
Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics

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When the Spanish and Portuguese arrived in the Americas, the inhabitants there made a cacao liquor which was diluted in hot water seasoned with pepper and other spices . . . all these ingredients gave this mixture a brutish quality and a very savage taste . . . The Spanish, more industrious than the Savages, procured to correct the bad flavor of this liquor, adding to this cacao paste different fragrances of the East and many spices of this country [Spain]. Of all these ingredients we have maintained only the sugar, vanilla, and cinnamon.¹

WRITTEN AT THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, this account of the European assimilation of chocolate is one of the earliest versions of the myth that suffuses modern scholarship: the notion that because Spaniards found the Indian form of chocolate unappetizing, they “procured to correct the bad flavor” by eliminating strange New World spices and adding sugar. Contrary to popular and scholarly opinion, the reason for chocolate’s success with Europeans was not that they could insert it into existing flavor complexes and discursive categories, masking indigenous flavors with sugar and Mesoamerican symbolism with medical excuses. The Spanish did not alter chocolate to fit the predilections of their palate. Instead, Europeans unwittingly developed a taste for Indian chocolate, and they sought to re-create the indigenous chocolate experience in America and in Europe. Europeans in the New World and then the Old World somatized native aesthetic values. The migration of the chocolate habit led to the cross-cultural transmission of tastes (an appetite for spices such as vanilla and pepper, the color red, and a foamy froth). Over time, the composition of chocolate did evolve, but this was a gradual process of change linked to the technological and economic challenges posed by long-distance trade rather than a radical rupture in the aesthetic preferences of chocolate consumers.²

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¹ Antonio Lavedán, *Tratado de los usos, abusos, propiedades y virtudes del tabaco, café, té y chocolate* (1796; facs. ed., Madrid, 1991), 214.

² “Cacao” refers to the seed kernels of the fleshy pods of the cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*). “Chocolate” refers to consumable substances in which a primary ingredient is cacao; before 1800, it almost always refers to a beverage.

When and how do societies assimilate foreign things? In the context of early modern globalization, this question has been taken up by scholars working in three historiographic traditions—histories of imperial expansion and colonialism, consumerism, and food. Although there has been surprisingly little dialogue across these fields, their approaches can be categorized in similar ways: they tend toward biological and economic essentialism, on the one hand, and toward cultural functionalism, on the other. By revisiting the reasons that Europeans came to develop a taste for chocolate, it becomes clear that both essentialist and functionalist models of taste are inadequate. The first Europeans who learned to like chocolate were neither fulfilling physiological destiny nor embodying a socially desirable ethos.

Among the many advances in studies of colonialism and imperialism is the recognition that colonialism is no longer only something done to someone else; struggles and endeavors in the periphery changed the society and culture, as well as the economy, of the metropole.³ Traditionally, historians interested in the material exchanges between metropole and periphery have considered “goods” as a static category. Alfred Crosby’s landmark study *The Columbian Exchange* takes for granted the universal character of migrating things. Crosby shows how Europeans eventually incorporated potatoes, maize, tomatoes, and other New World crops into their foodways, while American soil became a hospitable site for sugar plantations and wheat farming; and how pathogens crossed oceans and precipitated demographic catastrophe.⁴ This literature largely ignores the question of *why* Europeans adopted certain goods from colonies, taking for granted the cheap sustenance of maize and potatoes, the luxurious tastiness of chocolate, and the insidious addictiveness of tobacco. Environmental histories such as this do not consider the American or European social context, which largely determined what and how novel New World flora and fauna were appropriated.⁵

Another set of scholars have taken the opposite tack in studying European adoption of colonial goods, or, conversely, indigenous appropriation of metropolitan goods. In *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pa-*

³ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony,” in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 1. Phenomena once viewed as exclusively internalist European developments—scientific innovations, nationalist identities, Enlightenment epistemologies, and modern anthropology, among others—have now been linked to dynamic relations between European centers and colonial peripheries. See Londa Schiebinger, “Forum Introduction: The European Colonial Science Complex,” *Isis* 96 (2005): 52–55; Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen, eds., *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2002); Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds., *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2005); Jorge Cañizares Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World* (Stanford, Calif., 2001); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London, 1991), 56–57; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992); Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (New York, 2002); Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago, 2001); Antonio Barrera, *Experiencing Nature* (Austin, Tex., 2006). These arguments find their place alongside an older, but renewed and vibrant, debate concerning the role of European expansion in the development of modern capitalism; see below.

⁴ Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: The Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn., 1972). Works in this tradition include Elinor G. K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge, 1994), and Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York, 1997).

⁵ Crosby’s environmental determinism is even more in evidence in the sequel *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. 145–170.

cific, a study of how Westerners and Pacific Islanders have used each other's material artifacts, Nicholas Thomas contends that "objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become" and rejects "stabiliz[ing] the identity of a thing in its fixed and founded material form."⁶ For Thomas, Europeans' collections of stone tools, feather dresses, carved bowls, weapons, and other museum-worthy artifacts "performed the . . . operation of standing for a voyage and the work of science." Such an argument parallels that made by J. H. Elliott in his seminal study of how and when Europeans "assimilated" the New World discoveries into their intellectual frameworks. He found that Renaissance naturalists and ethnographers could see New World goods only through the grid inherited from classical models exemplified in the work of Aristotle, Galen, and Dioscorides.⁷

Culinary historians have similarly argued that existing food and drug paradigms go a long way toward explaining when and how Europeans incorporated unknown foodstuffs or drugs into their diets and apothecaries. According to culinary historian Alan Davidson, the reason some New World consumables met with more success than others was Europeans' "ability to fit them into the European scheme of things, to make analogies between them and familiar foodstuffs." This logic informs similar studies which argue that New World turkeys and beans caught on quickly because Europeans recognized them as kin to familiar fowl and legumes; or that maize succeeded in places such as northern Italy where people already relished *pulmentum* (polenta) made from millet or barley. In contrast, it is argued—problematically—that potatoes and tomatoes were initially treated with suspicion because of their similarity to poisonous belladonna.⁸ A similar framework has explained Europe's embrace of tobacco: its purported therapeutic effects matched the European obsession with the quest for a universal panacea.⁹

⁶ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 4, 184, 125–126, 143, 153. Similarly, Marshall Sahlins developed the idea of "commodity indigenization" to argue that non-Western cultures did not passively accept European goods but incorporated them on their own terms, in ways that were consistent with their cultures; Sahlins, "Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of 'the World-System,'" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 1–51. Jordan Goodman uses Sahlins's model to help account for tobacco's success in Europe; Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence* (London, 1994), 41–42.

⁷ J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (Cambridge, 1970), 8, 15. Other works in this tradition include Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1984); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge, 1982); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991); and Claudia Swan, "Collecting *Naturalia* in the Shadow of Early Modern Dutch Trade," in Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial Botany*.

⁸ Alan Davidson, "Europeans' Wary Encounter with Potatoes, Tomatoes, and Other New World Foods," in Nelson Foster and Linda S. Cordell, eds., *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the Americas Gave the World* (Tucson, Ariz., 1992), 3. Ken Albala writes that "the key" to explaining a food's acceptance "appears to be whether the new food was considered analogous to something already standard in the diet or could be substituted in a recipe with comparable results"; Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 233–238. The idea of "analogousness" is often an important mechanism for the absorption of new goods and is one that I discuss below in accounting for changes in chocolate's composition, but it does not apply in the initial phase of European assimilation of chocolate. Both volumes suggest that more research is needed on the diffusion of tomatoes and potatoes, for the notion that there was considerable resistance to them rests on literary sources, whereas evidence from the inventories of a Sevillian hospital show their regular use by the late sixteenth century; Earl J. Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price of Revolution in Spain, 1501–1650* (New York, 1965). The hospital inventories record regular purchases with no special explanation; see, for instance, Archivo de la Diputación de Sevilla, Hospital Cinco Llagas, lib. 110, 1591–1595.

⁹ Among others, see Sarah Augusta Dickson, *Panacea or Precious Bane: Tobacco in Sixteenth Cen-*

The “cultural-functionalist” model is also apparent in theoretically informed histories of consumption. The work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is both illustrative and influential. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu actively disputed Platonic and Kantian traditions (whose heirs are biological determinists) that accept a natural and universal capacity to discern the inherently beautiful or excellent. Instead, he sought to show the contingent and contextual basis of aesthetic determinations. His thesis is that “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.” Bourdieu argued that seemingly subjective pleasures accord with social hierarchies.¹⁰ The particular form that the human capacity to discriminate between sights, sounds, touch, and flavor (alias taste) takes at a given historical moment, he affirmed, serves the interests of those in power.

Echoing the findings of sociologists from Thorstein Veblen to Bourdieu, cultural historians, by and large, have eschewed biological or economic determinism and instead theorize taste as socially constructed. The cultural-functionalist model of taste is apparent in what is perhaps the most innovative and important study to date on the intermingled history of colonialism and consumerism, Sidney Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. Its central thesis is that the seemingly unquenchable desire for sugar in the modern world is not simply the outcome of the tongue’s biologically based affinity for sweetness, but rather the historical result of a conjuncture of factors. As Mintz traces sugar’s transformation from a medicinal additive to a luxury good among the upper classes, he argues that sugar “embodied the social position of the wealthy and powerful.” He points to “sugar’s usefulness as a mark of rank—to validate one’s social position. To elevate others, or to define them as inferior.” Sugar use traveled down to other classes in large part because their members accepted the meanings of their social superiors: “those who controlled the society held a commanding position not only in regard to the availability of sugar, but also in regard to at least some of the meanings that sugar products acquired . . . the simultaneous control of both the foods themselves and the meanings they are made to connote can be a means of a pacific domination.”¹¹ For Mintz, like Bourdieu, class hegemony is based on a trickle-down interpretation of the diffusion of taste.

Some scholars have faulted the “emulation” model for assuming an “identity between this ‘trickle-down’ phenomenon and imitative behavior.” An astute critic, Colin Campbell, points out that “the fact that a merchant or shop-keeper was now

tury Literature (New York, 1954); Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, 41–44. I offer another interpretation of tobacco’s transculturation—similar to the one offered here for chocolate—in Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate, 1492–1700* (Ithaca, N.Y., forthcoming), expanded from my dissertation, “New World of Goods: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Spanish Empire, 1492–1700” (University of California, Berkeley, 2000).

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 6, 3; Loïc Wacquant, “Taste,” in T. B. Bottomore and W. Outhwaite, eds., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (Oxford, 1992), 662.

¹¹ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985), 140, 139, 153, 166–167.

both able and willing to purchase a product previously a characteristic of superior aristocratic consumption patterns does not necessarily mean that he sought to imitate an aristocratic way of life." He proposes replacing the "emulative thesis" with an approach that "accord[s] a central role to the subjective meanings which, in reality, accompany and inform conduct." This leads Campbell to argue that the novelty of consumer behavior in eighteenth-century England was that it was informed by a "romantic" sensibility that distinguished it from previous forms of consumption, as it was marked by "a distinctive form of hedonism, one in which the enjoyment of emotions as summoned through imaginary or illusory images is central . . . combined with the ranking of pleasure above comfort."¹² A few historians have taken Campbell's lead to relate new forms of consumer behavior to a prevailing "ethos," and so attribute the seemingly sudden fondness of British consumers for coffee and then tea to emerging ideals of "virtuosi" (marked by "limitless curiosity"), "masculine rationality," and then "feminine domesticity" in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England.¹³ Yet while distancing themselves from "functionalist" interpretations of consumer behavior, all of these scholars share with their "functionalist" predecessors an idealist conception of behavior: in other words, bodily comportment follows abstract values; behaviors manifest an "ethos."¹⁴

These scholars have performed a great service by debunking the notion of the rational consumer who acts simply in attempting to maximize function use-values of goods or to fulfill biological destiny. Yet this reductively rational or biological actor has been replaced by the reductive consumer who consumes solely in order to manifest her or his social identity, or the one to which he or she aspires. In its current form, the history of consumers has been written largely in a way to replicate already existing narratives of modernization—the emergence of the court consumer, the public-sphere consumer, the bourgeois consumer, or the romantic hedonist consumer. Moreover, not all concur that "modern consumption" originated in eighteenth-century England. Others locate its origins in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Renaissance Europe, or seventeenth-century Netherlands. In accordance with the fracas about periodization and geography, a major fault line divides those who believe that modern consumption was a phenomenon initiated among court society and emulated by bourgeois, and those who consider the new middle classes of northern Europe to be the significant innovators.¹⁵ An offshoot of this debate concerns dis-

¹² Colin Campbell, "Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England," in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993), 40, 42, 48; Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1987).

