CHAPTER FOUR

Encounter and Transformation

It was thanks to Christopher Columbus that Europeans first set eyes on the seed of the chocolate tree. Exonerated by the Reyes Católicos (the “Catholic Monarchs,” Ferdinand and Isabella) from the unjust charges and imprisonment with which his third great voyage had ignominiously ended, the Admiral of the Ocean Sea was determined to make one more exploratory trip to the New World which he had “discovered.” This time his goal was to find a strait which might lead westwards to that part of Asia already reached and exploited by Spain’s principal competitor, Portugal.

Few ships that ever sailed the seven seas could have looked more ungainly than the three-masted caravels used by the Spaniards and the Portuguese on their astonishing voyages of exploration. With their huge rudders, towering poops and even higher forecastles, they looked more like houses than boats; in fact, the first caravel to be spotted off the shores of Motecuhzoma’s realm was reported by his spies to be “a house that moved on the water.” In their general tubbiness, they resembled the Chinese sea-going junks that Marco Polo had so admired. Yet few more seaworthy vessels have ever been designed than the caravel and the junk.

First Encounter: Guanaja, 1502

Columbus set sail on his fourth voyage on 9 May 1502, with four caravels and 150 men. Forbidden by Hispaniola’s Spanish colonists to land on that island, he nevertheless weathered a hurricane in
which those selfsame rivals went down with their ships (for which the pious admiral gave thanks to God). He next headed for Jamaica but, missing it, he continued on a WSW course across the reef-strewn open sea. At last he made land at the island of Guanaja, some 30 miles (50 kms) north of the Honduran mainland, in what are now known as the Bay Islands. There they anchored; in the limpid, transparent waters that surround the island, the caravels must have seemed as though floating on blue-green air.

Until now, the Spaniards had encountered in their “New World” only scantily-clad subjects of small chiefdoms—in the simplicity of their culture, these bore little resemblance to the civilized subjects of the mighty Khan of the Cathay which Columbus was so intent on reaching.

On the fateful day of 15 August 1502, these latter-day Argonauts came across something very different. The admiral had sent a reconnaissance party ashore at Guanaja, where they found people like those of other islands, but with “narrower foreheads” (whatever that might signify). What happened next is to be found in the account penned in Jamaica in 1503 by Columbus’s second son Ferdinand. This work was eventually translated into Italian and finally reached print in Venice in 1571, by which time it had become somewhat corrupted by later material (for example, a statement that cacao beans were used for money in “New Spain,” a fact which could only have been known by the year 1518). Nonetheless, this is the only text we have regarding these events, the Spanish original having been lost.

Here is what transpired on that day. There suddenly appeared a tremendous dugout canoe, said by Ferdinand to have been as long as a galley; the standard Venetian galley of the period being between 141 to 164 feet long (40 to 50 m). Even if its size was exaggerated, it must have indeed been an impressive vessel. The chronicler Peter Martyr tells us that there were not one but two such canoes, each rowed by slaves with ropes around their necks, and that they came from a land called Maiam, almost surely the Maya lands of the Yucatán Peninsula. As for the canoe described by Ferdinand Columbus, amidships it had a shelter fashioned of palm leaves, “not unlike those of Venetian gondolas,” under which were placed the children, the women, and the cargo. The admiral immediately ordered its capture, which was effected without resistance. By this adroit move, he gained an excellent idea “of all the goods of that country without exertion or exposing his men to any danger.”

The vessel he had captured was a great Maya trading canoe, most likely belonging to the Chontal-Maya-speaking Putun; its cargo consisted of fine cotton garments, flat war clubs set with razor-like stone blades along the edges (the formidable macuahuitl of Aztec warriors), and small axes and bells of cast copper. Ferdinand goes on to say:

For their provisions they had such roots and grains as are eaten in Hispaniola [these would have been maize and manioc], and a sort of wine made out of maize which resembled English beer; and many of those almonds which in New Spain [Mexico] are used for money. They seemed to hold these almonds at a great price; for when they were brought on board ship together with their goods, I observed that when any of these almonds fell, they all stooped to pick it up, as if an eye had fallen.

Lacking an interpreter, the admiral had no way of knowing that these “almonds” were used to manufacture the New World’s most esteemed beverage, nor could he have realized cacao’s use as money, but he must surely have been impressed with the high value put on these strange seeds.

