

# ● History of Cheese



Cheese is one of the most varied, subtle and fascinating foods in the world. Even though there are always the same two ingredients, milk and rennet, there is an enormously wide variety of results and many of them are very surprising. Tiny variations in temperature, in fermentation or in the cheese-making process produce an abundance of different flavours, textures and aromas. From the taste point of view, cheese can be bland, buttery, innocuous, rich, creamy, pungent, sharp, salty or lightly delicate. Its texture can be hard enough to chip off in flakes, so soft and runny that it needs to be eaten with a spoon or at any one of a dozen points of softness and firmness between these two extremes. The smell of cheese can be rank and overpowering enough to turn the stomach of the strongest man (and still be eaten with relish by devotees), delicately aromatic or virtually unnoticeable. Bread and cheese were the staple foods for many nomadic sheep herding tribes in Europe. Nowadays

it can serve as the perfect companion for wines, a superbly satisfying finale to a gourmet meal or simply as a basic nourishing foodstuff for family snacks or meals.

Archaeologists have discovered that as far back as 6000 BC, cheese was made from cow's and goat's milk and stored in tall jars. Egyptian tomb murals of 2000 BC show butter and cheese being made, and other murals showing milk being stored in skin bags suspended from poles demonstrate a knowledge of dairy husbandry at that time. Also the Jews knew how to preserve milk making cheese and yoghurt. Learning these techniques, the Romans with their characteristic efficiency were quick to develop cheesemaking to a fine art. Cheese making was done with skill and knowledge and reached a high standard. By this time the ripening process had been developed and it was known that various treatments and conditions under storage resulted in different

flavours and characteristics. The larger Roman houses had a separate cheese kitchen, the caseale, and also special areas where cheese could be matured. By 300 AD, cheese was being regularly exported to countries along the Mediterranean seaboard. Trade had developed to such an extent that the emperor Diocletian had to fix maximum prices for a range of cheeses including an apple-smoked cheese highly popular with Romans. Yet another cheese was stamped and sold under the brand name of “La Luna”, and is said to have been the precursor of today’s Parmesan. Roman expertise spread throughout Europe wherever their empire extended. Tribes such as the Helvetica, who had settled in the Swiss Alps, developed their own distinctive types of cheese. They were, in fact, so successful in doing this that for a period all export of their Emmental cheese was banned. In the fertile lowlands of Europe dairy husbandry developed at a faster pace and cheesemaking from cows’ milk became the norm. Hence, the particular development of cheeses such as Edam and Gouda in the

Netherlands. A hard-pressed cheese, relatively small in size, brine-salted and waxed to reduce moisture losses in storage, proved both marketable and easy to distribute. France developed a wider range of cheeses from the rich agricultural areas in the south and west of the country. Soft cheese production was preferred with a comparatively long making season. Hard-pressed cheese appeared to play a secondary role. To some extent this reflects the Latin culture of the nation, mirroring the cheese types produced in the Mediterranean areas as distinct from the hard-pressed cheeses that were developed in the northern regions of Europe for storage and use in the long cold winter months that lay ahead. During the Middle Ages, monks became innovators and developers and it is to them we owe many of the classic varieties of cheese marketed today. During the Renaissance period cheese suffered a drop in popularity, being considered unhealthy, but it regained favour by the nineteenth century, the period that saw the start of the move from farm to factory production.

## exercises

### 1 Read the following passage and fill in the blanks with the right suggested word.

Most sources consider that (1) ..... was first made in the Middle East. The earliest type was a form of (2) ..... milk which came into being when it was discovered that domesticated animals could be (3) ..... Legend has it that cheese was “discovered” by an (4) ..... Arab nomad. He is said to have filled a saddlebag with milk to sustain him on a (5) ..... across the desert by horse. After several hours riding he stopped to quench his (6) ....., only to find that the milk had separated into a pale watery liquid and solid white lumps. Because the saddlebag, which was made from the (7) ..... of a young animal, contained a coagulating (8) ..... known as “rennin”, the milk had been effectively separated into curds and whey by the combination of the rennin, the (9) ..... sun and the galloping motions of the horse. The nomad, unconcerned with technical details, found the whey drinkable and the curds (10) .....

- |    |           |            |           |
|----|-----------|------------|-----------|
| 1  | a cheese  | b milk     | c yoghurt |
| 2  | a creamy  | b sour     | c rancid  |
| 3  | a brewed  | b grown    | c milked  |
| 4  | a unknown | b shepherd | c man     |
| 5  | a journey | b holiday  | c walking |
| 6  | a hunger  | b thirst   | c anger   |
| 7  | a skin    | b leg      | c stomach |
| 8  | a enzyme  | b vitamin  | c liquid  |
| 9  | a hot     | b cold     | c cool    |
| 10 | a eatable | b eatingly | c edible  |



## ● Mozzarella: a unique, unequalled Italian Cheese

Legend says that mozzarella was first made when cheese curds accidentally fell into a pail of hot water in a cheese factory near Naples, and soon thereafter the first pizza was made! Actually, new cheeses are often born when mistakes happen, so there may well be truth in the tale!

