



# Ancient Inventions

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"IT'S CHOCKABLOCK WITH CURIOUS LORE....[James and Thorpe] have amassed scores of persuasive testimonials of primeval ingenuity."

--The Boston Globe

We in the twentieth century tend to assume that our era has a monopoly on the inventions of clever machines, labor-saving devices, feats of engineering, and advanced technology. But as the authors of this fascinating and eye-opening book reveal, some of humankind's most important and most amazing inventions actually date back thousands of years.

Historian Peter James and archaeologist Nick Thorpe have pooled their expertise in amassing this compendium of human ingenuity through the ages. Together they conclusively prove that our ancestors, however long ago they lived and whatever part of the globe they occupied, were brilliant problem-solvers. Written with the pure joy of discovery, *Ancient Inventions* reveals that:

- \* Medieval Baghdad had an efficient postal service, banks, and a paper mill.
- \* Rudimentary calendars were being used in France as early as 13,000 B.C.
- \* Apartment condominiums rose in deserts of the American Southwest a thousand years ago.
- \* The ancient Greeks used an early form of computer.
- \* Plastic surgery was being performed in India by the first century B.C.
- \* The Egyptians knew about effective contraceptives.
- \* Flamethrowers were used in battles waged in tenth-century China.

Brimming with odd facts and entertaining curiosities, written with zest and humor, comprehensive and fun to read, *Ancient Inventions* is a wonderful celebration of the endless inventiveness of the human mind.

"This presentation of the discoveries and innovations of the ancients will fascinate."

--Booklist

"Thoroughly researched...It is doubtful that anyone could examine [this book] without coming away enlightened in one of its broadly ranging areas."

--Library Journal

AN ALTERNATE SELECTION OF THE QUALITY PAPERBACK BOOK CLUB AND THE NATURAL SCIENCE BOOK CLUB

## Ancient Inventions Details

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# From Reader Review Ancient Inventions for online ebook

## Dave says

Recently, I was looking for something I can read in small spurts without having to break up any continuity or remember any storyline so I'm going back and reading this one cover to cover. I had previously read a large portion of this book solely for research purposes for writing classes for my job. This book was a good source of information concerning historical backgrounds for these things because it is indeed chock full of great information. Now, upon reading it for leisure, I'm feeling like a two minute brainiac historian, able to recall strange amazing knowledge on cue. Very interesting stuff!

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## Mike says

This book contains, among much other interesting stuff, one of my favorite sentences: "Gunpowder seems to have been discovered in China by accident--ironically, by alchemists seeking the elixir of immortality."

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## Liz says

An absolutely phenomenal book. Highly recommended reading.

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## Sesana says

Fun for history buffs, but you definitely have to be a history buff to read through all 600+ pages. I am, and I did. I picked it up because I had greatly enjoyed reading the equally huge Ancient Mysteries (both books are approximately the size and shape of an urban phone book), but this book is far more straightforward. There are few actual mysteries here, just what the archaeological record says and suggests came before. Luckily, the authors' writing styles are as interesting as the subject matter, and I practically breezed through it.

And now, the history buff nitpicking: There are limited citations, at the end of the book. Not every source is cited, apparently, but each section has at least one source, and usually more. I spotted a few tiny errors (the Great Wall of China can't be seen from space, and extrapolating that, because they didn't take fully immersive baths on a regular basis, medieval Europeans didn't wash at all on a regular basis) and both authors are pretty comfortable labeling the medieval era as "The Dark Ages". But they are specialists in prehistory and classical history, so I give them a pass. I didn't notice any overt errors in their own specialties.

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## Eddie Jong says

Invaluable Information

I bought this book as a reference for writing Velvak's Victory. As my novels take place in a world that has

never had an industrial revolution, I wanted some ideas of what technology would be available to the people of Bradapol.

This book is amazing. Not only is the content fascinating, but it is arranged in such a way that any subject can be easily found. When a specific subject is covered, e.g. a specific plant used for cooking, there are also references to other section of the book where the same plant is used for other purposes.

I would recommend this book to anyone doing research, or for simply reading to increase your knowledge.

