Preface

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*I believe in miracles
Where you from, you sexy thing?
I believe in miracles
Since you came along
You sexy thing*

“YOU SEXY THING,” HOT CHOCOLATE, 1975

THIS VOLUME BEGAN WITH SOME QUESTIONS. THE first was posed when we asked each other how our two research projects, one focused on alcohol in Maya Guatemala and the other on chocolate in Central America and the Atlantic, might provide a fruitful area for collaboration. Very quickly we decided that we wanted dialogue with scholars doing similar work on other ingested commodities in the region broadly centered on colonial Mesoamerica. The initial result of those discussions was a double session held at the American Society for Ethnohistory meetings in Indianapolis on October 8–11, 2014. All the contributors to this volume participated in those sessions, and we were also fortunate, then and now, to have two commentators, Marcy Norton and Carla Martin, to provide a deep historical and rich contemporary context. We would like to thank them for their insights, as well as those who attended the sessions.

A second question guiding us through organizing the session and planning this volume was fundamental: why ingested commodities? Alcohol and chocolate, tobacco and sugar, peyote and hallucinogenic mushrooms are taken into the body, yet none is a dietary staple. Collectively (and often individually) they straddle modern conventional divi-

sions between food and drugs, medicines and ritual objects, frivolous luxuries and daily necessities. A shared focus on these substances not only interrogates such divisions but also opens up new avenues for considering colonial Mesoamerica across other divides: Spanish, African, and indigenous; producer and consumer; and the local and the global. Following the paths of these substances as they intersected across the colonial Mesoamerican world led us to fascinating places we would not have reached working alone. For that we are very grateful to our contributors for their enthusiastic and thoughtful collaboration over the past two years.

A last set of questions arose as we moved toward publication and sought to deepen our consideration of the two key concepts of this volume's title. Through their insightful comments and critiques, Frederick Smith and an anonymous reviewer encouraged us to engage these questions more profoundly: How did these substances seduce? When and how did they come to be desired and then needed, even by those who had never encountered them before? Exploration of these questions across the diverse range of substances, times, places, and peoples represented here reveals how the individual pleasures of consumption were shaped by social, cultural, economic, and political constraints. As other scholars have pointed out, it was no simple process of swapping out one substance, such as pulque, for its closest new equivalent, such as wine. Instead, the way they seduced sometimes followed the original sense of the word as "leading astray" from duty or rectitude, by persuading the consumer to ingest as a sensual, personal endeavor. From this viewpoint, the seductiveness of a substance seems to grant a certain degree of agency to the substance itself. This agency may be seen to arise simply from the pharmacological effects of the tobacco, alcohol, hallucinogen, sugar, and so forth. Yet the genesis of desire (as well as its repetition) also involves a certain degree of fetishism, and each of the contributions in this volume directs us toward complicated, fascinating, and illuminating social relations. The act of ingesting is of less significance than its collective results in markets and politics, which were often far-reaching. As the chapters show, seduction was a dynamic process with many moving parts and actors, and people and things did not stay the same. The investigation of the substances discussed in this volume illuminates the colonial Mesoamerican world and, we hope, sheds light on the dynamics of seduction in general.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE REVIEWERS AND OTHER critical readers for their careful attention to bringing out the relevance

of our investigations. We owe a debt of gratitude to the staff of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University and Gabrielle Vail of the Maya Codices Project for their generous, swift, and skilled aid with crucial illustrations. Janet L. Steins, Associate Librarian for Collections and Research Librarian at the Tozzer Library at Harvard University, gave outstanding guidance and speedy access to vibrant images that only the Tozzer has. The volume is much richer for their help. We would also like to thank Casey Kittrell, Angelica Lopez-Torres, and the rest of the editorial staff of the University of Texas Press for their encouragement and support in making this volume a reality. As John Cheever put it, “I can’t write without a reader. It’s precisely like a kiss—you can’t do it alone.” The same can be said of colleagues and editors; even individual contributions come into being through collective effort. The work of this volume has shown us that the dynamic of seduction is one of increasing knowledge, not as a lonely enterprise but in concert. Both appreciation and knowledge grow when shared. In fact, they are intertwined; as knowledge increases, affection can blossom, and awareness can heighten with deepening enchantment. Seduction makes it imperative to embrace what seems distant and elusive: knowledge must be discovered, interrogated, and understood to bring together what seemed disparate.

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Substance and Seduction

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