

Eighteenth Century



Life

***The Cultural
Topography
of Food***

edited by Beatrice Fink

Eighteenth-Century Life
Published Tri-Annually for
The College of William and Mary
by The Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 23, n.s., 2

May, 1999

Chiles, Chocolate, and Race in New Spain: Glancing Backward to Spain or Looking Forward to Mexico?



Thomas Gage, a rare seventeenth-century English visitor to New Spain, observed an unusual ritual in Chiapas. Gentlemen draped themselves casually in their doorways each afternoon “to see and to be seen, and there for half an hour will they stand shaking off the crumbs of bread from their clothes.”¹ Gage ridiculed these “presumptuous and arrogant” Creoles—as Spaniards born in the New World were called—for claiming to pick partridge bones from their teeth when they could only afford to eat beans. Yet his preening dandies tell us much about the racial tensions that continued to swirl around food throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. The fundamental premise of colonial society was the distinction between European conquerors and Indian subjects—the *república de los españoles* and the *república de los indios*. That the Creole gentlemen of Chiapas distinguished themselves from the Native American “people of corn” by eating, or pretending to eat, wheat bread suggests how crucial food was to the ethnic and class identity of New Spain.

With this example in mind, we can ask: did eighteenth-century Mexican cooks create mestizo cuisine, a way of eating that straddled the “two hearths” of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica and early modern Spain? This has been the dominant interpretation through much of the twentieth century, and is summed up by an oft-repeated story² concerning the national Mexican dish, *mole poblano* (mole from Puebla), which was invented around 1680. Defined simply, *mole poblano* is turkey in a deep brown sauce, but no simple recipe exists. The ingredients may include cinnamon, cloves, peppercorns, anise, coriander, chocolate, chiles, almonds, pumpkin seeds, raisins, bread, and tortillas, all combined into one harmonious whole. Supposedly Sor Andrea de la Asunción of the Dominican Santa Rosa cloister in Puebla, one of the more important towns of New Spain, combined Old World spices with New World chocolate and chiles and invented this dish in honor of Viceroy Tomás Antonio de la Cerda y Aragón. No documentary evidence has been turned up in support of this story.³ So just how plausible is it?

To tackle the question, we must return to the two republics. Two separate societies were all well and good in theory but well-nigh impossible to maintain in practice. Imperial policy notwithstanding, the shortage of female settlers in the New World made race mixture inevitable, which led in turn to the development of a system of castes. Peninsular Spaniards claimed a racial superiority over the Creole population, which did indeed include substantial numbers of mestizo children who had adopted the racial identity of their European parent. Other mestizos, scorned by Spanish fathers, were raised as Indians in their mothers’ native communities. But not all people of mixed blood gained acceptance in one or the other society. An urban underclass of mestizos who had adopted European cul-

ture, but lacked a wealthy patron, had little hope for economic advancement. They, along with Africans and mulattos, could find only menial labor, and were referred to contemptuously by élites as *léperos* (street people).⁴

Over time, to the consternation of established Creole families, racial status became more a function of culture and wealth than birth. No discernable genetic differences existed between the "Indian" and "mestizo" categories, and villagers could fit into urban society simply by changing their patterns of dress, hair, and speech. More threatening still, the boundaries between Europeans and mestizos began to erode as lower-class Spaniards lived among the *léperos*. In an effort to shore up the racial hierarchy, Creoles developed an "almost pathological interest in genealogy" reflected in the *casta* paintings. These works constituted a graphic record of élite views of colonial society. Each series contained a number of idealized family portraits cataloguing the racially mixed castes, with labels such as "Spaniard and Indian beget mestizo" along with more bizarre combinations including "coyote mestizo and mulatto woman beget *ahí te estás*" (there you remain). The most famous *casta* collection, executed in 1763 by Miguel Cabrera, included as the final panel a woman beating her husband—the ultimate social inversion stigmatizing these "unnatural" racial combinations. Foods were one important way of distinguishing castes; painters showed darker-skinned subjects with native foods. The artists of two such series depicted tamales (ground maize steamed in a wrapping) in scenes labeled "from *lobo* and Indian woman comes *cambujo*," and "from Indian and *barsino* woman: *zambaiga*."⁵

Initially the Spaniards had not been so dismissive of indigenous foods. When Cortes and his men arrived in Tenochtitlán, where Mexico City now stands, they were as impressed with the range and variety of goods in the markets and with the elaborate food prepared for Moctezuma, as they were by the size of the city, its clean waterways, and its grand plazas. Describing one meal served to Moctezuma, Bernal Díaz del Castillo (who was perhaps mindful of the value of impressing his readers with the grandeur of the city) wrote glowingly of the "more than thirty dishes made according to their fashion and usage" and of the "fowl, wattled fowl, pheasants, native partridges, quail, domestic and wild ducks, deer, peccary, reed birds and doves and hares and rabbits," of the "fruit of every sort," and of the jars of "chocolate with its foam."⁶ The city of Tenochtitlán was surrounded by small gardens built out into the lake and by fields of maize.⁷ Every day porters brought produce into its huge central market where it was sold from an orderly arrangement of stalls and under strict regulation from the authorities. After months at sea and hard campaigning on land, it is no small wonder that the foods of the New World looked inviting to the rough and tumble group of Conquistadors.

