1 AN INTRODUCTION TO ARTISAN BREADS

Throughout the world, bread is regarded as an essential food. It is the cornerstone of almost every diet. It has played a role in the histories and cultures of dozens of countries. It has a place in folklore, traditions, and religions. But beyond that, how bread is made, sold, and eaten is truly indicative of the place it has come from and of the people who live there. It has been an incredibly important part of people's lives throughout history, and it continues to stay important and relevant today.

While this book details the equipment, ingredients, methods, and formulas needed to make excellent breads, this chapter serves as an introduction to the *concept* of artisan bread—what that term means, how it has evolved, and how it relates to the breads we make today.

IDENTIFYING THE TERM *ARTISAN*

What is artisan bread? The simple answer is that it is an excellent product made through careful labor, following proper methods. The complex answer has a little more meaning. At one point in history, bread baking was a basic skill that resulted in a simple product that served to provide nutrients. But the concept of bread baking has expanded to include dozens of categories of products, along with hundreds of types of breads and endless variations on those products. Equipment has been developed to streamline and perfect the process of making those breads. Bakers painstakingly study methods and techniques to ensure their full understanding of how to produce a proper artisan loaf. Bakeries have been created with the sole purpose of making and selling artisan bread.

The success in making truly artisan bread comes from understanding the entire process, from the twelve steps of bread baking (see page 84), to the equipment and ingredients needed (see pages 22–76), to the science behind each step in the process. When the baker fully understands the process, he or she can begin the extensive practicing of the techniques and the careful experimentation with formulas to produce the desired products. And once the desired products have been created, the artisan baker strives to achieve consistency in those products, ensuring that result through careful measurement and precision. When this has been accomplished, the artisan baker is confident that customers' expectations are being met.

To better understand how the production of artisan bread baking has come about, it is important to look at the history of bread baking.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BREAD BAKING

Bread has been not only a major food source in countries around the world but also an important part of folklore, religion, and cultural tradition. That long, rich history dates from the first unleavened breads made in ancient Egypt to the modern artisan loaves made around the world today.

Early Bread Baking

Before the first bread could be made, ancient humans had to discover how to cultivate and harvest grains. This cultivation began in the Middle East, with early varieties of wheat, millet, and barley, some time between 9,000 and 10,000 years ago in what is termed the "Fertile Crescent," along the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers. The early farming centered primarily on two ancient forms of wheat: *einkorn* and *emmer*. These ancient varieties were different from modern commercial wheat in many ways, primarily in that they had double-bearded rows of kernels that produced a low yield and were difficult to separate from the husk.

At first, the ancient peoples simply boiled the harvested grains in water to create a porridge-like mixture. Over time, though, hybrid varieties of wheat developed, creating a stalk with more seeds that were easier to separate from the husk, thus drastically increasing the yield from each plant. These hybrid varieties also had a higher starch content, which made the grains easier to grind into flour. The primary wheat varietal used for bread baking today is *Triticum aestivum*, which is a descendant of that early emmer wheat variety.

The concept of the food we know as bread is said to have been developed in ancient Egypt about 5,000 years ago. There is archeological evidence that the ancient Egyptians understood the basic concept of fermentation, and they used that idea to produce both breads and alcoholic beverages. However, there is also some evidence that suggests earlier Stone Age humans had developed the concept of brewing beer from malted barley. Nevertheless, it appears that the ancient Egyptians can be credited with the first attempts at bread baking, as archeologists have uncovered remnants of their farming tools, grinding stones, and even their ovens. Added to this evidence are the depictions of bread baking that have been uncovered in Egyptian tombs.

The ancient Egyptians were able to grow vastly improved varieties of emmer wheat because their soils were made rich in nutrients by the annual flooding of the Nile River. Initially, the Egyptians ground the grains using a thick stone, a rectangular shape with a rounded top; this tool is now called a "quern." The Egyptian millers would place a second "roller" stone inside the quern, using it to press the grains, forming a meal. Over time, this tool was improved by fixing the stones together and

attaching a turning handle. The handle was activated by the motion of animals, streamlining the process and increasing wheat yields. Though grain mills were eventually powered by steam and motors of various types, this basic principle of a rotary two-stoned mill remained unchanged until the advent of steel roller mills in the nineteenth century.

The Egyptians mixed coarsely milled flour with water and formed the dough into rustic grain cakes—the first flatbreads—which were cooked in the hot ashes near the open fire or atop a hot stone near the flames. The idea of risen bread appeared when the Egyptians decided to bake their bread inside pots, which provided constant, radiant heat. The pots were twin-halved baking pots with conical lids that could be heated separately from both sides. Eventually, this design was refined to a beehive-shaped oven in two tiers, with a firebox in the base and a baking platform, accessible by an arched opening. The beehive model is the basis of ovens used today.

The Role of Bread in Ancient Religion and Folklore

Bread is widely seen in ancient folklore and it has played a significant role in many religions. The ancient Egyptians shaped some bread loaves to represent a boar, and the loaves were dedicated to the fertility god Osiris. At that time also, Hebrew tribes considered the Egyptians unclean because they fermented their dough to make leavened bread. To the Hebrews, fermentation was impure, a form of corruption, and only unleavened breads were worthy of sacrifice to Jehovah.

