# AMARANTH, CHIA, CHOCOLATE AND THE AZTEC

Vanderbilt Center for Latin American Studies Professional Development Workshop: September 7, 2017

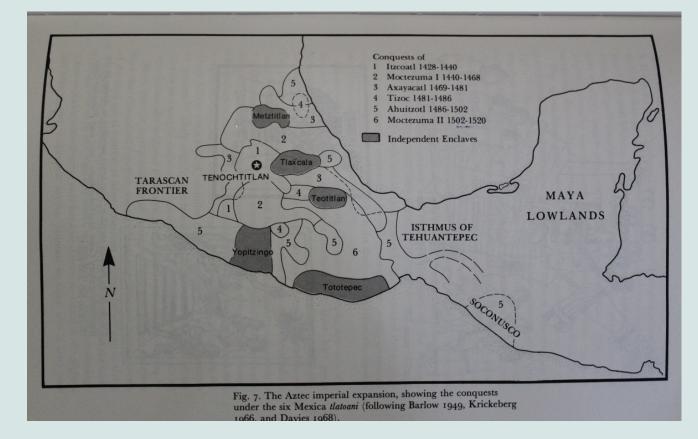
#### THE AZTEC

Teotihuacan: 200-700 CE (Classic Period), extensive trade networks throughout Mesoamerica

Toltec (Tula): 900-1150 CE

1150: Nahuatl-speaking immigrants from northern Mexico arrive in Central Mexico, and population explosion by 1350

Triple Alliance: Mexica, Texcoco, Tlacopan (1428)



### **AZTEC EMPIRE**

Tenochtitlan and Mexica leadership

Agriculture: terraces, irrigation canals, chinampas (floating gardens of Lake Texcoco)

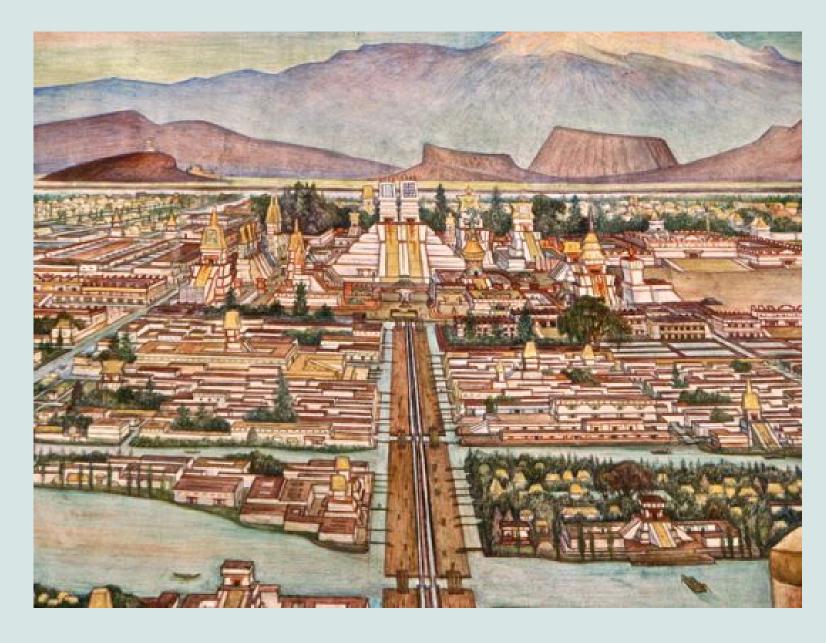
Well organized long-distance trade networks

Polytheistic religion

Healers

1519: Cortés arrives to Tenochtitlan

Export of flora and fauna, and loss of knowledge



## **SOURCES**

Accounts from conquistadors, priests, and others

Codices: Historical Accounts, Ritual Almanacs, and Tribute Records

Archeology and Paleoethnobotany

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Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España (Bernardino de Sahagún)



Codex Mendoza: Founding of Tenochtitlan



### PRE-COLUMBIAN CROPS

Four sisters: corn, beans, amaranth, and squash

Maize domesticated: 7000 BCE

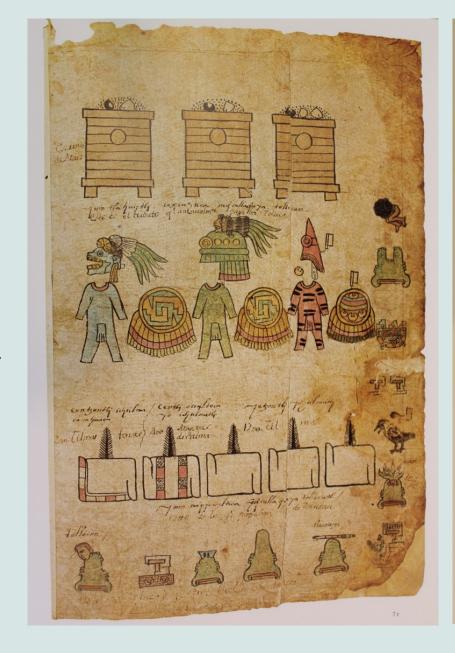
Amaranth domesticated: 5000-4000 BCE



# AMARANTH: HUAUTLI

Amaranthus cruentus: Important foodstuff, tribute, and component of religious rituals

