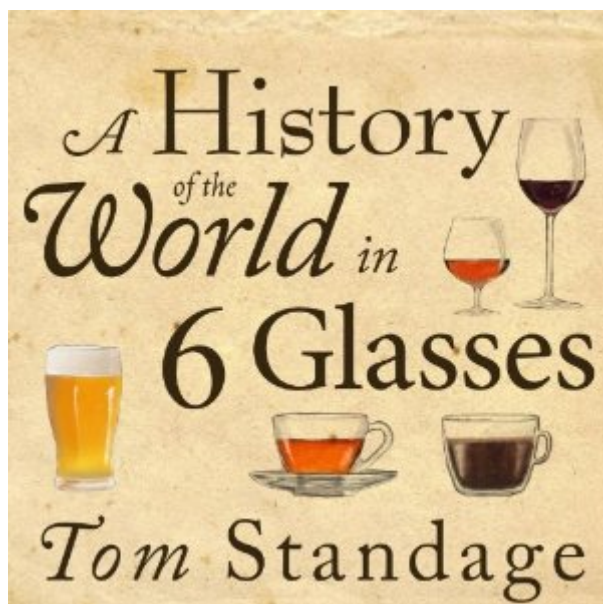


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A History Of The World In 6 Glasses



Synopsis

Throughout human history, certain drinks have done much more than just quench thirst. As Tom Standage relates with authority and charm, six of them have had a surprisingly pervasive influence on the course of history, becoming the defining drink during a pivotal historical period. *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* tells the story of humanity from the Stone Age to the 21st century through the lens of beer, wine, spirits, coffee, tea, and cola. Beer was first made in the Fertile Crescent and by 3000 B.C.E. was so important to Mesopotamia and Egypt that it was used to pay wages. In ancient Greece, wine became the main export of her vast seaborne trade, helping spread Greek culture abroad. Spirits such as brandy and rum fueled the Age of Exploration, fortifying seamen on long voyages and oiling the pernicious slave trade. Although coffee originated in the Arab world, it stoked revolutionary thought in Europe during the Age of Reason, when coffeehouses became centers of intellectual exchange. And hundreds of years after the Chinese began drinking tea, it became especially popular in Britain, with far-reaching effects on British foreign policy. Finally, though carbonated drinks were invented in 18th-century Europe, they became a 20th-century phenomenon, and Coca-Cola in particular is the leading symbol of globalization. For Tom Standage, each drink is a different kind of technology, a catalyst for advancing culture by which he demonstrates the intricate interplay of different civilizations. You may never look at your favorite beverage the same way again.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a good example of why history is fun. Tom Standage has investigated the origins of six

beverages: beer, wine, spirits, coffee, tea, and Coca-Cola and has found innumerable connections, interconnections, and insights into not only the histories of the drinks themselves but also their impacts on the larger human story. The links Standage finds, for example between coffee and the Enlightenment or tea and the Opium Wars or wine and beer and their effect on class and cultural tensions in Greece and Rome, just a few of the many insights you'll find in the book) are fascinating. Standage also provides one of the most succinct but thorough dissections of the globalization debate I have ever seen in his coverage of "Coca-Colonization." *A History of the World in Six Glasses* is much more than just a history of six beverages. It is history as it should be written (and taught).

Do you ever wonder where some people find the most interesting things to say at parties -- like how tea aided longevity in China or raised life expectancy in Europe? Well it is this kind of book that drives that knowledge. Standage has created a very enjoyable, brisk read that is definitely for fun and to load up on fun facts. By telling the world's history in six glasses (see below) Standage covers a lot of ground and sure he misses a lot, but it's still fun non-the less.

- 1) Beer -- a basis for why people replaced hunting with farming
- 2) Wine -- the civilizer of Greece and Rome
- 3) Hard Spirits -- slavery, the American Revolution
- 4) Tea -- the life sustainer and improver
- 5) Coffee -- the fuel for the enlightenment
- 6) Cola -- particularly Coca-Cola the expression of cultural dominance.