Maize, a plant that grew rapidly and yielded bounteously, formed the basis of the diet. Its grains were transformed into a myriad of products. Among the most important were a thick drink or gruel (*atole*) of ground grains of maize boiled with water; soft, warm flatbreads (*tortillas*) made from a wet dough of grain, cooked in an alkaline solution, ground on a saddle quern (*metate*), and then patted into thin discs to be quickly cooked on a clay griddle (*comal*); and soft, spongy, steamed breads (*tamales*). Ranking just behind the maize products were beans, cooked in a clay pot (*olla*) until tender and rich with their own juices.

Tortillas and tamales were eaten with a variety of side dishes and fillings made from local vegetables: sharp green tomatillos, a staggering variety of tomatoes, cactus paddles to be cut into strips, abundant squash, and, above all, chiles, which also came in a myriad of shapes, sizes, and flavors. Based on techniques of toast-

ing and grinding in a mortar and pestle (*molcajete* and *tejolote*), these sauces added flavor to the basic maize breads. Although we know a good bit about the ingredients of these pre-Hispanic relishes, we know very little of the way they were combined and structured into sauces and relishes; and what little we do know comes from accounts of Spaniards, such as Bernardino de Sahagún, subsequent to the Conquest.⁸ These basic ingredients were possibly supplemented by all kinds of additional delicacies: fish from the lake, fowl and game from the countryside, toasted and ground insects, fruits unknown to Europeans, intoxicating pulque from the maguey plant, and chocolate beans to be ground over a warm grindstone and made into a variety of hot and tasty drinks.

Such variety was not available to all the population at all times; as in Europe, strict rules governed who could eat what and when. Indeed, the Spaniards were struck by the frugality of the everyday diet of the average Indian. For most people for most of the year, the diet was sparse, largely vegetarian, and overwhelmingly composed of maize products. Drunkenness was severely punished, and pulque was available only to the elderly or on special occasions. Meats, in particular, formed a much smaller part of the diet than they did (at least for the well-to-do) in Europe.

In no time at all after arriving in Mexico, the Spaniards had begun surveying indigenous foodstuffs and medicinal herbs that might serve as substitutes for the spices they had hoped to find. For example, Francisco Hernández, one of Philip II's royal physicians, was dispatched to New Spain to study its plants, largely in response to concerns about the spread of syphilis. His *Natural History of New Spain* was completed in 1576, even though it was not published until 1646 and then in a heavily edited form. Even earlier, in 1552, a herbal written by a Spanish-educated Aztec doctor had been translated into Latin by Juan Badiano. In the meantime, plants were shipped back to Spain and established there in gardens.⁹

But useful as these plants might be for Spanish livestock and the Spanish poor, whatever potential they might have for the preparation of medicaments, they were not what the Spanish hidalgo ate. Spanish conquistadors may have marveled at the achievements of Aztec civilization, the great city of Tenochtitlán, and the opulent meals of Moctezuma, but they nevertheless set about to obliterate them and build a European civilization in their place. And part of European civilization was European cuisine.

To the Spaniards who followed the conquistadors to New Spain, the food of their home country meant health, status, religion, and race. The well-to-do there ate wheat bread, drank wine, and could afford the most desirable domesticated meats, lamb and kid. They used rice and citrus fruits and almonds and saffron and seasoned their dishes with rare and expensive spices transported all the way from the East.¹⁰ Tenochtitlán may have impressed the conquistadors, but the élite circles of the Viceregal court and the richest convents in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries looked to the culinary traditions of southern Spain. During the Renaissance, this area had shared with the rest of western Europe a cosmopolitan courtly cookery.¹¹ Printed cookbooks authored by the master chefs at the great courts were widely distributed and often translated into a variety of different languages. The chefs themselves were equally cosmopolitan, going from court to court as their masters married or conquered or as they themselves sought out new employment. Within this ambience, the cookery of the southern parts of Spain reigned supreme as the finest and most sophisticated of all.