Primary form of tribute, along with corn, beans, and chia





# CULINARY USES OF AMARANTH

Leaves: high in protein, rich in vitamins and iron

Seeds: contain all essential amino acids

#### **Culinary uses:**

- Huahuquiltamalli (tamales)
- Cuahquilmolli (sauce)
- Tortillas
- Drinks made from popped and ground seeds





# RITUAL USES OF AMARANTH

Amaranth Tamale Feast (Huahtamalcualitzli): popped amaranth tamales offered to god of fire

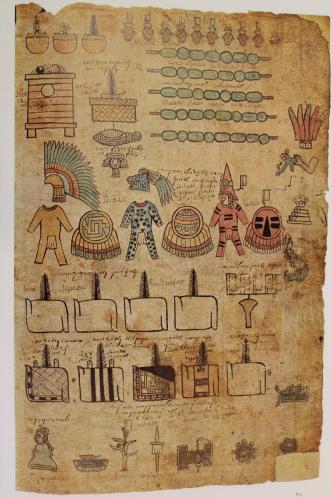
Tzoali: symbolizes flesh of gods

Spanish arrival and systematic destruction of native religious practices

Alegría, atoles, tamales

Contemporary movements to encourage amaranth cultivation and consumption





### CHIA: CHIAN

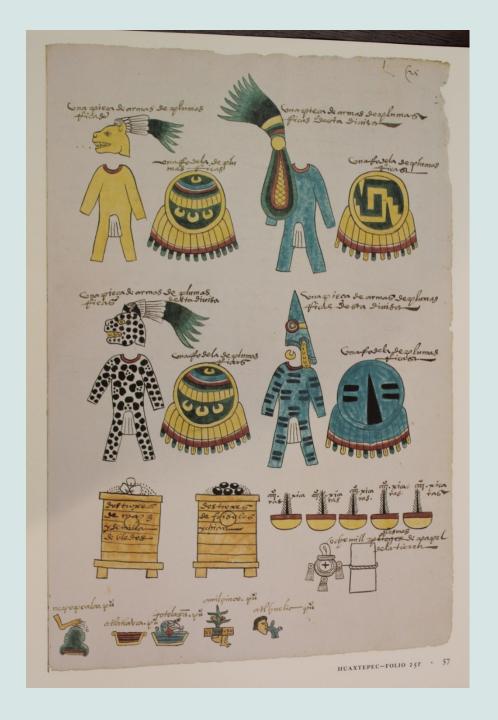
Salvia hispanica; member of the Lamiaceae family (mint and sage)

One of four major tribute crops

Medicinal, culinary, and artistic uses







# MEDICINAL USES OF CHIA SEEDS

- High in omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, antioxidants, manganese, phosphorous, and calcium
- Gastrointestinal
- Skin
- Fever
- Respiratory issues
- Urinary tract
- General malaise
- Obstetrics



Florentine Codex

#### CULINARY AND RITUAL USES OF CHIA





Chianpinolli: seed flour used to make tortillas, tamales, and chianatoles

Whole seed chia beverages

Chia oil: lacquer and body paint

Chia as an offering

### CACAO

- Evidence of cacao residues dating to 1800
- 1500 BCE at Olmec sites
- Olmec (and Mayan): ka-ka-wa
- Aztec: xocoatl
- Theobroma: food of the gods; native to the northern Amazon
- T. cacao ssp. cacao
- T. cacao ssp. sphaerocarpum (Forastero)
- Consumption and processing of cacao:
  - fermented beverage made from fruit
  - bitter beverage made from beans





### XOCOATL CONSUMPTION AMONG THE AZTEC AND SPANISH

- Aztec: xocoatl was an elite beverage, important in feasts
- Cacao beans as money
- 16<sup>th</sup> century trade of cacao and import from lowland regions to Tenochtitlan
- Spanish control of cacao trade production in New Spain and export to Europe
- Cacao production today: Ivory Coast, Brazil
- High in antioxidants, lower LDL cholesterol and blood pressure, improve memory



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### CROPS NATIVE TO THE AMERICAS