Sure you have heard some of these stories before, but this book presents history in a fun and entertaining light. So when you go to order your next beer know that you are engaging in high civilization even in a sports bar.

Breathing is essential, but the air is free and no one has found a way to make it special enough that people will pay for the privilege, unless you count the hits of pure oxygen that some favor. Eating is essential, and of course there are countless ways that the activity has been turned into a trade. Between them, as far as the body's needs go, is drinking, that is, drinking water, and while there is a pretty good trade in more-or-less pure water, it's the stuff that is added to water that has changed history. Or, at least, that is the view of Tom Standage in the sprightly *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* (Walker & Company). An overview of world history that is based on what people imbibe might seem to be a theme too narrow to tell us much, but this enjoyably breezy overview looks into science and culture through the millennia and shows that humans took a physiologic necessity and used it to shape the ancient, classical, and modern worlds. Beer, for instance, gave us history itself. The workers who built the pyramids were paid in beer, and Egyptians would greet each other with

the phrase "Bread and beer," a genial wish for prosperity. The pictures of Egyptians enjoying their beer show them doing it together, using straws communally inserted into a big jar of beer; using straws kept the floating stuff at the top from being ingested. Wine, by contrast, was the drink of the elite ever since it spread through ancient Greece. It is remarkable that thousands of years later, though the categories have merged somewhat, beer has remained the working man's everyday drink while wine has remained an exotic, fit for connoisseurship and social differentiation. Rum was "The world's first global drink" and a key part of the slave trade as well as of the American drive to independence. George Washington eventually distilled whiskey at Mount Vernon, but when he campaigned for the House of Burgesses in 1738, he distributed, besides wine and cider, twenty-eight gallons of rum and fifty of rum punch. This went to a county with only 391 voters. The use of coffee took off in European coffeehouses, and the tradition of coffee being a thinking beverage continues; we have Internet caf  s rather than internet bars. Tea was a perfect drink for sober, productive attendants of the machines that powered the industrial revolution, and tea breaks were part of the job. Coca-Cola was sold until 1865 as a medical elixir, but since not everyone is ill but everyone gets thirsty, it was thereafter marketed as a drink, not a drug. Coke was an all-American drink and the harbinger of the consumerism of globalization, largely due to its participation in World War II. Soldiers all over the world wanted this liquid bit of home while they were overseas, and the Coca-Cola company was happy to oblige them, especially since it got an exemption from sugar rationing as a product essential to the war effort. The soldiers eventually came back home, but the company continued distribution to the locals. Standage comes around in an epilogue to our basic beverage, water. There is an amazing paradox that now in nations which have good water supplies, people are bypassing them to buy bottled water. This is despite bottled water having no real advantages; it is not more nutritious or pure, and it might even be more likely to grow germs. It also costs hundreds or thousands more than tap water. But trendy bottled waters are not really a problem; access to water is, with a fifth of the world's population not having reliably safe drinking water. Water wars loom in various areas of the globe, and may well do as much shaping of our future as the other six drinks have in bringing us to the present. Standage's entertaining tour of thousands of years of drinking history makes plain that what we drink will continue to change the world in unexpected ways.

An entertaining and easily-read book that casually traces the impact of beer, wine, spirits, coffee, tea and Coke on human history. There are a few new tidbits of information and interesting factoids, but nothing particularly earth-shattering here. If you're looking for intriguing details on the order of

"Salt: A world history" or "Potato: How the humble spud changed the world" you'll be disappointed. That said, this is a good starting point for anyone interested in learning how consumables can impact history. An reviewer referred to one of the author's other books as a 'McBook' which is probably equally accurate here. But there's certainly room in the world for the literary equivalent of a Big Mac and fries. It may not be tremendously nutritious or flavourful, but it's tasty enough.

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