It was a cookery that already reflected centuries of refinement and reflection. The Romans had introduced their gastronomy to their provinces in Spain, laying the foundation for the diet based on wheat bread, wine, and olive oil. Christians endowed the products of this agricultural triad with multiple religious meanings, incorporating all of them into the rituals of the Church. Wheat was the only grain recognized for the Holy Eucharist; from the eleventh century on, priests could substitute no other bread for the body of Christ.

But this is to get ahead. When in the eighth century the Moors conquered the southern part of the peninsula, the Caliphate of Cordoba became famous for its rich orchards, extensive irrigation works, and flourishing agriculture. It was the westernmost point of the Muslims' astonishingly successful effort to acclimatize crops from the East (mainly India), such as rice, sugar, almonds, and citrus fruits, in all their conquered territories.¹² They transformed these ingredients into a sophisticated cuisine of rich, spicy meat dishes thickened with nuts, cooling drinks, and sticky preserved fruits and milk desserts.

Muslims and Christians alike embedded these foodstuffs not only in their respective theologies, but in the medical theory of the humors. It is unclear whether this derived ultimately from India, Persia, or Greece; nevertheless, there was a widespread belief that good health resulted from a well-tempered balance of hot, cold, wet, and dry fluids in the body. Diet was thought to play an important rôle, perhaps the major rôle, in fine-tuning this balance. Staple foods such as bread, rice, and sugar were considered close to perfect for the human temperament and could be eaten in large quantities with impunity. Other foods, further from the balanced center, could be used with discretion to adjust the body's temperament: spices were hot and dry, most green vegetables cold and wet, and so on. Hence hot-blooded characters were advised to cool down with cooling foods whereas cold-blooded melancholics needed to take hot foods.

By the time the Conquistadors landed in Mexico, the Christians had driven the Moors out of Spain. Notwithstanding that Christian and Moorish diets had so much in common, both materially and culturally, it was the small differences that mattered. Christians ate meats in larger quantities and above all they ate pork, abhorred by Muslims. The Reconquista meant a shift in diet, perhaps not in the direction of greater sophistication, but at least in the direction of meat eating.

The Spaniards thus arrived in the New World with a diet structured along lines of health, class, and race. The well-to-do ate foods that were well balanced in terms of hot and cold, that reflected precisely their place in the class hierarchy, and that marked them off from the infidels while affirming their own religious beliefs. Not surprisingly, then, they set about creating in the New World a diet that duplicated the one that they knew at home—the same foodstuffs, the same kitchen equipment, the same plates and eating utensils, the same cookbooks—to ensure their continued good health, high status, and Christian consciences.

Reviling the native maize as "a more convenient food for swine than for men," they rejoiced to see "beautiful and abundant wheat" beginning to grow on mountain slopes near Mexico City. Until the Spaniards established sufficient mills and bakeries, native women prepared wheat in the only manner they knew—as tortillas.¹³ But settlers invested heavily in everything needed to assure a steady supply of wheat for urban markets: iron plows, draft animals, irrigation, mills and ovens, as well as forced Indian labor to work the fields.

Finding no large grazing animals, the Spaniards imported cattle, sheep, goats,

and pigs (as well as horses and donkeys). Without competition, cattle and sheep multiplied at fantastic rates. Franciscan friars observed that the sight of cattle herds often sent astonished natives fleeing into the mountains. Sheep made a less fearsome sight, but proved more destructive as they nibbled away the plants of the formerly lush Mesquital Valley. In the cities, meat prices fell so low in the sixteenth century that ranchers slaughtered cattle for their hides and left the carcasses to rot.¹⁴ In the case of meat, settlers ate far better than those who stayed behind in the peninsula.

Wine and olive oil never became affordable in New Spain because of unfavorable growing conditions and imperial policy. Lard, already in use in Spain, only increased in importance in the New World. Wines and sherries were imported from the home country for those who could afford it. Less well-heeled colonists adopted the fermented native drink, *pulque*, or the distilled sugarcane liquor, *aguardiente*.

As important as the raw materials were the means of turning them into familiar foodstuffs and dishes. The Spanish imported the European kitchen with its iron cauldron for stews, its tall chimneys for good drafts, and its charcoal fires in raised masonry or adobe benches for simmering, relegating to second place the native tradition's earthenware griddles and pots balanced on hearthstones on the floor.¹⁵ They built dome-shaped brick ovens (*hornos*) for baking bread and pastries, using a design that went back at least to Roman times and they introduced stills for the distillation of essences, including alcohol. The tables of the rich were set with fine pottery decorated in Arabic style or, later, with Chinese porcelain imported through the port of Acapulco. For their more complex, festive dishes, the rich turned to the court cookbooks of Spain, above all Francisco Martínez Motiño's *Arte de Cocina, Pasteleria, Vizcocheria, y Conserveria*, first published in 1611 and frequently reprinted. With five hundred small, densely packed pages of instructions, this remained the major printed cookbook in use in New Spain throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁶ New Spain itself, with its sparse scattering of people, many of them not even Spanish speaking, was not populous enough to support its own printed cookbooks; the few New World cookbooks remained in manuscript only.

