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Zapotec (Zapotecan)
Mitla

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THE MAKING OF CHOCOLATE AND ROPE

Submitted by:
Hilda Halloran
November 1949

ORIENTATION

In this paper is described the processes of the making of chocolate and rope as made by the Zapotecos of Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Chocolate is a drink that figures largely in the celebrating of the all important phases of Zapoteco life: christening of a baby, betrothal and marriage, holidays, mayordomías (feast days held in honor of the patron saints of people). No matter what else is served, this drink is always served. Sra. Asunción Goopar de Lopez , through text from, gave the information.

Sr. Amado Martínez kindly demonstrated the rope-making process and gave further information concerning it.

THE MAKING OF CHOCOLATE

The proportions and ingredients of chocolate are as follows: One kilo, which is two pounds and two ounces, of cocoa beans, three kilos of sugar, two ounces of cinnamon.

The woman takes her metate, which is a "curved stone, in the shape of an inclined plane, resting on three feet"¹, and with a long round stone, called the hand of the metate, she first grinds the sticks of cinnamon. Taking the cocoa beans, she grinds them until they become a fine powder. Even though the sugar is granulated, this also is ground until much finer. All of these ingredients are mixed together, a small fire is built under the metate, and as the powdered mixture is ground together, it melts. It is then put into little molds. When satisfactorily molded, the chocolate is taken out and put aside to harden and use when desired or sold.

mas?

1. Velázquez, Spanish Dictionary


ROPE MAKING

When ready to make mescal (amnative liquor) which is made from the heart, the maguey cactus plant's leaves are cut. These are sliced lengthwise, tied at one end, and taken to the river in which small partially dammed-up places are made. Here the leaves are soaked for eight days.

After the period of soaking, the man goes to the river equipped with his wooden implements (see pictures), squats down beside a big stone by the stream on which he will pound the fiber. Some men have wooden saw-horse like apparatus which they place in the stream and on which they pound.

Curving the soaked fiber around one of his hands, he takes the wooden hammer in his other and pounds on the end of the fiber. Every so often, he pauses, rinses the fibers, then resumes his beating until satisfactorily completed. At this stage the fibers resemble a long piece of taffy.

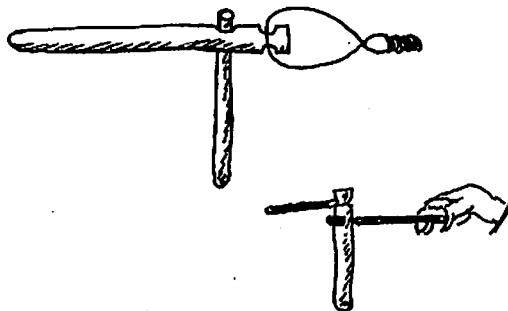
Hands of steel wring it out and with several quick, deft shakes, the excess water is out and the fiber is laid in the sun to dry.

Another way of pounding the fiber was also used. A long flat board was placed in the water where there was a slight falls. Two large stones were used to weight it down. Two large strands of fiber were loosely looped together  and placed on the board. The knot was at the top and was stood on while the loose end was pounded and scraped. The water constantly runnd so it is not necessary to stop and rinse. When this end is finished, it is looped together and the other end is unwound and pounded.

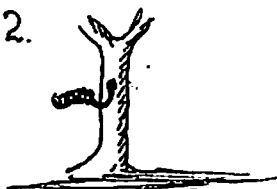
After the sun has dried the fibers, the winding process begins. Trained hands twist the right amount of fibers around the end of the winding instrument (see next page)¹. While one person whirls with not too fast speed, another takes the fibers in hand. While one hand holds the end, the other feeds enough strands to keep going the piece of rope and to make the desired width.

When the rope is long, it is placed on a hook and wound tighter.² If a thick rope is desired, several of these small ropes are twisted together by means of a stone wheel.³

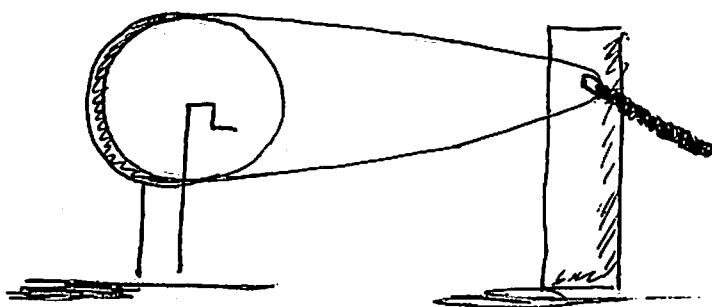
1. Winding instrument:



2.

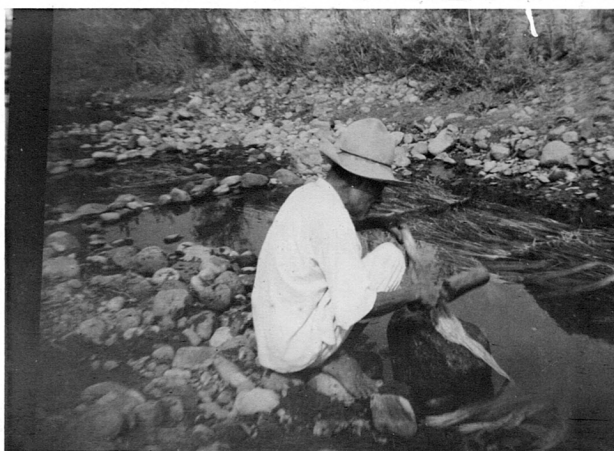


3.





Fibers soaking. Notice board and wooden scraper in left background.



Pounding the soaked fibers. In background small dams can be seen



Rinsing the pounded fibers