

# Food of the Gods:

## A Look at the Evolution of Chocolate as a Recipe

### Ingredient

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Joyce White

If you were to travel on a culinary journey back in time to seek chocolate in its earliest gastronomic forms, you would be delighted with what you would find. Chocolate is the product derived from the commodity, cacao, grown on an evergreen tree native to Mesoamerica, particularly from South Mexico to the northern Amazon basin. Botanist Linnaeus named the cacao species of tree, *Theobroma*, which is Greek for 'food of the gods.' Over the centuries, this earthly ambrosia has been utilized in many ways to create a wide variety of sweet and savory confections and dishes.



Cacao Tree

I love chocolate, especially dark bittersweet chocolate, and have considered myself a chocoholic since early childhood. For over 40 years I have taught cooking with chocolate, and lectured on the history of chocolate. Recently I was thrilled to make the acquaintance of food historian Joyce White, who shares my passion for chocolate and its history.

I have invited Joyce to write this issue's column. She is the foodways consultant to the Riversdale House Museum in Maryland and was the consultant for the restoration of the kitchen in Annapolis's William Paca House.

Joyce White offers food history presentations and tastings on a freelance basis to museums and other community organizations. You can follow her on Facebook by joining the *Cooking Up the Past* group or visit her website for program/tastings information at [www.atasteofhistory.net](http://www.atasteofhistory.net)

Sheilah Kaufman

At the time of the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica, the Aztecs were practicing the consumption of chocolate, a tradition handed down to them from the Olmecs, who domesticated the plant, and the Mayans, who further developed its use in the culinary arts. While no ancient written recipes for chocolate exist, there is archaeological evidence for chocolate use dating back to ancient Mesoamerica. The Mayans and Aztecs preferred their drinking chocolate with as much froth or foam on top as possible, derived by pouring chocolate from one vessel to another from a long a distance. The foam was actually considered the most

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important part of the beverage and was set aside in a special pot to be spooned on top of the chocolate during service. While there is evidence that the Mayans preferred to drink their chocolate hot, the Aztecs drank it cool.

Chocolate was additionally eaten by Mesoamericans as gruel, porridge, powder, or possibly even in solid form. The addition of cornmeal masa (maize) to chocolate was common and used as an emulsifier to help blend the fat-rich cacao with water or to thicken the liquid into a porridge or gruel. Honey was added to chocolate to sweeten it and give it flavor. Many local botanicals, such as achiote seeds and chili peppers were also added, among many others plants, to give the chocolate a spicy, floral, or sweet taste.

Spanish conquistadors in Mesoamerica incorporated chocolate into their culinary repertoire and altered it based on their particular tastes and culture. According to Antonio Colmenero de Ledesma, a Spanish doctor who wrote a treatise on chocolate in 1631, the Spanish enjoyed drinking their chocolate hot, and preferred to add cane sugar rather than honey. Colmenero describes hot chocolate drink recipes that add eggs and bread to make a more substantial dish to be eaten as a morning meal. Over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Continental European, English, and American recipes for hot chocolate were similar to early Spanish recipes that combined Native American additives with European-preferred products. The Mayan/Aztec importance of frothing the chocolate remained a feature among the European and American chocolate drinking crowd.

Once chocolate reached Europe, it was used primarily to make a hot drink consumed in the morning by women of leisure. However, chefs began experimenting with ways to incorporate chocolate into other recipes. One of the earliest ways in which chocolate was prepared in a form other than as a thin beverage was as a thick cream that could be sipped or eaten with a spoon. Recipes for chocolate creams date as far back as 1691 and can be found in French chef Francois Massialot's book *The Court and Country Cook*. These early chocolate creams were based on recipes for British possets, which were milk drinks usually curdled with an alcoholic beverage, such as wine or ale. Less common, but nevertheless notable, is a recipe for an interesting savory dish by Massialot called *Sea Duck in a Chocolate Ragoo*. The duck is seasoned with salt, pepper, bay leaves, other herbs, mushrooms, chestnuts, and chocolate.

The earliest chocolate cookie recipes date back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and were for chocolate puffs, biscuits, meringues, and macaroons. Almost all of these recipes were flourless and usually contained just chocolate, egg whites, sugar and sometimes ground almonds. Chocolate cookies as we know them today were not widespread until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and did not become truly popular until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Eighteenth century British chefs used chocolate to make ganache (a cooked mixture of chocolate and heavy cream) flavored with cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and lemon to fill pastry tart shells. Sometimes these tarts were topped with a meringue. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, new versions of these tarts emerged with lighter fillings of chocolate custard topped with freshly whipped sweetened cream.



Hot Chocolate by Raimundo de Madrazo y Garreta  
(1841-1920)

The 18<sup>th</sup> century also saw experimentations with chocolate and alcohol. Chocolate was melted and mixed with sugar and either sherry, port, or brandy to make a sweet after-dinner drink. The modern-day chocolate wine is not such a new idea after all!

Eighteenth century Italian chefs experimented with using chocolate in savory dishes. In 1736, Italian poet Francisco Arisi wrote an account of an Italian chef who grated chocolate over cornmeal polenta when he ran out of grated cheese, and another chef who made chocolate into a sauce. It is possible the sauce Arisi referenced was a form of an *agrodolce* sauce, an Italian sweet and sour sauce similar to the French *aigre-doux*. Mexican mole sauce is a cousin of these sweet and sour sauces, incorporating chocolate with savory and spicy ingredients such as chili peppers and other herbs and spices.

