

Book review

Chocolate in Mesoamerica (A Cultural History of Cacao), C.L. McNeil (Ed.). University Press of Florida, USA (2006). 21 Chapters, in four parts, 542 pp., 91 Photos b & w, 97 drawings and maps and 14 tables, Hard cover, Price: \$75, ISBN 13: 978-0-8130-2953-8

For many of us the word *chocolate* is related to desserts or brings back childhood memories when our grandmother offered us hot cup of chocolate after coming back from playing in the rain. But only a few of us know the socio-economical importance that chocolate has played in Mesoamerica since the ancient cultures to current days. For those readers interested in knowing more about the biology and cultural aspect of this plant, this book is ideal. The book is divided into four parts:

- The first one dedicated to the evolution, chemistry (very briefly) and identification of Cacao.
- Parts two and three deal with the importance of the plant in pre-Columbian cultures and during the colonial period in Mesoamerica, it covers the period since the origin of the word “kakaw” until colonial times and specifically the ways of production, giving a detailed account of the important role of the plant as a sacred beverage and its socio-political importance for ancient and historic Mayas.

- Part four is dedicated to use of the plant in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Parts 2 and 3 and their chapters are particularly interesting and through reading them one gets a clear idea of the importance of the plant for these cultures.

Since the Mayas played an important role in the domestication and use of the plant the book is – very appropriately – part of the series of Maya studies from the University of Florida.

I highly recommend the book for specialists as well as for the general public interested in knowing more about cacao; the reading is not complicated and is presented from an anthropological perspective.

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