Indeed, the ancient Greeks worshiped the source of their leavened bread as its own goddess, creating a myth reflecting the planting cycle of wheat. This is the story of the earth mother Demeter and her daughter Persephone (a seed princess). Persephone was abducted by Hades and taken to the Underworld for six months, able to return only in the spring each year, bringing the region into bloom and signifying the start of planting. The two also played a role in the nine-day celebration of bread, a feast that took place during the autumnal equinox. Romans later turned the Greek myth into their own, renaming Demeter as Ceres.

An obscure Jewish sect based in Palestine, the Essenes, preached the arrival of a Messiah who was said to be a bread god. According to revelations in the New Testament, Jesus was born in the house of bread (Bethlehem) as a human incarnation of the bread of heaven and the bread of God. Mary, mother of Jesus, was a descendant of earlier earth mothers whose sons were sacrificially killed in order to guarantee the continuance of life within the community. Early civilizations had seen bread as a symbol of life and fertility, but it was the Christians who elevated this symbol to the holy miracle known as the Eucharist, in which bread symbolizes the body of Christ.

In England, hot ash cakes were given to young girls as part of a tradition in which girls walked backwards to bed to dream of their future husbands. In many countries, bread is still placed in a bride's shoe and the shoe is attached to the getaway car. In Middle Eastern countries, dropped bread is a sign of bad luck, and the dropper must kiss it in hopes of reversing that luck.

Even today, bread plays an important role in traditions, folklore, and popular culture. Commonly, it is an icon of value: fertility, wealth, happiness, prosperity, or salvation. Consider the American slang of referring to money as "bread" or "dough," or commenting that a pregnant woman has a "bun in the oven."

Egypt became known as the "land of the bread eaters"; there is evidence that some pharaohs paid the workers who built the pyramids in bread and beer. Archeologists have even discovered remnants of a large-scale production bakery capable of producing 30,000 loaves a day; this bread works operated during the reign of Pharaoh Menkaure, whose pyramid was built nearly 4,500 years ago.

Bread Gains in Importance

While ancient Egypt set the stage for the cultivation of wheat, the Greeks and Romans continued down that path, and bread quickly assumed its important role in both cultures. However, as a primary food source and a household staple, bread also was central in political and trade issues.

For instance, the Greek Islands did not have proper terrain for growing wheat, and so the people relied on imported grain from Sicily. When the Roman Empire began dominating trade and expanding their routes into Asia, Rome began planting wheat on massive stretches of land along the northern coast of Africa. The Romans dispatched their engineers to build aqueducts and cisterns, thereby creating jobs and turning thousands of nomads into farmers. But while they were dominating the region's wheat production, the Romans made the mistake of keeping their wheat growers too far from their bread bakers, forcing the latter to endure high costs of importing their own grains.

In the first century A.D, Emperor Vespasian seized grain-trading fleets from the Flavian dynasty. In addition, he made all Roman bakers officials of the state, subjecting them to the political fortunes of Rome itself. At this time there were over 300 bakeries in Rome, many of which were run by Greeks, who had founded a guild for that purpose. Milling had been improved with the advent of horsepower rather than slaves, and with this improvement came greater and more readily available quantities of flour. This enabled the bakers to make a variety of breads ranging from white loaves for the upper classes to coarse loaves for the plebeians. The underclass was given a bread dole, which was notoriously and tyrannically controlled by the government. Over time, this took a huge political toll on the Roman Empire.

When invasions by the Vandals and Goths of the north caused Rome to fall in the fifth century, the focus shifted away from grains and toward livestock. The northern peoples were never an agricultural society like the Greeks or Romans, believing instead that the earth was a living thing and to alter it (for example, by plowing the land) was a sin. Livestock grazing fields quickly displaced the wheat fields, fermented barley replaced fermented grapes, and lard and butter took over the role played by olive oil.

In time, the Christians pushed out the Goths. As previously noted, bread was a vital part of Christian society, representing the body of Christ himself, so wheat

production gained prominence once more. During the Middle Ages, castles were built like mini cities, fortified against each other and the surrounding countryside. This division intensified the gulf between bakers and farmers. Inside those cities, the bakers were the first craftsmen to form a guild, designating a pecking order of apprentice, journeyman, and master. At the same time, people began to distrust both millers and bakers, as their professions were crucial to those living within the city walls, so dependent as they were on that grain. With that increase in distrust came grain thefts, sales of inaccurate weights, and price hikes that only increased during times of famine. In some places, the process of grinding grain for flour was monitored closely to ensure that no individuals were secretly milling their own flour or baking their own bread.

During the Middle Ages, bakers expanded on the Roman tradition of baking different types of bread for different classes of people. In France, there were at least twenty varieties of bread, each named by rank: *pain de cour*, *pain de pape*, *pain de chevalier, pain de valet*, and so on. High-ranking nobles ate bread made from white wheat flours; commoners ate large round loaves named *pain de boulanger*, generally made from coarsely ground barley or rye flour. Similar divisions of bread were made in the church. After Pope Innocent III decreed the importance of the communion wafer in the early thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas declared that the Eucharist must be made of only the finest wheat flour. The wafers also were unleavened to maintain purity. But this emphasis on white wheat flour only amplified the hierarchy of bread, maintaining the division between the bread of the rich and the bread of the poor.

The end of the Middle Ages marks the beginning of bread types being divided by region. While Germany maintained its feudal castle structure, Italy became a congregation of city-states and France developed as one major city with a dominant ruling class.

