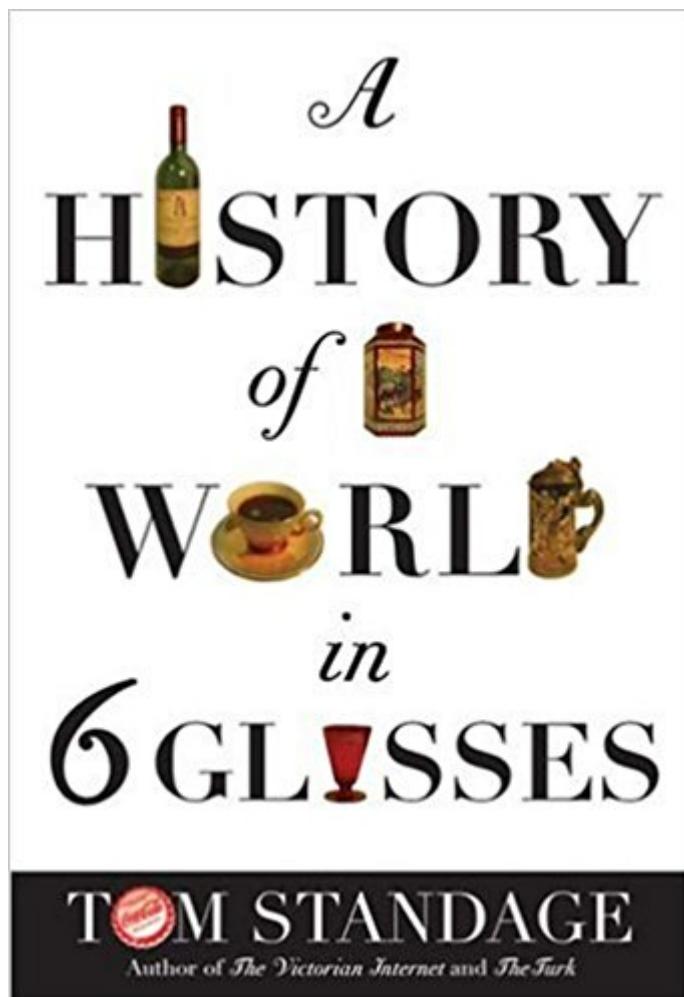


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# A History Of The World In Six Glasses



## **Synopsis**

From beer to Coca-Cola, the six drinks that have helped shape human history. 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 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 drink the same way again.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Starred Review. Standage starts with a bold hypothesis—“that each epoch, from the Stone Age to the present, has had its signature beverage”—and takes readers on an extraordinary trip through world history. The Economist’s technology editor has the ability to connect the smallest detail to the big picture and a knack for summarizing vast concepts in a few sentences. He explains how, when humans shifted from hunting and gathering to farming, they saved surplus grain, which sometimes fermented into beer. The Greeks took grapes and made wine, later borrowed by the Romans and the Christians. Arabic scientists experimented with distillation and produced spirits, the ideal drink for long voyages of exploration. Coffee also spread quickly from Arabia to Europe, becoming the “intellectual counterpoint to the geographical expansion of the Age of Exploration.” European coffee-houses, which functioned as “the Internet of the Age of Reason,” facilitated scientific, financial and industrial cross-fertilization. In the British industrial revolution that followed, tea “was the lubricant that kept the factories running smoothly.” Finally, the rise of American capitalism is mirrored in the history of Coca-Cola, which started as a more or less handmade medicinal drink but morphed into a mass-produced global commodity over the course of the 20th century. In and around these grand ideas, Standage tucks some wonderful tidbits—“on the antibacterial qualities of tea, Mecca’s coffee trials in 1511, Visigoth penalties for destroying vineyards”—ending with a delightful appendix suggesting ways readers can sample ancient beverages. 24 b&w illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Historian Standage explores the significant role that six beverages have played in the world’s history. Few realize the prominence of beer in ancient Egypt, but it was crucial to both cultural and religious life throughout the Fertile Crescent, appearing even in the Gilgamesh epic. Wine’s history has been recounted in many places, and its use to avoid often-polluted water supplies made it ubiquitous wherever grapes could be easily cultivated. Spirits, first manufactured by Arabs and later rejected by them with the rise of Islam, played a fundamental role in the ascendance of the British navy. As a stimulant, coffee found no hostility within Islam’s tenets, and its use spread as the faith moved out of Arabia into Asia and Europe. Tea enjoyed similar status, and it bound China and India to the West. Cola drinks, a modern American phenomenon, relied on American mass-marketing skills to achieve dominance. An appendix gives some modern sources for some of the primitive beers and wines described in the text. Mark KnoblauchCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I am a brewer at a commercial brewery in New Jersey. One of our customers recommended this book to me. I highly enjoyed it the first time I read it and will certainly enjoy it the next time. I liked this book so much that I purchased both the paperback and Kindle editions. If you like history or beverages -- you are going to like this book.

A History of the World in 6 Glasses covers the material as advertised, walking through human history via beer, wine, spirits, tea, coffee and soda (Coca-cola primarily). Anyone looking for a riveting story or in depth historical perspectives will need to dig deeper in other sources. The book gives a nice (if often dry) summary around the various beverages and the historical context, and will likely be the impetus for me to do a little more reading in some areas of history that piqued my interest in the broad overview covered within. Kindle and Audible versions (listened to this one).