¹³ Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven, Conn., 2005), 11; Woodruff D. Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (New York, 2002).

¹⁴ Thus I categorize them as "cultural-functional" theorists of taste, since for them "taste" is still a function of an abstract ethos.

¹⁵ Among the eighteenth-century partisans, see Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982), and Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods* (New York, 2003). For the Renaissance view, see Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600* (Baltimore, Md., 1993); Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore, 1980); Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York, 1983); Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (New York, 1996); and Paula Findlen, "Possessing the Past: The Material World of the Italian Renaissance," *AHR* 103, no. 1 (February 1998): 83–114. Jan de Vries insists that "modern con-

tinguishing “modern” from “traditional” consumption or “New Luxury” from “Old.”¹⁶ Scholars’ inability to agree on when the quintessential modern consumer emerged and what his or her salient characteristics were suggests that such distinctions are mostly semantic and thus too arbitrary to be useful.

But it is indisputable that a genuinely new consumer phenomenon was the accelerating demand for novel, luxury “groceries”—the exotic imports of tobacco, coffee, and tea, as well as chocolate, and the massive explosion in sugar consumption. One measure of this transformation is that whereas in 1559 “non-European groceries” accounted for less than 9 percent of the total value of English imports, by 1800 that proportion had risen to almost 35 percent.¹⁷ There is a heated debate about the impact of overseas expansion on Europe’s domestic economies and, ultimately, its modernization; yet those who ascribe to both “internalist” and “externalist” interpretations of European modernization seem to agree that the demand and trade in these Atlantic commodities had far-reaching economic effects. In line with both Adam Smith and Karl Marx, Kenneth Pomerantz and Robin Blackburn argue that the colonial trading companies and profits from the slave trade and slave-based plantation economies—fueled by European demand for tropical groceries—were a prerequisite for industrialization and the European economic takeoff.¹⁸ But even some of those who reject the view that profits from Atlantic commerce directly fueled the peculiar European dynamism that culminated in the Industrial Revolution think that the mass desire for overseas luxury imports—tobacco, sugar, cacao, coffee, and tea—affected the European economy significantly, albeit indirectly.¹⁹ For one, cravings

sumer behavior made a decisive advance . . . in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic”; de Vries, “Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age in Theory and Practice,” in Berg and Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 41. For seventeenth-century origins, see also Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge, 2005). Concerning the bourgeois vs. aristocratic origins of modern consumption, the classic debate was between Werner Sombart and Max Weber. Those who see the locus of the consumer revolution in eighteenth-century Britain point to the ascendant middling classes, while those who locate it earlier focus on courts. For de Vries, the urban society of the Golden Age Dutch Republic generated modern consumer behavior; “Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age.” For an overview on the debates, see Jean-Christophe Agnew, “Coming Up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective,” in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 23–25, and Craig Clunas, “Modernity Global and Local: Consumption and the Rise of the West,” *AHR* 104, no. 5 (December 1999): 1497–1511.

¹⁶ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*; Joyce Appleby, “Consumption in Early Modern Social Thought,” in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 172; de Vries, “Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age,” 43, 50–53.

¹⁷ Carole Shammas, “Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption from 1550 to 1800,” in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 178. See also Sidney W. Mintz, “The Changing Roles of Food in the Study of Consumption,” in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 266; Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (1947; repr., Durham, N.C., 1995); Goodman, *Cultures of Dependence*; Goodman, *Tobacco in History*; Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (London, 1996); Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy, and Andrew Sherratt, eds., *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* (London, 1995); James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660–1800* (New York, 1997); Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*.

¹⁸ Jan de Vries, *The Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis, 1600–1750* (Cambridge, 1976), 141; Elliott, *The Old World and the New*; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (London, 1998), 363, 376; Kenneth Pomerantz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J., 2000), 194. See also Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*.

¹⁹ De Vries, *The Economy of Europe*, 145; David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2000), 270–276; Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815* (Cambridge, 1997), 350, 502.

for these stimulants may have motivated people to work harder to earn the cash necessary to supply their new habits, in what Jan de Vries has coined the “Industrious Revolution.” And with the demand for tobacco, chocolate, coffee, and tea came yearnings for accessory implements, spurring European manufacturers to produce porcelain chocolate pots, imitation Chinese teacups, clay pipes, and snuffboxes. The newfound love of American tropical groceries stimulated commerce in Europe as well as its colonies.²⁰

Despite this increasing emphasis on the importance of “luxury groceries” for transformations in European culture and economy, scholars have failed to recognize the primacy of chocolate in the pantheon of tropical imports. By the eighteenth century, coffee and particularly tea would overtake chocolate in terms of mass quantities imported,²¹ yet the latter was the *first* stimulant beverage consumed in significant quantities by Europeans. This fact is overlooked in even the most recent studies of the arrival of stimulant beverages into Europe. At best, chocolate is ignored; more often, scholars wrongly assume that chocolate *followed* coffee. This mistaken view has led many to explain the diffusion of chocolate as a consequence of the popularity of coffee.²² Yet chocolate had a significant presence in Iberia by the 1590s, and had spread northward by the 1620s.²³ Coffee, on the other hand, did not gain a permanent foothold in England until the 1650s (despite English traders’ involvement in its commerce in the inter-Asian market in prior decades), and in Spain until the end of the eighteenth century; tea’s ascendance did not begin until the end of the seventeenth century in Britain.²⁴ The common view that coffee con-

²⁰ Jan de Vries, “Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe,” in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 85–132, and de Vries, “The Industrious Revolution and the Industrial Revolution,” *Journal of Economic History* 54 (June 1994): 249–270; de Vries, *European Economy*, 41. For tobacco, coffee, tea, and chocolate’s indirect contribution to particular sectors such as tobacco processing, snuff and pipe manufacture, and porcelain in the “first modern economy” of the Dutch Republic, see de Vries and van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy*, 305–311, 324–329.

²¹ Jordan Goodman, “Excitantia: Or How Enlightenment Europe Took to Soft Drugs,” in Goodman, Lovejoy, and Sherratt, *Consuming Habits*, 126.

²² For instance, Davidson suggests that chocolate was accepted when an “analogy was eventually made with coffee,” so that it “could then be slotted into place as a luxury beverage with stimulating qualities”; “Europeans’ Wary Encounter,” 3. See also Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 111; David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2001), 19; Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 75. Wolfgang Schivelbusch is wrong that chocolate remained an “exclusively Spanish phenomenon” in the seventeenth century; Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants*, trans. David Jacobson (New York, 1992), 91.

²³ On Spain, see below. Chocolate’s place in early-seventeenth-century northern Europe has not received the attention that it deserves, but available evidence is suggestive. The first treatise devoted to chocolate in England (a translation of Antonio Colmenero de Ledesma’s treatise) appeared more than twenty years before the first coffee treatises; compare *A Curious Treatise of the Nature and Quality of Chocolate . . . Put into English by Don Diego de Vades-forte* (London, 1640) with Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 314–326. Colmenero de Ledesma wrote in 1631, “the number of people who nowadays drink Chocolate is so great that it is not only in the Indies where this drink originated and began, but also in Spain, Italy, and Flanders it is already very common”; *Curioso tratado de la naturaleza y calidad del chocolate* (Madrid, 1631), 1r. Records from 1624 show Jesuits in New Spain shipping chocolate through Seville to Rome; Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla (hereafter AGI), Contratación (hereafter CT) 825, no. 8. Also, translations proliferated of Colmenero de Ledesma’s *Curioso tratado* in English (1640, 1652, and 1685), French (1643, 1671), Latin (1644), and Italian (1667, 1678, 1694). Wolf Mueller, *Bibliographie des Kaffee, des Kakao, der Schokolade, des Tee und deren Surrogate bis zum Jahre* (Krieg, 1960). Given the close links between European nobility and Spanish aristocrats’ devotion to chocolate by the 1620s, it is logical that non-Iberian nobility would have had opportunities to acquire a taste for chocolate.

²⁴ The first European encounters with coffee took place in the late sixteenth century, mostly in

sumption led to chocolate consumption in Europe is backward. Rather, it seems, chocolate helped pave the way for coffee by creating a craving among consumers for dark, bitter, sweetened, hot stimulant drinks.²⁵ Chocolate, like the caffeinated drinks that followed it, may have also increased demand for sugar, since it was an important vessel for sugar. One cannot fully understand the accelerating popularity of sugar without paying attention to the reasons for the diffusion of stimulant beverages.²⁶

CHOCOLATE SCHOLARSHIP LIES AT THE INTERSTICES of culinary, colonial, and consumer history, and like these, it gravitates toward biological essentialism or cultural functionalism. Chemical and neurophysiological studies that have isolated and identified powerful psychoactive compounds provide support for chocolate's inherent attractiveness, or even addictive qualities. Cacao contains stimulating methylxanthines (small amounts of caffeine and abundant but weaker theobromine), even more potent amphetamine-like phenylethylamine, pleasure-producing cannabinoids, and cholesterol-lowering flavonoids. The fat and sugar in chocolate also may stimulate the brain to produce opiates.²⁷ The view that chocolate may hold universal appeal

regions under Ottoman control, but it was not imported for European consumption until the mid-seventeenth century. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 58–60; Jean Leclant, "Coffee and Cafés in Paris, 1644–1693," in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, eds., *Food and Drink in History* (Baltimore, Md., 1979). Chocolate remained hegemonic in Spain until the end of the eighteenth century, when coffee began its triumphant ascendance; Charles E. Kany, *Life and Manners in Madrid, 1750–1800* (Berkeley, Calif., 1932), 151.

²⁵ Direct evidence that coffee was recognized as a cognate of chocolate is *Carta qve escrivió vn Médico cristiano, que estava curando en Antiberi, a vn Cardenal de Roma, sobre la bebida del Cahuè o café* [n.p., 16–], University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library. In the early seventeenth century, a Spanish doctor who was visiting an unidentified locale in the Ottoman Empire viewed "this new drink coffee . . . so common among the Turks, Persians, and Moors" through chocolate-tinted glasses. He designated the special coffee cups used by the Turks, Moors, and Persians with the hispanized pre-Columbian term used for chocolate vessels: *jícaras*. He referred to the vessel used to boil the water as "a glass pot or a tinned *chocolatera* with a spout." He noted that "they add a spoonful of ground sugar as with Chocolate, and stir it with a silver spoon and drink it by sipping it like Chocolate, as hot as they can take it." Throughout Europe, many early treatises grouped together chocolate, coffee, and tea: Dufour, *Traitez nouveaux*; [Jacob Spon], *Usage du caphé, du thé et du chocolate* (Lyon, 1671); John Chamberlayne, *The Natural History of Coffee, Thee, Chocolate, Tobacco* (London, 1682); *Tractatus novi de potv caphé; de Chinensivm thé; et de chocolata* (Paris, 1685); Nicolas Blegny, *Le bon usage du thé, du caffè et du chocolat* (Lyon, 1687).

²⁶ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 150; Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, 121. Why have scholars failed to recognize the actual relationship between chocolate and coffee? Part of the answer may lie in the anachronistic projection of contemporary chocolate (low in cacao, high in milk and other additives) onto the prevalent early modern formula, which prescribed a large amount of stimulating cacao and no milk. And perhaps long-standing assumptions about Dutch and British exceptionalism and the teleological recognition that these precocious economic modernizers ultimately derived the most economic benefit from the trade in Asian and Atlantic goods has led scholars to focus on the success of these goods in the northern European context and to ignore the Iberian Atlantic. Yet British and Dutch economic prowess should not obscure the fact that the European demand for stimulant beverages originated in the Spanish Americas, followed by the Iberian Peninsula, and then moved northward. For studies that redress the neglect of Iberia in the development of Enlightenment epistemology and the scientific revolution, respectively, see Cañizares Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*, and Barrera, *Experiencing Nature*.

