

Brian Fagan Abstract: Elixir: Humans and the History of Water

Long before water became an anonymous commodity at the end of a faucet, people revered water and valued it in ways that are unimaginable in today's world. Archaeologist Brian Fagan describes the ever-changing, complex relationships between humans and water over the past 10,000 years. How did Australian Aborigines track water supplies across harsh deserts? How did ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians irrigate their fields? We visit African tribes who are still using gravity and narrow furrows to water their crops, learn of simple ways of tapping ground water that survived for thousands of years. This is a journey into the past that describes the brilliant water managers of classical Greece, the aqueducts of Rome, the magnificent gardens crafted by Islamic engineers, and the challenges of taming Chinese rivers. It's the little known story of a largely forgotten water world before the diesel pumps and fossil fuels of the Industrial Revolution turned water into a seemingly limitless commodity. And from this now largely vanished world come important messages about water conservation of relevance to us all.

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