BREAD IN FRANCE

The importance of bread in France begins with the rise of the city of Paris in the ninth century, under the rule of Charlemagne. The twelfth century saw the first bakeries located inside the city walls; previously, ovens were kept outside the city in hopes of preventing fires. Every stage of baking was monitored by the royal court, including the type of flour to be used and the weight and price of the finished loaves. The crown even owned the ovens; it wasn't until the thirteenth century that bakers were allowed to rent ovens, thereby moving past the prior tradition of communal ovens. At court, the Grand Panetier served as purveyor and overseer of the king's bread; he also oversaw the setting and breaking down of the royal table at mealtimes.

By the end of the Middle Ages, the bakers had formed a coalition, designating rules and standards for bread baking. To become a master, bakers had to produce a "master piece" proving their skills, as well as pay annual dues. The masters presided over the valets, who were in charge of the apprentices (*geindres*). Masters shaped the bread, operated the ovens, and ran the business. Apprentices handled pest control and kneaded dough; the dough was often made in such large quantities that the kneading was done with the feet.

At this time in Paris, there were roughly thirty varieties of bread, differing in shape and ingredients. Popular breads included *pain de brode, pain coquille, pain balle, pain de ouleurs, pain rousset, pain de magne, pain de Chailly*, and *pain de Gonesse*. *Chailly* and *Gonesse* were both especially favored varieties—these towns were on the outskirts of Paris and were known for producing bread with an incredibly white crumb, likely due to the addition of alum.

The Renaissance marked major cultural shifts throughout Europe, led in large part by the Italians. By the seventeenth century, though, France had broken free of Italian dominance, and had begun to develop its own set of customs and cultural rules. This was prominently shown through their development of what would become modern cooking and dining.

The first major French cookbook, called *Le Cuisinier Francois,* was published in 1651, by La Varenne (a Marquis). This book was an important publication, but it focused on cuisine of the royal court. In 1654, a valet for Louis XIV, Nicholas de Bonnefons, wrote a cookbook more akin to home cooking—at least home cooking for the wealthy bourgeois. His *Les Delices de la Campagne* supplied the first important bread recipes, offered as a solution for the wealthy visiting their country homes who found the bread in the villages to be of poor quality. This cookbook included traditional sourdough breads and a bread similar to what would one day be known as brioche. The most noticeable characteristic of the recipes in de Bonnefons's book is the addition of beer yeast to leaven bread, rather than the existing natural process of fermentation. The beer yeast made the loaves rise more fully, creating a puffy appearance and giving a soft crumb. This style of bread making became increasingly popular under the reign of Louis XIV.

Thus, bread quickly became a symbol throughout France for the region's independence and rise to power. Incorporating bread prominently in their diet, rather than consuming grains in other forms like porridge, began to define the French identity. As time went on, even the poor were able to get their hands on white loaves, formerly reserved for royalty. Pale white bread with a thin crust became known throughout Europe as "French bread" and was designated with words like *pillow* or *pouf*. While some varieties of dark, dense bread were still made for the lower classes, a royal decree in 1670 permitted bakers to use beer yeast to produce the now infamous soft, white bread called *pain de luxe*. White bread was no longer a food reserved for the highest

Viennese Bread Traditions

The first noticeable Austrian contributions to bread baking came around the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the Austro-Hungarian Empire rose to power. Advances in milling in Hungary were producing high-quality flours, Viennese bakers had begun to use the poolish method (see page 124), and inventors were creating steam-injected ovens that produced products of superior quality. In addition, Austria was widely known for its excellent water (from the mountains) and its flavorful and unique natural yeasts. Hence, Vienna began taking the lead in the production of fine pastries, with an emphasis on intricately shaped yeast-raised pastries, some with flavorful fillings or toppings. These pastries were introduced to Paris in 1840, when an Austrian baron opened a shop selling this *pain viennois*. The 1873 World's Fair in Vienna solidified the city's reputation for fine baked goods.

One of the most well-known of these Austrian pastries was the croissant (see page 265). While breads had been made in crescent shapes for years to symbolize certain gods, fertility, and even the horns of bulls, croissants—made with flaky, yeast-raised puff pastry—are famously said to have come from Vienna. Indeed, the first croissants were made in Vienna in 1683, when the city was attacked by Turkish forces. It was the city's bakers, already awake and working on producing the day's bread, who alerted officials of the Turks' arrival. To celebrate the defeat of those invading forces, Austrian bakers made the pastries in a crescent shape, referencing the departed Ottoman Empire.

The flaky puff pastries filled with fruit or nut fillings we call Danishes (see page 254) were actually created by Viennese bakers who had been sent to Copenhagen during a shortage of skilled workers. The Danes referred to these pastries as "Vienna breads."

powers—the aristocracy and the church; it also represented personal health and wealth throughout France, for all its citizens.

The French Revolution in Bread

Bread is more than a symbol of the French Revolution—it's at the very core of that major political event. In the fifteenth century, millers and bakers joined forces in an attempt to deal with the ever-fluctuating prices and supplies of grains. As a way to settle the matter, the government enacted a law to control the price of bread. (This law was famously enforced until 1981.) However, the government could not control the price of European grain supplies, and the result was chaos. Both farmers and merchants took advantage of the fluctuations, often escalating their prices to exorbitant levels.