At first, as part of their evangelizing mission, Spanish priests sought to spread their own food habits to the natives. Father Bernardino de Sahagún instructed them to eat "that which the Castilian people eat, because it is good food, that with which they are raised, they are strong and pure and wise.... You will become the same way if you eat their food."¹⁷ But the Indians were no more enamored of wheat bread than Spaniards were of tortillas. Indian chronicles rejected bread as being "like famine food...like dried maize stalks."¹⁸ When left to their own devices, Native Americans almost invariably planted corn instead of wheat, in part because they found the foreign grain distasteful, in part because it yielded poorly and was expensive to mill and bake.¹⁹

Even so, changes in the native diet did creep in. Indian *caciques* emulated European habits of riding horses, carrying swords, wearing wool clothes, and at times, eating wheat bread. Gradually the native peoples acquired a taste for beef and pork, but often preferred to buy it from Spaniards rather than care for the troublesome animals themselves. They raised the more manageable chickens, smaller versions of the native turkey, and indeed the Nahuatl word *Castillan* means "land of chickens."²⁰ They learned to make fluffier tamales by beating in lard. And a taste for intoxicating drinks swept the country as the old rules governing

sobriety were replaced by the new order.²¹ Especially in the growing cities, those of mixed race and even Indians became increasingly accustomed to European foods. Indians who worked in urban bakeries, often as a result of labor drafts or jail sentences, obtained a reputation for deviant behavior immortalized in lewd, eighteenth-century songs and dances such as the *Baile de los panaderos* (the dance of the bakers).²² Nevertheless, by the eighteenth century, bread was eaten, at least occasionally, by even the poorest urban dwellers.

Forgetting that some of their number had earlier tried to convert the natives to Spanish foods, the Creoles now felt threatened. Ruling over a multiracial society, Spaniards lived in mortal fear of losing the respect of the lower classes, for any appearance of going native could undermine the legitimacy of their privileged status. The élites of New Spain viewed people of mixed blood as outcasts, economically necessary perhaps, but hardly human. Writers ignored the castes in their works, and painters depicted them in the same way they categorized flora and fauna. The élites concerned themselves greatly with outward displays of status, as did European colonists throughout the New World. English sugar planters in the Caribbean, for example, spent enormous sums of money importing food, clothes, and furniture to maintain a life-style appropriate to their social position. They followed European standards regardless of the discomforts involved in eating meat-laden banquets on humid afternoons or in wearing woollen coats and trousers under the tropical sun. As historian Richard Dunn notes, this reflected European customs where "Each rank in the social order, from aristocrats at the top to beggars at the bottom, had its own distinct style of dress, diet, and habitation.... So the masters dressed and ate like gentry in England, while the slaves...went semi-naked and ate tropical produce."²³

In the face of the threat posed by racial mixing, we would expect chefs, cooks, and housekeepers to have determined to retain the structure of Spanish cuisine: its staple and the kinds of condiments that were thought of as at one and the same time healthy, socially appropriate, and morally correct. Foods gained acceptance among the élite only when they appeared to be Creole adaptations of Spanish dishes rather than descendants of the pre-Hispanic cuisine of corn. New World ingredients had to be assimilated to the culinary ethos imported by the Spaniards from Europe. Turkey and other American game were easy to fit into Spanish recipes for stewed chickens or roasted partridges. Indigenous beans often replaced the traditional Iberian chickpeas, known because of their tough skin as "musket balls."²⁴ The acid tomatoes (tomatillos) and jitomates (our tomatoes) could go into sauces reminiscent of the green sauce of cosmopolitan European cookery.²⁵ Fruits such as guava, cherimoya, and mamey could go into the fruit pastes and syrups of Europe as well as imported quinces and apples and peaches.

