ForeWord Reviews

HEALTH & FITNESS

A Brief History of Drugs: From the Stone Age to the Stoned Age
Antonio Escohotado
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The Greek word for drugs is pharmakon which means both remedy and poison. That double meaning for substances that can harm and cure, give pleasure and pain, has haunted man's history with drugs.

A Brief History of Drugs is a shortened version of Escohotada's three-volume General History of Drugs, which contains a detailed index and bibliography. Regardless of the reader's view on the legalization of drugs or the use of drugs in various cultures, the shorter version makes worthwhile reading and will perhaps be most appreciated in academic settings as students pop over-the-counter stimulants to stay awake to work on term papers or exams.

Escohotada indeed begins, not in the Stone Age, as the subtitle cleverly suggests, but pre-antiquity, and follows man's use of and experimentation with various substances for medicinal and spiritual purposes. He leads the reader through the use of drug potions and alcohol by various cultures and religions. Early mood- or mind-altering substances came from plant life.

As he reaches the twentieth century, the author documents his opinion that efforts to restrict or prohibit the use of mind-altering drugs is a dismal failure. He explores various Supreme Court rulings, Congressional Acts and research statistics and others sometimes startling reports. He concludes: "Whether drugs cure or do damage depends on human beings, not on drugs…the options are not a world with or without drugs. The alternatives are to teach people how to use them correctly or to indiscriminately demonize them: to sow knowledge, or to sow ignorance."

Eschohotada's Brief History of Drugs helps "sow knowledge" in a controversial field that is more frequently characterized by emotional rather than informed debate.

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