



Chocolate: a Delicious History

Earliest Record

Approximately 4,000 years ago a small village in the Ulúa valley in Honduras used special cups and plates exclusively for the consumption of Xocoatl, the original chocolate drink.

250-900 AD Cocoa became a major piece of the Mayan culture and religion, also taking on an essential role as currency. "Cacau" originally meant "carrying over from those who walk, work, or cultivate" which is interpreted to mean exchange or payment.

1300 Around this time, the Toltecs and later the Aztecs established their communities in Mexico. Adopting much of the Toltec tradition and religion, the Aztecs worshipped Queztalcoatl, the feathered god of cocoa. They consumed chocolate mainly as part of their religious ceremonies honoring Queztalcoal.

1502 First European contact with cocoa beans brought from the fourth voyage of Christopher Columbus. He landed on the island of Guanaja, near Honduras, and was offered cocoa by the natives.

1528 Hernando Cortez returns to Spain with cocoa beans. Though he had ventured to Mexico in search of gold, he was impressed by the fact that the Aztecs used cocoa beans as currency. Cortez had started the first cocoa plantations on Trinidad, Haiti, and the West African island of Bioko to grow "money" to trade with Aztecs for gold. Spain then had a virtual monopoly of the cocoa market for almost a century.

1590 Spanish monks created a recipe for the first sweetened cocoa drink which contained honey, vanilla, and sometimes sugar.

1606 Explorers and traders introduced cocoa to Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and eventually Switzerland. For another 100 years it remained a novelty only afforded to the aristocracy.





- Early 1700's** The industrial revolution mechanized chocolate making and brought the price within the public's reach. Chocolate houses started to spring up in England to compete with coffeehouses. (Chocolate at this point was still consumed as a liquid beverage, not as a confection.)
- 1737** The cocoa tree got an official botanical name from Linnaeus himself: *Theoboma cacao* – which literally means “cocoa - food of the gods.”
- 1765** Chocolate came to the US! The first chocolate factory was established in Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- 1828** Conrad Van Houten, a Dutch chemist, learned to press cocoa butter out of chocolate liquor. This allowed the production of cocoa powder.
- 1848** Conrad Van Houten added cocoa butter and sugar to chocolate liquor and “eating chocolate” was created.
- 1875** Daniel Peter, of Switzerland, combined chocolate and milk powder (invented in 1867 by Henri Nestlé) and created the first milk chocolate bar.
- 1879** The Swiss Rodolphe Lindt produces chocolate that melts on the tongue. He develops the “conching” machine that kneads chocolate for hours giving it a fine taste and a rich, smooth texture.
- 1910** Cocoa production shifts from large plantations in Central and South America to small, independent farms in Asia and Africa.

For more in depth historical chocolate facts check out:

<http://www.huntington.org/BotanicalDiv/Timeline.html>