Columbus never tasted chocolate, nor did he ever again encounter those civilized people of whom he had dreamed. Instead, he turned his little fleet in the wrong direction, towards the southeast and to what is now western Panama, where he did at last find some of the gold which he had so coveted. Four years
later he died in Spain. The discovery of the fabulous wealth of the Indies was to be made by others.

Crossing the Taste Barrier

From the initial invasion of Yucatán, beginning in 1517, and of Mexico in 1519, it took the Spaniards little time to grasp and take advantage of the monetary value of cacao beans in the native economy: witness the shameless plundering of Motecuhzoma’s warehouse, described in the last chapter. This was “happie money” that retained its function as small currency through virtually all of the Colonial period.

But although they appreciated cacao as money, the conquistadores and those who followed them into the newly conquered lands of Mesoamerica were at first baffled and often repelled by the stuff in the form of drink. While the open-minded Italian Peter Martyr on the other side of the Atlantic could sing the virtues of chocolate as a drink worthy of kings, lords, and nobles, it is highly doubtful that he ever tried it. His compatriot Girolamo Benzioni, who was in the New World, certainly did, and his reaction to the strange, murky, sinister-looking beverage was probably typical of Europeans encountering it for the first time. In his History of the New World, published in 1575, Benzioni comments sourly:

Woodcut from Benzioni’s 1565 La Historia del Mundo Nuovo, depicting a cacao tree and cacao beans spread out to dry; the artist has naively shown the pods growing from the tips of the branches, instead of the trunk.

It [chocolate] seemed more a drink for pigs, than a drink for humanity. I was in this country for more than a year, and never wanted to taste it, and whenever I passed a settlement, some Indian would offer me a drink of it, and would be amazed when I would not accept, going away laughing. But then, as there was a shortage of wine, so as not to be always drinking water, I did like the others. The taste is somewhat bitter, it satisfies and refreshes the body, but does not inebriate, and it is the best and most expensive merchandise, according to the Indians of that country.

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, an enemy of Bartolomé de las Casas and one who despised the natives of the New World, had run across chocolate during the Spanish conquest of Nicaragua, and, not surprisingly, found it obnoxious: when the drink was quaffed with its usual lacing of achiote, it turned the Indians’ mouths, lips, and
whiskers red, as though they had been drinking blood. Fernández de Oviedo had better things to say about cacao’s by-product, cacao butter. In this account, he meets an Italian friend who fries up a mess of eggs in this substance for his troops, converting cacao to a use utterly foreign to the fat-free native cuisine. For Fernández de Oviedo, the butter also had medicinal virtues, for, on cutting his foot on a rock, he cured the wound by covering it with bandages soaked in the oil.

Yet the Spanish aversion to the chocolate drink was eventually to change. How did this come about? Initially, the invaders would have little to do with the foodstuffs which they found in ‘New Spain’, unless there was no alternative. Maize-based bread in the form of tortillas and tamales had no attraction for them; nor did the wide variety of vegetables and pot herbs, for the traditional Iberian cuisine was heavily weighted toward meat and starch, as it is today, with an emphasis on frying with lard and olive oil. In contrast, the Mesoamerican housewife never cooked with oils and fats. To make matters worse, cheese was totally absent from the native table (in fact, they didn’t even have tables).

Soon after the Conquest, the new settlers went about remedying this deplorable situation, importing beef cattle, milk cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens, and forcing their native laborers—treated little better than slaves—to plant wheat, chickpeas, and Old World fruit trees like peaches and oranges. Cane sugar was also a novelty to Mesoamerica, and was grown on a vast scale on the private estates of the Marqués del Valle (as Cortés was by now styled). Although sweetenings in the form of honey, agave syrup, and other substances existed in the native diet, the Maya and the Aztecs had nothing approaching the European sweet tooth induced by the medieval introduction of sugar into the western part of the Old World. The Spaniards craved it.

In time, though, a kind of hybridization or creolization between the two cultures began to take place, as the Spaniards, for instance, found themselves consuming less wheat and more maize, or absorbing Nahuatl words for local plants and animals into their own language. Likewise, the abused and long-suffering Indians willingly adopted their oppressors’ domestic animals and fruit trees into their way of life (while rejecting the Iberian wheat and chickpeas). The poorer Spaniards perform married native women, while the richer ones took them as concubines; thus in many a “Spanish” kitchen of early Colonial Mexico, the housewife was an Aztec. And it was not long before an entire generation of Spanish Creoles was to be born in the old Aztec realm, never to set foot in the old country from which their parents had come. Thus, an entirely new, creolized culture was taking form that partook of elements from both cultures, but was different from both. This was the context in which chocolate was taken into the Colonial cuisine of New Spain, and was eventually transplanted to Old Spain and the rest of Europe.