Other ingredients required a little more ingenuity. Two of the most important were chiles and chocolate. Chile pepper quickly acquired a reputation as a food that was not only piquant to the taste but hot in the system of humors. By 1577, Nicholas Monardes, a Spanish physician who wrote one of the first treatises on New World plants, enthused that "It dooeth comforte mucho, it dooeth dissolve windes, it is good for the breaste, and for them that bee colde of complexion: it dooeth heale and comforte, strengthenyng the principall members."²⁶ Certified as a healthy foodstuff and filling a rôle similar to that occupied by the expensive, imported black pepper, chiles quickly became incorporated in Creole cuisine. Red *ancho* peppers imparted a delicious new piquancy to *chorizo*, an already-spicy smoked sausage from Extremadura. Unsmoked Creole chorizo, made with New

Spain's "very sweet and savory" pork, particularly from the valley of Toluca west of Mexico City, rivaled the Old World's finest sausages.²⁷

Chocolate was a little more difficult because it had no Old World equivalent. It did have class, however: beans had been used as coinage, and the beverage the Aztecs prepared from them was reserved for the highest political and religious uses.²⁸ Modified by heating and by the addition of sugar and sweet spices, and accompanied by a new and expensive set of utensils, the beverage became fashionable among those at the pinnacle of Spain's social hierarchy. Its medicinal properties and theological import were debated by priests and doctors in a scholarly literature that extended over a couple of centuries. It was a cooling substance, according to the general consensus, and could be used to good effect by those with hot temperaments. Many theologians were of the opinion that it was just a drink, not a food, and thus could be taken even during the fasts demanded by the Church (though the more strict Dominicans dissented from this belief). Given the circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that it became the most popular beverage of New Spain.

With this in mind, let us return to the problem of *mole*. There is no doubt that the Creole elite in eighteenth-century New Spain relished *mole*-like dishes. The manuscript cookbooks of the period attest to this. Cookbooks naturally have to be studied with caution as they are at best only approximate indicators of what people actually eat. However, they are much better indicators of what people aspire to eat, and therefore are useful in our case. Several of these manuscripts have been edited in recent years and we shall consider two in particular. The first is the *Libro de cocina* from the Convent of San Jerónimo in Mexico City.²⁹ For a long time this book was attributed to the leading seventeenth-century intellectual, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, but the fact that it is written on eighteenth-century paper means that it was at least copied, and perhaps even written in the eighteenth century. It is a slim collection of not more than forty recipes. The other is a much more substantial volume, the *Recetario de Dominga de Guzmán*, composed around 1750.³⁰

The *Libro de cocina* includes few meat dishes, the *Recetario* many more. In both cases they are meat dishes that would have been completely familiar in the seventeenth-century Spanish court: stews in spicy sauces, in nut sauces, made into pies, or stuffed in vegetables. They include typically Spanish ingredients, cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, saffron, capers, raisins, and olives, along with New World chiles. Consider, for example, the *Conejos en mollo* (Rabbits in sauce), a recipe that appears in almost identical terms in both Martínez Motiño and Guzmán. It consists of a base of fried onions to which rabbits were added, seasoned with pepper, nutmeg, and ginger, stewed with stock and finished with vinegar and saffron.³¹ In another recipe, in Guzmán, for *Nogada portuguesa* (Portuguese nut sauce), chickens were quartered and simmered with cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, saffron, and a little vinegar; once cooked they were fried and sauced with a mixture of cloves, cumin, garlic, breadcrumbs, and ground nuts (p. 71). This sauce would later form part of a Mexican national dish, *chiles en nogada* (stuffed chile peppers), but the idea clearly derived from Iberia; a cookbook published in Madrid in 1699 by Diego Granado gave a recipe for stuffed cabbage in "a composition called *nogada*" (*Libro del arte*, p. 98).

When the authors of these cookbooks thought their dish was specific to New Spain, they made it quite clear. In one interesting juxtaposition, Guzmán pairs a recipe entitled *Morisco* (Moorish) with one called *Mestizo*. The first uses onion,

oregano, mint, parsley, garlic, cumin, ham, sausage, cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, and capers among the ingredients to cook chicken; the second drops the expensive spices but adds tomato. In short, eighteenth-century Mexican recipes for *mole*-like dishes are based on techniques and ingredients that would have been familiar to any cook in the elite courts of Europe. In both cases, the lavish use of expensive Asian spices served as a mark of conspicuous wealth, and a single recipe would include combinations of ingredients such as cinnamon, cloves, peppercorns, garlic, and sugar. Cooks based their sauces on meat broths, often mixed with wine, and added ground almonds for taste and texture.

That the manuscript cookbooks were intended to continue the tradition of European courtly cookery is born out by their numerous recipes for confectionary. Sweet dishes, mainly prepared with fruits, eggs, and milk represented in Spain (and before that in Islam) the apex of modernity and complexity. As such, they were outside the repertoire of the everyday cook and ingredients, timing and other instructions carefully noted down in recipe collections. This emphasis reinforces our suspicion that the urban Creoles were looking over their shoulders to their European forebears.