The French bread riots began as early 1725, as commoners grew increasingly angry about the famine caused by grain shortages and the rising grain prices. Indeed, by 1715, nearly one third of the French population had died of starvation. The bread riots resulted in the Flour War of 1774, expanding to involve countries like Austria,

England, and Prussia. Through all of this, the art of bread baking in France was being elevated to incredible heights, the products admired and renowned by countries around the world.

In 1767, Paul Jacques Malouin published a series of illustrations detailing the layout and equipment of a bakery, along with descriptions of various types of breads being produced at the time. His detailed accounts explained much about bread's role in French culture and history. Malouin divided the social politics of bread into three divisions:

- *Pain du Blanc* (*pâte molle*): Bread made from white flour (very soft crumb)
- *Pain du Bis-Blanc* (*bâtarde*): Bread made from a mix of white and whole wheat flour (more dense crumb)
- *Pain du Bis* (*ferme*): Bread made from whole wheat flour (very dense crumb)

Bakers preferred to make *pâte molle*, not only because of its greater desirability but also because it used more water and less flour—meaning it was less expensive to make but could be sold at a higher price. The Paris ordinance of 1635 demanded that bakers show only bread for the commoners in the windows of their shops, while *pain du blanc* loaves were to be held behind the counters. That made these breads only increase in popularity, their most desired trait being their thin, crisp crust. So, to meet customer demands, bakers began rolling the dough into longer loaves to increase the surface area of the crust. In his book, Malouin also discussed the reliance of the French on wheat flours, imploring the government to research alternative flours. In an effort to ward off famine, in 1778, the crown funded the Academy of Baking in Paris, headed by Antoine Augustin Parmentier, to research such alternative flours.

However, economic problems only worsened; by 1789, wheat flour had become so scarce that bread doubled in price. The French population first turned their anger toward the bakers, who pointed fingers at the millers, claiming they were unable to purchase adequate quantities of flour. Rumors began to circulate of a massive conspiracy headed by the Minister of Finance, who was thought to be working along with farmers, millers, and bakers to collectively raise the price of grain. The unrest reached its limit on July 14, 1789, when commoners stormed the Bastille in a belief that there was grain surplus stored inside.

A drought in 1789 only worsened the wheat shortage, and in October of that year the commoners also stormed Versailles, bringing the French king, queen, and dauphin captive to Paris. Over the next few years, France suffered war, poor harvests, and high levels of inflation. By 1793, the Paris Commune decreed that only *pain du bis* (whole wheat) would be sold in bakeries, in an effort to produce *pain de'eglaite*, or "bread equality." An allotment of 1½ pounds of bread was issued to workers and heads of family, and 1 pound to all other citizens. However, just a few years later, *pain de blanc*

became the new bread representing "equality." It was believed in post-Revolutionary France that this bread, which had become iconic across Europe, was good enough for every citizen of France.

Revolutionizing the Technology of Bread

The nineteenth century marked a series of major revolutions in the processes of growing, harvesting, and milling grains. Advances in soil fertility were discovered by France's Louis Pasteur and Germany's Justus von Liebig, reducing the reliance of farmers on crop rotation. Austria's Gregor Mendel began studying the manipulation of crops by cross-breeding grains to improve desirable characteristics. Then, Russian scientists used these concepts to develop a strain of wheat that could survive their harsh winters. In North America, scientists focused on breeding wheat that could grow on the prairies of Canada and the United States.

And advances weren't limited to the science of farming. American Cyrus McCormick invented new harvesting machinery: a mechanical reaper and binder. These inventions, combined with massive crops being grown in the United States, as well as new railroad and steamship technology, enabled huge quantities of grain to be shipped across America and to Europe as well.

Swiss inventors began designing a new method of milling in 1834 that utilized rollers. This technique, called "the Hungarian system," used rollers rather than rotating stones to grind the wheat. The system moved beyond prior milling techniques, which had simply crushed the wheat kernels. Now, the bran and germ were separated from the endosperm. Successive sets of rollers would then extract more and more of the bran, which was removed by air drafts or by sifting through the screens. (Previously, the flour underwent a time-consuming process of being bolted by hand through silk gauze to remove the bran.)

These milling advances also increased the shelf life of the resulting flour. Because the germ was removed, the oil content was lowered, making the flour less prone to rancidity. Around the same time, millers started bleaching the flour to make it whiter in a shorter time period (flour naturally becomes white as it is allowed to mature).

In the bakeshop, technology began to streamline the process of making and baking bread, as well. Electric and gas-powered mixers were in use toward the end of the nineteenth century. But even before this, ovens powered by gas, oil, and electricity had begun replacing wood-fired ovens. Likewise, refrigeration changed the bakers' schedule, altering their production period and not limiting them to working overnight. The introduction of compressed yeast gave bakers increased flexibility in creating the bread formulas and timing how dough was proofed.

The year 1800 marked the first use of a preferment other than the traditional sourdough method. A Polish baker developed the concept of a "sponge," known later in France as *poolish* (see page 124). This method streamlined the process of making bread, as the poolish was essentially a piece of prefermented dough without beer yeast. This produced a highly desirable end product and was less sour than the sourdough leavener.

France initially did not adopt any industrialization of bread baking, but in the 1960s, technology won, and the process swerved away from the artisanal methods that had made French bread famous. Very few bakers held onto the traditional methods. However, one baker, Pierre Poilane and his apprentice son Lionel, maintained those standards of high-quality bread. In the 1970s, Lionel and his brother Max spearheaded a movement to bring artisanal bread-baking methods back to prominence throughout France.

