suzana Kranjec believes people with celiac disease should also enjoy heritage and culinary artwork, even if the preparation of gluten-free bread needs to follow strict rules to avoid gluten contamination. She dedicated her first book to this cause – Življenje brez Glutena (Life without Gluten, Zavod Parnas, 2013), which was followed by many more published by other publishers, various workshops and lectures about gluten-free diet and celiac disease in Slovenia and abroad.

GLUTEN-FREE *POPRTNIK*

Ingredients

(according to the recipe by Suzana Kranjec):

- 500 g gluten-free flour mix
- 1 packet of active dry yeast
- 10 drops of gluten-free rum essence
- 50 g gluten-free powdered sugar (or regular granulated sugar you blend yourself)
- Gluten-free vanilla sugar (can be homemade – sugar with vanilla bean added)
- 1 tsp lemon zest
- 400 ml of liquid (2 beaten eggs, 60 g melted butter and milk)
- Pinch of salt
- Pinch of gluten-free turmeric

For egg wash:

- Egg yolk
- 1 tsp gluten-free coconut sugar (or molasses or raw sugar)
- Water

Method:

The choice of the gluten-free flour mix should closely follow the characteristics of a standard *poprtnik*, and it should have enough starch and other binding additives to make it easy to shape the decorations. All ingredients should be gluten-free. Before baking, make sure there is no wheat flour residue in your kitchen. Use fresh salt and spices. If the dough is too soft, use a cake pan to shape your *poprtnik*.



Suzana Kranjec



1. Choose a suitable gluten-free flour mix. We used Schär FARINA Mix It and Vitapek UNIMIX in a 1:1 ratio.



2. Mix all the dry ingredients (flour and yeast) in a big bowl, and all the liquid ingredients in a smaller one.



3. You can prepare your own stock of lemon zest ahead of time – grate the lemon peel and mix it with sugar – so you always have it on hand.



4. Slowly pour the liquid ingredients into the flour, and mix with a spatula.



5. The dough starts coming together.



6. Knead the dough with your hands.



7. When the dough is soft enough, remove 2/3 for the loaf. Shape the bread and put it on the parchment paper to prove in a warm place.



8. Make the ornaments from the remaining third of the dough. Roll a long strand to shape the birds, one for each child in the family.



9. Tie a knot to shape the bird, and use a fork to create a tail. With your fingers, shape the head with a beak.



10. Brush the parts of the ornaments if you need them to stick together. Use the liquid from soaking flax seeds or an egg white.



11. To make a braid, roll out three long strands of dough. Pinch them together on one end and make a loose braid.



12. You can shape various ornaments from the braid. There are two balls added to each end of the pictured wreath.



13. Shape thin strands of dough into a flower or another similar motif to represent life and good growth.



14. When placing the ornaments on the bread, think about their balance. You can use a toothpick for attaching the heavier ornaments, but make sure to remove the toothpicks after the bread is baked.



15. The crust of the gluten-free bread is not as yellow, so add some coconut sugar or molasses to the egg wash mixture of an egg yolk and water.



16. Thoroughly brush the decorated *poprtnik* with the egg wash.



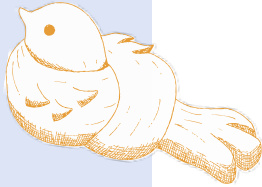
17. Bake in a pre-heated oven on the middle rack at 180 °C for 50 minutes.