![Imaginary scene purporting to show Aztecs making chocolate, from John Ogilby’s America, of 1671. The artist has misunderstood the use of the metate, and has mistakenly included the post-Conquest molino.](image)
It may not have been just the Aztec women in the back kitchens who were responsible for the adoption of the chocolate drink by the invaders—Spanish women may also have been agents of change, becoming “chocoholics” before their menfolk, if we examine an episode recounted by Bernal Díaz. In 1538, a huge banquet was staged in the Great Plaza of Mexico City (newly built over the ruins of the Aztec capital); this was to celebrate the signing of a peace treaty between those two arch-enemies, Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire and Francis I of France. In sheer ostentation, expense, and gaudy display of valuables, it was one of the most lavish examples of “conspicuous consumption” the New World has ever witnessed. Among other vulgar extravagances, there were actually fountains of wine. Allowed to gaze on the all-male revelers from windows and corridors, the Spanish ladies were chivalrously regaled with sweetmeats and other costly viands, along with wine. But they were also served chocolate in golden goblets. Was this a taste that they, and not their husbands, had picked up from their female servants?

That the Spanish appetite for chocolate may have been at first biased towards the distaff side is confirmed by somewhat jaundiced remarks made by the Jesuit José de Acosta in his *Natural and Moral History*, published in 1590:

The main benefit of this cacao is a beverage which they make called Chocolate, which is a crazy thing valued in that country. It disgusts those who are not used to it, for it has a foam on top, or a scum-like bubbling. ... It is a valued drink which the Indians offer to the lords who come or pass through their land. And the Spanish men—and even more the Spanish women—are addicted to the black chocolate.8

To cross the ethnocentric taste barrier and be accepted as a normal beverage by the Spanish-born and the Creoles, the cold, bitter, usually unsweetened drink had to undergo its own process of hybridization. The first transmutation was that the whites insisted on taking chocolate hot rather than cold or at room temperature, as had been the custom among the Aztecs. We shall see that this custom may have been adopted from the usage of the Yucatec Maya, from whom they first learned of chocolate as a drink. Secondly, it came to be regularly sweetened with cane sugar. Thirdly, Old World spices more familiar to the invaders, such as cinnamon, anise seed, and black pepper, began to be substituted for native flavorings like “ear flower” and chilli pepper (this never could have been too popular with the invaders, anyway). And finally, while certain modes of preparation remained the same as before, such as grinding the shelled cacao beans on a heated metate (curved grinding-stone), the froth was now obtained by beating the hot chocolate with a large, wooden swizzle-stick called a molinillo (about which, more below), instead of pouring the liquid from a height, from one vessel into another.

One further innovation deserves mention, for it was important to the transmission of chocolate drinking to Spain and its dissemination throughout Europe and the British Isles. This was the manufacture of the finished beverage from a wafer or tablet of ground cacao to which hot water and sugar could be added. Although one source ascribes this invention to Guatemalan nuns, we have already seen that Aztec warriors were issued such wafers to be turned into a kind of “instant chocolate” which was drunk during military campaigns. The Spaniards merely seized on these wafers as a convenient way to store and ship the cacao liquor as a dried product.

**Crossing the Language Barrier**

The military adventurers who brought down the Aztec Empire may have been able to deal with the formidable Aztec military machine, but they were helpless before the phonetic complexities of the
Nahuatl language spoken by their adversaries. The Spaniards consistently refused to stress Nahuatl words on the next-to-last syllable, as all Nahuatl words required, and they could not—or would not—properly pronounce the sound ı́l, which so often ends Nahuatl words as a noun marker, making it sound like te (or tay, the way English speakers would write it).

Cortés had a “tin ear” for the niceties of Nahuatl, on the evidence of his Letters to Charles V: he wrote the name of the capital as “Temistitan” instead of Tenochtitlan, and the tribal god Huitzilopochtli as “Uichilobos”. He probably did not care what such barbarians called them.