French Regional Breads. From the left: Epi Baguettes (page 134), Tricouronne (page 139), Brioche à Tête (page 271), Pain au Levain (page 167), Fougasse aux Olives (page 313), Gugelhopf (page 222).

French Bread Shapes and French Bread Today

The baguette is France's iconic loaf, but it wasn't named as such until the 1930s. Long before that, these skinny loaves had been popular throughout Paris. Additionally, they were ideally suited to the technological advances of the day (commonly using poolish and mechanical kneaders for mixing). Their long shape allowed the loaf to rise and bake quickly—but it also staled quickly. This meant that baguettes needed to be baked, purchased, and eaten fresh; in Paris, this meant three times a day.

But there are dozens of French breads beyond the infamous baguette. The French notoriously classify many culinary and cultural traditions, and their breads are no exception. French breads can be named by any of the following methods:

- Type of leavening used
- Shape of the loaf
- Ingredients in the loaf

- Region where the bread originates
- Tradition, holiday, or event with which the bread is associated

Regional breads made a resurgence in the 1970s, many years after they had been banned during World War II (the government had standardized bread baking during the war to control costs and prevent fraudulent sales). While there are hundreds of varieties of bread in France, some examples of popular breads and regional varieties are:

- *Pain ordinaire*: A plain, white loaf, generally using no preferment.
- *Pain complet*: A whole wheat version of *pain ordinaire*.
- *Pain de mie*: The sandwich bread of France, made with milk, butter or oil, and sugar and baked in a Pullman loaf pan, with a tight crumb for easy slicing.
- *Pain de siegle*: French rye bread, made with at least 66 percent rye flour (otherwise it is *pain au siegle*), with a dark crust, commonly eaten with oysters. The addition of raisins is common, which makes it *pain de siegle rustique*.
- *Pain de campagne*: Bread made with both white and rye flours, leavened with sourdough starter, shaped into a large, round loaf (4 to 6 lb/1.81 to 2.72 kg), with a dark brown crust.
- *Pâte morte:* Also known as "dead dough," a plain dough enriched with fat but without the use of leaveners. It is used to make decorations on loaves for garnish or display (see photo on page 378).
- *Pain de metiel*: Made from wheat flour mixed with buckwheat, barley, or rye flour. Traditionally during the use of communal ovens, housewives would dust their initials on top of the loaf in flour, and some bakeries still continue this practice today.
- *Pain aux cereales*: Whole-grain bread made with sesame seeds, linseed, and malt.
- *Pain grenoblois:* Regional bread from Grenoble, made with wheat and rye flour, as well as sugar and milk.
- *Pain bordelais:* Regional bread from Bordeaux, made with wheat, rye, and whole wheat flours.
- *Pain normand:* Regional bread from Normandy made with cooked apples and apple cider.
- *Pains de provence*: Any number of regional breads from Provence.
- *Fougasse:* A regional bread from Provence, shaped into a flat loaf with open pieces in the center, like a ladder. These loaves are often stuffed with olives, bacon, anchovies, or nuts and are flavored with olive oil and herbs.

- *Pissaladière*: A pizza-like bread from Nice and Marseille, topped with anchovies, caramelized onions, and olives.

While bread is consumed in lesser quantities in France today (at one time, a typical Frenchman ate 1 lb 12 oz/800 g of bread daily, whereas now the average is 5¼ oz/150 g), bread is still an important part of French culinary culture and is expected to be served at every meal. The baguette maintains popularity for this reason—it can be served alongside any meal, regardless of the time of day, formality, or ingredients being used.

BREAD IN ITALY

Italy's culture is greatly centered on food and cooking, and bread plays an important role in that. The country's location (largely surrounded by sea) made it vulnerable to invasions. Italy was invaded first by the Etruscans, then the Greeks, then the Saracens,

Italian regional breads. From the left: Pane Siciliano (page 186), Pane alle Olive (page 165), Focaccia (page 324), Francese Stiratto, Panettone (page 249), Semolina Bread (page 182).

and so on. Italy became a melting pot of ethnic populations and cultures, as well as a gateway between the East and West. This position is only amplified by Italy's rich history, including the rise and dominance of Roman Empire, as well as the importance of the church to Italy and the rest of Europe. While Italian breads are widely known as being solely Italian, the inspiration for many of these breads is undeniably countries in the Middle East and Asia Minor.

From the fall of Rome until the rise of General Garibaldi in the middle of the nineteenth century, Italy was a collection of city-states. Even today, the majority of the Italian population lives in villages, hill towns, and small cities—often called "peasant cities"—in one of the twelve distinct Italian regions. Unlike France, where everything is centered on a single major city, there are six large cities in Italy: Milan and Turin in the north, Florence and Rome in the center, and Naples and Palermo in the south. Italy was slower to industrialize than either France or Germany, and until the middle of the twentieth century, power was held by a small group of landowners whose income was based on rent paid rather than crops produced on their land. This lasted until the Land Reform Acts of 1950, meaning that the traditions local to specific regions have been

Italian Special-Occasion Breads

Special breads are made throughout Italy to celebrate a variety of occasions, from agricultural celebrations, to religious events, to annual festivals. Many of these breads are merely decorative and are made from *grano-duro*, or hard wheat, and are barely leavened. The result is a stiff dough that can be easily shaped into a variety of styles. Some of the most common special-occasion breads celebrate the following:

