Cheeses Sardinia







THE ISLAND OF CHEESES

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uring the Bronze Age and the Nuraghic era, around 1500 BC, Sardinian village dwellers raised sheep, goats and cattle. They created, and handed down, images of their pastoral world in small bronze statues, which can be seen today, preserved in several museums on the island.

Shortly after the end of the first Punic War, Sardinia, occupied by the Roman Legions, supplied the Empire with grain, while the very tasty cheese and butter, skilfully produced by Sardinian shepherds graced the tables of Republican senators and consuls.

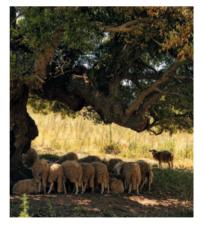
During the Middle Ages, the island, divided into four Realms or *Giudicati*, produced and exported *Torres* or *Sardesco* cheeses, as well as *Cagliari*, white *Arborea* and *Gallura* ones, through Pisan merchants. The demand for such valuable Sardinian products caused a levy of three and a half *soldi* per cantharus more than that imposed on *Paramensis* or Parma cheeses.

The levy imposed on cheese, wool and leather exports allowed the *Reale Amministrazione delle Torri* (Royal Administration of the Towers) (1581), set up under Catalan and Aragon dominion, to protect the coast, and to promote cheese-making activities.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the *Regno di Sardegna* (Realm of Sardinia) under the Savoy dynasty, maintained its important role in the raising of cattle and in the production of dairy products. In fact, these island activities allowed the royal coffers to reap as much as 132,000 lire from exporters of *pickled cheeses* to Naples, Leghorn and Marseilles: *delicate cheeses* for Genoa and Nice, and *smoked*







cheeses for Corsica the Ligurian and Riviera, from Sardinian ports. The Regie (Taxation Gabelle body) of the Realm also imposed levies on other types of cheese, such as fino cheese and intiero cheese. In Turin. in 1776, the 18th century reformer and writer on Sardinian affairs,

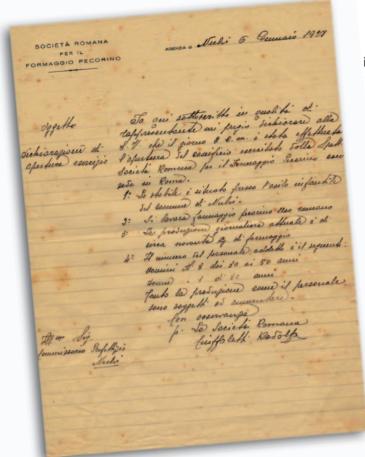
Francesco Gemelli, proposed a renewal of Sardinian agriculture. He underlined the economic importance of sheep and goat breeding on the island; important for the consistency and size of herds, for their territorial diffusion and for the commodities they provided. He wrote: but now let us talk of 'cacio', produced in large quantities in Sardinia, 'pecorino' and 'caprino', insofar as cow's milk is scarce not only for local use, but also as a commercial product. also praised the wholesomeness of the produce. and the suitability of the natural

Gemelli also praised the wholesomeness of the produce, and the suitability of the natural Sardinian environment. His enthusiasm did not, however, prevent him from pointing out, as an astute observer, some defects in the marketing of the commodities he so admired.

Sardinia makes fine cheeses in various zones, and they could be excellent as a whole, as this island has particularly good, aromatic grazing land, if only it could address certain defects, which inhibit quality.

If the preparation of 'Sardesco Cacio' were equal to its quantity, I would but praise the shepherds, who make the cheese, and exhort them to continue in their ancient ways. But it is not so... Then he goes on to list the technical shortcomings to be found in the production of those cheeses: the use of milks, which are too acid, excessive doses of rennet, imperfect draining of the ferment, too much salt and excessive dehydration during smoking. The writer implies that the only real Sardinian cacio, prepared in small pieces, is the Fiore Sardo, still produced in the traditional manner, being entirely made by the shepherds themselves. Despite his broad vision of the 're-flowering' of Sardinia, he could never have dreamt that cacio would become the object of





international treaties, such as the Stresa Convention, nor that it would achieve Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status, nor that a protection consortium bearing the name of this cheese would be set up. Gemelli's suggestions were not adopted, and his dream was not fulfilled, Sardinia did not 're-flower'.