But the new settlers from the Iberian peninsula had to deal on a day-to-day basis with these people following the Conquest, whether constructing a new capital on the rubble that was once Tenochtitlan, or forcing tribute from unwilling vassals, or harnessing native labor on the newly founded cattle ranches and plantations that were usurping traditional lands everywhere in “New Spain.” This was truly frontier country, and as on any frontier a kind of hybrid way of life took form. Nahuatl words for plants, animals, and even for prepared dishes previously unknown to the Spaniards were adopted wholesale, after they had undergone linguistic transformation to fit Spanish mouths. Thus, the wild dog coyotl became the coyote; an ear of corn, elote, turned into an elote; xicalli, the gourd drinking bowl, was hybridized into the jícara; and so on.

Chocolate and its appurtenances for preparation and consumption went through the same process of linguistic hybridization, matching the “creolization” of the drink itself. The Spanish (and English) word chocolate is a case in point. Our Merriam Webster Dictionary, 1993 edition, in agreement with most books and articles on chocolate, simply states that this is derived from the Nahuatl word chocolatl. This seems logical given the mutation from -d to -te endings for so many other nouns which have entered Mexican Spanish. But the real story is far more complex and ambiguous than this.

We must first of all tell you that chocolatl appears in no truly early source on the Nahuatl language or on Aztec culture! You can search in vain for it in the first Nahuatl-Spanish dictionary, that of Alonso de Molina (published as early as 1555); or in Sahagún’s great encyclopedia; or in the Huehuetlatolli, “The Sayings of the Ancients,” preserved in several versions. In those pristine sources, the word for the chocolate drink is cacahuatl, “cacao water,” a reasonable compound since the drink was made of ground cacao beans and water. Cortés himself always uses for the chocolate beverage the word cacao, which the Spaniards almost surely picked up from the Maya of Yucatán and Tabasco. But some time in the latter half of the 16th century, the Spaniards began using a new world, chocolatl. It is also used by the Royal Physician Francisco Hernández who, as we have seen, was carrying out his researches in Mexico during the decade of the 1570s. According to him, this was a drink made up of equal parts of cacahuatl (“cacao beans,” in this case) and ground pochotl (seeds of the ceiba tree), frothed up with a wooden molinillo. It was probably simultaneously that chocolatl was transformed into chocolate, by the white population, and employed by them for every kind of drink made from
cacao; at any rate, this is what José de Acosta and his contemporaries called these beverages.

The noun chocolate had even spread beyond the confines of New Spain to the province of Yucatán, for it appears as a gloss to the native Yucatec Maya name for the drink in early Maya-Spanish dictionaries, such as the one now in Vienna’s National Library. Yet it is clear that chocolate is what the Spaniards called it, not the natives.

Exactly what is the origin of this neologism? Here we enter the murky realm of supposition. The authoritative Diccionario de la lengua española of the Royal Spanish Academy claims that it derives from the Nahuatl chocolatl (thus agreeing with Merriam Webster), which, in turn, is based on choco, “cacao,” and latl, “water.” Mexican linguists rightly hold this etymology in derision, since neither of the latter exist in Nahuatl. A more informed school of thought would have it transformed from a hypothetical xocoatl, based on xo-co-, the root for “bitter,” and atl, “water.” This is possible, but unlikely, since there is no strong justification for altering the sound x (like English sh) to ch, and inserting an l.

Now let us recall that the invaders first became familiar with cacao and the chocolate drink in the Maya lowlands, and turn again to the Vienna and other very early Maya vocabularies: there “the drink called chocolate” is glossed chacau haa, literally “hot water,” with the implication that these people drank theirs hot, not cold. Another word for “hot” in Yucatec is cholol, so that an alternative way of saying the same thing would be cholol haa. We are now getting very close to chocolatl.

Then there is a possible derivation of chocolate from the Quiché Maya verb chokola’j, which, as we have seen in Chapter Three, means “to drink chocolate together.” This is a clue which needs further research.

It was the distinguished Mexican philologist Ignacio Dávila Garibí who first proposed that the Spaniards had coined the new word by taking the Maya word cholol and then replacing the Maya term for “water,” haa, with the Aztec one, atl. Thus we get first chocolatl, then chocolate. Miguel León-Portilla, the greatest living authority on Nahuatl, has told us that this is a reasonable explanation, and we agree. The vast majority of Iberians who had poured into Mesoamerica had settled in the old Aztec realm, not in the gold and silverless Yucatán, and they needed a new term that could be applied to a beverage that they had learned to drink hot and sweetened with cane sugar—not the cold, bitter, water-based cacahuatl of the native Aztecs. Chocolatl and chocolate suited them perfectly.