18. Baking *poprtnik* this way produces a soft and fluffy crumb and a nice crust.



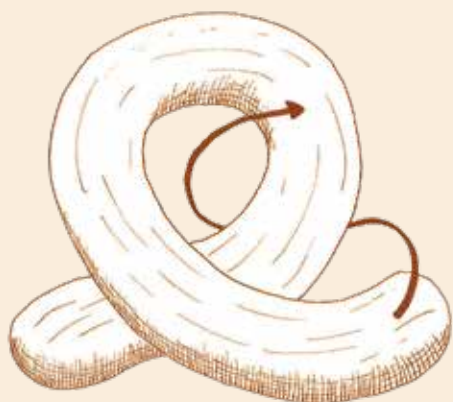
Golo



12 BIRDS FROM GOLO

Sometimes we are lucky enough to record a piece of heritage just before it fades into oblivion thanks to our numerous volunteers engaged in preserving the heritage of baking poprtnik within our heritage community, collecting information from others, and holding various activities to promote this heritage and inspire others. Iva Jana Jakič, representing the tradition bearers from Golo, managed to learn from the older women from the villages of Golo and Škrilje what type of poprtnik breads were baked in the villages around Ig. In Golo, the poprtnik was tall, baked in a pot, and decorated with 12 birds that represented the 12 apostles or 12 months. In the middle, there would be another, a bit larger bird. Each year, there are more and more people that bring their poprtnik to the blessing at the St. Margaret the Virgin Church in Golo, where an impromptu exhibition is also held. And each year they inspire people to start baking poprtnik, in part thanks to the workshops they host in time before Christmas.

The pictured poprtnik breads were baked by Ester Bergles, Izak Bergles, Iva Jana Jakič, and Marjeta Škarja.





"After researching the tradition of baking poprtnik breads in the village of Golo, I encouraged a few women some years later to bring their breads to our church for the blessing. Then we started hosting workshops. One of the most interesting ones was with the ten children preparing for confirmation. They were so eager to work together, roll out the dough, decorate the bread, then bring it for the blessing and taste it afterwards. Now there are three generations that have mastered the baking of poprtnik and continue this cultural and spiritual heritage. Whenever I meet with the children and their parents, I feel grateful and proud that this beautiful heritage is being carried on in Golo."

Iva Jana Jakič, representing the tradition bearers from Golo

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK AND YOUTUBE

"The mosaic of our preservation of the cultural heritage of baking poprtnik also includes the Facebook page Poprtnik. The page was started in 2017 to publish all events, as well as reports and live feeds from those events. The majority of all 15 groups bearing the tradition of baking poprtnik actively participate in creating content. Around the time of the Christmas Bread Festival, we post information about the workshops, exhibitions, and the blessing of the poprtnik breads. Each year, we choose the main theme to get more individuals to participate. This way we made presentations of all groups of tradition bearers, encouraged the passing of knowledge on to younger generations, researched past Christmas customs, showcased various poprtnik breads and their features from different places and regions, and more. The Facebook page has more than 700 followers, whom we invite to join us in preserving our heritage. At our workshops, which more and more young people attend, they can learn something new or refresh what they already know."

Beti Lunder, FB page editor



Website on poprtnik breads
zavod-parnas.org/poprtnik



"The Advent and the Christmas time are intertwined with the rich spiritual and cultural heritage. And when this heritage is 'kneaded' in the shape of a Christmas bread, I get to experience the mystery of the material, natural, spiritual, and cultural, all while enjoying this baked delicacy."

*Blaž Podobnik, the author of the song
Na Mizi Sta Bog pa Kruh
(Only God and Bread on the Table)*

It has been more than a decade since baking poprtnik was entered into the register as a part of the Slovenian intangible cultural heritage when the first group of tradition bearers in the area around Velike Lašče and Dobrepolje was founded. In this decade, I've been following how this community grew with the dedicated support and engagement of the Parnas Institute with great excitement. Their research, as well as recognition and collaboration of all tradition bearers, but also exhibitions, workshops, and all other events, strengthen our heritage community and the general Slovenian cultural landscape.

This handbook depicts the extraordinarily diverse heritage of Christmas bread baking, while it is also a valuable collection of photos, illustrations of various technical methods of preparation, and messages of the poprtnik. However, it is also a practical tool, which I feel will serve as an inspiration to many.

Klara Golob, Ethnologist

Poprtnik is a Christmas bread, which was placed on the festive table for all three holy eves, namely Christmas, New Year's, and Epiphany, according to tradition. There are still those with skilled hands who can bake poprtnik nowadays, so they can fill their homes with the cozy feeling of joy and eager anticipation at Christmastide.

Ana Jerin, Slovenian Ethnographic Museum

The vast rich knowledge contained in this handbook is an important resource for all generations looking to connect with their roots. Every time tradition bearers come and bake poprtnik with our students they remind me how important it is to respect our ancestors' heritage and to pass it down to younger generations.

Sebastijan Repnik, Vocational School Professor



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