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HIGHLIGHTS FROM CHEESE HISTORY

8000 BCE: Goats in the Near East are the first livestock to be domesticated by humans.

2500 to 1250 BCE: The Hittites in central Anatolia include a fight with cheeses—as weapons, not opponents—as part of the entertainment at one of their religious festivals.

150 BCE to 450 CE: The Romans produce the earliest recorded smoked cheese, with the best wheels found in, and named for, the Velabrum, the city's bustling food marketplace.

774 CE: Brie de Meaux, produced on farmsteads around the Abbaye du Jouarre outside Paris, is recognized by the emperor Charlemagne.

Late 13th century: The earliest record of a macaroni-and-cheese-type dish appears in the anonymously authored Neapolitan cookbook *Liber de coquina*, according to the food writer and historian Clifford A. Wright. Called *de lasanis*—which sounds an awful lot like lasagna—the dish consists of boiled squares of fermented pasta dough tossed with grated cheese.

1365: The Alkmaar auction, one of the earliest Dutch cheese markets, opens in northern Holland.

1585: Following Spanish colonization, the first cheeses are produced in Mexico, using sheep's milk.

1801: Dairymaids in the town of Cheshire, Massachusetts, made a 14-foot, 1,235-pound wheel of cheese—known as the Cheshire Mammoth Cheese—and presented it to President Thomas Jefferson on January 1, 1802, after its three-week journey to Washington, DC.

1854: The French scientist Louis Pasteur discovers that yeasts are responsible for fermentation—and that applying heat to products like wine, beer, and milk could halt microbial activity without damaging the flavor and quality.

1914: James Kraft purchases his first cheese factory in Stockton, Illinois.

1919: Cabot Creamery, the farmer-owned New England dairy famed for its cheddar, is founded in Cabot, Vermont.

1937: Boxed Kraft "macaroni and grated cheese" debuts in the United States.

1970s: Women cheesemakers like Capriole's Judy Schad, Cypress Grove's Mary Keene, Alison Hooper of Vermont Butter and Cheese, and Laura Chenel of Laura Chenel's Chèvre pioneer a new era in American artisan cheesemaking.

2003: Andy and Mateo Kehler begin making cheese at Jasper Hill Farms in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.

2018: Archaeologists from the University of Catania and the University of Cairo identify the earliest Egyptian cheese in the tomb of a high-ranking official. The cheese, made from a blend of sheep and goat's milk, is 3,200 years old.

MILK TYPES

One of the most basic ways to categorize cheeses is by milk type. In the U.S., cow's milk cheeses are by far the most common. Goat's and sheep's milk cheeses are more prevalent in parts of Europe and the Middle East, and water buffalo are milked throughout Asia. These are the most common ruminants whose milk is made into cheese.

Cow: Sweet, creamy, and lactic, cow's milk is versatile and abundant—modern dairy cows produce around 8 gallons of milk per day. This milk also has fewer short-chain fatty acids than goat's milk (these account for the “goat-y” flavor of stored goat's milk and some goat cheeses that some find off-putting). When we talk about milk generally in this book, we're referring to cow's milk unless otherwise noted.

Goat: While goats don't chow down on tin cans and other garbage like they do in cartoons, they do eat the leaves of trees and shrubs in addition to grasses. As a result, wild herbs and plants in a region will influence the flavor of the milk and cheese. Goat's milk is less sweet than cow's milk and contains more short-chain fatty acids, giving it a flavor that can make for tangy, light fresh cheeses and earthy aged cheeses. Because

goat's milk has smaller fat globules and a slightly different protein structure than cow's milk, people with lactose intolerance may find it easier to digest.

Sheep: Sheep produce only a tenth of the milk in a year that cows do, but their rich, buttery milk is prized for cheesemaking. Because it contains twice the fat and 70 percent more protein than cow's milk, half as much sheep's milk is needed to produce the same amount of cheese. Signature sheep's milk cheeses are Roquefort, Manchego, feta, and Pecorino.

Water buffalo: Though Italy is known for its ultra-rich mozzarella di bufala, the vast majority of the world's water buffalo are raised across Asia. Their milk is made into cheese in India, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Here are some of the less common animals whose milk is made into cheese.

