

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO
CHEESE

Edited by
CATHERINE DONNELLY

Foreword by
MATEO KEHLER



in the 36 percent range; a paste that has fine, hard granules from cooking and pressing; aging for eight months in cellars whose air is dry and cool; and a rind that is brushed with olive oil to finish.

Today Pecorino has achieved a mass popularity and is produced en masse in the province of Lazio, in Sardinia and in Grosseto, Tuscany. Much of Pecorino Romano, in fact, does not originate in its traditional area of Rome, but from those places, using the traditional recipe.

See also ITALY; PARMIGIANO REGGIANO; and PECORINO SARDO.

Androuet, Pierre. *Guide to Cheese*. Henley-on-Thames, U.K.: Aidan Ellis, 1993.

Dalby, Andrew. *Cheese: A Global History*. London: Reaktion, 2009.

Formaggio.it. <http://www.formaggio.it>.

Harbutt, Julie. *The World Cheese Book*. London and New York: DK, 2015.

Kindstedt, Paul. *Cheese and Culture: A History of Cheese and Its Place in Western Civilization*. White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 2012.

McCalman, Max. *Cheese: A Connoisseur's Guide to the World's Best*. New York: Clarkson Potter, 2005.

Robert McKeown

Pecorino Sardo is a firm sheep's milk cheese from the Italian island region of Sardinia. It is made in two distinct styles: *dolce* (sweet) and *matturo* (matur).

Pecorino Sardo Dolce is a straw-colored wheel, 2.5–4 inches (6–11 centimeters) tall and 6–7 inches (16–18 centimeters) in diameter, with rounded edges and slightly convex sides. It is aged for twenty to sixty days. Dolce's paste is pale yellow and firm but springy and elastic, and often scattered throughout with small irregular holes. It is mild and sweet, with aromas of sheep's milk and hay.

Matturo cheeses are taller, approximately 5 inches (12 centimeters) high and 6–8 inches (16–20 centimeters) in diameter with straighter sides and sharper edges. They are aged for at least sixty days and often longer. Their rind color ranges from pale yellow to mahogany; their texture is hard and grainy, more or less, depending on age, and their flavor is more pungent and pronounced in salt.

While the legal designation Pecorino Sardo is modern—Pecorino Sardo was awarded DOC (denominazione di origine controllata) status in 1991 and granted PDO (protected designation of origin) protection in 1996—the history of pecorino-type

cheeses in Sardinia and throughout the Mediterranean region is certainly ancient. Homer described Pecorino-type cheese in the *Odyssey*. Virgil lists Pecorino among the standard rations of Roman soldiers. Medieval tax records show exports of Sardinian cheeses to Pisan merchants. See HOMER and VIRGIL.

The initial steps in the making of Dolce and Matturo cheeses are the same: pasteurized or thermized sheep's milk is coagulated with calf rennet at 95–102°F (35–39°C). Coagulation is achieved in thirty-five to forty minutes. Once set, the curd is “cooked” to a temperature not above 109°F (43°C), a process that further expels whey and contributes to the final texture of the cheese.

The curd of Dolce is cut into large pieces, roughly the size of a hazelnut, which preserves moisture and results in a softer cheese. Curd for Matturo is cut smaller, to the size of a corn kernel, which facilitates greater whey expulsion and results in a drier, more age-worthy cheese. Both styles may be either brined or dry-salted. They may be smoked, although this practice is rare.

Pecorino Sardo is often confused with another Sardinian sheep's milk cheese, Fiore Sardo. Though the two cheeses are similar, they differ in several key respects: Fiore Sardo is made of raw sheep's milk exclusively of the Sarda breed and is coagulated with goat or sheep rennet. It has more bulging, rounded sides and is in practice more likely to be smoked.

See also FIORE SARDO; SARDA; and SARDINIA.

Associazione Formaggi Italiani D.O.P. <http://www.afidop.it/en/dop-igp-cheeses/pecorino-sardo-dop>.
Consorzio per la Tutela del Formaggio Fiore Sardo D.O.P. <http://formaggio.it/formaggio/fiore-sardo-d-o-p>.
Kindstedt, Paul. *Cheese and Culture: A History of Cheese and Its Place in Western Civilization*. White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 2012.
Sardegna Agricoltura. <http://www.sardegnaagricoltura.it>.

