

## **Bread Making Traditions in the South Tyrol**



Figure 1. Traditional breads of South Tyrol (South Tyrol, n.d.).

**6060 Turning Traditions into Markets**

**Green Mountain College**

**Sharon Palmer**

**July 31, 2018**

## Introduction

Thanks to the rich soils, sunny valleys, and warm air currents, the South Tyrol has been perfectly situated to take advantage of cultivating grains as a major source of nutrition for its inhabitants for centuries. Rustic, sourdough breads (Fig. 1) made from wheat and rye have grown to become iconic symbols of the culinary food traditions in this region.

## History

Wheat, the world's largest crop, dates back to 17000 BC, when archeological evidence shows that people were collecting and eating emmer wheat in the Near East (Biodiversity Explorer, n.d.). Domesticated about 9,000 years ago, there are two types of wheat: durum wheat and bread wheat (Biodiversity Explorer, n.d.). Bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) (Fig. 2) was derived from the hybridization of emmer wheat with



Figure 2. Bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) cultivated in Vienna (Biodiversity Explorer, n.d.).

wild grass about 6700 years ago (Biodiversity Explorer, n.d.). Einkorn wheat was domesticated about 7000 BC (Biodiversity Explorer, n.d.). Both grains were cultivated for bread-making in South Tyrol, along with rye and spelt, over the centuries (Ackerman-Leist, 2017).

### **Grains in South Tyrol**

The Vinschgau Valley in the South Tyrol was created by a mountain collapsing, thus depositing material into a megafan, which spurred the formation of unique soils and an ideal climate for cultivating grains, such as rye, spelt, emmer, einkorn, barley, and oats (Ackerman-Leist, 2017). This combination of sunshine, year-round air currents, well-drained soils, and broad valleys made for an excellent opportunity to grow grains for bread-making (Ackerman-Leist, 2017).

The importance of grains in the region was proven by South Tyrol's most famous resident, Ötzi the Iceman, the oldest mummy in Europe (dating back to 3,300 BC), who was found to have grains in his clothing, as well as in his belly (Einkorn.com, n.d.). His last meal included a bread made with finely ground Einkorn wheat (Einkorn.com, n.d.).

Grains and breads have long been an important source of nutrition and sustenance in Europe. During the Medieval period, it is estimated that people consumed 200 kilograms of grains/cereals per person annually (Hirschfelder, & Trummer, 2013). The poor usually ate staples of porridges and bread made with grains (Hirschfelder, & Trummer, 2013).

All the way up to the post World War II period of economic comfort, farmers typically baked bread only a few times per year, because it was difficult work in the South Tyrol to get the grain to the miller and back home again as flour, which needed to be turned into bread immediately to avoid loss (Ackerman-Leist, 2017). It's no wonder that many of the local bread traditions are based on this need for functionality. Today, traditional South Tyrolean breads are a welcome sight in bakeries, creating a must-taste experience of the local cuisine.

## Bread-Making in South Tyrol

The traditional breads of the region, which have been made for hundreds of years, are made of local ingredients, including grain flour, water, salt, yeast, sourdough, and herbs, including the classic Schüttelbrot (Fig. 3) and Vinschgau Paarlprot (Fig. 4) breads, (South Tyrol, n.d.).

