Guatemala, a country in the middle of Central America, is often considered the “birthplace” of chocolate, as the ancient Mayans worshipped the cocoa tree and consumed much chocolate. The Mayans are an ancient civilization who lived in parts of what we know today as Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

When the Mayans ate chocolate, they usually had it as a drink called Xoconochco or Suchitepequez, which are two words in the ancient Mayan language. Unlike typical milk chocolate that we drink today, the Mayans preferred the drink bitter and spicy, adding chilies and cornmeal to the cacao mixture. Cacao has health benefits, such as reducing blood pressure and boosting energy, which makes it a popular ingredient both during the ancient Mayan civilization and now.

Today, Guatemala produces 1,000 tons (which is 2,000 pounds) of chocolate per year, and the main variety of cacao is called “Criollo.” Criollo was the most prominent cacao bean 200 years ago, but it is now fairly rare given the tree’s susceptibility to disease.

Are you wondering what the difference is between cocoa and cacao? Cacao is the unprocessed bean inside the fruit of the cacao tree (its scientific name is Theobroma Cacao). There are 20 to 40 cacao beans inside each fruit. Once the cacao has been processed in order to eat, the name changes to cocoa.