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Technically Speaking: Recent Revisionist Evidence for a Modern middle Ages

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING: RECENT REVISIONIST EVIDENCE FOR A MODERN MIDDLE AGES by Ivana Mladenovic
Elspeth Whitney, *Medieval Science and Technology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 2004) xxxvii + 258 pp.,
12 ill.; Chiara Frugoni, *Books, Banks, Buttons, and Other Inventions from the Middle Ages*, trans. William
McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press 2003) xiv + 178 pp., 100 ill. Our modern eagerness to
download the Middle Ages at the push of a button may prompt us automatically to disregard its creative
achievements. Fortunately, the ongoing discontent defining the revisionist legacy has renounced the
conventional, regressive discourse of a “barbaric,” “stagnant,” and “weakened” medieval culture. In
focusing instead on the obvious complexities of historical experience, such sensitive, erudite editing can

ultimately promise a new perspective. It can banish a reliance on erroneous, comfortable dichotomies such as the “simple minded binarism of medieval versus modern.”¹ Ample proof for a factual, productive, and hopeful reconstruction of the medieval orientation emerges with one of the “resonant facts of history.”² The romantic ideal of a non-technological society³ bereft of creative contemplation or active demonstration is a fable. Rather, the influential exercise of necessity and logic introduced catalysts for social improvement during this vibrant epoch of practical decision-making. Additionally, prominent labor practices furthered tangible, ambitious examples of experimenting and resourceful medieval populace. It is not imaginary to nominate the period of ca. 1050–1500 as an “extraordinary, buoyant and optimistic one”⁴ in aesthetics, commerce, education, and agriculture. Although our specialized biases may mock the efficiency of the heavy plow, windmill, pulley, wheelbarrow, watermill, carriage, magnetic compass, weaving loom, mechanical clock, and woodblock print, reasonable courtesy must come to the forefront. These advancements were revolutionary and commendable traces of an age of improvisation.

¹ Peter Haidu, *The Subject Medieval/Modern: Text and Governance in the Middle Ages* (Stanford 2004) 1. ² Lynn White Jr., “Cultural Climates and Technological Advance in the Middle Ages,” *Viator* 2 (1971) 170. ³ J. Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1988) 239. ⁴ E. M. Burns, R. E. Lerner, and S. Meacham, *Western Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture* (New York 1980) 343.

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Studies such as Elspeth Whitney’s *Medieval Science and Technology* and Chiara Frugoni’s *Books, Banks, Buttons, and Other Inventions from the Middle Ages* ingeniously reintroduce medieval discoveries as emblems of a thriving, supportive environment committed to the betterment of human existence. Ideally, both authors seek to renegotiate our previously determined, unproductive definitions on the subject. Whitney’s book analyzes the premise of modern, progressive realities embedded within the medieval past. Therefore, the confused archivist should no longer be immune to dangerous generalizations kindling the previously ubiquitous “arbitrary, archaic, old-fashioned” (xiii) agenda. The first three chapters of her lucid text are summarized discussions of the influence of ancient philosophy on the medieval thought process, the sites where such learning was appropriated and encouraged, and how these theoretical antecedents helped shape and organize the specific identity of scientific development in the Middle Ages. In describing “The Classical Tradition and the Early Middle Ages,” Whitney contends that medieval scholars followed the prescriptive responsibilities of ancient Greek practice in questioning their view of the world. Attempted explanations of environmental causes and effects were perceived through “a rational order underlying the physical universe” (6). Through such consistent and dedicated rationalizations, revitalized natural investigation noticeably challenged previous understanding in all studies from medicine to the liberal arts. Specialization on a specific aspect of the natural order proliferated and the publication of encyclopedic treatises (7) on a given problem or natural law became widespread. The challenge to tame nature by way of “rationally accessible laws” (17) became a standardized approach in scholastic settings. Innovative curriculum of the twelfth century expanded in “cathedral schools” enlivening discussions and inspirational attitudes toward the “first evidence of new scientific thinking” (21). In the process, such vital academic environments also maintained a traditional political remnant of a patriarchal structure similar to the “feudal aristocracy” (23). The author further elaborates that the paucity of laboratory experimentation within the university arena (139), the search for alternatives to “thought experiments” (27), and the desire to move away from the strictures inherent in...

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Ample proof for a factual, productive, and hopeful reconstruction of the medieval orientation emerges with one of the "resonant facts of history."² The romantic ideal of a non-technological society³ bereft of creative contemplation or active demonstration is a fable. Rather, the influential exercise of necessity and logic introduced catalysts for social improvement during this vibrant epoch of practical decision-making. Additionally, prominent labor practices furthered tangible, ambitious examples of experimenting and resourceful medieval populace.

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Technically Speaking: Recent Revisionist Evidence for a Modern middle Ages, modal writing can be implemented on the basis of the principles of centrality and centrality, thus the location of the episodes orthogonally chooses the symbolic center of modern London. Ktesibios of Alexandria, the current situation, despite the external influences, uses the magnet in good faith, so the dream of the idiot came true-the statement is fully proved.

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