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century eating solid chocolate could be a bitter and gritty experience. While the addition of sugar to the chocolate made it palatable, eating a solid bar of chocolate as a form of candy was not an overly popular fashion at the time. Milk chocolate bars were not introduced until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Swiss technological advancements and the invention of evaporated milk made it possible to incorporate large enough quantities of milk successfully into chocolate. Once confectioners could control the ratio of cocoa solids to cocoa butter, they were able to produce chocolate candy bars that were less bitter and smoother on the palate. One of the first commercial chocolate bars was made by Fry & Sons of Bristol, England in 1847. Local small-scale chocolate confectioners also offered chocolate confections in the form of chocolate tablets covered with nonpareils (sprinkles) and chocolate coated nibs. The Swiss conching rollers invented by Lindt in 1879 furthered advancements in producing high quality chocolate candy by making it even smoother and more palatable. Lindt kept the conching system a secret for twenty years thus cornering the market on chocolate candy bars. The Hershey Company followed shortly after and was making the classic American milk chocolate bar by 1900.

While chocolate-flavored cakes did emerge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of the Sachertorte in Vienna in 1832, chocolate as a flavoring for cake did not become popular until later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, most recipes for chocolate cake actually meant either plain shortbread eaten with a hot chocolate drink, or cakes iced with chocolate flavored frostings or filled with chocolate cream. Throughout the decades of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, cakes marbled





Chocolatier in Brugge, Belgium

traditionally with molasses instead started to become marbled with chocolate. Similarly, recipes for brownies that previously used molasses were rewritten with chocolate as a replacement for the molasses. It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that there was a marked appearance of recipes for chocolate glazed pastries and cookies, chocolate soufflés, and chocolate flavored layer cake. Chocolate really reached its golden age in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when mass production lowered its price and democratized it in the West for the masses, and culinary technological advancements positioned chocolate as a premier confectionary ingredient for professional and home chefs alike.

A trip on the chocolate timeline is a delight to any chocolate enthusiast. A vast array of sweet and savory dishes emerged over time from its beginnings in Mesoamerica to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when technology made it a more versatile product. Linnaeus had it right when he classified it as *Theobroma cacao*

because chocolate is definitely the food of the gods.



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## Recipes

### Chocolate Cream

Edward Kidder. *Receipts of Pastry and Cookery for the Use of His Scholars, 1720*

Take a pt of cream with a spoonfull of scrapt chocolate boyle y m well together mix y m wth ye yolks of 2 eggs & thicken & mill it on ye fiery n pour it into your chocolate cups.

#### Transcription:

1 pint heavy cream  
3 ounces dark chocolate  
2 egg yolks prepared in a separate mixing bowl

Heat the cream and chocolate together over medium heat and stir to avoid the bottom from scorching. Be careful not to let the mixture boil over. Boil until the chocolate is completely melted. Take the bowl with egg yolks over to the stove and then gently pour a ladle full of the hot chocolate/cream mixture into the eggs. Whisk the eggs while you are pouring in the hot mixture. Then, pour the egg mixture into the saucepan with the remaining chocolate and cream. Bring back to the boil whisking constantly. Keep stirring for about one minute. Then, pour your mixture into four individual 5 ounce cups.

**Note:** *This can be chilled. It will develop a skin but will not thicken, it is a version of a thin un-gelled cooked cream (panna cotta). It should be eaten with a spoon.*

### Hot Cocoa

Tyree, Marion Fontaine Cabell, *Housekeeping in Old Virginia, Richmond, 1878*

#### Cocoa

To one pint milk and one pint cold water add three table-spoonfuls grated cocoa. Boil fifteen or twenty minutes, milling or whipping as directed in foregoing recipe. Sweeten to taste, at the table. Some persons like a piece of orange-peel boiled with it.--Mrs. S. T.

### Chocolate Biscuits

Chocolate biscuits, puffs, and meringues are names that have been used interchangeably for a usually flourless confection that is lightened with egg whites and sweetened with a lot of powdered sugar. Sometimes almond meal is used to make a very light macaroon-like variety of this very early form of a chocolate cookie. Recipes for this type of sweet can be found going back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### Chocolate Biscuits

B. Clermont, *The Professed Cook, or the Modern Art of Cookery, Pastry & Confectionary Made Plain and Easy, 1812*

Pound a quarter of a pound of chocolate, and mix it with four yolks of eggs, and half a pound of fine powder-sugar; add eight whites beat up, a quarter of a pound of flour; pour them upon the paper with a spoon of what length or bigness you please.

**ANOTHER METHOD WITH CHOCOLATE.** Make a paste with much the same quantity of chocolate, six whites of eggs, and sugar sufficient to make the paste pretty firm, dress it in flowers, designs, or moulds, according to imagination and fancy, and bake as the biscuits.

#### Transcription:

2 ounces chocolate, at least 85% chocolate  
3 egg whites  
4-5 cups Confectioner's sugar

Preheat oven to 375° F.

Line baking sheets with parchment paper. In a food processor, grate the chocolate. Add the egg whites. Add 3-4 cups of the sugar. The mixture will thicken up. When it gets too stiff for the processor blade, turn the dough out into a bowl. Add as much additional sugar as needed to make a dough that is not sticky. Use confectioner's sugar to coat a rolling pin and pastry board. Roll the dough and cut with cookie cutters. Place on the cookie sheets, leaving about ½ inch between each biscuit. Bake for 10 minutes. They will rise up and puff while baking. Cool and store in a cool, dry tin.

Yield: 80 2" biscuits