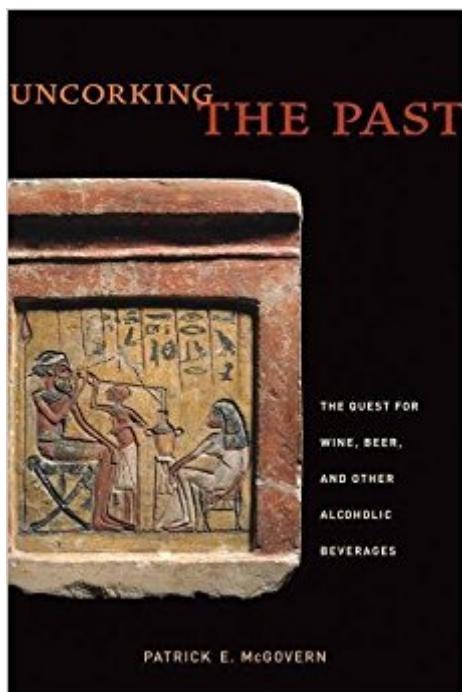


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Uncorking The Past: The Quest For Wine, Beer, And Other Alcoholic Beverages



Synopsis

In a lively tour around the world and through the millennia, *Uncorking the Past* tells the compelling story of humanity's ingenious, intoxicating quest for the perfect drink. Following a tantalizing trail of archaeological, chemical, artistic, and textual clues, Patrick E. McGovern, the leading authority on ancient alcoholic beverages, brings us up to date on what we now know about how humans created and enjoyed fermented beverages across cultures. Along the way, he explores a provocative hypothesis about the integral role such libations have played in human evolution. We discover, for example, that the cereal staples of the modern world were probably domesticated for their potential in making quantities of alcoholic beverages. These include the delectable rice wines of China and Japan, the corn beers of the Americas, and the millet and sorghum drinks of Africa. Humans also learned how to make mead from honey and wine from exotic fruits of all kinds—even from the sweet pulp of the cacao (chocolate) fruit in the New World. The perfect drink, it turns out—whether it be mind-altering, medicinal, a religious symbol, a social lubricant, or artistic inspiration—has not only been a profound force in history, but may be fundamental to the human condition itself.

Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; Reprint edition (October 30, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520267982

ISBN-13: 978-0520267985

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 18 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #71,084 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #58 in Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Beverages & Wine > Beer #67 in Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Beverages & Wine > Wine & Spirits > Wine #86 in Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Archaeology

Customer Reviews

“McGovern's delving, detailed in this fascinating book, leaves little doubt that humans are born drinkers.” (New Scientist 2009-12-13) “A magnificent study, skillfully written and well illustrated.” (Choice 2012-04-01) “Takes his reader on a world tour, examining the archeological record for alcohol use across continents and cultures.” (Nature

2009-10-29) "Highly informative and challenging." (California Grapevine 2010-07-01) "In this engaging book, Patrick McGovern gives us a world tour of the origins of alcoholic beverages." (John Gava Law Society Journal 2011-11-01) "A remarkable book, both erudite and entertaining." (Gastronomica 2012-01-01)

"Patrick McGovern has written his masterpiece. He takes us on an engrossing, multifaceted journey through the complex relationships between human cultures and alcoholic beverages of all kinds. In doing so, he develops a new context for human history." (Brian Fagan, author of *The Great Warming and Fish on Friday*) "Fascinating, wide-ranging and erudite. When it comes to ancient beverages, Patrick McGovern is the dean of the subject." (Tom Standage, author of *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* and *An Edible History of Humanity*) "In *Uncorking the Past*, Patrick E. McGovern charts the enchantment of human beings with alcoholic beverages from their initial discoveries of fermented honey, fruits, and grains to the perfection of elaborate means for producing, storing, transporting, and consuming treasured spirits. McGovern's gaze is truly global, spanning all the continents, but it is also microscopic, penetrating to neural pathways, genes, and molecules. This is a story told with verve and passion, yet one that is endlessly entertaining and highly informative." (Victor H. Mair, co-author (with Erling Hoh) of *The True History of Tea*) "An eminently accessible, sweeping, and thought-provoking history of fermented alcohol." (Max Nelson, author of *The Barbarian's Beverage: A History of Beer in Ancient Europe*)

So says Patrick McGovern, and this book explains how it got that way. McGovern theorizes that organisms great and small, perhaps from the unicellular to non-human primates to humans, are hard wired to crave the products of sugar fermentation, particularly alcohol. This taste for fermented beverages has been a driving force in the evolution of human biology, agriculture, culture and religion, or so it would seem. McGovern documents this evolution through archeological findings from Europe, Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East -- anywhere and everywhere wine, beer and other alcoholic beverages have been made for many thousands of years, from grain, fruit, honey and whatever other raw material mankind could coax into creating intoxicating food and drink. We are, as McGovern has entitled his very first chapter, "Homo Imbibens." As the book concludes, summing up the theme, "our species' intimate relationship with fermented beverages over millions of years has, in large measure, made us what we are today." Being neither an archeologist nor a paleontologist, I found some of the copious detail presented in this book to be tough sledding.

Nevertheless, it is a fascinating read and worth the effort.

Simply an outstanding book of scholarship. McGovern is a scientist who speaks fluent vernacular, which for most of us is a blessing. This is a remarkably inclusive survey of worldwide alcoholic beverage production and consumption from the end of the last ice age through the age of the Greeks. Though much of the book deals with the beginnings and subsequent evolution of wine and beer, he touches on drinks, ceremonies and rituals involving fermentation of myriad fruits, honey and starch laden grains from South America to China to Africa. One can't help but be impressed by the widespread use of alcohol by almost every societal group on earth. The picture painted by the author is of an ancient world practically awash in mixed drinks (beer, wine, and honey mixed together being a common one) and a remarkable diversity of stand alone wine and beer styles, often infused with herbs and flavorings, many hallucinatory, to enable the priests and leaders of early societies to commune with their particular gods and goddesses. These drinks have not only been an integral part of human life for thousands of years but may well have been the impetus behind agricultural domestication, human migration and trade and the spread of dominant cultures. For any student of the human condition, of the development of ritual and religion, of the emergence of humanity from our earliest hominid ancestors - and certainly for any thoughtful devotee of wine or beer, I highly recommend Uncorking The Past.

A good review, with interesting insights on the evolution of fermented beverages in early humanity. A lot of unexpected side observations on everything from the bible to the human psychology, as well.

Absolutely fascinating, enthralling read! I am finding it difficult to put this book down so that I can go to work....or do just about anything else. If you have any interest in fermentation and how it has affected humanity throughout history, you're going to want to read this. The author is known as "The Indiana Jones of Ancient Fermented Beverages", and now I understand why.

Very entertaining, interesting and informative history of fermented beverages by beer lovers' favorite molecular archeologist, Dr. Patrick McGovern, who has worked with Dogfishhead in recipe recreations and was seen on Brewmasters. Great read if you are interested in archeology, brewing, fermentation in general, and the rise of civilization.

excellent this one is replacement for one I gave away to a friend. McGovern is the King of brew and ferments and its related bio chemistry and history of all kind. you wants know what the Mayans drank? check this out.

Even when they clearly love their subject matter, not all authors can achieve what McGovern manages with such apparent ease: to pull you right into the story, sharing a wealth of historical and scientific knowledge in a fun and painless way.

May explain how and why civilizations came to be. An interesting read even if you are non wine drinking Mormon.

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