Chocolate and History

Description

Chocolate has a long history in the Philippines and that remains to be written.

While enjoying a cup of hot native chocolate with some off-season puto bumbong during the rainy weekend, I remembered that hot chocolate in our home used to be made from cacao beans from Bohol, Dumaguete, Batangas or Pampanga.
Processed with sugar, the beans were formed into dark chocolate balls or tablets. These balls or tablets were dropped into a copper pot filled with boiling milk or water to make hot chocolate.

The balls and tablets were then dissolved into the liquid using a wood â€œbatirolâ€• that was twirled between the palms to produce a warm frothy drink that, depending on oneâ€™s preference, could be thick or watery. Someone told me that the correct consistency for hot chocolate was to have it so thick you could stand a teaspoon in your cup. I prefer it thick but drinkable.

For added flavor, my mother would add pulverized peanuts or cashew nuts into the brew. Other people laced it with vanilla, cinnamon, or even spice to bring life to an old staple.

CafÃ© Adriatico and the late father-son team of E. Aguilar Cruz and Lorenzo J. Cruz are credited for making â€œchocolate eh,â€• which remains popular in modern times even if it was an old staple referenced in Jose Rizalâ€™s â€œNoli Me Tangere.â€• Translated from the original Spanish by Soledad Lacson Locsin, this quote from Chapter 11 of â€œThe Sovereigns: Divide and Ruleâ€• tells us about chocolate drinking as a marker of social or political importance:

â€œAre you going to the convent to visit [al curita de Moscamuerta] that little dead fly of a priest? Careful! If he offers you chocolate, which I doubt he willâ€¦ but if he finally offers, be on guard. If he calls the servant and tells him: â€˜Fulanito, make a jicara [drinking bowl] of chocolate eh?â€™ then you can stay and not worry; but if he says: â€˜Fulanito, make a cup of chocolate ah,â€™ then pick up your hat and exit running.

â€œâ€˜What?â€™ asked the other man fearfully. â€˜Does he dole out [jicarazos] a poisoned drink? Carambas!â€™

â€˜Man, no; not to that extent.â€™

â€˜So?â€™

â€œâ€˜Chocolate eh means espeso, thick; and chocolate ah means aguado, watered down.â€™

â€œWe believe, however that this was just a calumny of the Alferez [a top military official], since the same anecdote has been attributed to many priests. Unless, of course, this is a practice special to the Order.â€•

Cacao was one of the plant immigrants that came to our shores from Mexico in the early years of the Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade, which connected both ends of the world from 1565-1815. Cacao was one of the crops that changed and formed us into the way we are. One source says that our chocolate is of the Central American Colombian variety, sometimes referred to as the â€œCriollo-typeâ€• in the 17th century.

If we are to believe the Augustinian chronicler Gaspar de San Agustin, cacao trees were brought over by a certain sea pilot named Pedro Brabo, who entrusted them to a priest named Bartolome Brabo, who in turn introduced and cultivated the plants in Camarines. Not to be outdone, the Franciscans lay claim to the introduction of chocolate, avocado, tomato and maize to the Philippines.

Then, of course, we have the Jesuits who are credited with importing cacao to the Philippines between 1663 and 1668. If we are to look at other 17th-century sources, there is a reference to the Portuguese taking chocolate in 17th-century Siam, and their chocolate source was the Spanish West Indies by way of Manila!

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History is littered with the names of warriors and places of battle which may bae important in tracing the development of nations, but there are other ways to skin a cat. Fernand Braudel in his multivolume work on â€œCivilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century,â€• a sweeping work on the â€œStructure of Everyday Life,â€• makes reference to Europe and the introduction of new drinks from abroad: coffee from the Arab world, tea from China, and chocolate from the Americas via Spain. Instead of following the routes of armies or migration, Braudel traced the route of chocolate from Mexico to Spain in the beginning of the 16th century, then to the Spanish Netherlands on to France, then to England by the mid-16th century.

Braudel provides some interesting bits of information like Queen Marie-Therese taking chocolate secretly, a bad habit she picked up in Spain, or Cardinal Richelieu drinking chocolate for its medicinal

properties; Spanish nuns had recommended it â€œto moderate the vapours of his spleen.â€•

In 17th-century Paris, there was a saying that â€œthe great take [chocolate] sometimes, the old often, the poor never.â€•

Half the world away, in 19th-century Philippines, chocolate was taken not just by the Spaniards, or by the rich and powerful, but also by ordinary folks who even mixed sweet chocolate with rice and came up with tsamporado.

In Ramon Reyes Lalaâ€™s book, â€œThe Philippine Islandsâ€• (1898), we read of cacao being planted in small quantities of 10 for private consumption:

â€œThe trees are usually planted in gardens near the house, and the chocolate-paste is made at home. A small quantity of the bean is sent annually to Spain; and there is a factory in Manila for the benefit of those that do not care to trouble themselves with either the growth of the fruit or the preparation of the kernel. The oil of the cocoa is used also for lighting the houses and streets. It is impossible to find better chocolate than that made by the friars of the Philippines. Special pains are taken with the cacao tree, which is planted in the orchards and gardens of the monasteries, and in the manufacture of the paste and in the making of the beverage.â€•

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Ambeth R. Ocampo
Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

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sephra