

White Bread

Aim: To make C15th white bread.

Method: Platina in “On Good Health & Good Eating” (1470) (1.14) tells us to: Take flour, separate it from the bran and inferior flour with a fine flour sieve, then put the flour, with warm water and salt, on a baker’s table closed in at the sides, with a little bit of leaven if you live in damp places. Knead to the correct consistency. Do not put in too much or too little leaven. Bread should be well-baked in an oven and not used in the same day as it was baked.

Larousse in “Gastronomy” (“Bread”) tells us to: Take 1 ounce of yeast and put it into 1½ pints of warm water with or without a tablespoon of sugar. Leave in a warm place until dissolved and frothy. Mix 3 pounds of flour with 1½ tablespoons of salt and rub in 2 tablespoons of butter. Add the yeast liquid and make a firm non-sticky ball of dough, adding flour if necessary to achieve the result. Knead dough until firm and elastic and non-sticky. Shape the dough into a ball, cover it and leave to rise until it doubles in size. Knock down (punch down) and knead the dough until firm, and shape into rolls and loaves. Cove the dough to rise again, then bake in a hot oven until cooked. Big loaves take longer to cook than small loaves.

Having examined the definitive C15th Italian and modern haute cuisine recipes above, I have decided to make bread with dried yeast, sugar, salt, flour and water only, without fat, such as butter or olive oil. Bread without fat will keep longer, and will be closer to the recipe described by Platina. The above rendition of Larousse will provide two medium loaves.

Results: Having made up 2/3 of the paraphrased Larousse recipe listed above in ½ hour, the bread dough was left to rise to double size for 1 ½ hours, thence punched and kneaded, thence risen to double size again in 1 hour, thence put in camp oven. After cooking for 1 hour, the loaf is cooked. Having the heat only come from below has meant the bottom crust is very crusty, but by using a grating still not really burnt. Total preparation time = 4 hours.

My mistakes were (i) to not put it to do the second rising in the cooking pan, (ii) to make one loaf rather than two. Two smaller loaves would cook quicker. Also the loaf has acquired a slight but not disagreeable nutty flavour from the use of olive oil to oil the baking tin.

Below: A cast iron pot with a cooking grid – the same also with the bread tin – the bread loaf cooked and ready to eat.

(Stefano da Urbino 08/12/2001)

