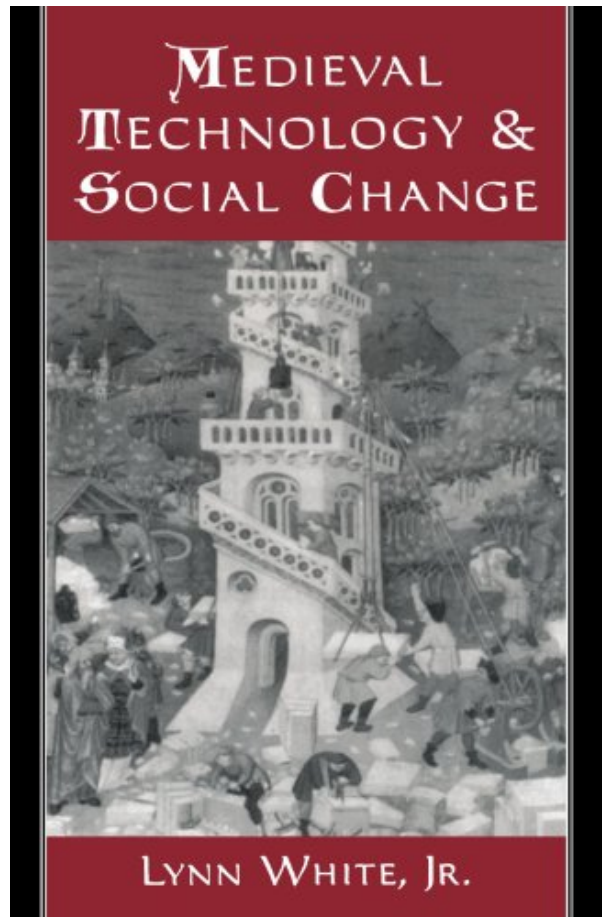


MEDIEVAL TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE BY LYNN WHITE



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In *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, Lynn White considers the effects of technological innovation on the societies of medieval Europe: the slow collapse of feudalism with the development of machines and tools that introduced factories in place of cottage industries, and the development of the manorial system with the introduction of new kinds of plows and new methods of crop rotation. One invention of particular import, writes White, was the stirrup, which in turn introduced heavy, long-range cavalry to the medieval battlefield. The development thus escalated small-scale conflict to "shock combat." Cannons and flamethrowers followed, as did more peaceful inventions, such as watermills and reapers.

Review

"Excellent."--Louis P. Towles, Central Wesleyan College

"The most stimulating book of the century on the history of technology...a positive delight."--Isis

"At once an advance in the study of medieval technology and also the best introduction to the subject for the serious general reader."--The Economist

"Still essential reading for students of Medieval studies. A must for those interested in Medieval technology and its impact on the development of western society."--Cecile-Marie Sastre, Flagler College

About the Author

Lynn White is Founding Director of UCLA Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

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This study examines the role of technological innovation during the rise of social groups in the Middle Ages

- Sales Rank: #250558 in Books
- Published on: 1966-12-31
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 5.31" h x .46" w x 8.00" l, .43 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 224 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

46 of 46 people found the following review helpful.

A great work that connects technological and social history

By Robert Moore

This is one of the classic works of medieval studies to emerge out of the past half century, and its importance far outstrips whether or not White's famous stirrup thesis is correct or not. The overwhelming consensus is that it is incorrect. But only someone who has not read the book could imagine that that thesis was the bulk of the book, or the only idea in it. In fact, there is an unstated, larger thesis that underlies White's book, and which indicates why it is important: White implies that we can only understand the medieval period if we also understand its technology. White virtually ushered in the age of the study of medieval technology and seeing it as intimately connected and underlying the social and even political history.

This is a short book, shorter than it initially seems upon holding it because of the vast number of foot and endnotes. But the number of ideas and insights are completely out of proportion with the book's apparent brevity. It is absolutely stuffed to overflowing with content. Miraculously, that doesn't effect its readability. Even a relative neophyte to historical studies will have little difficulty following White's ideas and arguments, although, obviously, the more one knows, the better the background one will have for understanding his theses.

Although his stirrup thesis has largely been rejected, this remains an essential book on any short list of the great works of medieval history. More than that, it is fun, too. I strongly recommend it to anyone with the slightest degree of interest in medieval history.

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

Jammed full of information

By Zach Schauf

Although this book has been around for awhile, it represents a truly amazing source of information on the role which technology played in Medieval society. I thought that the first two parts of the book, dealing with changes in technologies of war and agriculture and their effect on Medieval society were by far the strongest part of the work. At times, I found the meticulous description of the archaeology and etymology of various objects and words a bit much, but I was fascinated by the way in which White linked technological progress to the emergence of numerous aspects of Medieval life. I didn't enjoy the final section, on machinery, as much because it seemed to loose its focus on the social changes caused by the technology, although it did mention the new ethos that mechanical development fostered. I have done some more reading on the subject, and some critics have argued that White overstates the importance of the stirrup, but regardless about where the various historical controversies are today, this book provides a superb introduction to the field and would be a great resource to anyone doing research.

21 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Relevant, not outdated

By Alexander Wyatt

This book was part of the PhD curriculum at a top-tier university for Public Policy. The course was Science & Technology Policy I (a massive literature review before getting into our own research).

Whether or not the chain of events and relationships occurred precisely as White postulates is irrelevant.

The POINT is that small, technological change can have GIANT impacts upon life and social organization. This has been proven repeatedly by the researchers/students of complexity science (see Mitchell Waldrop, Murray Gell-Mann, Roger Lewin, John Holland, etc.)

By connecting medieval technological change (eg agrarian practices, stirrup, clock) to societal change (eg

feudal system, settlement/town patterns), this book provides readers with a conceptual starting point to begin thinking about the impact of modern and future technologies.

In short, its a quick, VERY stimulating and interesting read. With the price at only 2 dollars, you can't go wrong!

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