Matthew Rubiner

Pecorino Siciliano is a raw, hard PDO (protected designation of origin) cheese produced with whole sheep's milk taken from ewes raised in Sicily. It is one of the oldest cheeses in Europe, and its origins are legendary. It is cited in many writings, among which the most notable is *The Odyssey* in which Homer tells about the sheep's cheeses produced by the giant Cyclops Polyphemus. It also appears in *Naturalis Historia* by Pliny the Elder. It is historically linked to the sheep farms of hills and

semi-arid areas where ewes of autochthonous breeds are fed diets mainly based on natural pasture. In such farming systems, this cheese is manufactured with artisanal procedures using wooden tools, typical of the Sicilian dairy tradition. See HOMER; PLINY THE ELDER; and WOODEN VATS.

Lambs' rennet is used for coagulation and the separation of the curd from the whey is made by hand using traditional equipment to obtain the cheese curd. Afterward the curd cheese is placed into a bulrush basket. Dry salting is manually performed and the cheeses are then placed on a wooden workbench to mature at least four months.

Pecorino Siciliano has a cylindrical shape with slightly convex faces and a rind color ranging from white to light yellow. The paste is hard and compact, white or straw-colored, with few aeration holes. The weight varies from 9 to 26 pounds (4–12 kilograms); cheeses with greater weight are aged longer from six to over twelve months. The aroma and flavor of Pecorino Siciliano PDO varies according to the degree of aging, from fresh and floral, to a more pronounced taste of fruity, and spicy for aged cheeses. The annual production of the certified PDO cheese amounts to 40 tons, and the sales market is mainly regional.

See also SICILY; PECORINO DI FILIANO; PECORINO DI PICINISCO; PECORINO ROMANO; PECORINO SARDO; and PECORINO TOSCANO.

Today M., et al. "Effect of Different Salting Technologies on the Chemical and Microbiological Characteristics of PDO Pecorino Siciliano Cheese." *European Food Research and Technology* 233 (2011): 931–940.

Settanni L., et al. "Selected Lactic Acid Bacteria as a Hurdle to the Microbial Spoilage of Cheese: Application on a Traditional Raw Ewes' Milk Cheese." *International Dairy Journal* 32: 126–132.

Massimo Todaro

Pecorino Toscano is a sheep's milk PDO (protected designation of origin) cheese produced in the whole region of Tuscany and some municipalities of Umbria and Lazio. It comes in two types: *pasta tenera* (soft) and *pasta semidura* (semihard).

Pecorino Toscano is made using whole ewe's milk from breeds typical of the area (Sardinian, Comisana, Massese, Appenninica, and Langhe are the principal ones). Raw or pasteurized milk, inoculated with autochthonous or selected starter, is coagulated at

91–100°F (33–38°C), using calf rennet, within twenty to twenty-five minutes. For the "pasta tenera" type, after coagulation the curd is cut into pieces the size of hazelnuts and then transferred into molds and manually pressed. Cheeses are brined and ripened for at least twenty days in cool (41–54°F [5–12°C]) rooms with a relative humidity of 75–90 percent and during ripening the rind can be rubbed with anti-mold products. For "pasta semidura" type, after coagulation the curd is cut into pieces the size of corn kernels and then transferred into molds and manually pressed. Ripening lasts four months in cool (41–54°F [5–12°C]) rooms with a relative humidity of 75–90 percent and during ripening the rind can be rubbed with anti-mold products.

The cheese is cylindrical with straight or slightly convex sides and a straw-colored rind. It is 3–4 inches (7–11 centimeters) high, 6–9 inches (15–22 centimeters) in diameter, and weighs from 15 ounces to 8 pounds (0.7–3.5 kilograms). The interior of the *pasta tenera* cheese is white to white straw-colored, compact with a fat content of at least 40 percent while the *pasta semidura* cheese is straw-colored, compact, hard when cut, and with a fat content of at least 45 percent and a fragrant flavor. It can be used as table or grating cheese.

Ministero delle Politiche Agricole. "Disciplinari di produzione prodotti DOP e IGP riconosciuti: Formaggi." <http://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/3340>.

Pecorino Toscano official website. <http://www.pecorinotoscanodop.it>.

Pirisi, A., et al. "Sheep's and Goat's Dairy Products in Italy: Technological, Chemical, Microbiological, and Sensory Aspects." *Small Ruminant Research* 101 (2011): 102–112.

