As far back as is documented, drugs and alcohol have been prevalent in different cultures and societies globally.
Global Drug Consumption

Some substances change the way you feel. This was discovered long ago, and ever since then people have been growing and producing these substances, initially as a doorway to the world of the gods, then as a product consumed for recreation. A glass of wine can do you good, a bottle can be hazardous – to both you and others. Here are some milestones in the world of inebriation.


Kincardine O’Neill, Scotland: Ice Bock (2012) The world’s strongest beer has an alcohol content of 65 percent. ‘Armageddon’ by Brewmeister (type: ‘Ice Bock’)

New Delhi, India: Betel The leaves of this palm are one of the “betel bite”. They have a euphoriant effect and are mentioned in early Sanskrit texts, making them one of the oldest known drugs.

Bethel, New York, USA: My Generation (1969) Without drugs in front of, on, and behind the stage, the legendary and rainy Woodstock Festival would surely have been a washout.

Catal Hicyük, Turkey: Ancient Vintage (approx. 5500 BC) In 1961 James Mellaart found a vessel in an excavation containing remnants of wine, the earliest evidence of the drink.


South Pacific: Kava Here, a euphoriant drink is made from kava (Piper methysticum).

Bethel, New York, USA: My Generation (1969) Without drugs in front of, on, and behind the stage, the legendary and rainy Woodstock Festival would surely have been a washout.

Jave, Indonesia: Monopoly (19th century) The Netherlands generated as much as 15 percent of its income from their colony by selling opium.

Canton, China: First Opium War (1839–42) The English smuggled opium from India into China. When the Manchus forbade this the Opium War ensued, and China lost. One of the consequences was the cession of Hong Kong.

On Mother’s Day, William Griffith Wilson founded the self-help group Alcoholics Anonymous, which now has around two million members in more than 180 countries.

Alamut, Iran: Hashish (approx. 1000 AD) The secret society of the Assassins (‘hashish smokers’) threatened nearby rulers with assassination. What is not clear is whether the fighters received hashish as an incitement or a reward.

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I t all started with plants defending themselves from herbivores. In the course of evolution, many plants developed chemical shields so as not to be eaten: ingredients which were either poisonous or distasteful to animals. In the depths of prehistory the first humans discovered that these plants were also poisonous to them. But they discovered something else too: many of these leaves, roots, mushrooms, and caets, when administered in the right doses, produced astounding effects on the eater. They alleviated pain, healed illness, and facilitated contact with the spirits, gods, and ancestors. Therefor healers and shamans were needed because only they knew the fine line between trance and poisoning.

Intoxication Since Antiquity

Consciousness-altering plants have been part of human history since the very beginning. The Old Testament mentions hallucinatory acting mandragora (mandrake) as well as myrrh, a tropi cal resin which in high doses is analge sic rather like opium. For thousands of years people have made products from hemp and hashish to intoxicate them selves. Herodotus writes of the Scythians, a nation of horsemen who inhabit ed the steppes of Eastern Europe in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, and who, in their steam-baths, cast hemp seeds onto red-hot stones and became "so ecstatic that they cried out with joy."

With the spread of Islam and its mandatory rules of life, social changes came to the Orient from the 8th cen

tury AD onwards. Outlawing alcohol made drugs like opium, hashish, hoo weed, and khat more significant. The exotic stories of Scheherazade in the 1001 Nights seem to originate in a colorful plume of hashish smoke. Yet hashish was more of a poor-man’s herb in old Islamic societies; the more afflu ent reached for opium. Hashish has also been known since the Neolithic Age in China and India. In India its use was subject to strict rituals – as it still is to a degree today in the cult surrounding the Vedic god of fertility, Shiva.

In the modern era, following a dark period of witchcraft and witch hunts involving hallucinogenic drugs like henbane and belladonna, a phase of geographical and intellectual expansion occurred which had a direct impact on the use of drugs. Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492. The tobacco plants arrived back in Europe with the Spanish Conquistadors, and explorers and traders carried tobacco from there all over the world. Used at first as a healing and medicinal plant in courtly circles and by medics as well as biologists on account of its stimulat ing effect, at the end of the 16th Century people began to smoke its leaves following the Indian model. This new fashion spread quickly, and the author ities - and clergy - were soon trying to work out ways to forbid the new custom. Having had little success in their many attempts to restrict the consump tion of tobacco, rulers decided at least to earn something from it. So tobacco was taxed – even today: tax revenues amounting to more than fourteen billion euros (2011 in Germany alone) “significantly contribute to maintain the social and medical problems asso ciated”, Dr. Henrik Jungaberle, Addiction Prevention and Drug Researcher at the University of Heidelberg.