Be that as it may, there must have been an even more compelling reason for the sudden switch among its white users for cacahuatl to chocolate, and we think we know what it is. As we can see in this modern world of instant, global communication, words and word roots that are innocuous in one language often become exceedingly embarrassing when they are transferred into another cultural and linguistic setting. This can be seen in its most acute form in the case of certain Korean and Cantonese personal names which sound like four-letter words in English; often the bearers of such names are forced to adopt new spellings and even new pronunciations when moving into the international marketplace.

The caca of cacahuatl falls into this category. In most Romance languages, and in the Latin from which they descend, this is a vulgar or nursery word for feces, and is often compounded to make other words and even verbs describing defecation. Spanish is definitely one of these languages (we can even find the term cacafuego, “shitfire,” in an early 18th-century Spanish-English dictionary). It is hard to believe that the Spaniards were not thoroughly uncomfortable with a noun beginning with caca to describe a thick, dark-brown drink which they had begun to appreciate. They desperately needed some other word, and we would not be at all surprised if it was the learned friars who came up with chocolatl and chocolate.
Yet there are always nagging doubts about hypothetical etymologies. For example, just to confuse matters even further, the modern residents of the Chontalpa—the rich, cacao-growing region of Tabasco—call themselves Chocos, and claim (perhaps through local chauvinism) that the word chocolate comes from this!

We have seen that the Creole Spaniards altered the indigenous method of producing foam on top of their chocolate by the introduction of the molinillo or rotary whisk, a vertically grooved stick spun back and forth between the hands. It is usually thought that this word is a straightforward Spanish diminutive meaning “little mill,” derived from molino, “mill.” But, like chocolate, the story is not so simple. As Dr León-Portilla has pointed out, the twisting, back-and-forth motion is not that of a European mill at all, but something quite different, for which some other term was necessary. He has shown that molinillo is probably one more creolized Nahuatl noun, derived from the verb molinia, “to shake, wobble, or move”; its more immediate progenitor is likely to be moliniani, “something which moves or waggles.”

As for the gourd cup out of which the native Aztecs and early Colonial Spaniards drank their foamy chocolate, this was originally xicalli in Nahuatl, but was soon creolized to jícara, a term that came to be applied to pottery bowls or cups for quaffing chocolate throughout the New World and also in Spain (once the habit had become established there).

**Crossing the Medical Barrier**

Was chocolate good, bad, or indifferent for one's health? This was a vital topic for the Spaniards, who were at the mercy of a worthless and often destructive constellation of medical theories which had held the Western world in its grip for almost two millennia. Full acceptance of the exotic beverage held in such esteem by the defeated Mesoamericans meant fitting it into this fallacious scheme.

The basis of pre-modern European medical practice was the humoral theory of disease and nutrition, originated by the Classical Greeks, and not to be extinguished in the West until the advent of modern medicine and physiology in the first half of the 19th century. The invention of the theory is accredited to Hippocrates, who lived from 460 to 377 BC; he held that the body contains four humors—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. The right proportion and mixture of these results in health, while disease is caused by an imbalance. This theory was taken up by Galen, a Greek born about AD 130, who expanded it by adding the notion that humors, diseases, and the drugs to cure disease could also be hot or cold, and moist or dry. Blood, for instance, is hot and moist, while phlegm is cold and moist.

Galen achieved great fame as a physician, and even doctored Roman emperors, including Marcus Aurelius and his dreadful son Commodus. His main principle was curing by contraries, so that a “hot” fever called for a “cold” drug. By extension, since nutrition was an integral part of his health regime, foods were forced into this rigid classification. Like two other towering figures from the Classical past, Aristotle and Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Galen were
held in such awe by Europeans throughout the Dark Ages, medieval times, and even the Renaissance, that this scheme was never seriously challenged and was held to be dogma in the best medical schools. Other fanciful ideas adhered to it, such as the Doctrine of Signatures, which held that one must cure like with like: thus, if you want to cure an earache, seek out an herb, flower, or seed pod which resembles a human ear.

Add to this a large helping of magic, of belief in judicial astrology, and of downright quackery, such as the use of bezoar stones (calcoli found in the gastrointestinal tracts of animals), and you will appreciate that the medical knowledge brought by the Spaniards to the New World was largely ineffectual.