Very interesting and a writing style that makes you want to read on. I enjoyed the book immensely. This book is not a deep examination of history, but rather a light, fun read for a lazy afternoon or before bed. Would definitely recommend to history aficionados.

My grandson was reading this book for his AP World History class. I started looking at the book and thought it looked pretty interesting so I got it on my Kindle. Wow! What a great book! I learned so much about the history of all our well known beverages and how they tie in with world history. I would never have guessed that it would turn out to be such an enjoyable read!

I loved this book because it put history into a different sort of context, pulling together threads of the story of humans in a way that other books don't. I loved every page of it, and yes, it really does tell a history of the world.

I keep referring to stories that I learned about in the book, and my friends who have read it love recounting those stories! The best part (no spoilers intended) is the end where the author indicates places that exist where close to original recipes can be enjoyed. A fun but scientific and historic book for people who love to understand where their beverages come from.

This book was very informative without becoming too long or in a textbook format. I didn't realize that you could take six different drinks and sum up history using them, but Standage did and it worked really well. He went into great detail when explaining the major drinks of history: beer, wine,

spirits, coffee, tea, and Coca-Cola, as well as their impact on society and world history. Everything in history directly or indirectly correlates to other parts of history, as was shown in this book. The drinks that made history are still a part of our daily lives. My favorite part of the book is that it covers thousands of years, yet it doesn't read as such. This book isn't necessarily a quick read. It's of a thicker size, but the amount of information in this book cannot be compacted any more. It's filled with many quotes, a few pictures, and a lot of analysis. All of it flowed in a way that you would expect with him detailing history and then analyzing the information in relation to the drink being discussed. It helped the information and quotes from other sources make sense. Overall I enjoyed this book and I would recommend this book to other people who enjoy history.

As the author points out, there is a natural subdivision to the book, which is that the first three beverages are alcoholic and the last three are caffeinated. There is another way of looking at it, and that is the means used to achieve a drink that wasn't a health hazard. The first three drinks achieve germ-killing by fermentation, the next two by boiling, and the last through technology. The era of beer is associated with the Agricultural Revolution and the growing importance of cereal grains. Geographically, the region of focus is the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. Among the more interesting points of discussion is the role of beer (along with the related commodities of cereal grains and bread) in the development of written language. The era of wine is associated with the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome. Readers of the classics will be aware that wine was much celebrated among the Greeks and Romans, so much so that they developed gods of wine in their mythologies (Dionysus and Bacchus, respectively.) Of course, wine played no small role in Christian mythology as well--e.g. Jesus turns water to wine. Spirits are related to the Colonial period, though they were first developed much earlier. The author emphasizes that these were the first global drinks. While beer and wine were robust to going bad, they could spoil in the course of long sea voyages. Alcohol of all kinds has always attracted opposition. This conflict, of course, owes to the fact that people under the influence of alcohol frequently act like idiots. One might expect that the transition to discussion of non-alcoholic beverages would correspond to the end of controversy, but that is not the case. Each of the beverages brought controversy in its wake. There were attempts to ban coffee in the Islamic world where its stimulative effect was conflated with intoxication. Coca-Cola became associated with capitalism and American influence, and drew its own opposition because of it. It seems there is no escape from controversy for a good beverage. The most fascinating discussion of coffee had to do with the role of coffee as corollaries to the internet.

Centuries before computers or the internet as we know it, people went to cafÃ©s to find out stock values and commodity prices, to discuss scholarly ideas, and to find out which ships had come and gone from port. The role of tea in world history is readily apparent. Besides the aforementioned Boston Tea Party, there were the Opium Wars. This conflict resulted from the fact that the British were racking up a huge tea bill, but the Chinese had minimal wants for European goods. Because the British (through the East India Company) didn't want to draw down gold and silver reserves, they came up with an elaborate plan to sell prohibited opium in China in order to earn funds to pay their tea bill. Ultimately, Britain's tea addiction led to the growing of tea in India to make an end-run around the volatile relations with China. The book lays out the history of Coca-Cola's development before getting into its profound effect on international affairs. A large part of this history deals with the Cold War years. While Coca-Cola was developed in the late 19th century, it was really the latter half of the 20th century when Coke spread around the world traveling at first with US troops. The most interesting thing that I learned was that General Zhukov (a major Soviet figure in the winning of World War II) convinced the US Government to get Coca-Cola incorporated to make him some clear Coca-Cola so that he could enjoy the beverage without the heart-burn of being seen as publicly supporting an American entity (i.e. it would look like he was drinking his vodka, like a good Russian should.) General Zhukov was perhaps the only person to stand in opposition to Stalin and live (the General was just too much of a national hero to screw with.) There's also an interesting story about how the cola wars played out in the Middle East. Both Coke and Pepsi wanting access to the large Arab market, and were willing to forego the small Israeli market to pave the way for that access. When Coke finally had to relent due to public outrage and accusations of anti-Semitic behavior, Pepsi slid in and followed Coca-Cola's policy of snubbing Israel in favor of the Arab world. I enjoyed this book, and think that any history buff will as well. One doesn't have to have a particular interest in food and beverage history to be intrigued by stories contained in this book.

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