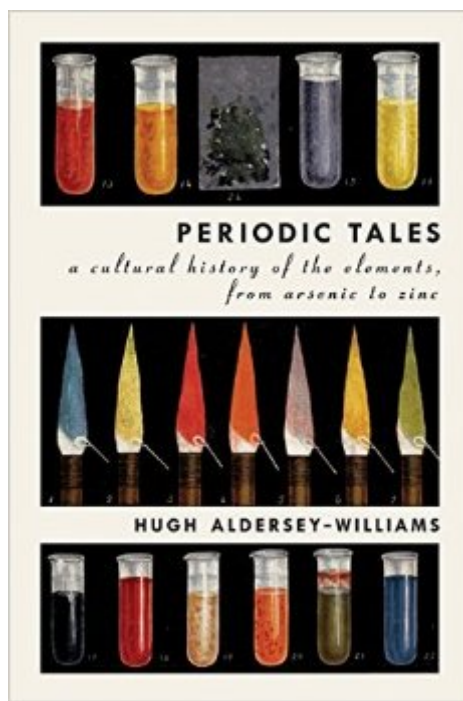


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# Periodic Tales



## Synopsis

In the spirit of *A Short History of Nearly Everything* comes *Periodic Tales*. Award-winning science writer Hugh Andersey-Williams offers readers a captivating look at the elements and the amazing, little-known stories behind their discoveries. *Periodic Tales* is an energetic and wide-ranging book of innovations and innovators, of superstition and science and the myriad ways the chemical elements are woven into our culture, history, and language. It will delight readers of *Genome*, *Einstein's Dreams*, *Longitude*, and *The Age of Wonder*.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (135 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #567,930 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #120 in [Books > Science & Math > Chemistry > Inorganic](#) #1464 in [Books > Science & Math > Chemistry > General & Reference](#) #2945 in [Books > Science & Math > History & Philosophy](#)

## Customer Reviews

I have to admit that I was curious when I saw the title *Periodic Tales*. Did it have anything to do with the periodic tables of elements? If so, why tales? (I had to assume it wasn't just a typo.) The title also attracted me because of a newfound interest in the natural sciences, something I never took in school unless I had to, and which I rarely understood. And, the cover blurb on the back of the book sounded interesting. After buying the book, I read reviews of it on BN.com and .com and feared I might have made a mistake. Some of those who had read it found it uninteresting and a bit self-serving. Others wrote good reviews. The mixture of opinions gave me pause, but I'd already bought the book, so I might as well take the plunge. I was immediately drawn into the stories of the discoveries, the insight, the pure luck in some cases. Did you know that Sweden is the site of the largest number of discoveries of metals in the world? Or that Marie Curie carried a bit of radium around in her pocket? The historical and biographical information is interesting. The differences in methods and sources, the reactions of new elements, especially in the atomic age. One of the more

interesting views of the elements described here is how so many are perceived by the public, artists, professionals, and others. Some are described as being either male or female, good or rich or bad. Silver is female, represents good, while gold is male and rich. Aluminum (aluminium in most of the world) was seen as flashy and modern, but its image has faded, if not its gleam. Chromium adorned automobiles and was considered to be a fancy ideal. The author visited many of the sites of discovery or the mining areas.

Reading Mr. Aldersey-Williams' collection of periodic tales leads you to one inescapable conclusion: some elements of the periodic table are more culturally interesting than others. From the author's point of view, this may be because an element's cultural significance increases with the amount of time we've pounded, polished, or manipulated it. This theory is sensible enough; after all, the most culturally significant elements in this book are gold, iron, silver, lead, tin, and copper. Add to them the radioactive elements--those that opened a new frontier for science, a new dread for mankind--and you have a sturdy bundle of literary alloys that form the book's backbone. Moving out from these, Mr. Aldersey-Williams goes on to fashion many more alloys you hope will be as culturally dense as the others. Many are not. In fact, some are hardly alloys at all, but merely more than stories of their discoveries. Others, examples of elements the author found in a forgotten cupboard. Still more, like those rare earth metals lingering all about the Nordic landscape, leave you appreciative for the author's excursion but questioning their relevance to his overall scheme. If there is a scheme, that is. It can be hard to track. The result: you're not sure whether you're reading a high tech scavenger hunt, a nostalgic tale of the author's childhood, or a true cultural odyssey.

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