Cookbooks from colonial Peru also contained dishes similar to *mole*, further confirming the strong ties between Spanish foods and the Creole kitchens of New Spain. In particular, the *Libro de Cocina* of Doña Josepha de Escurrechea, published in the silver-mining town of Potosí, in 1776, would have seemed familiar to any Mexican Creole. In addition to sweets of milk, eggs, sugar, and fruit (such as *huevos molles*), there were numerous stews using expensive Old World spices, as well as the *gigotes*, *manchamanteles*, *nogadas*, and *pipianes* that were found in New Spain. One typical recipe for chicken suggested that the fowl be cooked slowly in a closed pot with sliced onion, lime, tomatoes, chiles, parsley, saffron, cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, oregano, and lard, to be finished with oil and olives. Another specified that the chicken be quartered, marinated for a day in an unspecified adobo, then floured, fried, and simmered with onions, tomatoes, green chiles, parsley, cloves, cinnamon, black pepper, raisins, almonds, and roasted garlic, before adding a final thickening of dried bread crumbs.³² There was no turkey, scarcely surprising as it is not a Peruvian bird, nor much chocolate. But allowing for regional differences, Doña Josepha's book contained many dishes that would now go by the name of *mole*.

Why, then, is *mole* taken to be a mestizo dish? There seem to be two reasons: first, it contains New World ingredients such as turkey, chile, and chocolate. As we have seen, though, these were simply slipped into a well-defined structure for making sauces and preparing meat dishes. From the point of view of the diner, they were a continuation of well-established tradition, not a new departure.

Second, the name *mole* appears to have a Náhuatl origin. Josefina Velázquez de León, for example, whose cooking school and numerous cookbooks did much to systematize Mexican cooking in the middle of this century, stated: "Among our oldest and most famous dishes of genuine Mexican origin is the 'Mole de Guajolote [turkey],' known in the days of the Aztec empire before the Conquest. The word 'mole' is derived from 'molli' or 'mulli' which mean 'sauce.'"³³ This we do not dispute. We simply want to reiterate the point that Creoles were eating dishes we would now refer to as *mole* before they were christened as such. Instead they were called *gigotes*, *manchamanteles*, *guisos*, *alcaparrados*, all good European names. In the manuscript cookbooks we have examined, references to the word *mole* are rarely found and even then can be deceptive.

Guzmán offers one meat *mole*, a “Mole de sesos,” which appears to be a very simple dish of soaked ancho chiles, garlic and calves’ brains (p. 177). In the *Libro de Cocina*, there is a *clemole*, a stew of pork, chicken, and chorizo with cloves, garlic, cinnamon, raisins, and chiles. Beyond these two examples, however, there is nothing. The recipe for *Huevos moles* (Mole Eggs) in the *Libro de cocina* on inspection turns out to be a confection of sugar, wine, and egg yolks.³⁴ And in the *Recetario*, there is the “Conejo en Mollo” we have already referred to. *Mollo* was the Portuguese word for sauce (Martínez Motiño came from northern Spain, close to the borders of Portugal), and it was pronounced ‘molio’ with the ‘li’ as in ‘vermilion.’³⁵ Perhaps there was some crossover with the similar sound of ‘mole.’ But it is our sense that for *mole poblano* to have gained elite status in such a hierarchical world, it must have been viewed as a Creole rather than a mestizo dish, a supposition confirmed by the existence of the dish in Creole cuisine prior to its being given a Nahuatl name. To Creole tastes, then, we believe, *mole poblano* represented a New World version of European cooking.³⁶

Our interpretation of *mole* as a dish deriving from the Old World is given further credence by scattered archival records that confirm the vital importance of European cuisine as a status symbol throughout the eighteenth century. At its beginning, the archbishop of Mexico City had recorded that a catastrophic wheat plague in 1692 reduced more than forty thousand residents “who had not used this food before” to eating tortillas.³⁷ At its end, Mexico City restaurant owner Carlo Monti, in a lawsuit brought against Francisco Zapari in 1805, itemized a series of unpaid meals. The menus comprised exclusively Spanish foods such as *pucheros* (a one-dish soup-stew of beans, vegetables, and meat), salads, wines, and for Christmas Eve, the traditional Iberian dried cod.³⁸

In sum, we suggest that the cooks of the elite in the eighteenth century were casting a backward glance over their shoulders to the elite cooking of peninsular Spain and not gazing forward to a nationalist Mexico. What they could not anticipate was that, from the retrospect of the early twentieth century, their *manchamanteles* and *moles* and *chiles en nogada* would look like early signs of mestizo Mexican identity. The reason is simple: just as throughout the eighteenth century changes crept into elite Creole cooking in Mexico—chiles and chocolate, more lard and more beef, turkey and squash and beans—so too food in Spain was changing, although along a different trajectory. Motiño’s recipes were already old-fashioned by the beginning of the eighteenth century. By its end, Spaniards, like other Europeans, followed the French in abandoning their medieval heritage of spicy tastes in favor of bland foods they considered more natural and healthful. By the time of Mexican Independence, these two trajectories had diverged sufficiently that Creole Mexican food was quite different from elite Spanish food. Indeed, Spaniards criticized what they regarded as Mexico’s outlandish spicy food, causing patriotic Mexicans to assert their dedication to the chile.

