

Medieval Science and Technology (Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World)

By Elspeth Whitney

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Medieval science and technology was firmly rooted in Aristotelian explanations of the physical world. This book begins by introducing the basic concepts of the classical tradition, and explains how these ideas were promulgated by the ancient Greeks, preserved and commented on by the great Muslim scholars of the early middle ages, and finally transmitted to western Europe as that region began to grow and expand around 1100 C.E. Specific avenues of inquiry such as astronomy and astrology, optics, chemistry and alchemy, zoology, geography, and medicine are described on their own terms. Rounding out the work is a discussion of the many technological innovations of the medieval age, such as mechanical clocks, firearms, and the blast furnace, that profoundly altered the course of European and world history. Biographical sketches provide insight into the lives and accomplishments of 20 men and women, Christian, Muslim, and pagan, whose works profoundly shaped the era's scientific spirit. Eleven annotated key primary documents afford a fascinating glimpse into how the best minds of the time posed their questions and their answers. An annotated timeline, glossary of terms, several illustrations, and an annotated bibliography round out the work.

Medieval scientists, or natural philosophers, as they were then called, were powerfully influenced by the authority of older traditions, including Christianity and scientific ideas dating back to Plato, Aristotle, and Ptolemy. Yet their respect for these traditions was balanced by an equal respect for reason and the spirit of inquiry. Religious faith, far from dampening scientific and technological innovation, actually buttressed their efforts to understand the natural world as it was generally taken for granted that knowledge acquired through reason would harmonize with religious beliefs. While medieval science and technology did not seek to overthrow the prevailing worldviews of the time, their accomplishments did lay the groundwork for the scientific revolution and European global expansion of the early modern age.

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Review
"[S]urveys major changes of the era, examining the nature and methods of medieval inquiry from astronomy to chemistry and geography, discussing how technological inventions of the times changed world history, and including biographical sketches of the achievements of 20 selected men and women who contributed vastly to the changes in Medieval scientific thinking."-MBR Bookwatch/Donovan's Bookshelf

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About the Author

ELSPETH WHITNEY is Associate Professor of History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is the author of *Paradise Restored: The Mechanical Arts from Antiquity through the 13th Century* (1990), and she has published articles in *Annals of Scolarship, Medieval Latin Studies, Journal of Women's History*, and *Women in Medieval Culture*.

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