²⁷ Biochemists have identified more than three hundred chemical compounds in cacao and subjected several of them to intense experimentation. There is ongoing research and still much ambiguity about how these compounds work on the nervous system. See Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer, *The World of Caffeine: The Science and Culture of the World's Most Popular Drug* (New York, 2001),

because of a jigsaw-like fit between its active compounds and “propensities of the human body” is persuasive.²⁸ One cannot ignore the powerful psychoactive properties of cacao and its role in human history. However, this alone is an insufficient explanation for Europeans’ acquisition of a taste for chocolate.²⁹

One shortcoming of the purely pharmacological explanation should be immediately obvious: habit-forming properties may account for the continued use of chocolate, but not for its initial success. Another problem with this explanation is that the seventy-year time lag between the first European encounters with chocolate and its wide-scale use in Europe makes untenable assertions of instant addiction. Moreover, the fact that cacao contains compelling psychoactive compounds does not help explain the varying and evolving forms that chocolate has taken throughout history. Perhaps the most persuasive rebuttal to the theory that Europeans instantly recognized the aesthetic and psychoactive attractions of chocolate is that the empirical evidence demonstrates the opposite. Those with only scant exposure to the drink tended to find it disgusting, as indicated by the experience of the Milanese adventurer Girolamo Benzoni. He came across chocolate in Nicaragua in the middle of the sixteenth century, and famously wrote that it “seemed more a drink for pigs, than a drink for humanity. I was in this country for more than one year, and never wanted to taste it.”³⁰ The Jesuit José de Acosta likewise disparaged chocolate, asserting that those who had not grown up with it “could not have a taste for it,” and likening the frothy foam that capped the drink to feces.³¹ While the powerful chemical compounds in cacao may help to explain some of its enduring attraction, they clearly cannot account for why people began to consume chocolate or for the particular ways in which they used it.

The historians who have paid attention to chocolate by and large eschew biological explanations and employ cultural-functionalist assumptions to account for its assimilation into European foodways. They assume that Europeans appropriated the Indian beverage on their own terms—that they found it “analogous” to existing drink categories; that it matched the ethos of “decadent” court society; that its stimulant effects were appropriate to the needs of an ascendant bourgeoisie; or that they tinkered with the recipe until it satisfied their palate, and ensconced it in a familiar medical paradigm to veil its exotic origins. Eric Wolf was one of the first of many to hypothesize that American import commodities provided stimuli for global capitalism by invigorating both transatlantic commerce and laborers: “Among the pan-

217–219, 223, 231–232, and E. D. Tomaso, M. Beltramo, and D. Piomelli, “Brain Cannabinoids in Chocolate,” *Nature* 382 (1996): 667.

²⁸ Eric Wolf referred to Europe’s “Big Fix”; Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1982), 322.

²⁹ On the insufficiency of biological explanations for the triumph of sucrose, see Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 5–6; Goodman, “Excitantia,” 127. There may be “universal” parameters in which contingent taste is developed. For instance, people generally avoid lethal poisons, and certainly studies have shown that babies respond immediately to sugar. But within these parameters there is much that is culturally specific about taste.

³⁰ Quoted in Sophie Coe, *America’s First Cuisines* (Austin, Tex., 1984), 109; Girolamo Benzoni, *Historia del Mondo Nuovo* (Venice, 1565), fol. 102.

³¹ José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Sevilla, 1590), fols. 163r–164v. Diego Durán relayed that when Cortés and his men were first offered chocolate, they viewed the drink with suspicion and refused to try it; Angel María Garibay K., ed., *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de la Tierra Firme*, 2 vols. (Mexico, D.F., 1967), 2: 509–510. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

opoly of products destined for consumption in the industrializing areas a few are clearly not staple foodstuffs or industrial products but rather stimulants . . . favored because they provided quick energy in a period when more intense and prolonged performance was demanded from the human body.”³² Sidney Mintz likewise argues that such beverages, along with sugar, helped to fuel industrialization by providing laboring classes “stimulus to greater effort.” Wolfgang Schivelbusch developed a similar hypothesis, counterposing coffee and chocolate, apparently ignorant of the latter’s earlier ascendance. He viewed the former as the liquid manifestation of the Protestant ethic that lay beneath the economic modernization of northern Europe while characterizing chocolate as the potion that matched the decadent, aristocratic ethos of the declining powers of southern Europe.³³

A significant claim made in the cultural-functional vein is that Europeans initially found chocolate repugnant, so they doctored it until it matched the sensibilities of their palate, most notably by sweetening it and eliminating strange and often spicy additives. According to preeminent chocolate authorities Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe,

To cross the ethnocentric taste barrier and be accepted as a normal beverage by the Spanish-born and the creoles, the cold, bitter usually unsweetened drink had to undergo its own process of hybridization. The first transmutation was that the whites insisted on taking chocolate hot rather than cold or at room temperature, as had been the custom among the Aztecs . . . Secondly, it came to be regularly sweetened with cane sugar. Thirdly, Old World spices more familiar to the invaders, such as cinnamon, anise seed, and black pepper, began to be substituted for native flavorings like “ear flower” and chili pepper (this never could have been too popular with the invaders, anyway).³⁴

Echoing the assertion of the eighteenth-century author quoted in the opening epigraph, these and many other modern authorities—no doubt also influenced by current forms of chocolate that seem to bear little resemblance to the peppery liquid favored by pre-Columbian (and the first European) consumers—assume that the evolution of chocolate was marked by a radical rupture inaugurated by picky colonial drinkers.³⁵ According to this view, not only did the invaders transform chocolate’s material basis, but they also swathed it in a new ideological husk. “The Spaniards had stripped it of the spiritual meaning which it had for the Mesoamericans,” the Coes continue; “for the [Spanish] invader, it was a drug, a medicine, in the humoral system to which they all had adhered.”³⁶ Europeans attempting to fix these substances in a classificatory scheme invoked the Galenist humoral medical context most

³² Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, 322.

³³ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 186; Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*, 34, 38–39, 87–93.

³⁴ Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 112–115. See also Dauril Alden, “The Significance of Cacao Production in the Amazon Region during the Late Colonial Period: An Essay in Comparative Economic History,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, no. 2 (April 1976): 105.

³⁵ An exception to this view can be found in Ross W. Jamieson, “The Essence of Commodification: Caffeine Dependencies in the Early Modern World,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 2 (2001): 269–294, which argues that Europe’s acquisition of caffeinated drinks was dependent on a “dynamic history of interaction with cultures that struggled in complex relation to increasing European power” and that “All caffeine drinks came to Europeans embedded within the cultural practices of the non-Europeans who were using them” (287).

³⁶ Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 126; see also Goodman, “Excitantia,” 132; Solange Alberro, *Del gachupin al criollo: O cómo los españoles de México dejaron de serlo* (Mexico, D.F., 1992), 76–77.

familiar to them. Many authors assume that the early success of chocolate, as well as other stimulant beverages, was due to its acceptance as a medicine, and only later was it appreciated as an object of recreation and pleasure.

There is much that these accounts offer, but they fail to *explain* how chocolate got a foothold among European consumers in the Americas and then Europe. Past studies of colonial appropriation have focused on formal collecting endeavors and systematic scientific practices but have not paid attention to other sites of material transmission. In the case of chocolate, fundamental vectors of cultural transmission were social networks that emerged in colonial and imperial contexts, the informal and formal relationships that emerged between European missionaries and Indian subjects, conquistadores and tributaries, market buyers and vendors, and those between clergy and merchants who moved often and easily within an integrated Spanish Atlantic world. During the early history of chocolate among Europeans, the transmission of taste did not accord with the top-down structure of society. Instead, it flowed in the opposite direction: from the colonized to the colonizer, from the “barbarian” to the “civilized,” from the degenerate “creole” to the metropolitan Spaniard, from gentry to royalty. The European taste for chocolate emerged as a contingent accident of empire.

From this revisionist account of chocolate’s diffusion to Europeans, an alternative way of understanding taste emerges—overdetermined by neither biology nor ideology, but rather autonomous and contingent. In line with the scholarship of cultural functionalists, the history of chocolate reveals weaknesses with environmental determinism that neglects the social context in which resources, foods, and microbes crossed cultures.³⁷ But consistent with the Platonic-Kantian “biological” tradition, taste functions as an autonomous force, not a dependent manifestation of ideology, mentalité, ethos, or social identity.³⁸ Social conditions can accidentally affect the body in ways that have far-reaching consequences. In the case at hand, Spanish methods of colonization and imperial organization led Europeans in the colonies and metropole to internalize Mesoamerican aesthetics, which in turn inaugurated Old World demand for stimulant beverages.

AT THE TIME THE SPANISH ARRIVED ON THE SCENE in the early sixteenth century, the use of cacao in beverages was a unifying trait of linguistically and geographically diverse communities encompassing Mesoamerica, and perhaps even extending beyond its frontiers.³⁹ Since the finicky cacao tree flourishes mostly in tropical lowland

³⁷ For excellent examples of environmental history that foreground the dialectical relationship between environment and culture, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), and Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991).

³⁸ The history of chocolate also indicates the way that colonial histories have suffered from an overemphasis on “discourse determinism” at the expense of embodiment or “lived experience” in colonial encounters and exchanges; see Lynn M. Meskell and Rosemary A. Joyce, *Embodied Lives: Figuring Ancient Maya and Egyptian Experience* (London, 2003). In thinking about the role of the body in history, I have also found useful the notion of *habitus* developed in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Calif., 1990).

³⁹ Mesoamerica is the geographic area covered by the Mayan area of Central America and southeast Mexico, the Oaxacan zone, the Gulf zone of Veracruz and Tabasco, western Mexico, and the central

climates, many pre-Columbian consumers had access to cacao only through long-distance trade. The Mexica (Aztecs) who dominated much of Mesoamerica at the time of the Spanish arrival obtained their cacao supply through tribute (almost half came from cacao groves in Soconusco on the southern Pacific Coast), as well as voluntary long-distance trade.⁴⁰

Despite the different languages, long-standing enmities, and geographic expanses separating Mesoamerican communities, cacao and chocolate were a common interest, even obsession. That cacao beans functioned as currency throughout the region underscores their pan-Mesoamerican embrace. From Nicaragua to northwest Mexico, there was a fundamental sameness among the modes of consumption, ritual contexts, and symbolic resonances of chocolate. Everywhere, the prevailing cacao concoction was consumed as a beverage, sometimes hot and sometimes cold, mixed with maize or not, and often sweetened with honey and spiced with chili peppers, vanilla, and other fragrant flora. The starting point for all of them was the same. Cacao nibs—what are commonly called “beans,” or the seeds inside the pulpy mass of the cacao fruit—were dried and fermented to increase their “oily and buttery” qualities. They were then toasted until the nibs turned from brown to black and sloughed off their husks, and finally they were ground between two stones (one of which had a fire burning beneath) known as a *metate*. (A similar process still characterizes chocolate production.) The paste that resulted was perishable and would spoil within a week. If formed into hardened tablets, however, it would last for up to two years.⁴¹ The final beverage was made by dissolving the cacao paste in water and mixing in diverse additions (maize, spices, honey).

Sixteenth-century dictionaries from the Zapoteca, Nahuatl, and Mayan regions had distinct terms for cacao drinks, but they all included entries for “the beverage of cacao with maize,” “the beverage of cacao with chili peppers,” “the beverage of cacao alone,” and “the beverage of cacao with dried and ground flowers.” Nahuatl speakers designated as *atexli* a beverage composed of water, cacao, and maize, prepared cold and sometimes enhanced with the spices described below. *Tzone* was

highlands. Paul Kirchhoff, “Mesoamérica,” *Acta Americana* 1, no. 1 (1943): 92–107, classified cacao as one of the unifying features of this region, along with the *coa* (planting stick); maize cultivation and its preparation with lime; paper; and ritual human sacrifice for religious purposes. On the origins and development of pre-Columbian cacao and chocolate, see Allen M. Young, *The Chocolate Tree: A Natural History of Cacao* (Washington, D.C., 1994), 5–18; Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*; [Karen Dakin and Søren Wichmann], “Cacao and Chocolate: A Uto-Aztecan Perspective,” *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11 (2000): 55–75; John S. Henderson and Rosemary A. Joyce, “Brewing Distinction: The Development of Cacao Beverages in Formative Mesoamerica,” in Cameron McNeil, ed., *The Origins of Chocolate: Cacao in the Americas* (Gainesville, Fla., in press).

⁴⁰ “Mexica” refers to the Nahuatl-speaking Indians who were settled in Tenochtitlán and whom colonial Spanish identified as Aztecs. I will use the terms “Aztecs” and “Nahuas” more or less interchangeably, and “Mexica” to refer to the tribally affiliated group of Tenochtitlán. For the cultivation of pre-Columbian cacao, see John F. Bergmann, “The Distribution of Cacao Cultivation in Pre-Columbian America,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59 (1969): 85–96; René F. Millon, “When Money Grew on Trees: A Study of Cacao in Ancient Mesoamerica” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1955), 107–127; Murdo J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America* (Berkeley, Calif., 1973), 69–70.