In contrast, while the Aztec ticitl or doctor used a good deal of magic in his or her cures, and while Aztec disease etiology also had an overall theoretical scheme made up of contrary principles (such as “hot” vs. “cold”), native medical practices were light years ahead of the Spaniards’. This was due in large part to their incredible knowledge of the plant world included within the empire’s frontiers. They had, as the anthropologist (and chemist) Bernard Ortiz de Montellano has shown, an excellent empirical understanding of the actions of hundreds of plants in effecting real cures; the emperor even had a botanic garden at Huaxtepec in Morelos, where many of these plants were grown and tested.

Word of this pharmacopeia reached the ears of Philip II, and that is why he sent his Royal Physician Francisco Hernández across the Atlantic in 1570. In his great work, described in the last chapter, Hernández classified the plants of Mexico as either “hot” or “cold,” and “wet” or “dry” (please bear in mind that this has nothing to do with their actual temperature or humidity). Thanks to his slavish application of Galenic theory, it is almost impossible to find out how the Aztecs actually classified these same plants, or even how they used them in their own pharmacopeia: one has to get these data from other sources.

Cacao and chocolate naturally attracted Hernández’s attention. The cacao seed is “temperate in nature,” he says, but leaning to the “cold and humid”; on the whole, it is very nourishing (a virtue that would generate its own controversy in Europe, as we shall see in the next chapter). Because of its “cool” nature, drinks made from it are good in hot weather, and to cure fevers. Adding the mecaxochitl flavoring to chocolate not only gives it an agreeable taste, but because it, like most cacao spices, is “hot” by nature, it “warms the stomach, perfumes the breath . . . [and] combats poisons, alleviates intestinal pains and colics,” and so on. However, composite chocolate drinks, as we have seen already, “excite the veneral appetite”—which must have made them even more attractive to the Spaniards.

As Ortiz de Montellano tells us, the plants and plant derivatives that Hernández puts under the “hot” rubric are those with a strong odor or taste, or with a bitter flavor; while those with little odor or taste were “cold”. How, then, did the strongly flavored and quite bitter chocolate become classified as “cold”? We suspect that it was because the Aztecs themselves held it to be “cold,” and Hernández did not contradict them in this case (although he did in many others). According to Aztec belief, their other great drink, octli wine, was also “cold”; to the bewilderment of the Spaniards, the natives usually took it before undertaking hard labor, to avoid tiring the body by overheating it. But Aztec disease etiology bore little resemblance to the Galenic nonsense of the Europeans: for instance, fevers were not necessarily “hot,” and were often cured not by administering “cold” medicines but by giving the patient “hot” medicines to induce sweating—excellent medical practice, as we now know.

Published in 1591, a treatise on New World foods by Juan de Cárdenas takes Hernández’s Galenic analysis of chocolate one step further (this treatise was later to be studied by European “experts”). After warning that “green” chocolate harms the digestion, and causes alarming symptoms like paroxysms,
melancholy, and irregular heartbeats, Cárdenas goes on to assert that cacao, if toasted and ground and mixed with a bit of *atole* gruel, is fattening and sustaining, aiding the digestion and making one happy and strong. According to him, chocolate has three parts:

1. A “cold”, “dry”, and “earthy” part.
2. An oily part which is “warm and humid,” and associated with air. There is more of this part in chocolate made from old cacao; oil is likewise increased with more toasting.
3. A very “hot” part, with a bitter taste; this gives one headaches [perhaps not so far off the mark, as this is a symptom of caffeine, and possibly theobromine, withdrawal].

The native chocolate flavorings are all “hot”; he is high in praise of *huéénacaztli*, “ear flower,” which comforts the liver, stimulates digestion, and extirpates windiness. Cárdenas’s advice was that “hot” (overheated) persons should cool off by drinking chocolate with *atole* and sugar, or with honey and hot water.

Most of this was very welcome news to the Spaniards, who were as obsessed with health and diet as we are. During the course of the 16th century, cacao had been accommodated into the Spanish system as tribute, as coin, and as the first American foodstuff to have been accepted by the invaders for reasons of taste rather than necessity; but it had also passed the linguistic and health barriers. For full acceptance by Europe, it had one further barrier to surmount: the ecclesiastical. We shall look into this and other matters in the following chapter.