Camel: Because of several facts—camel's milk is difficult to curdle, camels tends to live in arid climates with low humidity, and a nomadic lifestyle is required to find food in the desert—camel cheese is a relatively new phenomenon. For example, Caravane, a fresh-tasting

Camembert-like cheese produced in Mauritania, in northwest Africa, was developed in the mid-1990s.

Moose: This milk is consumed throughout Scandinavia and Russia, but a single farm turns it into cheese. Christer and Ulla Johansson milk just three moose at Elk House in tiny Bjurholm, Sweden. Because the animals are skittish and don't produce much milk, the Johanssons produce only 660 pounds of cheese—which sells for as much as \$500 per pound—each year.

Yak: Fatty, rich yak's milk—twice as fatty as cow's milk—is churned into butter by nomadic herders in the animal's native Tibet. Farmers on the Tibetan plateau use it to make grassy Pecorino-esque cheeses. The leftover buttermilk is used in Himalayan cultures to make a ricotta-like cheese called *chhurpi*, which can be served as a soft, fresh cheese or pressed, cut, and heated until it's tough like jerky.

Donkey: Yes, donkeys can be milked, but because their output is so low (between 1 and 2 quarts per day) and the milk has lower levels of fat and protein, cheese made from it is rare—and pricey. *Puk*, a white, crumbly variety produced on a farm in Serbia, is the world's most expensive cheese, selling for \$1,700 per pound.

BLUE CHEESES

Cheeses in the blue mold family bring big flavors ranging from spicy to toasty to sour to chocolatey. Some cheese lovers crave this style's signature pungency, while others just can't stomach it.

Blue cheeses get their namesake hue from two different cultures: *Penicillium roqueforti* and *Penicillium glaucum*, part of the genus of molds from which penicillin is derived. The former creates a vivid greenish-blue mold and a more aggressive flavor profile—think Roquefort, obviously. By contrast, the latter produces a milder dessert-like blue.

A common misconception is that the colorful stripes of mold you see on a cut wedge of blue-veined cheese are injected into the wheels. In fact, the mold is added to the liquid milk, but it can only grow in the presence of oxygen, so the wheel must be pierced with a long needle. Some blue cheeses such as Monte Enebro, a goat's-milk round, have blue mold applied only to their rinds, not inoculated into the milk. This gives the spicy rind and the lactic paste contrasting flavors.

NOTABLE VARIETIES

Roquefort: Only seven producers make true Roquefort: an intense, complex, and ancient blue made exclusively from the raw milk of Laucaune sheep. Rindless wheels of this spicy, buttery, tangy AOC-protected cheese are aged in underground limestone caves in the South of France. Pair it with stone fruits, honey, and walnuts or a glass of Sauternes.

Colston Bassett Stilton: A rich, fudgy blue that melts on the tongue, Colston Bassett is the rare producer making Stilton with preindustrial methods, hand-laddling curds rather than producing wheels in factories. Because this pasteurized cow's milk wheel is pierced less than other blues—meaning less mold growth—its flavor is sweeter.

Rogue River Blue: The blue cheese experts—they make seven different kinds—at Oregon's Rogue Creamery triumphed with this cheese at the 2019 World Cheese Awards. Made only with luscious fall milk and aged wrapped in grape leaves soaked in pear liqueur, it's a seasonal treat that's worth its steeper-than-most price tag.

HATE BLUE CHEESE? TRY A GATEWAY BLUE

Not into the pungent, tongue-popping qualities of blue cheese? I encourage the blue-averse to try again with such milder, friendlier "gateway blues" as Bleu d'Auvergne that are cultured with *P. glaucum*, which creates those sweeter, nutty, chocolatey notes. You can also ask your friendly neighborhood cheesemonger to try a nibble of the most accessible blue in their case.

If you're shopping at the supermarket, Cambozola—a hybrid of Camembert and Gorgonzola—has the lush texture and buttery flavors of a ripe bloomy with only intermittent blue mold. It's also pretty affordable, so if you truly hate it, your pocketbook will take less of a hit when you give it away to a blue-loving friend.