

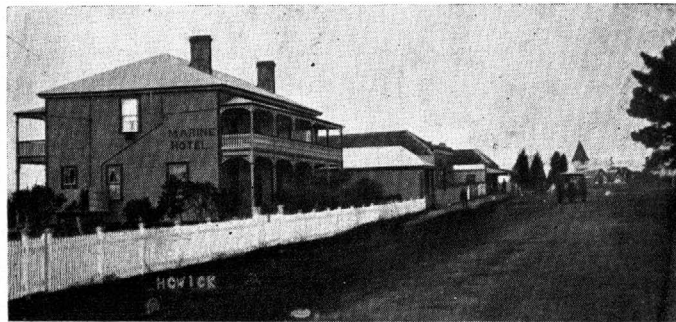
COSIMO'S JASMINE CHOCOLATE

Maria Teresa Corino

In the 1600s, European rulers practiced chocolate diplomacy. They filled precious caskets with small tablets of roasted cacao, itself a new and prized ingredient, compounded with the rarest and costliest flavourings from the old and new worlds. Designed to be whisked with water and sugar into chocolate drinks, they kept and travelled well. They were sent as princely gifts, to advertise the wealth and refinement of their makers.

This is an extract from the most recent draft of my novel/master's thesis *Cacao*, which explores chocolate-making in Guatemala and Italy in the baroque era. The jasmine chocolate recipe of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, the Medici, was a state secret for many years. I've taken liberties with the truth only at the margins: all the named characters are real people. I've tried to step into the actual recipe, briefly sketched in a private letter, and imagine how it may have come to be developed.

While preparing this piece for the 2020 Symposium of Gastronomy I discovered that the variety of jasmine, *Jasminum sambac*, called 'mugherino' by Cosimo III's coterie, which was eventually adopted for his prized jasmine chocolate, is still used in China to make jasmine tea. The technique is very similar. So I may now have to introduce into this scene a Chinese resident of Firenze, or a Florentine traveller to China.



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