By the time of the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century, elite Mexican food had changed yet again as a result of strong French influence in the late nineteenth century. So when, on 12 December 1926, in the national newspaper, *Excelsior*, the story of the origins of *mole* appeared, it quite plausibly appeared to the readership as an authentically Mexican dish, something quite different from contemporary Spanish or French food.³⁹ It lent itself to the ideology of the influential *indigenista* movement, which exalted mestizos as the embodiment of the Mexican nation, currently being conceptualized in the works of philosopher José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*, 1927), and archaeologist Manuel

Gamio, *Forjando patria (Forging the Fatherland, 1916)*. The movement entered Mexican popular culture through the murals of Diego Rivera, the films of Emilio "El Indio" Fernández, and the symphonies of Carlos Chávez, as well as through twentieth-century cookbook authors.⁴⁰ These authors who glorified colonial *moles* as "mestizo" cuisine displayed the nationalist ideology of modern Mexico rather than the hierarchical mentality of the colonial period. What had actually been created in the eighteenth century was not so much a mestizo cuisine as two separate cuisines: a Creole cooking style based on wheat bread in the cities, and Native American foods centered around corn tortillas in the countryside. The mestizo tradition invented by twentieth-century intellectuals and artists bore little resemblance to the Creole élite's image of colonial mestizos as degenerate. When those gentlemen of Chiapas went out on their doorsteps to brush bread crumbs from their ruffled collars, they were not celebrating mestizo nationalism but reaffirming elite social status and Creole identity.



Rachel Laudan
Guanajuato, Mexico

Jeffrey M. Pilcher
The Citadel



NOTES

1. *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World*, ed. J. Eric S. Thompson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981), p. 141.

2. See, e.g., *Encuentro de dos fogones: Historia de la comida criolla en México* (Mexico: Promoción e Imagen Editores, 1992), chap. 2, where the well-known novelist, Paco Ignacio Taibo I repeats this story, as does Jesús Flores y Escalante, *Brevísima historia de la comida mexicana* (Mexico: Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Fonográficos, A.C., 1994), pp. 92–93.

3. Manuscript cookbooks of the 18th century have been examined by José Luis Juárez, "La lenta emergencia de la comida mexicana, ambigüedades criollas 1750-1800" (Lic. thesis, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1993), pp. 60–61; and Rosalva Loreto López, "Prácticas alimenticias en los conventos de mujeres en la Puebla del siglo XVIII," in Janet Long, ed., *Conquista y comida: Consecuencias del encuentro de dos mundos* (Mexico: UNAM, 1996), pp. 481–504. See also Elizabeth Lambert Ortiz, "Mole Poblano and Turkey," *Petits Propos Culinaires* 3 (1979): 33–34.

4. Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967); John K. Chance, *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: Stanford Univ., 1978).

5. María Concepción García Sáiz, *Las castas mexicanas: Un género pictórico americano* (Milan: Olivetti, 1990), pp. 86 & 98.

6. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Inst. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, 1982), pp. 184–86.

7. Sophie D. Coe, *America's First Cuisines* (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1994), and Yoko Sugiura and Fernán González de Vara, *México Antiguo*, vol. 2 of *La cocina mexicana a través de los siglos* (Mexico: Editorial Clío, 1997) and Fernán González de Vara, *Época prehispánica* vol. 1 of *ibid.*

8. *General History of the Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1950–82).

9. Janet Long, "América en Europa después de 1492," in *Conquista y comida*, pp. 171–82; and Esteban Hernández Bermejo y Angel Lora González, "El transporte recíproco entre América y Andalucía de especies agrícolas de interés alimentario," in Antonio Garrido Aranda, ed., *Cultura alimentaria Andalucía-América* (Mexico: UNAM, 1996), pp. 177–212.

10. Xavier Domingo, "La cocina precolombina en España," in Janet Long, ed., *Conquista*

y *Comida*, pp. 17–229; Lucie Bolens, *La cuisine andalouse, un art de vivre. XIe-XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1990), and Bernard Rosenberger, “Dietética y cocina en el mundo musulmán occidental según el *Kitab al-Tabij*, recetario de época almohade,” in Antonio Garrido Aranda, ed., *Cultura Alimentaria Andalucía-América* (Mexico: UNAM, 1996), pp. 13–55.