Genre from the Bottle

The cultural history of tobacco, still used today by some people of the Ama zon as a healing and religious plant, rep resents an example of how many plant derived psychoactive substances have undergone a change of meaning over the course of time, evolving from ritu ally consumed sacraments, into a large ly individualized means of enjoyment.

This is easy to follow using opium as an example, just as we can trace a line from the plant itself to the isolated, intoxicating substance. The physician and naturalist Paracelsus (1493–1541) used laudanum (which means ‘praise worthy’), a tincture of opium containing alcohol, to make opium into an everyday medicine for the treatment of common complaints in broad sections of society, rather like aspirin today. For 400 years it was probably the most widely used medi cament in the Western world, which may also be why it was the first drug to be analyzed scientifically.

In 1804 the pharmacist F. W. Sertürner succeeded in isolating the “sleep-inducing substance” in opium, known as morphine. This was the first time that the active ingredient in a plant-based product had been sepa rated from the inactive. As early on >
Every ban on drugs and alcohol releases enormous criminal energies

> as 1827 the Darmstadt-based company Merck began to mass-produce morphine. The invention of the hollow needle for injections came in 1841, paving the way, from a medical point of view, for the military hospitals to treat the wounded in the Franco-German War of 1870/71. Morphine became the ‘medicine of the soldiers’. Countless combatants returned home addicted. In order to retain the pain-relieving effect while excluding the risk of addiction, ‘heroin’, named in remembrance of the wounded war-heroes, was produced in 1888 using morphine and acetic acid, and mass-marketed. Herein remains one of the most dangerous addictive drugs up to this day. According to the European Union Annual Report 2012, an average of one person has died every hour from an overdose of opioids over the past ten years in the EU. Most of these deaths involved heroin.

### War on Drugs

Modern chemistry and the onset of the Industrial Revolution were the motivational forces behind another fundamental transformation: ritually used trance inducers became, with the isolation of the individual substances in them, pharmacological consumer goods used according to one’s state of mind: either to lift up, or to forget. Albert Niemann succeeded in 1860 in isolating cocaine from the coca plant. From there it did not take long to arrive at the ‘Roaring Twenties’ when bohemian society and the demi-monde in Berlin and Paris plunged into the hysterical nightlife consumption of ‘snow’.

Over the course of the 20th century there were a growing number of international treaties aimed at restricting the worldwide production of morphine and cocaine. The International Opium Convention of 1912 aimed for the first time to monitor global production of the two drugs. Substances which until then had been widespread and used among other things as medicines were declared illegal. Several other treaties followed, until in 1961 the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs bound more than 180 nations under international law, and subjected poppy, coca, and cannabis plants – as well as substances produced from them, and certain derivatives – to strict controls, while prohibiting all non-medical uses.

However, the classification into legal and illegal drugs is controversial. As in the previous prohibition efforts (Alcohol: United States, 1919-1933; Opium: China, 19th century) enormous economic and criminal energies were released to circumvent the bans. Much money can be made from the smuggling of drugs, as the British East India Company found out in India and China in the 19th century. By smuggling opium into sealed-off China, that trading entity attempted to offset British foreign trade deficits originating with China in the tea trade. China, which could not defend itself against this flood of drugs was forced to open up its markets and to tolerate the opium trade.

To this day, many people earn a lot of money with illegal drug production and trafficking. The policy of global drug prohibition, launched by former American President Richard Nixon as the ‘War on Drugs’, has failed. This was admitted by the Global Commission on Drug Policy in its 2011 report. Drug cartels are a component of globally organized criminality alongside money laundering, trade in weapons, and human trafficking. And it is more successful than ever before.