- San Guiseppe, the patron saint of pastry cooks, is given an annual festival on March 19. At home, an altar is set up dedicated to the saint, including flowers and three kinds of bread, which are decorative and not meant to be eaten. The first tier of the altar is made up of three huge rounds of bread, sometimes weighing as much as 20 lb/9.08 kg, representing the holy family. The altar is then decorated with bread shaped to represent Joseph's staff, a date palm for Mary, and a wreath for Jesus. Above the altar are hung bay leaves and citrus, along with tiny breads shaped as moons and stars. Bread shaped into Mary's slippers is placed in front of the altar—this symbol is a treasured one in Italy, making the Mother Mary seem intimate and domestic.
- Christmas in Rome is a highly celebrated time, and in early Christian times, worshipers offered focaccia bread, as well as breads shaped into discs to represent the sun, to altars of Christ. *Panedi Natale* was a popular Christmas bread in the Middle Ages. Enriched with fat, sugar, eggs, nuts, and dried fruit, it served as a symbol of plenitude. In Florence, breads were flavored with walnuts, pine nuts, honey, figs, and dates. In Emilia-Romagna, bakers added raisins, black pepper, and candied pumpkin. Traditionally, each member of the family would take a bite of the first three slices to ensure good luck in the coming year. In Ferrara, bakers present *pan pepato,* a chocolate-covered loaf, to their regular clients as a Christmas gift.

maintained. These traditions include religious and agricultural festivals, each with its own special foods, including bread.

Italy's vastly diverse geographical regions have helped dictate what kinds of bread are produced in each locale. Eighty percent of Italy is mountainous, with the Apennines running from the Alps in the north to the tip of Calabria, separating the eastern and western parts of Italy, giving many spots access to mountains, valley, and sea. Temperatures are regulated by the Mediterranean Sea. Generally, soft wheat is grown in the north and hard wheat in the south, with other important crops like olives, tomatoes, and grapes grown throughout the country.

Many breads in Italy use a preferment called a *biga* (see page 125). Firmer than a poolish, the biga serves the same functions of shortening the fermentation time and increasing the flavor. To best understand the breads of Italy, it is ideal to review them based on the regions from where they originate.

Tuscany's Breads

One of Italy's true epicurean epicenters, Tuscany is home to several of Italy's most famous varieties of bread, *pane toscano*. Traditionally, these breads were made without salt—possibly originally because of high prices on salt and taxes on it. But the more commonly believed reason was taste. *Pane toscano* was traditionally paired with very flavorful foods. The prosciutto in Tuscany, for example, is one of the saltiest varieties in Italy; and the olive oil produced in Lucca is one of the most flavorful and fragrant. Tuscany so values pure flavors that *pane toscano* is used to highlight the flavors of the food that it is served with. One of the most popular dishes of the region is *la fettuna*, a slice of Tuscan bread slathered with oil and warmed in the oven.

Other breads in the region include *pane toscanoscuro*, a whole wheat version of *pane toscano* scored with a checkerboard pattern on top. *Panediterni*, a regional bread from Terni, is another saltless bread, lighter in color and texture, with an open crumb structure. *Pane schiacciata*, or "crushed bread," is a traditional Tuscan hearth bread baked on an earthenware slab in a wood-fired oven. The dough is stretched thin, pricked with a fork, and then covered with a lid that is piled with hot embers.

Northern and Central Italy's Breads

The most well-known bread of northern Italy is *ciabatta*, a thin loaf made from a very wet dough with a crunchy crust and an open, chewy crumb structure. The word *ciabatta* means "slipper" or "old shoe" and is somewhat descriptive of the thin, wonky shape. Near the Swiss and French borders, *pane franchese*, made with a

sour starter and a mixture of white and whole wheat flours, is popular. *Pan di como* is another version of this, made with only white wheat flour, shaped and risen in baskets, and leavened so that the dough forms high domes, with an open, honeycomb-like interior.

Also popular in this region is a dense rye bread, called *pain de segale*, which is made with a sponge preferment to give the bread a moist interior texture. Often, pancetta is added to the dough as well. Milan is home to *franchese stirato*, meaning "French string," a thin crusty loaf. *Filone* is similar to a baguette, made with a sourdough starter and with a crisp exterior crust and a tender interior crumb. *Pane di noci*, or walnut bread, uses a mixture of white and whole wheat flours along with chopped walnuts. *Pane casereccio* (Caesar's bread) has a very fine crumb and crispy crust.

Pain di mais, or corn bread, is the celebrated bread of the northern corn-growing region in the Po Valley, which also produces the popular dish polenta. Using finely ground corn flour mixed with wheat flour, the bread is shaped in large, rustic rounds and has a golden crumb color. *Pane di patate,* or potato bread, is made in the neighboring region of Valle d'Aosta, using mashed potatoes, oil, garlic, and parsley.

Small varieties of bread and thin, crisp crackers and breadsticks are also very popular in the northern regions of Italy. Some varieties include *panini*, a thinner bread that is halved and used for making sandwiches. *Biova* are soft rolls with a fluffy texture. *Coppiete* are starfish-shaped rolls from the Emilia-Romagna region. *Michetta* from Milan and *rosette veneziane* from Venice are rosette-shaped rolls that require special stamps to form the small rounds. These rolls are sometimes rolled in sugar, have almost no interior crumb structure, and are made up almost entirely of crisp crust. *Semelles*, originating from Florence and Rome, are another roll made in this fashion.

