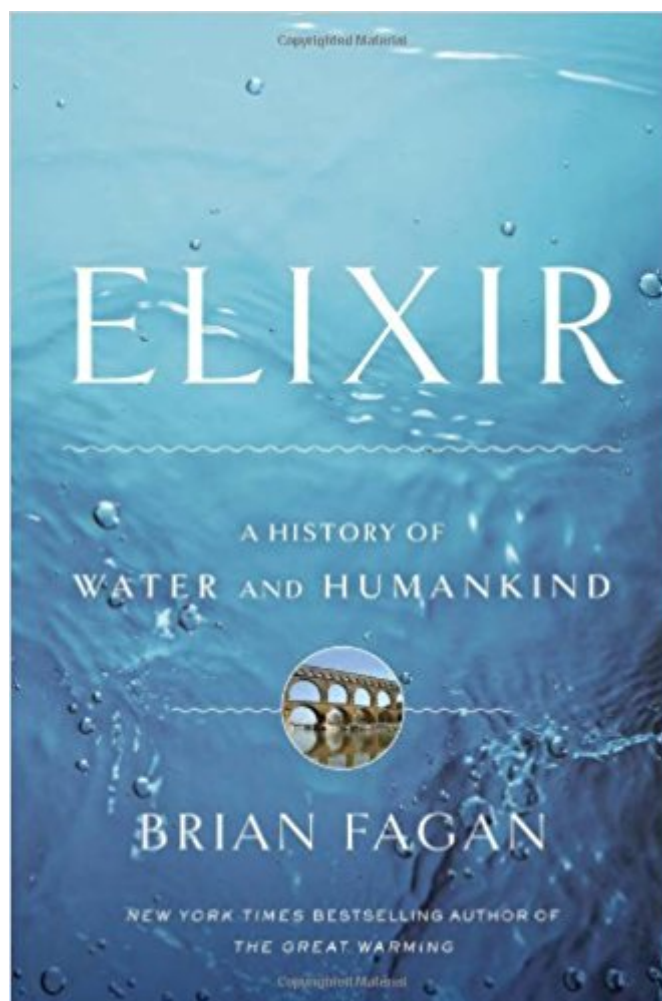


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# Elixir: A History Of Water And Humankind



## Synopsis

Elixir spans five millennia, from ancient Mesopotamia to the parched present of the Sun Belt. As Brian Fagan shows, every human society has been shaped by its relationship to our most essential resource. Fagan's sweeping narrative moves across the world, from ancient Greece and Rome, whose mighty aqueducts still supply modern cities, to China, where emperors marshaled armies of laborers in a centuries-long struggle to tame powerful rivers. He sets out three ages of water: In the first age, lasting thousands of years, water was scarce or at best unpredictable—so precious that it became sacred in almost every culture. By the time of the Industrial Revolution, human ingenuity had made water flow even in the most arid landscapes. This was the second age: water was no longer a mystical force to be worshipped and husbanded, but a commodity to be exploited. The American desert glittered with swimming pools— with little regard for sustainability. Today, we are entering a third age of water: As the earth's population approaches nine billion and ancient aquifers run dry, we will have to learn once again to show humility, even reverence, for this vital liquid. To solve the water crises of the future, we may need to adapt the water ethos of our ancestors.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Five thousand years of rising and falling civilizations flow through Fagan's sweeping survey of man's ability to harness water. From the stirrings of agricultural settlements in the Euphrates Valley to the canny manipulation that sent the Owens River's flow to a tiny California town called Los

Angeles at the start of the 20th century, Fagan (*The Great Warming*), an archeologist, digs down into our relationship to water sources, pointing out that "water is capricious and powerful, far more masterful than the humans and animals that depend on it." However, this survey veers unevenly, offering vivid descriptions of the hazards of channeling water in prehistoric northern Iraq, of water distribution in traditional Balinese governance structures, of Middle Eastern irrigation engineering that becomes mired in measurements and dimensions. Fagan prompts an appreciation of water's centrality to civilization and of human ingenuity, but his topic is so broad and his treatment so dry that his conclusion is a call for a profound realignment of an increasingly urban world with its dwindling water supplies that lacks the impact it deserves. (June) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

"As always with Mr. Fagan's work, the range is dazzling, the focus sharp and the pictures vivid...The author holds us with his glittering eye, as he conjures a vision of a world with water everywhere, nor any drop to drink." *Wall Street Journal*  
"Juxtaposes ancient and contemporary cultures' veneration of water with the current commodification of it" *Fagan is a passionate and lively writer.* *Los Angeles Times*  
"examines societies' relationships with water since ancient times, and describes how the advance of technology has led to unsustainable management and depletion of our most valuable resource." *Chronicle of Higher Education*  
"It is hard to imagine industrial societies regaining some sense of water as sacred. The best we might hope for in the near term is a new-found respect for water. Reading Fagan's book is an enjoyable way of gaining that respect, by taking a tour through the hard-won lessons of the past."  
"Eye-opening...making sense of water and its place in the development of civilization....[Fagan] understands how the ancients struggled with changing climate and that what matters has always been the fluctuating availability of water, rather than shifting temperatures. That is an important lesson for us now." *Washington Post*  
"Supplying intriguing historical background, Fagan well informs those pondering freshwater's role in contemporary environmental problems."  
"Important and, from a New York Times best-selling author, accessible to all." *Library Journal*  
"Fagan prompts an appreciation of water's centrality to civilization and of human ingenuity." *Publishers Weekly*  
"A rewarding survey of water's role in history and contemporary politics alike."  
"Not just a fascinating book, but also an important one" [a]

marvelous history. Don't take water or Elixir for granted. Give this important book a read--and then maybe send a copy to your local representative or senator.

Mother Nature Network "At a time of increasing threats of regional water wars,' Elixir provides crucial temporal depth and worldwide scope to an emerging water scarcity crisis that we can no longer ignore. Fagan's detailed examination of past use and abuse of water--highlighted by personal experience--makes his book not only a major source on the subject but, as usual, enjoyable reading.

R. Gwinn Vivian, curator emeritus of archaeology, Arizona State Museum, author of The Chaco Handbook "[Fagan] is a beguiling writer and his lessons from global experience are both refreshing and sobering.

Daily Express (UK) "A comprehensive look at the history of water control there are places on the earth today where our water control systems are breaking down, and most of us don't yet recognize how devastating the effects of that will be. Elixir helps that realization

This book is one of the best pop science books I've read in a long time there is much to reread and contemplate.

About.com

This book is a good read for any person interested in water. For anthropologists it is a must read. Historians could benefit in terms of good past and contemporary comparisons. For water studies specialists it is a nice overview.

I like terms of Brian Fagan so any of his book I read more than once. But lay Japanese knows Chinese history more than fagan knows. Sorry but it is the case. Preferably exchange Chinese history to the sailings or shipbuilding.

The most important thing on this planet is not us! It is water. The author, Brian Fagan, is a gentle but thorough teacher. All of his books are treasures. Especially this one. DO READ IT!

I didn't know all the complexities involved with the use of water. A keeper. I'll read it again and again. Duane Pierce

This is a well written, thought provoking book that artfully blends stories and science. All conclusions are clearly based on published science and cautiously interpreted. I highly recommend it.

An extraordinary book. It awakens our sense of duty with nature.

The author describes irrigation systems and water usage in a variety of past civilizations around the globe to illustrate the historical value placed on having water. Although many of these systems are interesting, the detail becomes tiring. This book would have been improved if the author would have spent more time relating water usage in the past to present day overuse and needs.

I love this book!

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