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Happy Valentine's Day

Giving chocolate goes back to the days of the Ancient Americans who “invented” chocolate. Gifting chocolate has likely been around for a long time—probably for 5000 years.

“The key ingredient of chocolate was being used in South America centuries before it was exploited by civilisations in Mexico and Central America, according to new research.”*

“The cacao tree, and in particular the drinks made from its dried seeds, has long been linked to the Maya and other ancient civilisations in Mesoamerica – a heritage embraced by chocolate companies that produce goods with monikers like Maya Gold.”

“But now experts say seeds from the cacao tree were first used in present-day Ecuador by members of the Mayo Chinchipe culture, in research that pushes back the date of the first cacao use by about 1,500 years and shifts the location of the culinary event 1,400 miles to the upper Amazon.”

“It is used by people in this area more than 5,000 years ago – way earlier than we have ever found in Mesoamerica and Central America,” said Prof Michael Blake, a co-author of the research from the University of British Columbia in Canada.”

*Source: [Origin of chocolate shifts 1,400 miles and 1,500 years](#)
-- [TheGuardian](#) (29 October 2018)



"Since [Pre-Columbian Mixtec](#) documents are mainly concerned with histories, they record historical events such as royal births, wars and battles, royal marriages, forging of alliances, pilgrimages, and death of rulers. In addition to the calendrical signs used for dating events and naming individuals, [the Mixtecs](#) used a combination of conventionalized pictures as well as glyphs to illustrate the type and nature of the event. An example is ... the wedding scene, usually shown as as two individuals of opposite sex facing each other and sitting on jaguar-pelt chairs, as illustrated by this example from the Codex Nuttall recording the marriage of the legendary Mixtec king 8 Deer "Tiger Claw" of Tilantongo to Lady 12 Snake on the day 13 Snake of the year 13 Reed (1051 CE)."

"This arrangement of the bride and groom is a purely pictorial convention, with no connection to the language. This means that no idiom or phrase in the Mixtec language describing two people sitting facing each other is a metaphor for marriage. However, the cup of chocolate held by Lady 13 Snake may represent the expression *ynodzehua*, which means "dowry" in Mixtec, where the root *dzehua* means "chocolate". Chocolate or cacao was one of the most expensive and luxurious products in Mesoamerica, and cacao beans were used as currency. It is no surprise the word for dowry would be based on chocolate."



Aztec statuette
of a male figure holding a cacao pod

More information on chocolate is available from
[the class Chocolate page](#)

at <http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/anthfood/afchocolate.html>.



Aztec statuette
of a male figure holding a cacao pod

Wikipedia

Why chocolate?

No.

It's not **an aphrodisiac**—or at least if it is, there is no scientific proof of that. Phenylethylamine in chocolate *is* an aphrodisiac, but it's not likely that enough of it makes it to your brain while eating chocolate “to make a difference,” so to speak. But there's always the power of suggestion . . . and chocolate sugar pills (placebos) are powerful psychosomatics <<http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/anth4616/cpplacebo.html>>.

As for St. Valentine, as in “St. Valentine's Day,” there are more than a dozen St. Valentines in the Roman Catholic Church, and neither of the two Valentines thought to be responsible for “Valentine's Day” ate chocolate (Valentine of Rome, and Valentine of Terni in Central Italy). And Valentine's Day itself became associated with romance only in the Middle Ages.

Chef Oscar Ortega of Jackson, Wyoming—one of the folks featured in the Who's Who section of the course—won first place in 2016 in the world competition for his praline creation. He is now recognized as one of the world's greatest chocolatiers. And, at least equally important, he's a very nice person <<http://atelierortega.squarespace.com/#oscar-ortega>>.



Locally, **Russell Stover**, nephew to his namesake who created the candy company, served on the City Council of Duluth, MN from 2000-2008 .



More information on **Valentine's Day** is available from the class WebPage at http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/anthfood/afvalentines_day.html#title.

Enjoy your chocolate . . . and Valentine's Day.

Tim Roufs

<http://www.d.umn.edu/~troufs/>