

Chocolate



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Chocolate For a cultural geographer, the human geography behind chocolate offers a rich field of study equivalent to diving into the beginnings and development of such other celebrated food and drink such coffee, wine or cheese. A cultural geographer or a political-economic geographer is necessarily someone who must go into the influences of place and location on the resulting human activities and social interaction. Human geography on the other hand, leads into the discovery and the revelation of patterns in political, social and economic activities and how they interact with location, distance and movement.

With chocolate, the history and the habitats of ancient civilizations such as those of the Mayas and Aztecs in Central and South Americas are intertwined with the histories and social development of old colonial powers such as Spain, England and France. One could moreover trace the map of the world as close to what we know today by starting from that time when Ferdinand Columbus, the son of Christopher saw the canoe loaded with cacao beans in 1502 - the first sighting by a European - to that time when the Maya nobles presented chocolate as a gift to the Spanish crown in 1544 - the beginning of the popularization of chocolate, first among the nobility, until they the colonial powers spread the practice of eating and producing chocolate as a beloved food concoction.

Location is evidently a starting point for chocolate. It must be noted that for example coffee and chocolate originated only in certain parts of the world, and not in any other location. The same can be said of wine and cheese. And while the seeds or technologies in making them may have been transported to other parts of the world, they're cultivation and production are still limited in certain parts of the world, where they are said to have their origins.

Chocolate comes from the cacao tree which has been described as a "difficult tree to grow, uncooperative and moody" (Wolf 4). Moreover, it is a very choosy tree and could only bear fruits in a certain strip near the equator, with all-year round moisture and for which temperature must not dip below 60 degrees Fahrenheit (Wolf 4). The Maya Indians of the Yucatan Peninsula certainly were noted agriculturalists by being able to transport the cacao tree into their plantations from its natural habitat in the rainforest in Guatemala (The History of Chocolate: The Beginning.).

The movement of human culture could not only be traced through the movement of chocolate via their crossover from one geographic location to another, but the way chocolate permeated the socio-economic foundations of succeeding civilizations from the Mayas and Aztecs to the Europeans and to this day, brought to popularity the world over. The Maya Indians managed to promote the popularity of chocolate that soon people began using them as currency which were both used as a drink to toast relationships and pacts and even as a medicine. When the Aztecs became the dominant ruling class in ancient Mexico, the importance of coffee could be gleaned from the fact that they demanded tax in the form of cacao beans (The History of Chocolate: The Beginning). The Mayas used chocolate to highlight marriage, where bride and groom as a token of their acceptance for another, gave one another grains of cacao (Wolf 1). The European early on their discovery of chocolate, probably because of the relative scarcity of sourcing cacao beans in those days, marked chocolate drinking as a class or social marker - where the rich were the only ones who could afford to drink chocolate.

Now that distance is not much more of a concern in sourcing cacao beans with the invention of more efficient means of transportation and the ease of

chocolate production, the story of chocolate is very much a part of almost everyone in the world, if only limited to how chocolate is part of everyone's enjoyment of it as food. Chocolate is now dispersed, in as much as now almost everyone knows that the geography of the world is no longer just bounded by Asia in the East and Europe in the West, as Christopher Columbus once thought of.

Works Cited:

Wolf, Burt. What We Eat: When Money Grew on Trees, The Story of Chocolate. Copyright 2002 by Accorn Associates, Ltd. 10 December 2007 .
The History of Chocolate: The Beginning. (No date). 10 December 2007