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Alcohol: A History

Rod Phillips

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Whether as wine, beer, or spirits, alcohol has had a constant and often controversial role in social life. In his innovative book on the attitudes toward and consumption of alcohol, Rod Phillips surveys a 9,000-year cultural and economic history, uncovering the tensions between alcoholic drinks as healthy staples of daily diets and as objects of social, political, and religious anxiety. In the urban centers of Europe and America, where it was seen as healthier than untreated water, alcohol gained a foothold as the drink of choice, but it has been more regulated by governmental and religious authorities more than any other commodity. As a potential source of social disruption, alcohol created volatile boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable consumption and broke through barriers of class, race, and gender. Phillips follows the ever-changing cultural meanings of these potent potables and makes the surprising argument that some societies have entered "post-alcohol" phases. This is the first book to examine and explain the meanings and effects of alcohol in such depth, from global and long-term perspectives.

An ambitious book, which succeeds at least in part because of Phillips's elegant style and his nose for recurring themes." --Times Literary Supplement
A major achievement. . . . Provides an essential introduction to the social, cultural, and economic role of alcohol in human history.--Canadian Journal of History
An enthralling piece of research that considers the history of alcohol from the ancient world right through to trends in modern regulation and consumption.--Jancis Robinson, wine expert and editor of The Oxford Companion to Wine
A must read for alcohol studies scholars.--CHOICE
Rod Phillips has created what will be the standard book on the cultural history of alcohol. A significant contribution.--David Fahey, Miami University of Ohio
Alcohol: A History is well written, entertaining, deeply informative, and thoroughly researched. In this magisterial text, Rod Phillips offers a broad vision and a rich treatise on cultural history. Its focus on consumption as a social and cultural act distinguishes it from books that focus on taste or geography, and it is a profound pleasure to have this much excellent, up-to-date scholarship devoted to a subject that touches all of our lives.--Thomas Brennan, The United States Naval Academy
About the Author
Rod Phillips is professor of history at Carleton University and the author of A Short History of Wine.