⁴¹ The creolized doctor Juan de Cárdenas provided a detailed description of cacao preparation and chocolate; Cárdenas, *Problemas y secretos maravillosos de las Indias* (1591), ed. Angeles Durán (Madrid, 1988), 136–137, 144–145. Writing for a European audience in 1636, Antonio de León Pinelo provided a very similar description; León Pinelo, *Questión moral: Si el chocolate quebranta el ayuno eclesiástico* (Madrid, 1636), fol. 5v.

made of equal quantities of toasted corn and cacao and “served as a refreshing food and not as a medicine.” *Chilcacautl* was the beverage composed of cacao and chili peppers. Finally, there was the cacao beverage of cacao, water, and flower spices, known as *xochiaya cacautl*, the beverage described by the great Franciscan ethnographer Bernadino de Sahagún as “honeyed chocolate made with ground-up dried flowers.” This cacao preparation became hegemonic among creoles and then Spaniards in the Old World.⁴²

The “ground-up dried flowers” were *xochinacaztli* (also known as *gueynacaztle*), *mecaxóchitl*, and *tlixochitl*. *Xochinacaztli* probably referred to the thick ear-shaped petal on blossoms of *Cymbopetalum penduliform*, a tree of the custard-apple family that grows in the tropical forests of Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. The taste has been described as akin to that of black pepper with “a hint of resinous bitterness,” and compared to nutmeg, allspice, and cinnamon. *Mecaxóchitl* are small flowers (probably *Piper sanctum* and related to black pepper) with a spicy, floral edge reminiscent of anise. *Tlixochitl* we know as vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*).⁴³ This flower spice constellation had an ancient lineage, in evidence in Mayan cosmological and sacred texts of the Popul Vuh.⁴⁴ Chili peppers added a further bite to many renditions. Achiote (*Bixa orellana*, also known in English as annatto) tinged the drink red and imparted a slightly musky flavor (sometimes compared to paprika and saffron). And honey was used to sweeten many cacao drinks. Mesoamerican chocolate was frequently topped with a foamy froth produced by pouring the liquid from one container into another from a “certain height until it produced a foam, and the fatty parts, with an oil-like quality, rose to the surface.” (See Figures 1 and 2.) Finally, chocolate was imbibed from drinking vessels made for that purpose. During the pre-Hispanic era, finely painted lacquered gourds and ceramics were manufactured exclusively for chocolate—some of them painted with designs, others colored in a “smoky” tone. Known in Nahuatl as *tecomatl* (for ceramic cups) and *xicalli* (for the calabash variety), these vessels were among the tribute items levied by Moctezuma.⁴⁵ (See Fig-

⁴² Alonso de Molina, *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana*, 2 vols. (1571; facs. ed., Madrid, 1944), 1: 19v; 2: 10v. The Zapotec–Spanish dictionary includes these entries for “cacao”: “a fruit like pine nuts that is drunk as a beverage” (*pižòya*), “a cacao drink of these made with water” (*niçapizòya*), “cacao in this way with chili peppers” (*niçapizòya quiña*), “cacao in this way with certain things that have fragrance” (*niçapizòyachina*), and “cacao made this way to drink raised high [e.g., with foam]” (*tocanizapizòyachina*); Juan de Córdoba, *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteco*, ed. Wigberto Jiménez Moreno (1578; facs. ed., México, D.F., 1942), 64v. Commissioned by Philip II in the 1570s to investigate the *materia medica* of New Spain, Francisco Hernández conducted extensive interviews with indigenous authorities and described the preparation of various cacao beverages; Hernández, *Obras completas*, Tomo 2: *Historia natural de Nueva España*, 2 vols. (Mexico, D.F., 1959), 1: 303–305, 100. Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles Dibble, 12 vols. (Santa Fe, N.Mex., 1950), 8:13, 39. For similar Maya preparations, see Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 63–64.

⁴³ Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 89–91.

⁴⁴ Susan D. Gillespie and Ana Lucrecia E. de MacVean, “Las Flores en el Popol Vuh,” *Revista Universidad del Valle de Guatemala* 12 (2002): 10–17.

⁴⁵ On achiote, Hernández, *Historia natural*, 1: 27–28; on sweeteners, *The Florentine Codex*, 8:13, 39, and below; on foam, Hernández, *Historia natural*, 1: 305; *The Florentine Codex*, 10:26, 93. The importance of chocolate foam is also suggested by the fact that Sahagún’s informants listed aerating stirring sticks among the ruler’s chocolate paraphernalia; *The Florentine Codex*, 8:13, 40; 9:6, 27; Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, intro. and ed. Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas (México, D.F., 1964), chap. 91, 155–156. A Maya vase from the Late Classic period (600–900 A.D.) depicts the frothing process by showing a woman pouring the liquid from one vessel into another; Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 52. On drinking vessels, Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt,



FIGURE 1: *Codex Tudela*, fol. 3r. From a manuscript painted in New Spain ca. 1553, this image depicts a Nahua woman, of high social rank (as suggested by her fine cloak), frothing chocolate by pouring it from a height. A similar representation of chocolate-frothing occurs on a ceramic piece used for serving chocolate by Maya from the Late Classic period (A.D. 600–900). 21 x 15.5 cm. Ink on vegetable-fiber paper. Reproduced courtesy of the Museo de América, Madrid, Spain.



FIGURE 2: Girolamo Benzoni, *La Historia del Mondo Nuovo* (Venice, 1572), fol. 104v. This engraving, which also appeared in the 1565 edition, depicts Mayan revelers. Although disdainful to Benzoni, chocolate was integral to keeping the Mesoamerican celebrants awake for the nocturnal festivities. In the lower right corner, a figure froths the chocolate. Shelfmark: xE141.B42. Reproduced courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

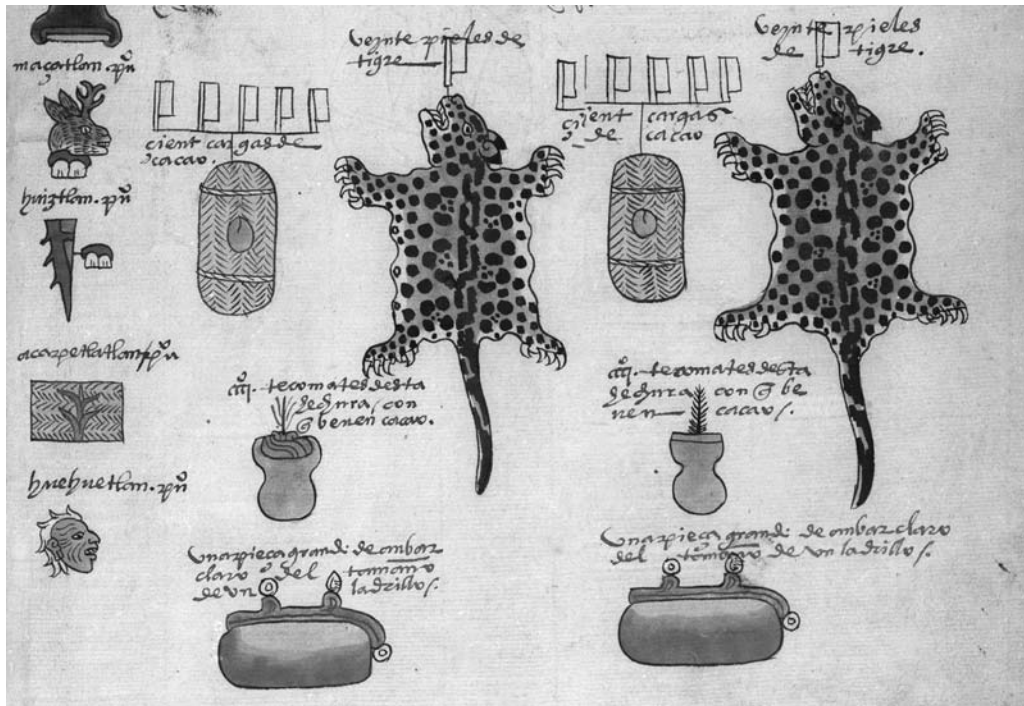


FIGURE 3: *Codex Mendoza*, fol. 47r. Although this manuscript was commissioned and compiled ca. 1541–1542, the tribute lists that it includes are thought to be based on pre-Hispanic prototypes. The loads of cacao and chocolate-drinking vessels were among the items that the Aztec ruler levied from tributaries. Ink on European paper. Shelfmark: MS. Arch. Seld.A.1. Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, England.

ure 3.) Mesoamericans appreciated chocolate for its psychological effects as well: “when an ordinary amount is drunk, it gladdens one, refreshes one, consoles one, invigorates one.”⁴⁶ Drinking chocolate was a complex somatic experience for pre-Columbian and colonial Indians. The emphasis put on flower spices, the frothy foam, the special drinking vessels, and the requisite reddish hue shows that chocolate was valued not only for its effects on the taste buds, but also for the stimulation of the olfactory, tactile, visual, and affective senses.

IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1519, when Cortés began the march on Mexico that culminated in the fall of the Aztec Empire, that the stage was set for Europeans’ education in and eventual adoption of chocolate. Within a few years of the fall of Tenochtitlán in 1521, Spanish military control coalesced throughout central Mexico.⁴⁷ Colonial policies

eds., *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 47r, 68r, “Commentary,” 1: 219; Molina, *Vocabulario mexicana*, 93r, 158v; *The Florentine Codex*, 9:7, 35, 9:6, 28. *The Florentine Codex* also refers to vendors who specialized in different kinds of gourd containers, including those for chocolate; 10:21, 78.

⁴⁶ *The Florentine Codex*, 11:6, 119. See also Hernández, *Historia natural*, 1: 305.

⁴⁷ The first known European encounter with cacao came in 1502, during Columbus’s fourth voyage, when his crew captured a Mayan trading vessel off the Honduran coast and discovered among its cargo cacao beans, later described by Christopher’s son Fernando as “those almonds which in New Spain are

ensured the continued cultivation, commerce, and consumption of cacao, because the Spanish rulers' immediate ability to profit from the conquest depended on their usurpation and maintenance of the tribute system organized by the Aztec rulers. Indian demographic catastrophe and Spanish pressure to overproduce led to the decline of traditional pre-Hispanic cacao-producing regions in southern Mexico (Tabasco and Soconusco) and to the development of new regions for cultivation or intensification of cacao production in the Sonsonate region in Guatemala and El Salvador.⁴⁸ Although Spanish policies and cupidity transformed the geography of cacao cultivation, the crop itself, if not the indigenous producers, flourished under the colonial regime. In the sixteenth century, Spanish policy encouraged (or rather demanded) that Indian tributaries augment cacao production; cacao had been a tribute item under Aztec rule, and the new imperial overlords, the Spanish, envisioned that wealth could be secured through its continued sale to indigenous consumers.

Given that the existing evidence suggests that Europeans' first encounters with chocolate were overwhelmingly negative, how did this Mesoamerican beverage ingratiate itself among Europeans in the Indies, Spain, and beyond? That chocolate became a success in Spain was due to the social organization of the Spanish Empire. Spaniards in the New World absorbed many elements of the material practices connected to pre-Columbian chocolate. Despite their position at the apex of the social hierarchy, colonists in sixteenth-century Mexico were enveloped within an Indian cultural milieu and were susceptible to native acculturation.⁴⁹ Even with Indians' catastrophic mortality in the face of Old World pathogens and increasing European emigration, Spaniards still constituted only a small minority in their most densely settled areas.⁵⁰ In mid-sixteenth-century Mexico City, for instance, Indians vastly outnumbered Spaniards, and people of African descent almost equaled the Spanish in number: Spaniards and their "pure" descendants made up only 5 percent of the population in Mexico City in 1570, and still only 10 percent by the mid-seventeenth century.⁵¹

used for money"; quoted in Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 107. There is no indication that the Spanish explorers knew anything about the use of cacao as the basis for beverages.

⁴⁸ By the late sixteenth century, Guatemala had become the prime producer of cacao. But after Spanish exploitation exhausted the labor supply and the delicate ecology of that region, production moved southward to the Guayaquil region in Ecuador and the area around Caracas in Venezuela and more than compensated for (and contributed to) the drop-off in Guatemala. In net terms, total cacao production continued to increase in the seventeenth century in Guatemala. Alden, "The Significance of Cacao Production," 105–106; MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, 68–94, 235–252; Eduardo Arcila Farías, *Comercio entre Venezuela y México en los siglos xvi y xvii* (México, D.F., 1950); Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (Stanford, Calif., 1964), 335, 348–349.

⁴⁹ Alberro examines this process of acculturation generally in *Del gachupín al criollo*. For an archaeological perspective on Europeans' acculturation to native foodways, see Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría, "Eating Like an Indian: Negotiating Social Relations in the Spanish Colonies," *Current Anthropology* 46 (2005): 551–573.