Mozzarella was first made in Italy near Naples from the rich milk of water buffalos. Because it was not made from pasteurized milk and because there was little or no refrigeration, the cheese had a very short shelf-life and seldom left the southern region of Italy near Naples where it was made. As cheese technology, refrigeration and transportation systems developed, the cheese spread to other regions of Italy. However, to this day it is widely known that the best and most highly prized buffalo mozzarella produced on craft scale is still found south of Naples near Battipaglia and Caserta where small factories continue a centuries-old tradition of making buffalo mozzarella fresh daily for their local customers, who line up at the factories to buy this delicacy.

This is what an American traveller wrote about it.

*«When I first travelled to Italy in the early 1960's and tasted fresh mozzarella I couldn't quite decide what I was eating. It was so soft and moist, very bland and milky tasting, almost spongy and oozing with milk. It was often served with tomatoes in a salad. When I was told it was made from "buffalo milk", I couldn't imagine what Wild Bill Cody and his buffaloes could possibly have to do with this delicious dish! Later I learned that some of this fresh mozzarella was made from the milk of water buffalos and it was called "buffalo mozzarella" and some was made from cow's milk and it was called "fior di latte"! Whenever I travelled to Italy I would enjoy fresh mozzarella and tomato salads».*

To make mozzarella, raw milk is pasteurized and then coagulated to form curds. Once the curds reach a pH of 5.2 they are cut into small pieces and mixed with hot water and then "strung" or "spun" until long ropes of cheese form. This "stringing of the curd" is unique to cheeses in the "pasta filata" family, such as mozzarella,

scamorza and provolone. When the proper smooth, elastic consistency is reached, the curds are formed by machine or hand into balls which are then tossed into cold water so that they maintain their shapes while they cool. They are then salted and packaged. It is a short making process, usually less than 8 hours from raw milk to finished cheese. The critical moment is determining exactly when the cheese is mature and ready to be strung: waiting too long can result in a mushy cheese, while stringing too early can result in a tough dry cheese.

What distinguishes a superior fresh mozzarella from the rest of the pack? Taste above all. The cheese should taste fresh and reminiscent of milk. It should be mild and delicate. Some say it is bland, yet there is flavour. There should be a hint of sourness. If it tastes too tart or sour the cheese is past its prime. The colour should be white; however, seasonally the cheese can be more yellow due to the cows' diet of grass. The fresher the cheese is the more elastic and springy the curd will be. As the cheese ages it becomes softer and softer. The perishability of fresh mozzarella varies according to packaging. Nowadays vacuum sealing extends the shelf life dramatically even if fresh mozzarella is usually packaged in a liquid called "latte".



## exercises

### 4 Complete the following sentences with one of the three alternatives.

- 1 Legend says that mozzarella was first made when
- a the first pizza was made.
- b some curd fell into a bucket of hot water.
- c some curd fell into a basket of hot water.
- 2 It was difficult to keep mozzarella fresh because
- a it wasn't made with cow's milk.
- b fridges hadn't been invented yet.
- c it was made with pasteurized milk.
- 3 Mozzarella was very rarely transported out of the south of Italy because
- a there weren't enough lorries.
- b there wasn't enough demanded for the product.
- c there weren't refrigerated lorries.
- 4 The "pasta filata" method for making cheese was
- a known also in the north of Italy.
- b unique to mozzarella.
- c not known outside Campania.
- 5 The taste of a superior fresh mozzarella should be
- a mild and delicate.
- b sour.
- c tart.

### 5 Match the words in column A with their opposite in column B.

- | A          | B             |
|------------|---------------|
| 1 truth    | a hard        |
| 2 seldom   | b lumpy       |
| 3 soft     | c lie         |
| 4 moist    | d rigid       |
| 5 bland    | e often       |
| 6 smooth   | f pasteurized |
| 7 elastic  | g dry         |
| 8 raw      | h unyielding  |
| 9 mushy    | i sharp       |
| 10 springy | j tough       |

6 Fill in the following recipe with the word you find in the box.

serve ripe ground leaves there inch arrange fanning drizzle tear

## RECIPE Mozzarella and tomato salad

**Serves:** 4

**Ingredients**

2 large ..... tomatoes, peeled and sliced 1/4 inch thick

8 ounces fresh mozzarella, sliced 1/4 ..... thick

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ..... black pepper

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

8 ..... fresh basil

**Method**

..... the tomato and mozzarella slices on a platter or individual salad plates, overlapping the slices and ..... them out like a deck of cards. Sprinkle with the salt and pepper. .... with excellent extra-virgin olive oil. Garnish with the basil. Cut it into very thin slices or ..... into bits and scatter it on top, or leave the leaves whole and tuck them here and ..... peeking out between the mozzarella and tomato slices. .... immediately.