Some significant developments did however take place, and were to have their effect upon the regional livestock sector during the final 20 years of the 19th century. The breach of the Franco-Italian treaty for the export of meat livestock to France (1888), the drop in sheep's milk production in the Latium Maremma area, following major public works, the drop in grain prices caused by imports of cheap American wheat, the conversion into grazing land of territories on the island formerly dedicated to cereal production, as well as the growth in overseas demand for Pecorino Romano

brought about a considerable increase in the number of sheep in Sardinia, from 850,000 in 1881, to over 2,000,000 in 1918. The processing of sheep's milk, formerly carried out in small circular buildings known as sas pinettas made up of a low stone wall and a conical thatched roof, was replaced by the use of small portable structures called caselli around 1897, operated by Latial, Tuscan and Campanian entrepreneurs, who started up Pecorino Romano production on the island.

This technological change was brought about by order of the Mayor of Rome (1884), which forbade the salting of sheep's cheeses, that is to say Romano cheeses, rather than by the abundance of raw materials, or by the developments mentioned in the previous paragraph. This was an important issue; the salters, on the one hand had organized the first salting plants on the outskirts of towns, near which the first cheesemaking

centres grew up, but on the other hand they resisted the new regulations. They lost their case, as was fair and logical, and *Pecorino Romano* landed decisively in Sardinia. Over a century of production and the application of research findings by Sardinian Institutes for the improvement of the product, whilst remaining faithful to tradition, have guaranteed island citizenship and have legitimised the important role of Sardinian cheesemaking.

At the end of the last century, the *R. Scuola Agraria* (Royal Agrarian School) of Sassari, directed by Dr. N. Pellegrini, in order ...to spread basic notions of the art of modern cheesemaking and to improve local cheese production so that Sardinia could acquire fame in the production of great cheeses, with great benefit to the economy, both private and public... organised itinerant conferences in the field of cheesemaking in many villages, promulgating new technologies and concepts of the art to participants, whilst at the same time recognising the already well renowned abilities in the transformation of milk.

Developments in breeding continued, and cheesemaking enterprises proliferated, located near livestock establishments. Salting and maturation plants were generally located near towns and railways. Pietro Gobetti was particularly struck by this aspect of sheep's milk processing on the island, writing in his 1924 essay, 'The Sardinia Problem'; It is the cheesemakers who have created the general characteristics of the island economy, and have managed to conquer the American market, bringing wealth to Sardinia. We shall see a new Sardinian psychology emerge thanks

to this transformation from ancient sheep-rearing methods. The field of sheep's milk processing was characterised during the first 30 years of the 20th century by the contemporaneous and conflicting presence of entrepreneurs, private both local and continental. and the creation of associations. The Latteria Sociale Cooperativa



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(Social Dairy Products Cooperative) of Bortigali (NU), formed in 1907 on the initiative of Doctor Pietro Solinas, and the cooperative experience of the Ozieri group, under Doctor Paolo Pili, which contributed new technological and commercialisation elements to the sector (Federation of Social & Cooperative Dairy Product Enterprises of Sardinia, 1924-30), should be mentioned here. Meanwhile, cheesemaking techniques typical of southern Italy began to arrive in Sardinia: the *canestrati*; whilst Greek cheese makers chose the island for the production of Feta, and of Balkan Vise cheeses.

Gemelli had said '... cow's milk is scarce...', but it was this milk which was chosen for the production of the delicate Fresa, the Pasta Filata called Casizolu, and for Sorrento Provolone. More recently, the range of marketable soft cheese and rapidly matured products has increased, as a result of the activities of the Regione Autonoma della Sardegna, which has also favoured associations of breeders, and by the involvement of institutes of applied technology, as well as that of local universities. The production of goat's milk cheese, penalised in the past by limited breeding which impeded the formation of specific cheesemaking methods, now has real prospects of development, thanks to improved livestock management methods, and to a more positive view of goats and their derived food products by consumers. Today, delicate goat's cheeses are bringing about the rediscovery of an ancient pastoral tradition, whilst modern technology has bestowed a well-defined nomenclature and identity upon them.





The concession in 1996 of PDO status to our sheep's milk three cheeses. Pecorino Romano. Fiore Sardo and Pecorino Sardo, the first two being inserted in the of the Stresa Convention of 1951 regarding the use of nomenclature of origin and denomination of cheeses, represents a credential of nobility and

credibility for Sardinian cheese making.