Grissini torinesi are the famous thin breadsticks of Turin. Napoleon called them "little batons" and was said to snack on them voraciously. They were apparently created by a baker working in the court in the seventeenth century to serve to a prince suffering from indigestion. It was presumed that these small, crunchy sticks were easier on his stomach than dense, heavy bread. *Grissini* are usually brushed with oil and topped with cheese, poppy seeds, or sesame seeds.

Pane all'olio is a flavorful dough enriched with both olive oil and lard, shaped into rolls. The rolls are then put together in a ring to make a wreath shape and sprinkled with coarse salt. *Pan marino*, or rosemary bread, is an aromatic round loaf garnished generously with salt.

Southern Italy's Breads

Puglia is one of the most popular bread-producing regions of southern Italy. *Friselle* is one variety, shaped into a flat, crisp bread with a hole in the middle. This bread is

Panettone

Milan's prized Christmas bread, *panettone* has become popular throughout the world, enjoyed year-round. The bread is baked in a high-sided, rounded mold. The top crust is a deep brown, while the interior is fluffy, light, and studded with dried fruit and nuts. The characteristic shape was the result of a cylindrical mold used by the Angelo Motta Company in the 1920s. The loaves were so popular that a competitor, Giacchino Allemagna, who had previously only made large (10 lb/4.54 kg) loaves, began churning out smaller varieties (as small as 1 lb/454 g), so that anyone could have a *pannetone,* now a revered status symbol, on their Christmas table.

sometimes made as small, individual pieces (like bagels) and other times made into large loaves. The dough is baked as a whole, then split in half and returned to the oven, where it bakes until it is very crisp. *Pane pugliese* is a large loaf (up to 4 lb 6½ oz/ 2 kg), traditionally a commoner's bread found in the country. In times of famine, legend cursed anyone who wasted even a crumb of *pane pugliese*. It was said they were destined to spend as many years in purgatory as they wasted crumbs.

In the olive groves of southern Italy, *pane alle olive*, or olive bread, is made. After years of snacking on bread and olives, bakers began adding both green and black olives directly to the dough to form these loaves. Another version is *puccia*, which is based on whole wheat or durum rather than white flour.

Durum is a hard wheat that is ground into what is known as semolina flour. Lightly yellow in color, semolina flour is very high in gluten and can be ground coarsely or very fine. This is the same flour that is commonly used to make pasta dough throughout Italy. *Pane siciliano*, or Sicilian bread, mixes semolina and white wheat flour, along with olive oil. The loaf is commonly sprinkled with sesame seeds.

BREAD IN GERMANY AND EASTERN EUROPE

While artisan bread is often associated with France and Italy, eastern European countries have rich bread cultures that have often gone unnoticed. As in the other countries discussed, bread is the center of the food world, having a place at every meal. In Germany, supper is still called *abendbrot*, or "evening bread." In fact, it has been documented that Germans eat three times as much bread as do Americans, and more than most Europeans.

The countries that border the North and Baltic seas (Great Britain, Scandinavia, western Russia, Poland, Germany, Netherlands, and Belgium) were colonized by the

Rye Bread Gallery: 100% Rye Bread (page 349), Haferbrötchen (page 356), Landbrot mit Sauerkraut (page 359), St. Gallener's Brot (page 370), Rye and Sunflower Bread (page 373).

early Germanic peoples—a varied group united only by their lack of Latin speakers and their love of rye. Rye flour is to many parts of eastern Europe what wheat flour is to the western regions. While rye evolved later than wheat in the Middle East, by 3000 B.C.E. it was growing in southern Russia and in northern and central Europe. Rye grows well in cold climates, whereas wheat often dies.

Even before the Ostrogoths of the northeast and the Visigoths of the northwest conquered Rome, these tribes had split into twenty-five divergent groups, including the Teutons, Angles, Saxons, and Franks. Each tribe had its own dialect and was constantly growing and changing as its boundaries were shifting. The disunity of this region was amplified by its varied geographical differences; some places were bitterly cold and mountainous, while others were flooded and marshy.

Germany consisted largely of small farms surrounding small villages, which were overseen by local dukes. Despite Charlemagne's attempt to include Germany as part of the Holy Roman Empire in the ninth century, Germany was an autonomous state until

Bread in Eastern European Religion and Folklore

Beginning with early pagan myths and legends, Norse myths animated things found in nature, like thunder or fire. Breads shaped like animals, especially the wild boar, were often offered as a sacrifice to the powerful gods Thor, Odin, and Freyr. Easter and midsummer celebrations were marked with fires—peasants would run through the hot embers and dance around the fires, afterwards distributing loaves of bread and cakes.

Even after Christianity had successfully converted the populations in much of the north, farmers would enact ancient fertility rituals at their farms. In these rituals, grain was celebrated and seen as alive, usually personified as a woman: the old rye-mother. This character was also used to frighten small children away from the fields, where it was said that the rye-mother would strangle any children who trampled on her grains.

Fairy tales also mention the grain-mother, sometimes as a sacred being wielding positive powers, but most often as a demonic witch capable of evil or wrongdoing. In the original tale of Hansel and Gretel, the siblings are enticed to the gingerbread house by a "grain-witch."

Bismarck attempted to found a Prussian empire at the end of the nineteenth century. These separate villages had distinct cultural customs, including specific breads local to each region.

