

OFFERINGS FROM XOCHILHUITL: THE FEAST OF XOCHIPILLI



Statue of the god, Xochipilli from the National Anthropological Museum in Mexico City

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PROJECT SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

For the cultura theme of something brought back from a pilgrimage, I chose to interpret “brought back” a bit more loosely. There’s less documentation of extended pilgrimage in the Mexica world but that certainly doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. With large ceremonial centers throughout the Basin of Mexico and temples to various gods built throughout the city of Tenochtitlan, it seems highly unlikely that only residents of the city came to worship there.

Coming across an account of the festival of the god Xochipilli in the Florentine codex gave me the idea of a pilgrim -perhaps a young noble or artisan- coming from the outer edges of the empire and visiting the city for the first time. Seeing and experiencing new foods and flavors that they might take back home to make their own offerings or prepare for special occasions. A spiritual journey resulting in the broadening of worldly experiences seemed like it would be a common theme across cultures, faiths, and time.

I’ve prepared a pepita and vanilla atole and quail egg tamales with a green chili salsa. While the passage describing the offerings doesn’t go into detail on the flavors or exact presentation I took descriptions from noble feasts and food vendors elsewhere in the codex to assemble the recipes. I cannot be exactly sure that what I’ve made is what would have been offered, but my goal was to create a meal that would have looked and tasted familiar to Nahua pilgrims and priests before the Spanish conquest.

XOCHIPILLI: THE PRINCE OF FLOWERS

Xochipilli is a Nahua god associated with flowers, pleasure, singing, fertility and joy. The Florentine codex translates his name as “Noble Flower” or “Main One in Charge of Giving Flowers.” He was particularly venerated by nobles, fine artisans, and other Nahua elite. The Florentine codex describes him as ‘...the god of those who lived in the lords’ houses or in the nobles’ palaces’¹.

The primary surviving image we have of Xochipilli is a statue that shows him covered in glyphs and images of a wide range of flora and with a trance-like expression on his face (see cover page). A number of the plants he’s depicted with are responsible for altered states. Tobacco flowers, Psilocybin, and “Seed of the Virgin” or *ololiuhqui* all appear on his effigy².

Ololiuhqui in particular is associated with him and was also used to treat syphilis, tying together Xochipilli’s connection with both psychedelic experiences and sexually transmitted disease and other afflictions of the genitals.



Ololiuhqui, a kind of morning glory

¹ Historia General de las cosas de la Nueva España, Book 1 Folio 12r

² González Romero, Osiris. “Xochipilli: Psychedelic Plants, Song, and Ritual in Aztec Religion.”

With the heavy emphasis on psychoactive plants in his imagery it is very possible his worshippers would partake in mind altering substances during his festival, xochilhuitl to enter the *temicxoch*, or “The Flowery Dream”.

For the four days leading up to the climax of the festival, worshippers would fast. They would only eat once a day and forgo sex or else be punished, *‘this god was very offended at this; and that is why he would attack those who did so with diseases of the private parts, such as hemorrhoids, rotting of one’s privy member, boils and tumors, et cetera’*³. Xochipilli was also prayed to for relief from these afflictions.

After days of fasting, a young man would dress as the god and dance in Xochipilli’s temple while priests would preside over food offerings as well as both animal and human sacrifices. The faithful would pierce themselves with maguey thorns in the ear, lip or tongue in an act of auto sacrifice as well.

THE OFFERINGS

RECIPES

VANILLA AND PEPITA ATOLE

During the fast preceding the height of the festival worshippers would have *atolli* (spelled atole in modern spanish) the codex refers to the recipe as *‘painted atole’* due to it being served with flowers on top. This porridge made of masa (ground nixtamalized corn), chia, amaranth, or a number of other seeds and nuts could be served hot or cold, sweet or savory. The text also mentions that those fasting would refrain from eating chilies with their food.