Whatever the inherent eating habits of the consumer may be, he cannot ignore our cheeses, not only sheep's milk cheeses, but also those made from cow's and goat's milk, be it for table or other uses.

Next to these cheeses, perhaps of less importance, is *Ricotta* or – to tell the truth, the *Ricotte*. A series of products can be obtained from the *ricottura* (re-heating) process. They are all different, in structure, texture and consistency, in taste and aroma, and can be applied to a wide variety of uses.

Sardinian cheesemaking has evolved over the centuries: it has accepted external suggestions, it has re-thought its own traditions, whilst respecting those handed down over generations, adapting them to the requirements of an increasingly refined buying public. What has not changed in Sardinia is the natural environment, from which the raw materials, milk in particular, come. From raw materials

to finished products, as natural and as genuine as ever. A clean sea, green, blue and turquoise; beaches of fine red or brilliant white sand; caves with delicate traceries of flowing water; wind-crafted rocks; the perfume of lentisk trees, strawberry bushes and the presence of the 'nuraghi', the characteristic conical dwellings of the island, which tell of times long past. This is what our island has to offer. The Island of Cheeses which are to be discovered and appreciated in their magical natural environment, but which may also be found near your own home.





PECORINO ROMANO

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) cheese.

The end of the 19th century witnessed the arrival on the island of the cheese which was to become the mainstay of the Sardinian dairy industry. One of the first Italian cheeses to win international and national awards and recognition. Indeed, it is listed in the Convention of Stresa of 1951 addressing the denominations of various cheeses and has held the title *Denominazione d'Origine* since 1955, and the title PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) throughout Europe since 1996; finally, in June 1997, the United States Patents & Trademark authority issued it the trademark "Roman cheese made from sheep's milk". Whole sheep's milk, derived from herds in their own grazing zones: Sardinia, Latium and Province of Grosseto, a combination repeated daily following an age-old tradition. Sheep's rennet in the form of paste, skill and knowledge of local operators and painstaking respect for the various production phases are the characteristic and unique ingredients of this cheese.

The cheese, cylindrical in form, with flat sides, weighs between 20-25 kilos. The rind is thin, ivory or straw-coloured, often domed, the cheese itself being similarly coloured, hard, compacted or slightly holed. When matured for a minimum of eight months, the slightly sharp taste of the table variety, which requires at least five months maturing, becomes intensely sharp, and pleasantly characteristic in the grating variety, which is seasoned for a minimum of eight months.

All types of cheese are validated at their point of origin, and must bear on their rind elements which the *Consorzio per la Tutela del Formaggio Pecorino Romano* (Consortium for the Protection of *Pecorino Romano* Cheese), set up in 1979, have laid down: the name *Pecorino Romano* in writing, the logo in the form of a rhombus with rounded edges framing the stylised head of a sheep, with *Pecorino Romano* written below, the province of origin, cheese maker's code, the year and month of production, and finally the details of PDO recognition.

CONSORZIO PER LA TUTELA DEL FORMAGGIO PECORINO ROMANO Corso Umberto I°, 226 - 08015 Macomer (NU) - Sardegna - Italia Tel. 0785-70537; Fax 0785-72215 - www.pecorinoromano.net





Acua a su meloni, casu a su maccarroni.

Water for melons, cheese with macaroni.



PECORINO SARDO

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) cheese

A sheep's milk cheese, among the most highly-regarded in Sardinia, esteemed in the annals of Sardinian cheese making, which go back to the end of the eighteenth century.

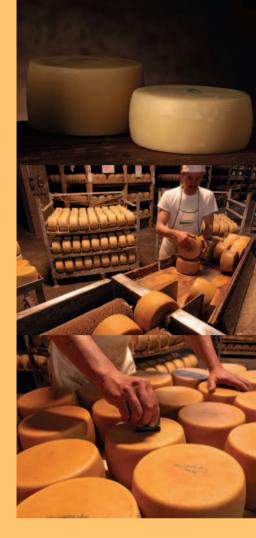
It has held the *Denominazione d'Origine* title since 1991, this being the first great award for a typical cheese particularly representative of the Sardinian scene, and PDO at European level since 1996. The two categories of the cheese, *Dolce* and *Maturo*, are exclusively produced in Sardinia. Whole sheep's milk, with lactic ferments added in the zone of origin, coagulated with calf's rennet, produces a cheese which, after *semicottura* (half-cooking) is placed in cylindrical moulds. Next, the serum is carefully drained, it is salted and seasoned for a brief period, from 20-60 days, to obtain the *Pecorino Sardo Dolce* variety, whilst the *Pecorino Sardo Maturo* requires more than 2 months' seasoning. The cheese, cylindrical, with flat sides, with a straight or slightly curved rind, has variations depending on its method of manufacture.