⁵⁰ Perhaps 1,500,000 people lived in the Valley at the time of conquest; the Indian population had declined to 325,000 by 1570, and it continued to decrease until the mid-seventeenth century, according to Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule*, 141. Around 8,000 Spaniards arrived in New Spain before 1560, and almost as many again by 1580, according to Peter Boyd-Bowman, "Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the Indies until 1600," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 56 (1976): 601.

⁵¹ Alberro, *Del gachupín al criollo*, 55; Ida Altman, *Emigrants and Society: Extremadura and America in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), 325; R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico* (Madison, Wis., 1994), 13–22; Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

Spaniards learned to like chocolate because of their continued material dependence on Indians. Colonial spaces of dependence included households where women labored as wives, concubines, and servants. Cross-cultural contacts flourished in intimate settings, some voluntary, others coerced. Both a drastic shortage of Spanish women⁵² and a conscious and explicit strategy of appropriation and conquest through matrimony led to many marriages, as well as less formal domestic unions, between Indians and Europeans in the early sixteenth century.⁵³ Historians have long commented on the role of Indian wives in acculturating Spanish men (and creating culturally mestizo households) to Indian dietary and domestic practices.⁵⁴ The role of women as cultural intermediaries has particular salience for the history of chocolate, since numerous sources disclose that women were charged with its preparation in pre-Columbian and colonial Mesoamerica.⁵⁵ (See Figures 1 and 2.) As emigration increased the pool of Spanish women, elite Spaniards no longer married Indian women (although commoners continued to do so), but Indian women still dominated the domestic sphere.⁵⁶ In the Yucatán, for example, Maya domestics created a culturally indigenous milieu for creoles: “Creole children spent their infancy, literally from birth and their early childhood in almost the sole company of Maya women,” writes Nancy Farriss, “suckled by Maya wet nurses commandeered from the villages, reared by Maya nurses, and surrounded by Maya servants.”⁵⁷

Indian villages were another place in which colonists became the unwitting students of native teachers. Maintained as political units by the Spanish colonial regime, these Indian enclaves were constantly penetrated by non-Indians: the *encomenderos* and *corregidores*, accompanied by their retainers and servants, came to collect tribute and demand laborers for their agricultural and building enterprises, while friars, clerics, and their assistants built churches and convents in and near pueblos to spread

⁵² Not only did the number of emigrants spike in the second half of the sixteenth century, but their social composition changed from the early years, in which the predominant social element was single men desiring to be conquistadors. In the second half of the century, a greater proportion were women, and more of the men were merchants, artisans, lay or ecclesiastical bureaucrats, and their servants—the latter accounted for more than half of the male emigrants in the years between 1595 and 1598. Women constituted less than 7 percent of the migrants before 1540, and more than 25 percent in the period after 1560. These figures apply to Spanish emigration to the Indies as a whole, but it seems obvious that they would particularly characterize emigration to New Spain—an area identified as a major settlement region for Europeans and therefore in need of administrators and wives; Boyd-Bowman, “Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the Indies until 1600,” 583–584, 599. Pedro Carrasco has calculated that out of a total of sixty-five married men in Puebla in 1534, twenty were married to Indian women. While the sixty-five men included both conquistadors and later arrivals, the latter (of lower social standing) were more likely to be married to Indian women than were the conquistadors, who nevertheless made a statistically significant showing in the cross-cultural unions.

⁵³ Pedro Carrasco, “Indian-Spanish Marriages in the First Century of the Colony,” in Susan Schroeder and Robert Haskell, eds., *Indian Women of Early Mexico* (Norman, Okla., 1997), 88. These cross-cultural unions continued even though marriages with Spanish women remained the socially esteemed preference for Spanish men.

⁵⁴ J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (1966; repr., Berkeley, Calif., 1990), 123; Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 110–111; Alberro, *Del gachupín al criollo*, 71–73.

⁵⁵ Díaz del Castillo and Sahagún were unequivocal that it was women who prepared and served chocolate at traditional Aztec banquets; Coe, *America's First Cuisines*, 75, 78, 103. Diego Valadés, *Retórica Cristiana* (Perugia, 1579), 172–173.

⁵⁶ Alberro, *Del gachupín al criollo*, 72.

⁵⁷ Nancy Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), 112.

their faith and enforce orthodoxy.⁵⁸ During visitations, the Spaniards continued their education in chocolate, along with other facets of Mesoamerican culture. Indian tributaries and parishioners, following traditional pre-Hispanic practice, welcomed the Spanish lords and priests with chocolate. Toribio de Benavente (often known by his Nahuatl nickname, Motolinía), one of the twelve Franciscan friars who inaugurated conversion efforts in New Spain, described the reception that he and his fellow missionaries received in Indian villages:

[The friars] visited and baptized three or four villages in one day . . . and many times they gave [the friars] who carried out this mission chocolate, which is a drink that is used frequently in this land, especially in the hot season . . . [T]he lord marquis Hernando Cortés . . . ordered that they show much reverence and hospitality to the priests, as they used to show to the ministers of their idols. And so they showed the same reception to the Spanish.⁵⁹

This passage demonstrates how the direction of cultural influence was independent of that of power dynamics. Despite—or because of—the colonial relations of subordination, Indians' cultural practices infiltrated colonists' milieu. Similar receptions of friars and colonists continued into the seventeenth century.⁶⁰

Another setting for initial chocolate encounters was the marketplace, an Indian institution. Lists compiled in the mid-sixteenth century of goods sold at markets in Mexico City, Tlaxcala, and Coyocán include cacao, chocolate, and the gourd containers used for drinking chocolate.⁶¹ A Spaniard who spent time in New Spain during the 1570s clearly viewed these markets as an Indian space, albeit one wherein Europeans and others moved freely, and found chocolate: “In all of the neighborhoods there is a plaza where every fifth day or with greater frequency are celebrated markets not only in Mexico City but in all of the cities and villages in New Spain,” he wrote, “in which congregate a numerous multitude of men and women . . . The varieties of fresh and dried fruits, indigenous and from our land [e.g., Spain], sold there cannot be enumerated, and that which is held in higher appreciation than all of the others is the *cacaotl* [cacao].”⁶² Another Spaniard, the physician and author Bartolomé Marradón, who visited Mexico some years later, took a less sanguine view of such transactions:⁶³

The usage of chocolate is so familiar and so frequent among all of the Indians, that there is not a square or market where there isn't a black woman or an Indian woman with her aunt, her *Apstlet* (which is a clay vessel), and her *molinillo* (which is a stick like the needles they

⁵⁸ Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule*.

⁵⁹ Toribio de Benavente, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, intro. and ed. Claudio Esteva Fabregat (México, D.F., 2001), 131. I modified the translation in Toribio Motolinía, *Motolinía's History of the Indians of New Spain* [*Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*], trans. and ed. Francis Borgia Steck (Washington, D.C., 1951).

⁶⁰ Thomas Gage, *The English-American, His Travail by Sea and Land; or, A New Survey of the West-India's* (London, 1648), 25.

⁶¹ James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, Calif., 1993), 187; Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule*, 353, 356.

⁶² Francisco Hernández, *Antigüedades de la Nueva España*, trans. and notes by Joaquín García Pimentel (México, D.F., 1945), 80, 82.

⁶³ Bartolomé Marradón, *Diálogo del uso del tabaco . . . y de chocolate y otras bebidas* (Sevilla, 1618). Not being able to consult the only known exemplar in the Vatican, I have relied on the French translation “Dialogue du Chocolate,” in *Traitez nouveaux et curieux du café, du thé et du chocolat*, trans. Philippe Sylvestre Dufour (Lyon, 1685), 423–445.

use to spin yarn in Spain), and their containers to collect the run-off and cool the foam [off the chocolate]. These women first put a section of the paste or a square of chocolate in water and dissolve it, and after removing a portion of this foam . . . they portion it into vessels called *Tecomates* . . . Then the women distribute it to Indians, or to Spaniards who surround them. The Indians are great impostors, giving to their plants Indian names, which renders them in high repute. We can say that of the Chocolate sold in the marketplace and stands.⁶⁴

Marradón anxiously reveals the marketplace as a meeting point among cultures, one where the normative order is thrown out of balance. Women—particularly Indian and black women—became the purveyors of desirable knowledge and edible and potable substances, while Spaniards were the seekers and buyers.⁶⁵

As the demographic and social composition of colonial society changed during the sixteenth century, creole and mestizo spaces became important for chocolate socialization as well. Religious houses served as nodes of transmission, in that they were spaces where people from both sides of the Atlantic met, socialized, and shared experiences. The experience of Thomas Gage, a young clerical recruit to the Dominican Order who came to Mexico lured by tales of easy riches, reveals how rituals of hospitality could lead to chocolate inauguration. Gage recalled how, after disembarking in Veracruz, the Dominican novitiates participated in a procession to the cathedral, and then their supervisor “entertained us very lovingly with some sweetmeats, and every one with a Cup of the Indian drink called chocolate.”⁶⁶ An autobiographical aside in the physician Antonio Colmenero de Ledesma’s *Curious Treatise on the Nature and Properties of Chocolate* (1631) affords another glimpse of transmission in creole spaces. He described his initiation into chocolate consumption when, “arriving hot [in the Indies], visiting sick people and requesting a little bit of water to refresh” him, he was instead “persuaded to drink a *jícara* [gourd cup] of chocolate . . . which placated [his] thirst.”⁶⁷ When Europeans arrived in the Americas, they became integrated into social networks—organized around family, occupation, or religious order—which exerted considerable pressure for them to conform to local customs.

As there was nothing intrinsically appealing about chocolate, how did a taste for the beverage develop in Europe? It took a while. Chocolate had no significant presence in Spain until the very end of the sixteenth century, and it became well established in Seville only in the first decades of the seventeenth century.⁶⁸ Before then, small quantities of chocolate arrived in Spain infrequently and erratically. For instance, an abusive *encomendero* (the conquistador-turned-Spanish lord who received tribute from Indians) ordered his subjects to prepare a thousand pounds of “ground cacao ready to drink” for his voyage to Spain in 1531.⁶⁹ A retinue of Indians brought Prince Philip (the future Philip II) a gift of chocolate in 1544.⁷⁰ Yet both contem-

⁶⁴ Marradón, “Dialogue,” 431–433.

⁶⁵ For other references to cacao and chocolate sold in the colonial “Indian” marketplace, see Lockhart, *Nahuas*, 187; Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule*, 353, 358–360.

⁶⁶ Gage, *The English-American*, 23.

⁶⁷ Colmenero de Ledesma, *Curioso tratado*, fols. 6r, 6v.

⁶⁸ Pierre Chaunu and Huguette Chaunu, *Séville et l’Atlantique, 1504–1650*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1956–1959), 6, pt. 2: 1043, 2129, 4439, 4440, 4452, 4462.

⁶⁹ *Noticias relativas al pueblo de Tepetlaoxtoc* (México, D.F., 1944), 18.

⁷⁰ Coe and Coe, *The True History of Chocolate*, 130–133. Oliva Sabuco de Nantes, a singularly enigmatic female physician, made a passing mention of cacao in her medical advice book intended for a

porary commentators and tax registries for American imports attest that chocolate was not a regular trade item until the 1590s.⁷¹ The first work about chocolate to be published with a Spanish readership in mind was printed in 1624.⁷² By the 1620s, thousands of pounds of cacao and chocolate were imported into Spain annually. Venezuela exported more than 31,000 pounds between 1620 and 1650, and more than 7 million pounds between 1650 and 1700.⁷³

A critical mass of aficionados with New World experience had to develop in Spain before a market for the beverage could exist. A necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the arrival in Europe of chocolate as an object of consumption was the degree of social contact between mainland and colonial Spaniards. Return migration has been estimated at between 10 and 15 percent.⁷⁴ A study of passenger lists discloses that two groups in particular—clergy and merchants—crossed the Atlantic in both directions most frequently.⁷⁵ Not surprisingly, members of these communities appear among the vanguard of consumers who initiated chocolate neophytes in Europe. As in the New World, religious houses were important nodes for such socialization. When the representatives of religious orders (*procuradores*) attended general meetings in Europe, they made sure to “carry with them great wealth, and gifts to the Generalls, to the Popes and Cardinals and Nobles in Spain, as bribes to facilitate whatsoever just or unjust, right or wrong they are to demand.” Among these “gifts” were “a little wedge of Gold, a Box of Pearls, some Rubies or Diamonds, a Chest of Cochineal, or Sugar, with some boxes of curious Chocolate, or some feather works of Mechoacan.”⁷⁶ A 1634 lawsuit brought against a ship’s captain by a Jesuit in Seville for two large containers of lost chocolate that had been shipped from the brethren in Veracruz provides ample detail of how his order may have facilitated the transmission of the habit.⁷⁷ Some of the shipment was destined for the “procurador general” based in Seville, and some was to be shipped on to “brother Antonio who

Spanish mainland audience, *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre* (Madrid, 1588), fols. 132, 176, 183r–v.