Taking the description into account I put together a recipe that would be subtle enough for a fasting food, but palatable enough for a more well to do pilgrim. Taking from a description of an *atolli* vendor from book 10 folio 68v, I decided to make a toasted masa atole with ground pumpkin seeds and vanilla sweetened with honey.

Recipe

1 ½ cups hulled pumpkin seeds

4 cups masa harina

¾ tablespoon Mexican vanilla extract

Honey to taste

Dried flowers for garnish

³ Historia General de las cosas de la Nueva España, Book 1 Folio 12r

I started by grinding the pumpkin seeds into a fine flour in my vitamix. After the seeds were mostly ground I added about two cups of water to make pumpkin seed milk.



Setting that aside, I toasted the 4 cups of masa harina in a dry pot for about 5-7 minutes or until it was a light tan color and my kitchen smelled like popcorn.

I took the pot off the heat and stirred in the pumpkin seed milk and another 6 cups of water, stirring consistently to avoid clumping. Once the consistency was correct I added the vanilla extract and honey while the atole was still warm. I strained the final porridge to ensure as smooth a mouth feel as possible.

The edible flower mix I was able to acquire does have marigolds, but it also includes roses and lavender, both eurasian plants. If I recreate the recipe in the future I hope to use fresh flower petals from my garden from indigenous mexican varieties.

QUAIL EGG TAMALES AND GREEN CHILMOLLI

The text describes an offering would be made at the temple of Xochipilli on the fifth day of xochilhuitl that consisted of ‘...five tamales. These are like round loaves of bread made of maize, neither too thick nor too round, which were called “fasting bread.” They were large, with an arrow stuck on top, which they called *xochmitl*, This was an offering from the whole town.’⁴ a separate bowl of *chilmolli*, fresh pepper sauces or salsas, would have been served alongside these tamales. However, there is not a description of the filling or flavors for either of these foods.

Later in the passage, there’s a description of quails being sacrificed. From that inspiration, I decided to use quail eggs as the filling for my tamales. Scenes of noble feasts from book 8 of the codex include turkey egg tamales, so I thought this might not be too far off. Since I thought these tamales would need to have more masa than usual to fill in the gaps between the eggs I decided to go with a flavored masa.



Feasting from the Florentine Codex

I took a pumpkin tamale recipe that I had previously created for a fundraiser lunch for grit wars in 2024 and adapted it to cut out the ingredients introduced after the Spanish conquest.

⁴ Historia General de las cosas de la Nueva España, Book 1 Folio 12v

For the sauce I wanted something bright that would contrast with the savoriness and color of the tamales. Eventually, I opted for a pre hispanic salsa verde tweaked to avoid being too spicy so that more people could enjoy it.

Recipe

Tamales

6 cups masa harina
1 can pumpkin puree
2 cups corn oil
Dried epazote
Salt
Annatto
Canned quail eggs
Corn husks

Chilmolli

About 12 tomatillos
2 poblano peppers
Small handful of culantro

For the tamales I prepared the masa according to my base recipe, mixing together the masa and oil before crumbling in some dried epazote, adding a can of pumpkin, and about 2 tablespoons of powdered annatto for a more intense orange color. After adding some more water and mixing by hand until it was consistently smooth and fairly sticky I covered it and set it aside to rest for about an hour.



In the meantime I rinsed the canned quail eggs and prepped my corn husks for wrapping.

Once rested and fully hydrated the dough becomes much less sticky. I layed the masa fairly thick on the cornhusks to ensure there would be enough to fully surround the eggs. I placed two eggs in each tamal to make sure they wouldn't be lopsided.



After filling I placed them in a large dutch oven and steamed them for about an hour before turning off the heat and letting them slowly cool off for another hour.

While the tamales cooked, I roasted the poblano and tomatillos to soften them a bit and add some flavor. I added them to the culantro and blended until I had a bright green, thin, chili sauce





Sources

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3. "How Were Xochipilli and Xochiquetzal Linked?" *Mexicolore*, www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/ask-us/how-were-xochipilli-and-xochiquetzal-linked. Accessed 01 Apr. 2026.