Pecorino Sardo Dolce, weighing between 1-2.3 kilos, has a smooth, soft rind, straw-white in colour, becoming darker with ageing. The cheese itself is compact soft and elastic, sometimes with tiny holes. Mature examples are also denser, and more grainy. The taste is pleasantly sharp, A table cheese.

Pecorino Sardo Maturo, weighing from 1.7 to 4 kilos, has a smooth, consistent rind. The colour is light straw, becoming darker with seasoning. The cheese itself is compact, sometimes sparsely holed, white, tending towards straw-coloured in matured examples, which are also denser and grainier. The taste is pleasantly sharp, making it an excellent product both for the table and for grating.

The Product specifications of this PDO require *PS DOP* labelling together with the identity mark of the producer at the time of sale. The identification consists of a logo with the words *Pecorino Sardo DOP*, separated by a narrow blue cone, and a green or blue stamp, meaning either *Pecorino Sardo Dolce* or *Pecorino Sardo Maturo*.

CONSORZIO PER LA TUTELA DEL FORMAGGIO PECORINO SARDO Piazza San Bartolomeo, 8 - 09126 Cagliari - Sardegna - Italia Tel. 070-372885; Fax 070-372899 - www.pecorinosardo.it





Pani e casu e binu a rasu.

Bread with cheese and glasses full of wine.



FIORE SARDO

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) cheese

Mentioned in the 1951 Convention of Stresa addressing the use of cheese nomenclature of origin and denomination, it was recognised as a *Denominazione Tipica* cheese in 1955 and was awarded the *Denominazione d'Origine* in 1974; in 1996 it obtained PDO rating. It is the Sardinian sheep's milk cheese which is still made using the ancient techniques mentioned in the 4th century A.D., by that erudite Latin scholar, *Palladio Rutilio Tauro Emiliano*.

The name is derived from the use, up to recent times, of chestnut wood moulds bearing sculpted flower impressions, as well as the initials of the producer, which naturally transferred themselves to the rind of the cheese. It is a hard cheese, made exclusively from whole sheep's milk, fresh and raw, coagulated with goat's or sheep's rennet in paste form. The shape of the cheese recalls the characteristic 'mule-back' form, and derives from the special presses used.

Cheeses are marked at the point of production, and after a short period under salt water are briefly smoked, then ripened in cool storage areas in central Sardinia. Average weight is 3.5 kilos, variations being due to production methods. The rind is somewhere between yellow and dark brown in colour, the cheese itself being straw-coloured, whilst the characteristic taste becomes more pronounced with maturation. Fiore Sardo DOP is an excellent table cheese, when consumed young, as well as being a good grating cheese after maturation.

The label bears the words *Fiore Sardo DOP* on the external crown, and inside the PDO logo there is the stylised figure of a sheep, and the PDO recognition label.

CONSORZIO PER LA TUTELA DEL FORMAGGIO FIORE SARDO Via Margherita, 21 - 08020 Gavoi (NU) - Sardegna - Italia Tel. 0784-529043; Fax 0784-529310 - www.fioresardo.it





Su casu cheret fittu, su pane ispugnatu.

Cheese is better hard, bread, soft.



CANESTRATI CHEESES

Cheeses made since the start of the twentieth century from the whole milk of Sardinian-bred sheep.

The typologies, which are various in shape, weight and fragrance, are unified by the presence of a characteristic network on their rind, stamped by the reed baskets *canestri*, where the curd is deposited. The coagulation of milk by means of sheep's or goat's rennet in paste form, the breakage of the curd into small granules, and the various types of *canestri*, together with the skilled addition of peppercorns and months of maturation, create an excellent table and grating cheese. The cheeses, with straight or slightly curved rinds, weigh from 2 kilos for the *Crotonese*, 5-7 kilos for the *Foggiano*, and up to 13-14 kilos, with a diameter of up to 40 cm for *Calcagno* and *Pepato*.

The latter is notable for the presence of black pepper. The rind, normally straw-coloured, assumes a darker hue with maturation, whilst the cheese itself is hard, white or straw coloured, with small holes. Intense flavour and perfume, complete and pleasantly sharp.