### Hare and Tortoise

The wheel of drugs turns ever faster. Every week a new drug is brought on the market in the EU; says the EU drug observation agency in their 2011 annual report. There is a hare-and-tortoise game in play, the stakes being mainly ‘legal drugs’ – psychoactive designer substances sold as finished products. They contain synthetics cannabinoids and cathinones (derivatives of cannabis and khat substances). They manage to circumvent the Narcotics Act because they are not explicitly forbidden. As soon as they are incorporated after a delay into the Narcotics Act, and thereby forbidden, new variant forms arise to which the Act does not yet apply. Among these substances found in “bath salts” are amphetamine-like substances such as mephedrone and bupropion, but also the cathinones in herbal blends like Spice and K2. Cecilia Malmström, Member of the EU Commission, says: “Stimulants and synthetic drugs play a central role in the European drug situation, because they give rise to a market which is fast-changing, volatile, and difficult to monitor.”

To this can be added the long-known stimulants and hallucinogens: ecstasy, LSD, GHB (date-rape-drugs), crack cocaine, crystal meth, desomorphine (“krokodil”) – a hokka which grows two new heads for every one cut off. That is why more and more drug experts are realizing that the situation cannot be confronted by penal means alone. Besides education about effects and active involvement with the groups most at risk of drug abuse endangerment; many groups now see a way out of the misery and crime in a relaxation of the strict prohibitions – for drugs such as cannabis.

Regina Naumann
From Biblical Vine to Gin Lane
Since prehistoric times people have crafted drinks containing the potable alcohol, ETHANOL. As a result of that there have always been interactions between the social, economic, and technological developments.

Neolithic Chinese menus may have included a cocktail of wine, mead, and rice beer. The people who settled on the banks of the Yellow River around 7000 BC fermented the juices of grapes and hawthorn berries together with honey and rice. This brew, which contained ten percent alcohol, is currently the oldest known man-made alcoholic beverage.

The Neolithic Chinese cocktail was reconstructed by American Molecular Archaeologist Patrick McGovern. He examined traces left behind in ceramic drinking vessels found during excavations in Jiahu, a Stone Age site in the Chinese province of Henan. By a complex process of proofs he decrypted the composition of this prehistoric drink: ‘Uncorking The Past’, as he calls it, which is also the title of his book.

Refining Raw Materials
In order to prepare for the fermentation process, people used to break down the starches in grains by chewing them. The amylase in their saliva converted long-chain polysaccharides into short-chain sugars – a rather unorthodox procedure by today’s standards perhaps, yet very important in the history of alcoholic beverages. It was not the consumption of ethanol which was an issue 9000 years ago, but the very art of its production. Alcohol as a naturally occurring intoxicant is older than the history of modern man. Many animals enjoy the intoxicating effects of overripe fermented fruit whose sugar has been transformed by wild yeasts.

The art of producing alcoholic beverages coincided with the development of agriculture during the Neolithic Revolution. In particular the early civilizations improved the methods of agriculture, fruit growing and viticulture steadily, more feed stock was available for producing alcoholic beverages. Wine-growers and brewers refined the selection of raw materials, fermenting processes, and subsequent procedures such as distillation and storage. The alcoholic fermentation was probably discovered by accident and through observation.

Beer’s ancestor was a fermented cereal brew, while fermenting fruits produced wine-like drinks, allowing the physiological and psychological effects of alcohol to be enjoyed at any time.

One of the roots of beer production lies in Mesopotamia, where by the second millennium BC a wide range of beers had been established. In much of Central Europe, beer was one of the most important food-stuffs all the way up to the 17th century. Cultural scientist Wolfgang Schivelbusch even claims that the corpulent bodies depicted in northern European art in the 17th century had much to do with the cuisine of the day, which contained a lot of beer and beer soups. The Bavarian State regulations of 1516 which allowed only water, malt, yeast, and hops as raw materials for the production of beer was conceived at that time. This provision is known as the “Purity Law”. The production of wine from grapes developed rapidly into a complex cultural phenomenon. The British wine expert Oz Clarke writes that, in the third millennium before Christ the viticulture in Egypt had expanded so far, that experts made similar differences in the qualities, as it is the case today. The imagery of wine in biblical texts not least testifies to the early importance of viticulture.

Alcohol in the Tank
In order to obtain more concentrated alcoholic beverages, ethanol has to be distilled from the initial product. This was made possible around the year 1000 by means of what was known as the ‘Alembic’, a vessel used to separate substances and it is according to this principle modern stills produce their high-quality spirits. Aside from mashes made from grains and fruits, more recent times have seen the introduction of potatoes (vodka) and sugar-cane (rum).

