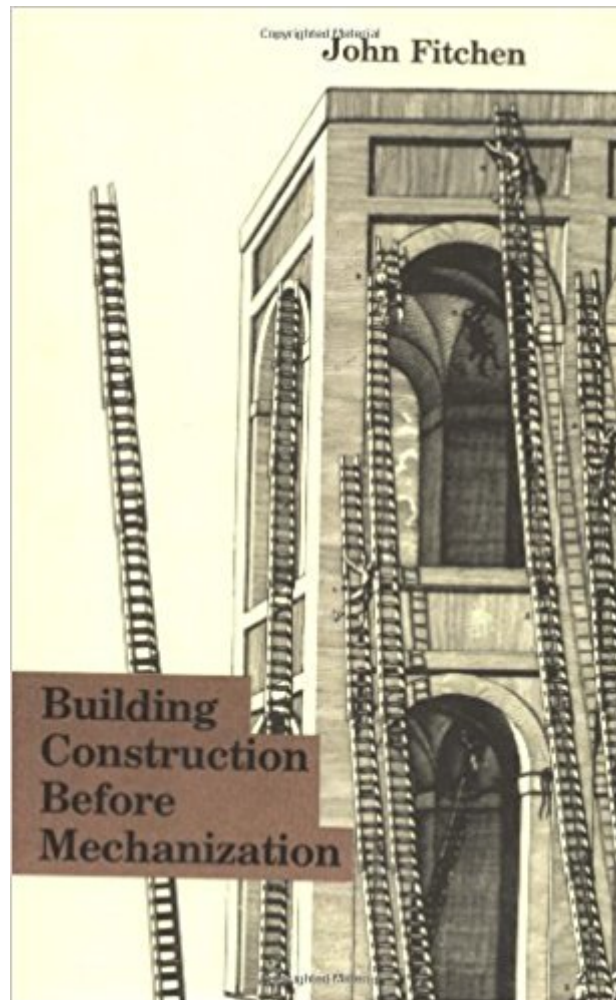




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Building Construction Before Mechanization (MIT Press)



Synopsis

How were huge stones moved from quarries to the sites of Egyptian pyramids? How did the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages lift blocks to great heights by muscle power alone? In this intriguing book John Fitchen explains and illustrates the solutions to these and many other puzzles in preindustrial building construction. This is the first general survey of the practices and role of the builder (as opposed to the designer) in constructing an array of structures. Fitchen's approach gives a valuable hands-on feel for what it's like to work with ropes and ladders, wedges and slings; with crews engaged in well digging, bridge building, and the transporting of obelisks hundreds of miles by water and over land. The buildings discussed range from the tents, tepees, and igloos of nomadic tribes to the monumental pyramids of Egypt, the temples of Greece, the aqueducts of Rome, and the cathedrals of medieval Europe.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Building Construction Before Mechanization is a mine of information...There are many insights and a jargon free use of language which will make the book accessible -- and thought provoking -- to a wide readership. (Times Literary Supplement)

Building Construction Before Mechanization is a mine of information...There are many insights and a jargon-free use of language which will make the book accessible--and thought provoking--to a

wide readership.

I was rather disappointed in this book. I am an engineer and very interested in medieval technology. This book lacks any in-depth technical details and only superficially discusses the more rigorous engineering details of this subject. It gives a very broad and far reaching overview with a fair amount of historical context and discusses some interesting chronological and etiologic issues, but is devoid of practical details. If you are planning to build a medieval structure using period methods, this book is of little help.

Ever wonder how all of those heavy stone parts were hoisted into the ceilings of a cathedral? Curious how the arch forms were installed in large ancient aqueducts? These and so many more building methods of the ancient and medieval world are explored and presented in practical, easily understood sections in this excellent scholarly volume.

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This book surveys what is known of construction techniques before mechanization - from an entire chapter on the Egyptian pyramids to recent vernacular and jerry-built construction, from planning to quarrying and transporting stones to raising workers and materials on site. Though most of the book concentrates on stonework for obvious reasons, there are brief discussion of other techniques and materials, and an entire chapter on the use of wood. It has an excellent notes section with parenthetical and source notes expanding on the text and a great bibliography.

If you are interested by construction or past cultures, give this book a read. My own copy is dog-eared, bookmarked, scribbled in, and in overall shabby shape--having been loaned to several of my peers. The writing style is specific but navigable, and the illustrations are inspiring. Two of my favorite and often-referenced themes from this book: that people in the past (or in less industrialized societies) weren't any less resourceful or intelligent--their amazing feats of ingenuity survive on. And the brick, designed to fit in the hand, has been the foundation of some of the most incredible structures of all time.

An excellent read for those interested in architecture or construction techniques. It is also a valuable resource for those interested in understanding historical technologies.

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