



The Aztecs

Cocoa as a means of payment and a luxury food.

The greatest success story in the history of chocolate started some 4,000 years ago, with the Aztecs – though it was then a liquid, rather than a solid. Thus, when chocolate is mentioned below, it is drinking chocolate which is meant.

The Aztecs were a wealthy, powerful people. Cocoa was one of their great riches, even though the climate of the area where they lived was not suitable for cultivating the delicate cacao tree. As the only way to get hold of cocoa beans was from free traders, this made them all the more precious, and the “dark gold” was used in many different contexts.

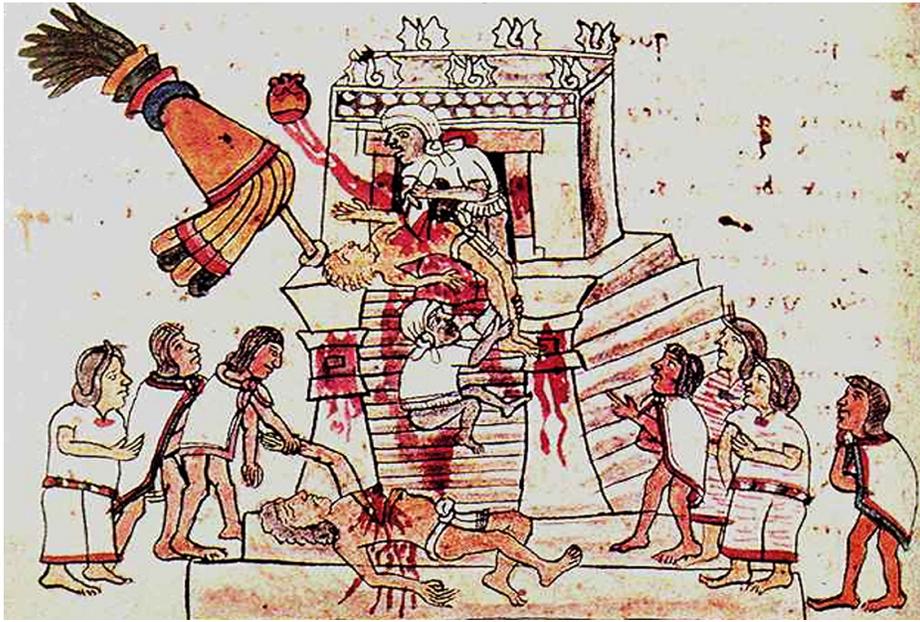
It was, for example, an exclusive luxury food reserved for the Aztec elite. Unlike the Mayas, the Aztecs preferred their chocolate cold, but the two peoples did have one thing in common - a preference for the cocoa foam floating on the chocolate.

Cocoa beans were even used as a means of payment. A document from 1545 lists the prices of some goods. According to this, a good turkey hen was worth 100 fat cocoa beans or 120 shriveled ones, whereas a turkey hen's egg could be bought for only 3 cocoa beans.

The valuable beans were of at least equal importance as an offering to the kings and gods. In the eyes of the Aztecs, the cacao pod symbolized the heart, and chocolate symbolized blood. Aztec warriors promoted to a higher rank to honor special services were given this sacred blood.

The Aztecs were also aware of chocolate's medicinal effect: combined with various healing herbs and spices, it was, for example, used to treat lack of appetite, weakness and feverish illnesses. Moreover, the Aztecs used cocoa butter to care for their skin and heal wounds.

Eventually, in 1512, the Aztec Empire came to an end, and along with it the cocoa cult. The Spanish occupying forces, led by Hernán Cortés, joined together with the previously suppressed Indian tribes to topple the Aztec rule.





Muteczuma