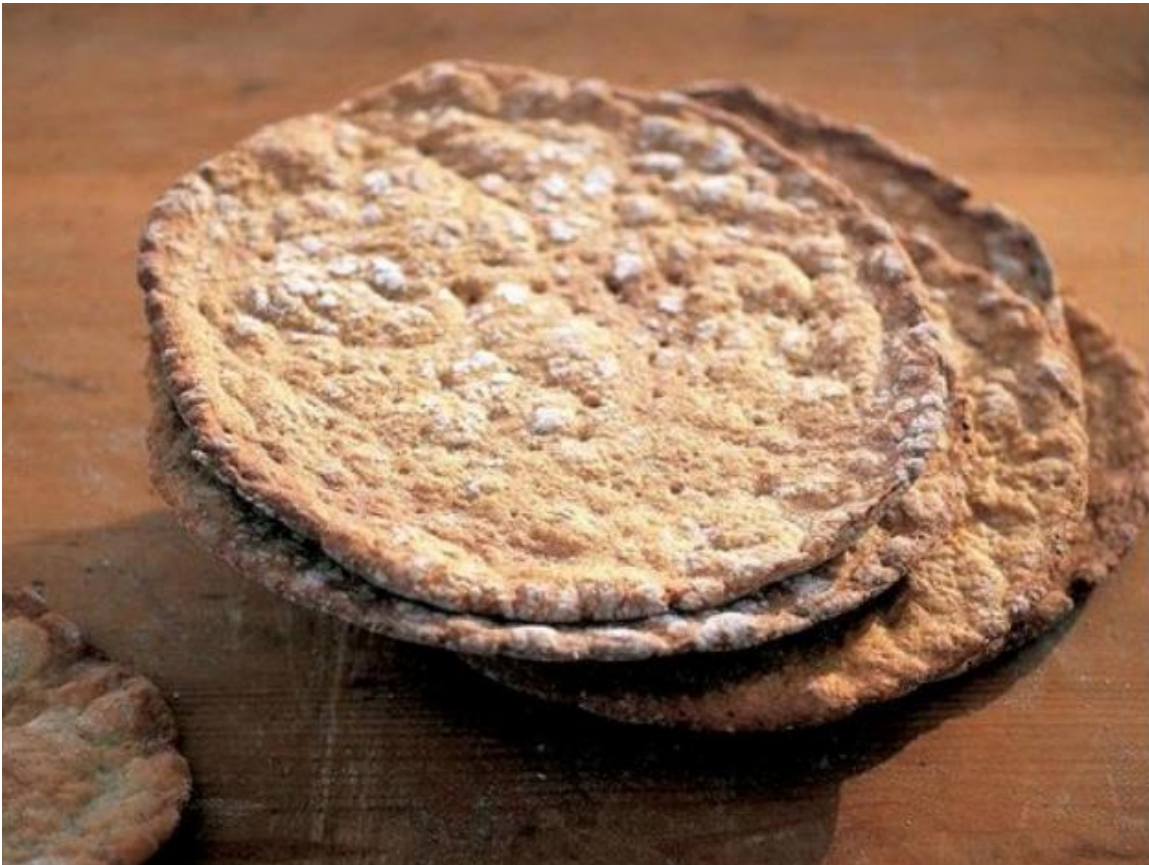


Figure 3. Schüttelbrot bread (South Tyrol, n.d.).

Schüttelbrot bread is a traditional, crunchy flat bread made with a sourdough starter; the bread is divided into 150-gram pieces, formed into rolls, and placed on clothes dusted with flour and allowed to rise for 10 minutes. It is then placed on a flat board, and shaken flat before baking (South Tyrol, n.d.). The bread is flavored with caraway seeds, coriander, fennel, or aniseed, and is typically served with speck or cheese. The unique shape and texture allowed for the bread to be stored in slotted wooden shelves (Fig. 1) for long periods (The Bittersweet Gourmet, 2016).



Vinschgau Paarlbrot (Fig. 4) comes from the traditional bread made by monks at Marienberg Abbey for several centuries before they shared the recipe with farmers (Ackerman- Leist, 2017). It is a sourdough bread containing mostly rye flour with a small amount of wheat flour, along with fennel, blue fenugreek, and caraway (Ackerman- Leist, 2017). The bread is about 1-inch thick, made with two connected circular loaves, typically baked in a stone oven, and then placed on edge in wood racks to be hung from



Figure 4. Vinschgau Paarlbrot (Bechtel, 2016).

the ceiling to dry and prevent spoilage (Ackerman-Leist, 2017). The bread was cut on a special wood board with a knife attached by a metal ring, and was typically served with soup, milk, or wine (Ackerman-Leist, 2017).

While visiting South Tyrol, it's essential to stop into one of the local bakeries, which showcase the bread-making traditions that date back to the beginning of human civilization in this region.

### **References:**

- Ackerman-Leist, P. (2017). *A Precautionary Tale*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Bechtel, K. (2016, February 27). Paarlrot—Traditional Bread from the Venosta Valley. Italian Food, Wine, and Travel. Retrieved from: <https://www.chefbikeski.com/?p=4470>
- Biodiversity Explorer. (n.d.). *Triticum* (wheat genus). Retrieved from: <http://www.biodiversityexplorer.org/plants/poaceae/triticum.htm>.
- Einkorn.com. (n.d.). Einkorn Wheat Bread: Ötzi the Iceman's Last Meal. Retrieved from: <https://www.einkorn.com/otzi-the-icemans-last-meal-included-einkorn-wheat-bread/>.
- Hirschfelder, G., & Trummer, M. (2013, August 20). Food and Drink. European History Online. Retrieved from: <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/food-and-drink/gunther-hirschfelder-manuel-trummer-food-and-drink/view>.
- South Tyrol. (n.d.). South Tyrolean Bread. Retrieved from: <https://www.suedtirol.info/en/this-is-south-tyrol/products/south-tyrolean-specialities/south-tyrolean-bread>.
- The Bittersweet Gourmet. (2016, May 18). Schüttelbrot, South Tyrol's 'Shaken' Bread. Retrieved from: <https://thebittersweetgourmet.com/schuttelbrot-south-tyrols-shaken-bread/>