WHAT CAN ANCIENT CHOCOLATE TELL US ABOUT CONNECTIONS IN THE AMERICAS?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Scientists have found the earliest known traces of cacao east of the Mississippi River. They discovered signs of cacao DNA on pottery fragments from Etowah in present-day Georgia. The pottery was made about 1,000 years ago by people of the Mississippian culture, who built large earthen mounds. Cacao grows naturally in tropical parts of Central and South America, so it could not have grown near Etowah. This suggests that beans, recipes or ideas travelled over long distances through trade and personal connections. People in the region probably drank a bitter chocolate drink during a feast linked to the building of a mound. Researchers had to test the pottery carefully to make sure the DNA was ancient and had not come from modern contamination. The discovery challenges the idea that Indigenous societies in North America were isolated from one another.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The story shows that people in the ancient Americas travelled, traded and shared ideas across huge distances long before European arrival. It also reminds us that history can be hidden in unexpected places. Tiny traces left inside broken pots can reveal connections between communities that lived 1,000 years ago.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“How could cacao have travelled from Central America to Georgia?”

Source: Smithsonian Magazine

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/ancient-pottery-reveals-the-earliest-known-traces-of-chocolate-east-of-the-mississippi-painting-a-picture-of-connec