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## **Jessica Strider says**

Pros: nice overview on a large number of topics

Cons: only a few photographs, mostly hand drawn illustrations, dated information

The book is comprised of an introduction and chapters on medicine, transportation, high tech, sex life, military technology, personal effects, food, drink, and drugs, urban life, working the land, house and home, communications and sport and leisure. Each chapter is subdivided, so under personal effects there are sections on mirrors, makeup, tattooing, soap, razors, perfume, wigs, clothing and shoes, jewelry, spectacles, and umbrellas. They're followed by a shortened list of sources, a bibliography and index. The book covers a surprisingly large range of topics, and a large range of locations. While the majority of ancient artifacts are from the Middle East/Mediterranean, the book covers a fair amount of Chinese discoveries as well. South and Central America, Japan, India, and other places are also mentioned to a lesser degree.

Modern society tends to look down on civilizations of the past as being lesser in many ways. This book shows that a lot of habits and tools we think are modern have been around for a long time. Sometimes they're lost and rediscovered, sometimes they have a long continuous history. The ingenuity of our ancestors is incredible and it's fascinating to see the variety of things they invented.

Most of the images are hand drawn illustrations, which is fine when showing cross sections but odd when they're meant as reproductions of historical items. I'm guessing they were unable to secure the rights to photographs and so did the next best thing, but it really would have been better to have photographs. And what photos the book does have are all black and white.

The book came out in 1994, so the information is already dated. That's not to say it's all wrong, just that you have to accept that not all of the conclusions mentioned here are still agreed upon. I do think the authors did a fantastic job of both showing how archaeological conclusions shift over time as new finds are discovered/researched, and also explaining that some mysteries may have different solutions to the ones proposed in this volume.

While the book has some limitations, it's a fantastic volume if you want a nice overview of the breadth of human achievement throughout ancient history.

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## **Dan Gladwell says**

Another well written book by these two authors. I didn't enjoy it as much as Ancient Mysteries, but that's mostly because Mysteries had the multiple view points and explanations included. This is more of a text book read (which is great by me), but it's still a very fun book to read!

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### **Shane says**

As the review on the back from the Boston Globe says, "It's chockablock with curious lore," and that pretty neatly sums up this book.

The information was concise and very informative, with lots of interesting facts about what the ancient world created. I liked the point made in the introduction that we like to think of modern man as clever and ancient man as primitive, but this is not the case: the ancients were just as smart and inventive as people today. The format is based on subject, which worked fine, but in a few instances I wish it would have been by historical period or country.

In a few instances I did not appreciate the author's tone, a sort of snarky know-it-all, although thankfully this was not throughout.

Some parts were more dense and less interesting than others, but ultimately there is so much good info here that I'll give it a "4".

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### **T. says**

This non-fiction book is ideal for those people who wish to know >who else< invented stuff long before the European Renaissance. Turns out many things, including the lightning rod and armored ships, were invented way before the Industrial Revolution. As an archaeologist, I like the excellent referencing and documenting the authors do for each of their topic areas. Very good bibliography. Highly recommended.

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### **Brittany Reads says**

I learned A LOT from this book! I was amazed by how advance ancient technology was, and how much I didn't know. I do wish more sources were cited throughout the book. There were times I found myself wondering how we know about certain things, or how a topic was researched.

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### **Deborah says**

This book includes a very detailed look at how the ancients used to live. It was very, very interesting, and is written in an easy-to-read fashion.

I intend to keep this book in my personal library for future reference during the writing of my novels.

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### **Alberto says**

A beautiful work on the history of technology. I really recommend it... wondering why China is leading the manufacturing nowadays? Well, you might want to know a bit about their thousands of years in developing technology.

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### **Rebekah Gamble says**

If I were going to choose the two most influential books in my life I would choose this one and the bible. As I child I used to stay up at night reading it secretly, looking up words I didn't know in a dictionary. As I got older, I turned back to this book in times of trouble when I needed something grounding that also reminded me of all the wonderful things to be found in the minds of men. Through all the years the book never gets old, it never seems done, and it's always inspiring, enlightening, and helps to restore the wonder in the world when things seem bleak.

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### **Olga says**

Great book for history geeks. Because you really have to be one to read 760 pages about mostly ancient and some medieval history.

In addition, it is an amazing book for curious people. If questions, like how the calendar was invented? what people used to clean their homes before Fairy and Gala? still pop up in your head, then go for this cradle of answers.

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### **Kozmo Kliegl says**

Proof that despite ancient did not understand the Universe as well our society does, they could still pull off feats of cleverness, e.g. cataract surgery in 2nd Millenium India that resulted in genuine improvement of vision.

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