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# The Substance Of Civilization: Materials And Human History From The Stone Age To The Age Of Silicon

Stephen L.  
Sass

Materials  
and Human  
History from  
the Stone  
Age to the  
Age of  
Silicon

The  
Substance  
of  
Civilization



## Synopsis

The story of human civilization can be read most deeply in the materials we have found or created, used or abused. They have dictated how we build, eat, communicate, wage war, create art, travel, and worship. Some, such as stone, iron, and bronze, lend their names to the ages. Others, such as gold, silver, and diamond, contributed to the rise and fall of great empires. How would history have unfolded without glass, paper, steel, cement, or gunpowder? The impulse to master the properties of our material world and to invent new substances has remained unchanged from the dawn of time; it has guided and shaped the course of history. Sass shows us how substances and civilizations have evolved together. In antiquity, iron was considered more precious than gold. The celluloid used in movie film had its origins in the search for a substitute for ivory billiard balls. The same clay used in the pottery of antiquity has its uses in today's computer chips. Moving from the Stone Age to the Age of Silicon, from the days of prehistoric survival to the cutting edge of nanotechnology, this fascinating and accessible book connects the worlds of minerals and molecules to the sweep of human history, and shows what materials will dominate the century ahead.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"History is an alloy of all the materials that we have invented or discovered, manipulated, used, and abused, and each has its tale to tell." These are the words of the author, a professor of material sciences at Cornell University. He is obviously in love with the subject he teaches. He reminds me of one of my Chemistry professors who was in the lab on a Saturday afternoon when a student

happened to come by, and said, "Do you have to work on Saturday's?" He replied, "Son this isn't work, it's my hobby." Reading this book, one gets the feeling you are just having a friendly discussion with him about the subject that is his work, interest, fascination, and most of all what his love revolves around. Just the opposite of a Librarian I was having a social chat with one day. I asked what she liked to read; and the reply stunned me. "I really don't like to read much; I get too much of it at work every day". Sass is a very good writer, particularly considering his profession. I don't say this as a slur; but generally good, interesting writing is not the strong point of technical people. Carl Sagan is a great exception to this, and it shows Sass loves materials like Sagan loved the universe. Although I am an engineer, took courses in materials; I never heard them talked about like this. Sass shows how materials have influenced civilizations from the Stone Age to the present time and will continue to do so for the future. Not only that, but there will be materials invented at an astonishing rate, even more so than the last half century. Just imagine the things that have become commonplace in that time and how much their existence is dependent on space age materials. Dreams are the ideas behind inventions; but materials are what makes them happen. I read a lot of history, and particularly of warfare.

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