

Review of Chocolate. History, Culture and Heritage.

Chocolate. History, Culture and Heritage. Edited by L. E. Grivetti and H.-Y. Shapiro (University of California Davis and Mars Incorporated, respectively). John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, NJ, USA. 2009. xxiv + 975 pp. 22 × 29 cm. \$99.95. ISBN 978-0-470-12165-8.

Chocolate. History, Culture and Heritage is a labor of love. Grivetti and Shapiro have pulled together 114 contributing authors over a period of 10 years to create a beautiful and informative text on chocolate. It is also very reasonably priced at less than a \$100 for a book spanning almost 1000 pages.

The chocolate, or cocoa, tree (*Theobroma cacao* L.) is commonly known as cacao to botanists. Cacao was employed in ancient Mayan ceremonies, rituals, and religious rites. The seeds (“nibs”) were used also as coins, so that by the time the Europeans sailed to the New World, cacao was well accepted in spiritual, nutritional, and financial Mesoamerican life.

European interest can be traced to the early 1500s, when Columbus engaged natives in the Gulf of Honduras, who gave him *xocoatl* made of cacao, honey, spices, and vanilla. However, it was later voyagers who established the plant in Spain, where they turned the “nibs” into drink and its popularity was assured. Together with the availability of sugar, the use of chocolate spread throughout Europe, offered in fashionable drinking houses and recognized for its alleged aphrodisiac properties. Chocolate became popular in confectionary, and large industries and plantations were created to meet the demand.

The chapters are wide ranging and arranged in chronological and geographical order, beginning with pre-Mayan cacao use. Medicinal application is a recurring theme. One chapter examines 21st century attitudes; use of cooking utensils and illustrations of various pots are covered over many chapters; and considerable space and descriptions are given to cacao and chocolate production in the Caribbean, Brazil, and West Africa. The final chapter appropriately scouts new terrain for future chocolate research. The book contains detailed appendices and references archival details, thus providing an exhaustive and certainly a welcome and scholarly text.

This book reflects the enthusiasm of the UC Davis chocolate history research group members, who have succeeded in assembling into 56 chapters an archive for which historians of food will be forever grateful. The book offers unusual and interesting facts and folklore about one of the world’s favorite foods.

Ray Cooper

Stratum Nutrition, Novus International
 St. Charles, Missouri

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