The alembic was the first in a series of technical innovations concerning alcoholic drinks. They included the bottle-fermentation of champagne (17th century), wine corks (18th century), refrigeration machines for the brewing of beer (19th century), and the continuous distillation of spirits (also 19th century). In 1889, Johann Heinrich Dräger contributed to this line of development with his Lubeca valve which allowed beer to be tapped safely from a high-pressure carbon dioxide system.

The industrialization of the manufacture, storage, and distribution of alcoholic beverages has brought with it consistent quality and low prices. Cheap spirits (made from potatoes) have however been blamed for the kind of alcoholism depicted in the famous print ‘Gin Lane’. This term describes the abuse of alcohol, in particular by lower groups of the population, during the Industrial Revolution.

Nowadays ethanol made on an industrial scale, from agricultural products, is becoming an increasingly important source of energy, used in products such as the vehicle fuels E10 (ten percent ethanol) and E85 (85 percent ethanol). The second generation of biofuels will then no longer be derived from the same sources as drinking alcohol, but mainly from cellulose fibers. Peter Thomas

Read up: Uncorking The Past – The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages/ University of California Press, 348 pages
Wings of the Spirit

Is mankind even conceivable without drugs? Almost always accompany him at all times and in every country substances that alter his thinking, feeling and acting.

In every country, the use of substances is to ritualize the consumption of cannabis. “Like food, drinks, and sex, intoxication is one of the fun- damental needs of the human being.” Wolfgang Nešković, a former German Federal High Court Judge, said that while campaigning for the liberal treat- ment of cannabis. “A human phenome- non is also to ritualize the consumption of intoxicating beverages and tobacco, to give it a visible role and thus to commun- icate one’s identity and social status,” knows Dr. Henrik Jungaberle, Addiction Prevention and Drug Researcher at the University of Heidelberg.

Stimulating drugs such as coffee, tea, and tobacco – together with canna- bis and khat leaves – are ritual accompa- niments to socializing, relaxation, and hospitality. They play an important role in social interaction, especially in Islamic countries because of the widespread abstinance from alcohol there. But rituals can also change, especially in the industrialized nations. “In our pluralis- tic society new rituals are forever aris- ing – rituals that protect and rituals that encourage people to consume. Often they are given publicity in the media,” says Drug Researcher Jungaberle. As the sun- sets on the beach it will be enjoyed with certain alcoholic drinks, or heavily ritu- alized technos parties in industrial tem- ples with its own jargon, its own music and drug use. New rituals of lasting and drug abstinence are also emerging, and not only in Christian circles.

Alcohol has spread triumphantly across the whole world over the past 9,000 years, and abstinent cultures have found it difficult to hold it off in the face of globalization. Any culture where alcohol manages to get a foot- hold, then finds it difficult to abolish it. Excessive bans such as the American prohibition from 1919 to 1933 did not last, and in fact became a major factor in the development of organized drug-related crime.

A prohibition of alcohol derived from the Koran is true in much of the Islamic world. The verses concerned do not actu- ally use the word “haram” (forbidden) – a minority of Muslim clergy take the position that only an excess of wine is for- bidden – but this interpretation has not prevailed with in the institution. Because of genetic predispositions in East-Asians, Aborigines, and the indigenous people of America their tolerance for alcohol is worse than most Europeans. They com- monly have only a small amount of the enzyme alcohol dehydrogenase, which is used to break down alcohol in the liver, and for this reason they feel the effects more quickly. That is also why the conquerors of America and Oceania had an easy time of destroying indige- nous cultures using fire-water.

As an ancient intoxicant and stimu- lant alcohol is in most cultures a central element of ceremonies with which large and small transitions are celebrated in life. These range from “happy hour” at the end of the working day, up to the end of school with drinking among high school seniors. Among the mesti- zos in Peru, maize beer is a constant companion to a range of events such as baptism, a boy’s first haircut, and ear- piercing for girls. In other cultures, alcohol strengthens people in their daily work: in Normandy you might pop into the bar for a Calvados, while in Peru, alcohol is consumed before heavy phys- ical work.

With one point all cultures are cer- tainly in agreement: drinking alcohol alone at home is suspicious and there- fore frowned upon. Regina Naumann