⁷¹ León Pinelo, writing before 1636, estimated that chocolate had been in common use among Spaniards for about forty or fifty years; *Questión moral*, fol. 8v. Tomás Hurtado wrote around 1645 that it had had a presence on the Iberian Peninsula for about fifty years; Hurtado, *Chocolate y tabaco: Ayuno eclesiástico y natural* (Madrid, 1645), fol. 19. I examined the cargo lists of eight ships returning from New Spain between 1588 and 1591; only one ship listed a shipment of chocolate—one box with no more than forty pounds of chocolate in 1591; AGI, CT 4390, 2595. Of the cargo lists I examined for twenty ships returning from New Spain in 1595, I found four with chocolate shipments, each of about fifty pounds; AGI, CT 4389.

⁷² Santiago de Valverde Turices, *Un discurso de chocolate* (Sevilla, 1624).

⁷³ Arcila Farías, *Comercio entre Venezuela y México*, 51–61, 72–73, 106, 143–145. These numbers, however, do not reflect the total amount of cacao imported, for they do not include cacao from New Spain or Guatemala, which were still vital producers until the mid-seventeenth century, nor the considerable trade in smuggled cacao; see Wim Klooster, *Illicit Riches: The Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795* (Leiden, 1995).

⁷⁴ Ida Altman has estimated around 10 percent; *Emigrants and Society*, 248. Using ship manifests, Auke P. Jacobs found that between 1598 and 1621, 944 passengers traveled from New Spain to Castile, which he calculates as a 14 percent rate of “return migration”; Jacobs, *Los movimientos migratorios entre Castilla e Hispanoamérica durante el reinado de Felipe III, 1598–1621* (Amsterdam, 1995), 150–151. See also James Lockhart, “Letters and Peoples to Spain,” in Fredi Chiappelli, ed., *First Images of America*, 2 vols. (Los Angeles, 1976), 2: 791–793.

⁷⁵ Jacobs, *Los movimientos migratorios*, 160.

⁷⁶ Gage, *The English-American*, 7–8.

⁷⁷ AGI, CT 825, no. 8.

resides in Rome.” Likewise, the earliest shipments of chocolate—along with chocolate-drinking paraphernalia—were destined for members of Seville’s elite merchant class in such limited quantities as to suggest that it was for their household consumption.⁷⁸

Having crossed the “taste barrier,” the chocolate neophytes fully embraced the beverage in the manner in which it was presented to them, having no alternative way to think or feel about it. The taste for chocolate encompassed not only gustatory appreciation but also the olfactory, visual, tactile, and cognitive senses. Europeans in both the New and Old World learned to like chocolate in its full Mesoamerican complexity, adopting the whole spectrum of cacao beverages that surrounded them. Juan de Cárdenas, a Spanish-born doctor transplanted to and educated in Mexico, lauded chocolate concoctions that were identical to those described as Indian beverages.⁷⁹ Their acceptance is further indicated by the hispanization of the Nahuatl terms—for example, *atextli* became *atole*. The Spanish provided the literal translation *orejuelas* (“little ears”) for the Nahuatl terms for the flower spices *gueynacaztle* (“great ear” in Nahuatl) and *xochinacaztli* (“flowery ear”). They hispanized *mecaxóchitl* into *mecasuchil*, and baptized *tlixochitl* as vanilla (“en nuestra romance *vainillas olorosas*”).⁸⁰

While Cárdenas gave pride of place to the flower-spiced cacao beverage, he also recommended the other cacao drinks. *Atole*, which was “consumed and sold in all of the Mexican plazas and streets,” he opined, was “that which is most refreshing and most quenches the thirst and provides the most sustenance” of all the cacao beverages.⁸¹ As described by Cárdenas, Europeans in the New World selected the cacao beverages that best fit their needs or temperament, choosing the more common *atole* when they wanted something refreshing and sustaining, and favoring the spicier, more potent chocolate at other times. Colonists and visiting Spaniards adopted the full array of cacao beverages made by Indian women in villages, markets, and households throughout the sixteenth century.

All these forms likewise arrived in Spain in the early seventeenth century. In the first years of chocolate’s diffusion in Europe—beginning with Spain—there was little difference between the types of chocolate consumed by creoles, Indians, and Iberians. A 1636 source testified that “in this court” there were “Mexicans” (Indians) and “persons of the Indies” (creoles) using chocolate in the same manner as they had in the Americas (with maize and honey).⁸² These New World arrivals were the first to use chocolate in the Old World, and they brought their chocolate with them, as it was prepared in the Americas.⁸³ At the beginning of its diffusion, there was not

⁷⁸ Among the illustrious chocolate purchasers in the period 1591–1602 were Antonio Armijo, described as “one of the most powerful Sevillian merchants at the end of the sixteenth century”; Pedro Mendoza, who amassed more than 4 million maravedis in 1596, and “thus was one of the wealthiest Indies traders”; and Cristóbal de Ribera. See Eufemio Lorenzo Sanz, *Comercio de España con América en la época de Felipe II*, vol. 1: *Los mercaderes y el tráfico indiano* (Valladolid, 1979), 336, 380, 395. Their chocolate purchases were registered in AGI, CT 2595, 4389, and 4412. The small quantities (one box apiece, which ranged between 20 and 100 pounds)—particularly in comparison with the massive amounts of bullion and dye goods they were importing—suggest auto-consumption.

⁷⁹ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 145–146.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 140–142.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁸² León Pinelo, *Questión moral*, 7v.

⁸³ For instance, in the fleet tax records of 1585, only chocolate, and not cacao, was imported; AGI,



FIGURE 4: Antonio Ponce (1608–1677), *A Still Life of Peaches, Fish, Chestnuts, a Tin Plate and Sweet Box and Two Mexican Lacquer Cups*. In Spain, it became increasingly common by the late 1630s for still lifes to depict chocolate accoutrements. In this painting, chocolate is signified by the lacquered gourds known as *jícaras* and the *molinillo* used to froth chocolate (upper left), perched on a container holding ground cacao. The presence of the gourds and frother demonstrates that chocolate engaged Iberians’ tactile and visual senses in much the same way it did their Mesoamerican antecedents. Reproduced courtesy of the Galería Caylus, Madrid, Spain.

sufficient technical knowledge to warrant bringing the raw materials, so chocolate itself was transported. It was not until the 1630s that chocolate artisans populated Madrid in detectable numbers.⁸⁴ This trajectory makes clear that European chocolate was not just similar to American chocolate. It *was* American chocolate.

Europeans who had grown up with the drink in the New World—or who had been immersed in an Indian milieu for a sufficient time—not only acquired a taste for the thick chocolate, but consumed it in the manner that it had been long consumed in Mesoamerica. Likewise, Spaniards assimilated the cacao complex in its entirety, and tried to maintain the sensory sensations that went with traditional chocolate even across the ocean divide. Royal legislation from 1632 hints at Spaniards’ appreciation for the chocolate-flavoring agents vanilla and *mecaxóchitl*. That year the crown levied a special tax on chocolate consumption in Spain, and the levy singled out these two additives as essential raw ingredients of chocolate.⁸⁵ The Jesuit who sued a ship captain for the loss of valuable chocolate and cacao also charged the defendant with the disappearance of cargo comprising “orijuelas,” “mecasuchial,” and “achiote,” as well as vanilla—in other words, the essential Mesoamerican chocolate spices.⁸⁶ It is widely held that the Spanish did not maintain the practice of combining maize and cacao in a beverage as was customary in Mesoamerica. Yet a description of choc-

CT 4389. In 1602, the fleet tax records show six boxes of chocolate and two boxes of cacao; AGI, CT 4412.

⁸⁴ Matilde Santamaría Arnaiz, “La alimentación de los españoles bajo el reinado de los Austrias” (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1986), 712–713.

⁸⁵ “Sobre el ‘servicio’ de los dos millones y medio” (1634), AGI, Consulados, leg. 93, no. 9. The 1632 edict (reissued in 1634) to implement a new kingdom-wide tax or monopoly on chocolate specified that duties were to be paid on *mecazuchil* (½ real/lb.) and *vanillas* (12 reales/lb.), as well as cacao and manufactured chocolate. Manufactured chocolate was to be taxed at 1 real/lb., cacao at ½ real/lb.

⁸⁶ AGI, CT 825, no. 8. The spellings *orijuelas* and *mecasuchial* are irregular variants of *orejuelas* and *mecasuchil*, the Spanish terms for the Nahuatl named *xochinacaztli* and *mecaxóchitl*.

olate-making techniques in the court in 1636 testifies to the use of maize, as does a 1644 lawsuit, which also mentions “mecasuchil,” “orejuelas,” and achiote.⁸⁷

Spanish appreciation and somatic expectations of chocolate were not restricted to the taste buds but encompassed visual and tactile preferences. Like native Mesoamericans, creoles and Spaniards learned that the beverage was better with achiote, which was praised by Cárdenas for enhancing chocolate with a “red and pleasing color.”⁸⁸ Another author expressed the “truth” that achiote was necessary for giving a “better taste, color, and flavor to chocolate.”⁸⁹ As the initial reaction of the Jesuit José de Acosta reveals, the foam hardly had immediate appeal to Spanish senses. Yet post-conquest connoisseurs in Mesoamerica and Spain alike came to agree with pre-conquest aficionados that chocolate was incomplete without a foamy head. Just as pre-Columbian artifacts make clear that foam was fundamental to chocolate consumption, so does the iconography of sixteenth-century creoles and mestizos, and seventeenth-century Spanish art. The *molinillo* (chocolate-frother) used to produce the foam became standard in representations of chocolate in seventeenth-century Spain. (See Figures 4, 5, and 6.)⁹⁰ The Spanish also learned from Mesoamericans that chocolate must be sipped from a special vessel—the *tecomate*, a cup fashioned from clay, or the *jícara*, a lacquered calabash gourd (hispanized from the Nahuatl *tecomatl* and *xicalli*).⁹¹ Ship manifests indicate that in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Iberian-based chocolate consumers bought *tecomates* and *jícaras* along with chocolate and cacao imports.⁹² Likewise, early chocolate still lifes depict the lacquered gourds as part of the conventionalized chocolate service. (See Figures 4 and 5.)

Europeans did, of course, add their own “inventions” to chocolate. The composition of chocolate and its paraphernalia evolved as it moved from pre-Columbian to colonial America and then to Europe. However, there was no conscious effort by “Europeans” to radically reinvent the substance. Instead, modifications came about

⁸⁷ León Pinelo, *Questión moral*, 8r. A 1644 lawsuit against a vendor accused of selling chocolate illegally in Madrid mentions that the chocolate’s ingredients included “mecasuchil” (*mecaxóchil*), “orejuelas” (*xochinacatzli*), achiote, and “harina de maíz” (cornmeal); Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Sala de Alcaldes, Lib. 1231.

⁸⁸ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 142–143.

⁸⁹ Valverde Turices, *Un discurso*, fol. A1-v.

⁹⁰ Foam references include Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 145–146; Marradón, “Dialogue”; León Pinelo, *Questión moral*, 8.

⁹¹ Molina, *Vocabulario mexicana*, 93r, 158v. I wish to thank Margaret E. Connors McQuade for helping me identify the materials from which the vessels were fashioned and explaining the significance of the *bucaró* tradition.