A fora est un'anzone, intro unu leone.

He looks like a sheep but is lionhearted.



SOFT SHEEP'S CHEESES

Sardinian sheep's milk is also used on the island to make soft table cheeses. Calf's rennet, a coagulant carefully broken into small granules, accurate salting and a brief maturation are the main elements which characterise these products.

The shape of the cheeses is cylindrical, with straight or slightly curved sides; the rind is of a dark straw colour, thin and smooth, whilst the cheese itself is white, soft, compact, and often has holes. It has a delicate aroma of sweet, aromatic milk. The weight ranges from 1.6-1.8 kilos.



Chie pastorighizat, mandighizat.

He who raises sheep shall never starve.



PASTA FILATA CHEESES

Traditional products

The technique used in Sardinia for the production of these cheeses, involving the choice of the ideal moment for the *Filatura* (the craft of shaping the product which is subsequently dried, then matured on wooden beams) dates back to 1200.

Various types of pasta filata cheeses of different weights and characteristics are obtained from cow's milk, rather than that of sheep. The most common are the pear-shaped cheeses, weighing 600-800 grams. These are the cheeses with the 'priest's hat', rather than a simple, round shape, and are the most common cow's milk cheeses on the island.

The denomination varies from zone to zone: Casizolu, Tittighedda, Fighedda, Sa Buledda, Sa Zucchitta. They are briefly-matured cheeses, with a smooth, thin straw-coloured rind. The cheese itself is soft, elastic and compact, with a pleasant odour of butter and milk, whilst the flavour is delicate, lactic or nicely sharp. Mozzarelle, Cacio cavalli and Provoloni complete the typology.



Annada mala distruet s'ama.

A bad year destroys the flock.



CASU AXEDU AND GIODDU

Traditional products

CASU AXEDU. A goat's or sheep's milk cheese made in various parts of the island, where it goes under various names: Frue, Frughe, Fruge, Frua, Casu Ageru, Casu e Fitta, Pretta, Latte Kadzadu, Latti Kallau, Latte Biskidu, Latte Viskidu, Merka.

The curd, formed chiefly by the natural culture of lactic ferments, is cut up into large pieces, left to acidify for a whole day and is ready for immediate consumption. Otherwise, it may be drained, dry-salted and preserved in salt inside terracotta containers for several months. The fresh cheese has no rind, and is in the form of small porcelain white cubes. The cheese is soft, and compact, with a pleasantly sharp lactic odour. The ripen variety, often used in preparing *minestra* (soup), is denser, with a saltier, sharper flavour.

GIODDU. Made with fermented sheep's or goat's milk, alcohol-acidic, it is also known on the island as: *Miciuratu, Mezzoraddu, Junchetta, Latte Ischidu*.

A natural mother culture, known as 'sa madrighe', is added to the milk. In 1840, Vittorio Angius described the preparation carried out by the shepherds as follows: they take some bread, slice it and put it into the warm, cooked milk, and leave it until it acidifies, and then they strain it and add it to other previously-cooked milks. In the absence of bread, wheat may be used. A porcelain white curd forms after some hours, ready to be consumed. The consistency is creamy and dense, delicately milk-scented, whilst the taste is pleasantly sharp and fresh.



Anzone rassu brincat in mandra.

The fat sheep jumps the fence.



FRESA AND DOLCE SARDO ARBOREA

Traditional products

FRESA. Soft cow's milk table cheese, mentioned by Prof. G. Fascetti, one of the first researchers into Italian cheesemaking, in 1908. It is chiefly produced in west-central territories of the island: Marghine, Planargia and Montiferru. The name comes from the Latin *fresus*, which refers to the round, flattened shape of the cheese. It is also known locally as *fresa 'e attunzu*, which refers to autumn, the season of its production.

In preparation, the grains of the curd, raw and small, are put into cylindrical presses, bound in cotton, lightly pressed, then salted and exposed to the sun for some hours. The rind then assumes a pleasant yellow-straw colour.

Briefly matured, weighing between 1.5 and 3 kilos, with a soft rind, the cheese itself being white or straw-coloured, compact, soft, with holes, and pleasantly smelling of butter and milk.

