Cornbread Connections

Using only traditional (pre contact) methods, it could take one yearly cycle to make a wheel of cornbread. This means that there is something to do in each season of the year to properly prepare corn. Traditional Haudenosaunee cornbread is boiled and usually made from White Corn that has first been lyed with hardwood ash (similar to the process of nixtamalization using limestone). If we think of all the things that are necessary, if we go through the whole process, we can fill almost every day in the yearly cycle, and relate to all areas of the environment. To have corn, we must plant, cultivate, harvest, dry, and store it. It is not a plant that we gather growing in the “wild.” We must first find the appropriate plants (medicines) to gather to add to water to soak with the corn seed. This is to protect the corn seed and acts as a natural insecticide. When planting, we sing seed songs as a way of expressing thankfulness and asking for a good crop. After harvesting, we husk and braid the corn to be hung up to dry for several months. In the meantime we could make the utensils needed for preparing and cooking. In keeping with traditional methods, we could use a bone husking pin for removing husk. We will need a clay pot for cooking corn in, so we would have needed to gather clay. For firing pots, we would need to burn wood, so we would need to cut down trees. We would need to know which trees were appropriate. We could then save the ashes that will be needed for lyeing the corn. After cooking in ashes, we need to strain and rinse the corn in a corn washing basket, woven from black ash splints, so we would have to know how to identify trees and pound the splints and weave them. After washing the corn, we need to pound it to make the flour. A corn pounder would entail identifying trees, burning a log and scraping to make the large mortar and pestle. We would also need to carve out the large pounder. After making the flour, we add boiling water to form the wheels of cornbread and add them to boiling water with a wooden paddle. Often people will add beans or nuts, seeds or berries to the bread, and maybe maple syrup on top, so all of those processes would be added. All of this goes into eating one meal of cornbread! By doing it this way, or even just reading about it this way, we can see how food, land/environment, language, people, art and technology are all related.

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