⁹² AGI, CT 4389, buyer 392; 4412, buyer 13, 601; 4413, buyer 708; 4424, fols. 210, 245, 296v; 4440, fols. 132, 133, 139; 4462, 315r. That these were meant to be used with chocolate is indicated by their being paired with it in the manifest, e.g., “un caxon de chocolate y xicaras”; AGI, CT 4424, fol. 245. See also León Pinelo, *Questión moral*, 8r. For other still life paintings that depict paraphernalia for making and drinking chocolate, such as *jícaras* made of lacquered gourds and/or porcelain and chocolate-frothers, by artists including Juan de Zurburán, Francisco Barrera, and Francisco Barranco, see *Tres siglos de pintura* (Madrid, 1995), 140, 142; and Peter Cherry, *Arte y naturaleza: El bodegón español en el Siglo de Oro*, ed. Conchita Romero, trans. Ivars Barzdevics (Madrid, 1999), plates 82, 86, 87. On this genre, see also William B. Jordan and Peter Cherry, *Spanish Still-Life from Velázquez to Goya* (London, 1995). I am grateful to William Jordan for helping me locate the still life in Figure 4 (as well as identifying Antonio Ponce as its artist), and to José Antonio de Urbina of Galería Caylus for allowing me to reproduce it. Mr. Urbina also relates that the celebrated court painter Juan van der Hamen y León, who was an apprentice in Ponce’s studio, later painted the identical chocolate service that is depicted in the upper-left-hand corner of Figure 4 in a painting auctioned by Christie’s in 1996.

because of gradual tinkering motivated by efforts to maintain—not change—the sensory impact of chocolate. The most famous modification was the addition of sugar. Contrary to the popular view that the Spanish invented the idea of sweetening cacao, native Mexicans and Mayans already sweetened many of their cacao beverages with honey. Since the Spanish recognized both sugar and honey as sweeteners, switching one for the other represented a slight modification but not a major divergence from the concoction as they had first tasted it. Sugar can be seen as a substitute for honey, in which the intention is to approximate the taste of the original, not to radically change it. Cárdenas mentioned that some dissolved the cacao tablets in hot water with a “touch of sweetness, which makes it very pleasing,” but notably, he did not indicate whether the addition was sugar or honey, suggesting their interchangeability.⁹³ Likewise, the chocolate authority Antonio de León Pinelo recognized honey and sugar as performing the same function in chocolate, although he suggested that Spaniards preferred their chocolate sweeter.⁹⁴

Another arena for Spanish “invention” was spices. Spanish colonists modified traditional Mesoamerican chocolate by adding or substituting spices esteemed in the Old World—cinnamon, black pepper, anise, rose, and sesame, among others—in place of the native flower spice complex, achiote, and chili peppers. Cárdenas, the creolized doctor, indicated that Spaniards innovated with the recipes by using Old World imports, yet he insisted that “the fragrant spices of the Occidental Indies” were superior, since they “do not give us the excessive heat of those brought from the Oriental Indies.”⁹⁵ Similarly, the Madrid physician Colmenero de Ledesma recommended spices from the New World, but acknowledged that Old World substitutes might be more practical. He suggested that the rose of Alexandria could replace *mecasuchil* (*mecaxóchitl*), because both substances possessed “purgative” qualities (perhaps the fact that *mecaxóchitl* and rose are flower blossoms also suggested the latter as a suitable substitute for the former).⁹⁶ He offered Old World black pepper as an alternative, albeit inferior, to Mexican chilies, enumerating the preferred kinds native to Mesoamerica (*chichotes*, *chiltecpin*, *tonalchies*, and *chilpatlagual*).⁹⁷ It seems likely that cinnamon, too, which became ubiquitous in chocolate preparations by the late seventeenth century, caught on because it had both the spicy aspect of chili pepper and the floral attributes of the flower spice constellation. When Spaniards tinkered with the recipes by using Old World spices, they were actually trying to simulate the flavors offered by less available New World flowers.⁹⁸

Maize did eventually disappear from European chocolate beverages, it is true. Yet cacao beverages employing maize, such as *atole*, did not become largely extinct in Spain as a result of distaste. Rather, it seems that maize fell out of use because

⁹³ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 140, 142–143, 145–146.

⁹⁴ León Pinelo, *Questión moral*, 8r. He wrote, “the Indians who invented [chocolate], it is without doubt, that in much water they added enough honey in order to sweeten it and a bit of cacao, with nothing else . . . the Spanish augmented the sweetness with sugar.” He also mentioned, however, that Spaniards from the Indies used honey as well as sugar.

⁹⁵ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 140, 142–143, 145–146.

⁹⁶ Colmenero de Ledesma, *Curioso tratado*, on the preference for chilies, fols. 4v, 8r; on the wonders of achiote (confirmed via the experiments of “physicians of the Indies” on sheep—early animal testing), varieties of chilies, and substitutions, fols. 6r, 8r.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 6r.

⁹⁸ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 140, 142–143, 145–146.



FIGURE 5: Antonio de Pereda, *Still Life with an Ebony Chest* (1652). This masterpiece (which is reproduced in color on the cover) is dedicated to New World sensory delights. On the left is a *chocolatera*, in which chocolate paste and sugar were dissolved together. The *molinillo* for frothing chocolate is to its right. On the tray below are three kinds of *jicaras* (chocolate-drinking cups); the two in front are made of Iberian ceramics, and the one in back is likely a porcelain piece imported from Asia. The spoon—a conventional element in early modern chocolate still lifes—was probably meant to scoop the foam off the top, a European variant of the tortoiseshell spoons used by Mesoamericans for the same purpose. On the right, wooden containers contain cacao paste, and a clump of white sugar is ready for use. Among the vessels sitting on top of the chest is another *jicara*, a splendidly decorated gourd imported from New Spain. Biscuits, favored for eating alongside chocolate, rest in the foreground. The chest could have been a storehouse for the cacao; the lock and key remind viewers of the value of its luxurious contents. The painting also illustrates another American-inflected sensory tradition: the red ceramic vessels, probably manufactured in Tonolá (outside Guadalajara in New Spain) and known as *búcaros*, were celebrated for the aromatic earthy qualities they imparted to water. Oil on canvas, 80 x 94 cm. Collection of William Coesvelt, Britain, 1815. Reproduced courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Spanish consumers internalized Mesoamerican definitions of luxury, and because maize-less chocolate fared better in long-distance travel. *Atole* was generally prepared with a highly perishable viscous cacao paste. But the traditional Mesoamerican preparation of hot chocolate without maize employed the “tablet” form of cacao. Cacao in this form could last “at least two years,” making it suitable for the lengthy voyage across the Atlantic.⁹⁹ So the predominance of the maize-free cacao beverages

⁹⁹ Cárdenas describes the preference for the perishable chocolate for cacao in *ibid.*, 145.

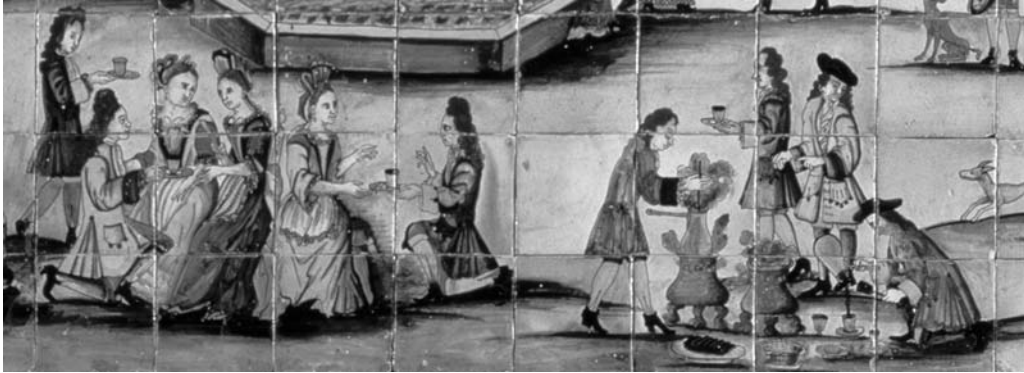


FIGURE 6: Detail, *La Chocolatada*, attributed to the workshop of Llorenç Passoles (Barcelona, 1710). The mural entitled *The Chocolate Party* illustrates an aristocratic gathering. It leaves no doubt that chocolate remained fundamental to elite sociability in the eighteenth century, and it underscores how the beverage's aficionados continued to prize the foam on top, as the scene displays the gentlemen, rather than their servants, engaged in frothing the chocolate. Reproduced courtesy of Museu de Ceràmica, Barcelona, Spain.

seems likely related to problems of storage posed by long-distance travel. It is also possible that Nahuas viewed the maize and cacao beverages as more quotidian, and the spicy, flowery cacao beverage as more of a special-occasion drink. In turn, if Spanish internalized such connotations, the elite who were vital to chocolate's transatlantic passage may have had a preference for the more "luxurious" chocolate.¹⁰⁰ In other words, it is possible that the disappearance of maize from Spanish chocolate is actually evidence of Spanish absorption of Mesoamerican values.

Finally, developments in vessels used for drinking chocolate demonstrate the dynamic of interwoven change and continuity and the error in seeing a sudden rupture in the history of chocolate. Over time, wealthy chocolate consumers in both the New and Old World increasingly replaced ceramic cups and hollowed gourds with porcelain and *mayólica* vessels. But while these were fashioned from new materials, they maintained a similar size and shape as well as the Nahuatl name.¹⁰¹ (See Figure 5.) The continuity is made particularly clear by the fact that chocolate consumers in Spain adopted the Nahuatl-derived term *jícara* for their porcelain cups.

In New Spain, and even more so in the Iberian Peninsula, Spaniards experimented with substitutes for Old World spices. But when they did so, their aim was to approximate original flavors, not to introduce new palate sensations. The view that Spanish "improved" on the chocolate of pre-Hispanic America is found in self-justifying Spanish texts by the eighteenth century. That chocolate had conformed to European taste was a myth that supported the Spanish ideology of conquest: it presupposed that the colonists brought their civilization to barbarians rather than the opposite. In fact, Europeans inadvertently internalized Mesoamerican aesthetics and did not modify chocolate to meet their existing tastes. Rather, they acquired new ones, a reality at odds with colonial ideology.

¹⁰⁰ According to *The Florentine Codex*, the chocolate served to the highest-ranking lords on special occasions did not include maize; 8:13, 39. Cárdenas's description suggests the quotidian/luxury distinction among cacao beverages; *Problemas*, 146.

¹⁰¹ Donna Pierce, "Mayólica in the Daily Life of Colonial Mexico," in Roin Farwell Gavin, Donna Pierce, and Alfonso Pleguezuelo, eds., *The Story of Spanish and Mexican Mayólica* (Santa Fe, N.Mex., 2003), 253–254, 259.

SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CULTURAL-FUNCTIONALIST TRADITION that concerns consumption in general and chocolate in particular assumes that taste follows discourse, that bodily practices reflect a dominant ideology, a guiding mentalité, or a prevailing ethos. The case of chocolate suggests a more complicated relationship between taste and discourse. For both Spanish colonists in the New World and Iberians in the Old World, chocolate-drinking habits drew attention to the paradoxes and tensions within the colonial project. Some have seen the fact that chocolate was discussed within a medical paradigm as an explanation for how Europeans came to embrace chocolate and remove its potentially idolatrous associations. Yet the medical paradigm neither led to Europeans' adoption of chocolate nor resolved the fraught issues concerning cultural difference. Instead, the "medicalization" of chocolate was a consequence, not a cause, of the challenge that this novel taste posed for colonial ideology. It emerged, first, because of the defensive posture assumed by creoles as they attempted to deny charges that those of European ancestry living in the Americas were less civilized than their counterparts resident in the Old World, and later, as metropolitans recognized their assimilation of a practice that emerged out of a non-Christian and non-European culture.¹⁰²

Colonial officials in the metropole believed that Europeans born and raised in the New World degenerated so much that the latter became little better than Indians. Such ideas, grounded in environmental theories of the day, led metropolitan officials to prohibit creoles from holding clerical offices in the late sixteenth century. They claimed, for instance, that "the greater part" of Europeans in the New World "take the nature and customs of the Indians, since they are born in the same climate and reared among them."¹⁰³ At the same time, by the late sixteenth century, creoles themselves worried about the possibility of reverse acculturation. Authorities fretted about the enduring, even renewed, idolatry among the majority Indian population, and, even more problematic, its influence on people of European and mestizo descent, particularly in plebeian contexts in which people of differing ancestry lived cheek by jowl.¹⁰⁴ Inquisition dossiers attested that white colonists, as well as those of "mixed blood," sought out native *curanderos* for assistance, so as to restore stolen goods, gain the affection of a beloved, or resolve other life difficulties. This phenomenon indicated disturbing failures in the evangelical project. Moreover, from the point of view of creole authorities, it also inverted the natural social order, since it

¹⁰² On the formation of white creole identities, see D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge, 1992), 2–3; Anthony Pagden, "Identity Formation in Spanish America," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), 51; Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory, 1513–1830* (New Haven, Conn., 1990), 91; Jorge Cañizares, "New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600–1650," *AHR* 104, no. 1 (February 1999): 35.

¹⁰³ Brading, *The First America*, 200, 297.