Marta Bertolino

pelle à brie is the traditional perforated ladle used for molding traditional Bries such as Brie de Meaux and Brie de Melun, two French AOP (appellation d'origine protégée) cheeses.

Bries are soft cow's milk cheeses named after Brie, the French region from which they originate (roughly corresponding to the modern department of Seine-et-Marne). A Brie may be produced from whole or semi-skimmed milk. The curd is obtained by adding rennet to raw milk and warming it to a maximum temperature of 99°F (37°C). In artisanal cheese-making, the cheese is then cast into molds with the

a public library of Greek and Latin books, the first in Rome.

Varro wrote in prose and verse on many subjects but most of his works are lost. One that survives is *Farming* (Latin title *Res Rusticae*), a readable introduction to the subject, written at the age of eighty and dedicated to Varro's much younger wife, Fundania, who is said in the preface to have just inherited a farm. It is written as a conversation in which real Roman landowners, friends of Varro, take part alongside fictional characters. In spite of this unusual format Varro's *Farming* is much more systematic than Cato's earlier *On Farming* and was a major source for Columella's more comprehensive work *On Agriculture*.

Varro's discussion of milk and cheese constitutes a subsection of the discussion of sheep, implying that, naturally enough for central Italy, sheep's milk cheese is what he has in mind. He begins with the timetable: "They make cheese between the spring rising of the Pleiades and the summer Pleiades." If the last phrase means "the summer setting of the Pleiades," this places the cheesemaking season between early May and early September, agreeing with other Roman sources. He continues:

In spring they milk early for cheese-making, in other seasons around midday, though owing to geography and to differences in food it is not the same everywhere. To coagulate two congii [6½ litres] of milk they add an olive-sized amount of rennet. Hare's or kid's rennet is better than lamb's; other people, though, use the milk from a fig branch and vinegar as rennets, and various other substances, all of which are classed as "sap" or "tear" in Greek.

Returning to the use of fig sap as vegetable rennet, Varro suggests that this is the reason why a fig tree flourished in Rome beside the ancient shrine of the goddess Rumina, honored by shepherds. He concludes with the observation that "those who add salt prefer rock to sea salt."

See also ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS.

Varro, Marcus Terentius. Marcus Porcius Cato on Agriculture; Marcus Terentius Varro on Agriculture. Translated by William Davis Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash. English translation of *Res Rusticae*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934. See pp. 413–415.

White, K. D. "Roman Agricultural Writers I: Cato and Varro." In *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen*

Welt. Part 1, vol. 4, edited by H. Temporini, pp. 439–497. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973.

Andrew Dalby

Vastedda della Valle del Belice is an Italian PDO (protected designation of origin) pasta filata cheese obtained from raw whole sheep's milk from the Valle del Belice breed. It represents a rare stretched pasta filata cheese made from ewe's milk. The PDO area covers some municipal areas in the districts of Agrigento, Trapani, and Palermo in Sicily.

To make Vastedda della Valle del Belice, the milk from one or two milking's is processed within forty-eight hours. It is filtered, heated at 100°F (38°C) and coagulated in a wooden vat employing lamb rennet. The curd obtained has to be broken up through the so-called *rotula* in order to form lumps the size of a rice grain, which have to rest for five minutes before being taken and put, without pressing, in bulrush baskets. After twenty-four to forty-eight hours the curd is sliced and put in a wood container called a *piddiaturi*, where it is covered with whey or hot water (176–194°F [80–90°C]) for three to seven minutes until the mass becomes compact and can be spun. Then, out of water, the cords formed are folded and shaped in braids, from which the spheres will be made. These last are put in ceramic soup plates and hand worked until achieving the typical shape of Vastedda. After cooling, the molds are salted in salt brine for one to two hours and after twelve to forty-eight hours they are ready for consumption.

Vastedda della Valle del Belice has a typical truncated conical shape, with a diameter of 6–7 inches (15–17 centimeters) and a weight of 17–24 ounces (500–700 grams). It is free from rind and the surface is ivory white in color. The flavor is typical of fresh sheep's cheeses, lightly sourish but not spicy. The annual production of certified PDO cheese amounts to 25 tons; the sales market is mainly regional.

See also PASTA FILATA and SICILY.

Mucchetti, G., et al. "Influence of Cheese-making Technology on Composition and Microbiological Characteristics of Vastedda Cheese." *Food Control* 19 (2008): 119–125.

Massimo Todaro