11. For this see Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Chronique de Platine: pour une gastronomie historique* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992); Barbara Wheaton, *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300 to 1789* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1983), and Terence Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995).

12. Andrew M. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1983); Bolens, *La cuisine andalouse*.

13. Cheryl English Martin, *Rural Society in Colonial Morelos* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico, 1985), p. 12. Quotes from John C. Super, *Food, Conquest, and Colonization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico, 1988), p. 33; Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas & Doris Heyden (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma, 1971), p. 255.

14. François Chevalier, *Land and Society in Colonial Mexico: The Great Hacienda*, ed. Lesley Byrd Simpson; trans. Alvin Eustis (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1970), pp. 84–94; Elinor G. K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1994); Super, *Food, Conquest, and Colonization*, pp. 26–28; Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972), pp. 75–79.

15. Maria Stoopen, “Las Simientes del Mestizaje en el Siglo XVI,” and María Cristina Suárez y Farías, “De Ámbitos y Sabores Virreinales,” in *Los Espacios de la Cocina Mexicana* (Mexico: Artes de Mexico, 1997).

16. Janet Long, *La Nueva España* vol. 4 of *La cocina mexicana a través de los siglos* (Mexico: Editorial Clío), p. 14.

17. Qtd. in Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona, 1989), p. 166.

18. James Lockhart, ed., “*We People Here*”: *Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1993), p. 80.

19. Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810* (Stanford: Stanford Univ., 1964), pp. 203, 224–26; Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, vol. 1 of *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, trans. Siân Reynolds (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 120; Alejandra Moreno Toscano, “Tres problemas en la geografía del maíz, 1600–1624,” *Historia Mexicana* 14 (Apr. 1965): 631–55.

20. James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford Univ., 1992), p. 278.

21. Sonia Corcuera de Mancera, *Del Amor al Temor: Borrachez, catequesis y control en la Nueva España (1555–1771)* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), part 3. William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford Univ., 1979), pp. 34–40.

22. Virginia García Acosta, *Las panaderías, sus dueños y trabajadores. Ciudad de México, siglo XVIII* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores de Antropología Social, 1989), pp. 53, 73–81; Sergio Rivera Ayala, “Lewd Songs and Dances from the Streets of Eighteenth-Century New Spain,” in William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French, eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1994), pp. 27–46.

23. *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina, 1972), pp. 263–64.

24. Jan Read, Maite Manjón, and Hugh Johnson, *The Wine and Food of Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), p. 38.

25. Barbara Santich, *The Original Mediterranean Cuisine* (Totnes, Devon: Prospect, 1995), p. 62.

26. *Joyfull Newes Out of the New Founde Worlde* (1577), trans. John Frampton; ed. Stephen Gaselee (London, 1925), I, 48.

27. Quote from Super, *Food, Conquest, and Colonization*, p. 29; Diana Kennedy, *The Cuistines of Mexico* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 194–97.
28. Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), chaps. 1–5.
29. *Libro de cocina. Convento de San Jerónimo. Selección y transcripción atribuidas a Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Mexico: Inst. Mexiquense de Cultura, 1996).
30. Ed. Guadalupe Pérez San Vicente (Mexico: Sanborns, 1996).
31. Francisco Martínez Motiño, *Arte de Cocina, Pastelería, Vizcochería y Conservería* (Valencia, 1715), p. 37; Guzmán, *Recetario*, p. 108.
32. Beatriz Rossels, *La gastronomía en Potosí y Charcas, Siglos XVIII y XIX, 800 recetas de la cocina criolla* (La Paz: Editora “Khana Cruz,” 1995), pp. 148–49. See also Vincent C. Peloso, “Succulence and Sustenance: Region, Class, and Diet in Nineteenth-Century Peru,” in John C. Super and Thomas Wright, eds., *Food, Politics, and Society in Latin America* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1985).
33. *Mexican Cook Book for American Homes* (Mexico, 1955), p. 12.
34. Guzmán gives a similar recipe (p. 152).
35. We are grateful to Dr. Regina Igel of the Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese at the Univ. of Maryland for help with this pronunciation.
36. For medieval dishes, see Sarah T. Peterson, *Acquired Taste: The French Origins of Modern Cooking* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ., 1994), pp. 1–14.
37. Qtd. in R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1994), p. 129.
38. Qtd. in Juárez, “La lenta emergencia,” pp. 107–08.
39. Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico, 1998), chaps. 3 & 6.
40. Adela Fernández, Emilio’s daughter, repeats the *mole* story in *La tradicional cocina mexicana ys sus mejores recetas* (Mexico: Panorama, 1985), pp. 32–33.