¹⁰⁴ Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Medicina y magia: El proceso de aculturación en la estructura colonial* (México, D.F., 1963); Aguirre Beltrán, *El proceso de aculturación y el cambio sociocultural en México* (México, D.F., 1970); Solange Alberro, *Les Espagnols dans le Mexique colonial: Histoire d'une acculturation* (Paris, 1992); Alberro, *Inquisition et Société au Mexique, 1571–1700* (México, D.F., 1988); Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th–18th Centuries*, trans. Eileen Corrigan (Cambridge, 1993); Georges Baudot, *Utopie et Histoire au Mexique* (Toulouse, 1977). On such plebeian contexts, see Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*.

made those at the bottom of the social echelon—Indians—into sought-out authorities.

Colonists' fondness for chocolate seemed to give credence to metropolitans' charge of creole difference and to affirm the vulnerability of colonial subjects of all castes to acculturation to native ways. Chocolate cleaved Americanized Spaniards from new Iberian arrivals; the latter noted and often balked at the peculiar habits and tastes of their creolized compatriots, while the former squirmed under the derisive condescension of haughty *peninsulares*. In *Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies*, a manifesto of creole legitimacy, Juan de Cárdenas acknowledged the criticisms of "those doctors in Spain [who] without understanding and inquiring what it is condemn everything about [chocolate]."¹⁰⁵ The Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta, after spending a year in New Spain, noted derisively that it was a "crazy thing" how those Spanish women "fashioned in the manner of this land will die for this black chocolate while those who are not so fashioned are disgusted by it."¹⁰⁶ Iberian disdain for chocolate became tantamount to peninsular denigration of creoles.

Chocolate was associated with various forms of colonial "idolatry." Jacinto de la Serna, intent on identifying and extirpating idolatrous practices in the Yucatán, wrote in 1656, "it is worthy to note that blacks, mulattos and some Spaniards, having left the hand of God . . . search out Indians, whom they pay" for services with various drugs. And he alleged that "in this city of Mérida . . . these Indian women put in chocolate enchanted things that bewitch their husbands."¹⁰⁷ Inquisition cases also confirmed the linkages between chocolate and sorcery, particularly associated with women of all castes. For instance, María de Riviera, identified as a mulatto woman in Puebla, in order that one of her paying customers might capture the affection of a man, instructed her client to grind cacao and add "certain powders and give the said chocolate to the said man to drink." Inquisition records from New Spain and Guatemala in the seventeenth century contain many cases like these, revealing chocolate as a crucial medium for the effective deployment of cures, love potions, and spells.¹⁰⁸

Juan de Cárdenas's *Problems and Marvelous Secrets of the Indies* (1591) contains the first extensive discussion of chocolate in the context of European consumption. That he inserted chocolate within a medical discourse cannot be separated from his defensiveness about creoles' claims to equality with *peninsulares*, nor from his fears about enduring Indian "superstition" and colonists' susceptibility to it. Cárdenas was motivated to write about chocolate in large part because of its ambiguous status. He bristled at the criticisms of "those doctors in Spain" who "condemn everything

¹⁰⁵ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 140.

¹⁰⁶ Acosta, *Historia natural*, fols. 163r–164v.

¹⁰⁷ Jacinto de la Serna, "Tratado de las supersticiones, idolatrias, hechicerías y otras costumbres de las razas aborígenes de México," in de la Serna, *Tratado de las idolatrias, supersticiones, dioses, ritos hechicerías y otras costumbres gentílicas de las razas aborígenes de México*, ed., notes, and intro. Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, 2 vols. (México, D.F., 1953), 1: 279.

¹⁰⁸ Bancroft Library, Ms. 96/95, "Processo y causa criminal contra Maria de Rivera mulata libre natural y vezina de la Ciudad de la Puebla de los Angeles" (1652), fols. 3r–v. Similar cases are documented and analyzed in M. Á. Méndez, "Una relación conflictiva: La Inquisición novohispana y el chocolate," *Caravelle* 71 (1998): 9–21, and Martha Few, "Chocolate, Sex, and Disorderly Women in Late-Seventeenth- and Early-Eighteenth-Century Guatemala," *Ethnohistory* 52 (2005): 673–687, <http://ethnohistory.dukejournals.org/cgi/reprint/52/4/673>. I appreciate that Martha Few first brought these cases to my attention.

about” chocolate. He thought that the lack of consensus on chocolate in the New World was also a problem: “In terms of the harms and benefits, I hear every person with his own opinion: some despise chocolate, considering it the inventor of numerous sicknesses; others say that there is nothing comparable in the world . . . there is no one who does not present his or her judgment to the populace.”¹⁰⁹

Cárdenas’s concern for chocolate’s ambiguous status related to the anxiety that permeates his work about marking the line between creoles and Indians. He expressed concern for Spaniards’ recourse to Indian healers, lamenting that he had to

listen every day to 2,000 tales and so many other stories, fables, and nonsense concerning those who cast spells, or another who expelled a bag of worms because of a potion or *patle* they gave, and this business does not stop here but they want you to believe that there are herbs, powders, and roots that have properties to make two people fall in love, or hate each other . . . and the ignorant multitude (*vulgo*) are persuaded not only to believe this, but also to believe and imagine (mostly barbarous and stupid people) that herbs and potions can be taken that predict the future (a matter reserved only for God).¹¹⁰

The shadowy characters to whom Cárdenas alluded—those who dispensed cures to the “multitudes”—included “a certain black slave” and “these Indians who are great dissimulators and clamorers.”¹¹¹

To rescue chocolate from its associations with “colonial idolatry” and its potential as a medium for cultural contagion, Cárdenas asserted that chocolate could be made European and sanitized from pagan associations through application of Old World medical principles. The act of prescribing provided the illusion that acculturation to Indian material ways could be mediated and safeguarded against unseemly and dangerous cultural contamination. Following the model provided by other European writers concerned with *materia medica*, Cárdenas began his discussion of chocolate by providing it with a humoral profile using the hot/cold and wet/dry categories deployed by the classical authority Galen (131–201 A.D.) and adopted by medieval and Renaissance physicians.¹¹² He explained that cacao was composed of three parts with different and contradictory properties, but that humorally speaking, its cold qualities predominated. In turn, he described the variety of cacao beverages and prescribed them according to individuals’ temperament, location, age, and other factors affecting humoral balance. After describing the confusing multitude of opinions concerning chocolate, Cárdenas promised that “Only the divine Hippocrates can deliver us from this confusion with that much cited sentence that says: ‘Not all for everything, but each thing for what it is,’ which is a way of saying that we do not want to give

¹⁰⁹ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 146.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 265–266.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 270, 273.

¹¹² In framing his discussion of New World *materia medica* in this way, Cárdenas adopted the model established by Nicolás Monardes, a Sevillian trader and physician, who wrote the best-selling and much-translated *Historia medicinal: De las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales, que sirven al uso de Medicina* (Sevilla, 1565–1574). Although Monardes did not discuss cacao or chocolate, he offered a prototype of sanitization in his discussion of tobacco. For Cárdenas’s debt to Monardes and Monardes’s publications as a pivotal turning point in European representations of the New World, see Norton, “New World of Goods,” 54–62, 104–112, 177–190. More recently see Daniela Bleichmar, “Books, Bodies, and Fields: Sixteenth-Century Transatlantic Encounters with New World *Materia Medica*,” in Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial Botany*, 83–99.

one single thing to all subjects, to all complexions, to all illnesses.”¹¹³ While others have viewed the insertion of chocolate into the classical medical paradigm based on Hippocrates and Galen as a *cause* of its success in Europe, it is better understood as an *effect*: a way that creole—and soon-to-follow Iberian—authorities found to reconcile their taste for an Indian delicacy with an ideology of cultural superiority. In writing about chocolate, Cárdenas reacted to, rather than caused, the widespread popularity of chocolate among creoles. Likewise, this medical discourse followed, not preceded, chocolate’s insinuation among Spanish consumers in Europe. *A Dialogue Concerning the Use of Tobacco, Chocolate, and Other Beverages*, the first treatise that addressed chocolate consumers in Spain, was published in 1618, at least twenty years after chocolate had a detectable presence among consumers there.

Despite Cárdenas’s efforts, the Indian legacy of chocolate continued to haunt some as the substance migrated to Europe. The author of the *Dialogue*, Bartolomé de Marradón, was an Andalusian physician (or apothecarist) who typified the vanguard of metropolitan chocolate drinkers: he traveled to the Indies (New Spain and/or Guatemala) at least twice and had family who migrated there.¹¹⁴ Marradón’s text reveals the unresolved tension between the medical framework and the lingering anxieties about chocolate as a vector for spreading Indian culture. As evidenced by the title, Marradón constructed his treatise as a dialogue between characters named “a Physician” (presumed to be Hispanic), “an Indian,” and “a Bourgeois.” The physician personage has few kind words for chocolate—he found its flavor distasteful, its effects unhealthy, its use unchristian, and its essence deplorably Indian. Yet, with the figure of the “Indian,” Marradón revealed the paradox in Spanish dependence on chocolate. The Indian recounts witnessing a Spanish priest—who was supposed to be proselytizing to his fellow native—so beholden to chocolate that he was compelled to interrupt Mass to guzzle it. The Indian spoke: “I once saw in a port town where we disembarked to purify water a priest saying Mass who was obliged by necessity—being exhausted—to sit on a bench, and drink a *tecomate* full of chocolate, and then God gave him the energy to complete the Mass.”¹¹⁵ That the priest relied on chocolate *during* Mass indicates how in adopting chocolate, Spanish civilizers themselves fell victim to Indian idolatry. Interpolated into the most central rite of Catholicism—the transformation of wine and bread into the blood and flesh of Christ—was chocolate drinking, a practice intertwined with heathen idolatry. Providing more evidence for this perversion, the “Bourgeois” adds that clerics took to drinking chocolate while in church.

The conclusion of the dialogue makes explicit the notion that chocolate was not neutral material, sanitized through medical discourse, but rather a vessel for the spread of Indian heresies. The last words in the conversation come from the Indian: he relates that Spanish women use “this beverage to give occasion to avenge their jealousies, learning and using spells from Indian women, who are the great masters, having been taught by the Devil.” He describes murders due to the spells of these women and cautions that “it is very good to abstain from Chocolate, in order to avoid

¹¹³ Cárdenas, *Problemas*, 139, 146.

¹¹⁴ AGI, CT 5360, no. 8; CT 5407, no. 8. Marradón was nicknamed “médico [physician] de Marchena” in Dufour, but in the AGI documents he appeared as a *boticario*.

¹¹⁵ Marradón, “Dialogue,” 436–438.

familiarity and frequenting with a people so suspected of sorcery.”¹¹⁶ Through his ventriloquism of the Indian character, Marradón sought to make clear that chocolate could not be separated from its cultural lineage, one that made Europeans apprentices to Indians, whom he portrayed as masters—or rather mistresses—of sorcery, or even diabolism. In doing so, he ensured that notions prevalent in colonial Mesoamerica, as indicated by the attention that chocolate-dispensing healers and sorceresses drew from Inquisition authorities, migrated to Spain. The 1618 *Dialogue* underscored the ironies inherent in European adoption of chocolate in a world where ostensibly the Spanish were sowers of civilization, not apprentices to Indian culture.¹¹⁷

Most studies of consumption in general, and those of stimulant beverages in particular, assume or seek to demonstrate that tastes reflect social hierarchies, or an ascendant ethos. In other words, taste is a function of other social phenomena. The case of chocolate demonstrates another possibility: that taste, instead of naturalizing ideologies of hegemony, can reveal internal contradictions in ideological apparatuses. In Spain and Spanish America, Europeans’ taste for chocolate did not bolster a normative hierarchy that elevated European colonists over Indian subjects, or Christians over pagans. Instead, it brought unwanted attention to the failures of the colonial civilizing and evangelical project and revealed the civilizers’ vulnerability to cultural metamorphosis and Christians’ potential for internalizing idolatry.

Not quite so abstract as ideas and not so tangible as goods, taste—understood here as embodied habits and aesthetic dispositions—formed part of the “Columbian Exchange.” These embodied habits and aesthetic dispositions have a history that exists in relation to—but not dependence on—other historical phenomena. In the case of chocolate, particular social conditions, namely Spaniards’ sustained proximity to Indian cultural milieus and the social integration of the Spanish Atlantic world, account for Europeans’ acquisition of a new taste. This taste, rather than bolstering a monolithic imperial ideology, spotlighted its internal contradictions. Taste, here, is an autonomous force that affected, rather than reflected, discourse.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 444–445.

¹¹⁷ Subsequently, cultural authorities in Spain and throughout Europe—physicians, pharmacists, theologians—hewed more closely to Cárdenas than to Marradón and emphasized the medical virtues of chocolate (when it was used in moderation). However, a subtext remained concerning the potentially unchristian aspects of chocolate consumption; see Norton, “New World of Goods” or *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures*.

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