DOLCE SARDO ARBOREA. A soft cow's milk table cheese, made in Arborea, a small town in west-central Sardinia, in the Province of Oristano. This briefly-matured cheese is obtained through the use of calf rennet, requiring a delicate breakage of the coagulant into small pieces, which are shaped in the mould, drained, salted and briefly matured. The product is cylindrical in shape, with straight sides, weighing around 1.3 kilos. The thin rind is ivory white, whilst the cheese itself is white and soft, often with holes, and has a pleasant aroma of butter and milk, and a delicate sweet buttery taste.



Cunforme a sa pastura sa rassura.

Fatness derives from the land.



BONASSAI AND SEMICOTTO CAPRINO

Traditional products

BONASSAI. A soft cheese obtained from the milk of Sardinian sheep, made all over the island. The *Istituto Zootecnico e Caseario per la Sardegna* (Sardinia Zootechnical Dairy Institute), in Bonassai (Province of Sassari), provided the name for this product, as a result of its work in refining the technology behind its production, in the 1960's. Calf's rennet and lactic bacteria are employed, the coagulant is broken up into small pieces, and shaped in perforated moulds, square or rectangular in shape, followed by draining, light salting and a brief period of maturation.

The product is rhombic in shape, and weighs between 1.6 and 1.8 kilos; the rind is thin, dry and a little wrinkled, white or straw coloured. The cheese itself is white, compact, soft and spongy, the taste and smell being lactic and sharp. A table cheese.

SEMICOTTO CAPRINO. Goat raising in Sardinia, which as long ago as the 18th century numbered over 200,000 animals, produces a type of milk which is processed to obtain a 'half-cooked cheese, coagulated with liquid calf's rennet, or sometimes sheep or goat rennet in the form of a paste. The cheeses, weighing around 2.5-3 kilos, are round with straight or slightly curved sides, with a smooth straw-coloured rind, tending towards brown after maturation. The cheese itself is white or delicately straw-coloured, compact or at times with eyes. The aroma is characteristic and accompanies a sweet, aromatic taste, in the young product, while stronger, sharper notes emerge after maturation, which normally lasts for more than 60 days, but may last for as long as 16-18 months. A suitable cheese both for grating and table use.



Sas crabas andant da -i punta in punta, e-i sos cascos da-i bucca in bucca.

Goats go from rock to rock, yawns from mouth to mouth.



RICOTTA Traditional products

Yeasty flakes of *ricotta*, obtained from cooking the residue of cheesemaking serum, for years represented the 'poor' product of sheep raising; the food which, with a piece of *carasau* bread, was nourishment for shepherds and farm workers, away from home for months on end, tending their flocks in the countryside. There exist several types of *ricotta* on the island, mainly linked to ovine dairy typology, for table or grating, or for the preparation of various dishes or puddings.

Ricotta gentile, truncated cone in shape, and weighing around 1.5 to 1.8 kilos, has a fine white structure, and is soft, with a delicate taste. It is for table use, usually shortly after production.

Various other types of *ricotta*, rightly known as *stagionate* (ripened), are of cylindrical, flat or conical shape, rather than round. Such products, denser and sharper to the taste, are smoked and salted. The smoking of the famed *mustia* (smoked *ricotta*), allows it to be preserved for months, as well as rendering it suitable for use as a grating cheese, in addition to its suitability for table use.



Arrescottu, arrescottu, arrescottu saliu. Su soli est chi l'at cotu a su picioccu miu.

Ricotta, salty ricotta. The sun has burned away my beloved.



OTHER PRODUCTS

Between history and novelty

The history of cheese-making on the island has witnessed exports in the 'Giudicale', 'Aragonese' and 'Savoy' eras, itinerant conferences at the end of the 19th century, the first continental entrepreneurs and the start of *Pecorino Romano* and Greek cheese production, as well as the organisation of groups of shepherds, the birth of local enterprise and the development of cooperative organisations.

This succession of events has left, preserved and in some cases improved the technology of Sardinian Master cheese-makers, allowing survival of ancient methods and specialities, such as *Pecorino di Osilo*, *Nule* and the *Griviera di Ozieri*, whilst new products have emerged, involving skilled production techniques, such as marbled rather than typically rough and grey rinded sheep's and goat's milk cheese, made with age-old attention and respect for authenticity and freshness.



In su casu pastore, messaju in su laore.

To the shepherd, cheese, to the peasant, grain.

LAORE Sardegna

of agricultural enterprises, rural development & agrifood chain

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