The Germans discriminated wildly between social classes. Aside from the usual divisions of nobility, clergy, burghers, and peasants, Germans also divided peasants into specific classes (landowner, hired help, foreman, chief maid, and so on). By the end of the Thirty Years War, large numbers of peasants had lost their land, and by the seventeenth century, nearly 60 percent of the population was gone—and the peasants that remained were incredibly poor until the industrial revolution brought changes before World War I.

Despite a distinct prominence of rye breads, wheat flour was often used to create enriched breads, decorative breads, or delicate products. Rye could not be ground as fine as wheat flour, and it was darker in color, making wheat flour ideal for breads where a certain appearance was desired. In many cases, wheat and rye flours were mixed in varying percentages to make a variety of products.

Varieties of Breads in Germany and Eastern Europe

There are hundreds of varieties of bread throughout eastern Europe, each of which has its own story, set of ingredients, and specific method of production. Some common varieties include:

- *Challah*: A lightly sweetened enriched bread originally made by the Ashkenazi Jews of southern Germany in the fifteenth century. This loaf gained popularity and

eventually spread throughout Europe as a ritual bread for the Sabbath. The dough would be made on Thursday and would rise overnight, then be baked fresh for the Sabbath on Friday. The name comes from the Hebrew word for "portion," referencing the piece that would be offered to Jehovah. The bread can be made in a variety of shapes, but is most commonly braided.

- *Kugelhopf*: A buttery bread, similar to brioche, made with wheat flour and dried or candied fruit and citrus peel. The loaf was baked in a tall mold with a hole in the center. The mold is said to resemble a fez (the literal translation of *kugelhopf* is "Turk's head"). The bread is often baked in Alsace, the region near the German border, where it is consumed with Alsatian white wine.
- *Limpa*: A Swedish enriched bread made using rye flour and beer. A rustic loaf flavored with fennel, cardamom, and/or candied citrus zest.
- *Gebildbrote*: Translated as "picture bread," this is an elaborate genre of folk art in Germany dedicated to making bread sculptures and displays depicting religious traditions. *Gebackmodel* is a molded dough made for decorative display, and *Lebkuckenmodel* is a decorative gingerbread. The displays are so elaborate, they can look like detailed woodcuts.
- *Oster-Hefegeback*: Any one of a variety of decorative breads made to celebrate Easter in Germany, often shaped into nests, fish, or doves.
- *Speckkuchen*: A New Year's Day bread, stuffed with bacon and sometimes shaped into "good luck pigs," or *Neujahrs-Gluecksschwienchen*.
- *Festbrot*: Special Christmas breads in Germany, made into shapes depicting different stories. *Wickelkindern* is one such bread—baked in a shoe shape with a child's head emerging from the toe. The bread is red and decorated with confectioners' sugar.
- *Fruchtebrot*: A special fruit bread baked at Christmas, sold only at the Christmas markets held in many German cities. *Stollen* is one variety. Another, *Dreikonigs Kuchen*, or "Three King's Bread," is shaped into a wreath and a trinket is hidden inside the dough.
- *Musli-Brotchen*: A hearty loaf developed in the Swiss Alpine region.
- *Haferbrot*: A loaf made with a large percentage of oats.
- *Leinsamenbrot*: A light rye bread with flaxseed.
- *Babka*: A Hungarian festive bread, traditionally filled with poppy seed filling.
- *Potato Bread*: A bread made from a base of mashed potatoes.

Pretzels

Pretzels originated from a tradition of shaped breads; it was common to make ring-shaped breads during the Roman Empire, as well as in Spain during the early days of Christianity, where dough bracelets would adorn the bodies of the dead before burial. Early pretzels were developed by monks somewhere between the fifth and seventh centuries. It is said that a monk was shaping scrap pieces of dough, and he twisted them into a shape to represent a person's arms crossed in prayer. At first, the popularity of pretzels was somewhat limited to the church: Monks used them to demonstrate Bible stories to children and also used them as rewards for their studies. It was thought that pretzels brought blessings and spiritual wholeness to those who ate them.

Eventually, pretzels made their way into wedding ceremonies, where couples would wish upon a pretzel, break it in half, and then eat it together to symbolize coming together as one. In fact, the twisted shape of the pretzel is the origin of the phrase "tying the knot."

Pretzels became increasingly popular in Germany, where children would tie pretzels on a string and wear them around their necks at the beginning of the new year to symbolize prosperity in the coming months. A pretzel topped with two hard-boiled eggs was hidden around Easter for children to find—likely the precursor to the modern Easter egg hunt.

By the Middle Ages, pretzels had become so popular that bakeries devoted solely to the craft of making pretzels opened. A giant pretzel would hang outside the door of the bakery or the baker would have a *Bretzen Back*, or "pretzel sign." Some bakers would blow a *Backerrufer*, or an "oxen horn," whenever hot pretzels had just come out of the oven.

There are forty-four named pretzel varieties, but they fall into three major categories: beer pretzels boiled in lye before baking and then sprinkled with salt, egg pretzels made with sweetened cookie dough and sprinkled with nuts, and soft pretzels made from bread doughs (much like bagels). Hard pretzels originated when the pretzels were dried to increase their shelf life.

- *Portugese Broa*: Made with a corn soaker similar to polenta, it is traditionally served with a classic Portuguese stew, caldo verde.
- *Vinchgauer*: An Austrian bread that originated in the late 1700s using spices that were prominently traded on the Spice Route and made its way to Austria, where it became famous.