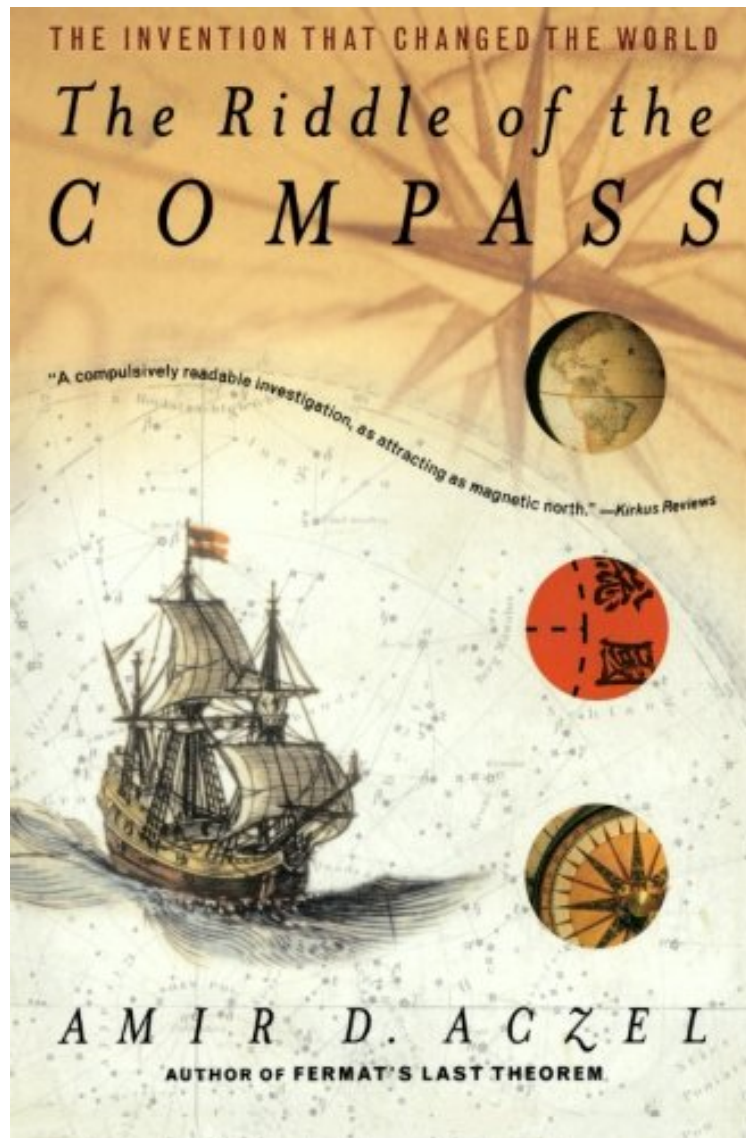


(Download free pdf) The Riddle of the Compass: The Invention that Changed the World

The Riddle of the Compass: The Invention that Changed the World

Amir D. Aczel

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#1133657 in Books 2002-05-02 2002-05-02Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.90 x .51 x 5.20l, .45 #File Name: 0156007533208 pages | File size: 56.Mb

Amir D. Aczel : The Riddle of the Compass: The Invention that Changed the World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Riddle of the Compass: The Invention that Changed the World:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The most up-to-date and comprehensive history of the compass developmentBy JaypeeThe online compass museum COMPASSIPEDIA ([...]) recommends this book because it offers in a short form the best status on the knowledge about the development of the compass in ancient times. Mr. Aczel

cites all relevant sources known and demonstrates in a wonderful way that the Chinese did invent and use the compass before the western civilization, that the Church was once again responsible for the destruction of many most important documents about this science and that the famous story about Flavio di Gioia is but a legend. The only problem that we have with this book: it will probably be equally difficult and need a courageous gentleman to destroy another legend, namely that the Briton Alexander Neckham was the first one in Europe to describe a mariner's compass, where he copied the words of the French monk and poet Hugue de Bercy/Guyot de Provins. But this is another story...1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great account of the history of the compass By Andres G. Vidal-gadeal bought this to read as I work with magnetic fields and needed to learn about the history of compasses. The book is written with passion and I literally went through it in a couple of days commuting to and from work. I highly recommend it for anyone who has ever wondered at the invisible force field that permeates through our world and lives at every instant. Give it a read, it will inform you while entertaining you.2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A good, readable narrative By Debra Hamel Amir Aczel spent his childhood on the Mediterranean Sea--literally--sailing around in and sometimes steering a passenger ship that was captained by his father. This romantic personal history makes Aczel particularly suited to tell the story of the compass, which so improved navigation in the late thirteenth century that it sparked a commercial revolution and made possible the Age of Exploration that was to follow. In his highly readable narrative Aczel provides a brief history of navigation centered on the compass--from navigation by stars and sounding lines to the naval supremacy of the Venetians in the 14th and 15th centuries to the masterful sailing of the great explorers--da Gama, Magellan--who opened up the world in the 15th and 16th centuries. We learn, too, about the early invention of the compass in China, where it was evidently not used at sea, and of its perfection as a naval instrument in the Italian city of Amalfi. The Riddle of the Compass is at its best when Aczel discusses the actual "riddle" to which the title of the book refers: the question of the historicity of a certain Flavio Gioia, whom the people of Amalfi credit with having invented the mariner's compass in 1302. Most interestingly, the question of this Gioia's existence involves the correct interpretation of a single Latin phrase, a reference to the invention of the compass in an early 16th century commentary on the poetry of Lucrezio Caro. Readers of Dava Sobel's popular book Longitude, which tells the story of the invention of the naval chronometer, will enjoy Amir Aczel's equally readable history of the compass. Reviewed by Debra Hamel, author of Trying Neaira: The True Story of a Courtesan's Scandalous Life in Ancient Greece

The story of the compass is shrouded in mystery and myth, yet most will agree it begins around the time of the birth of Christ in ancient China. A mysterious lodestone whose powers affected metal was known to the Chinese emperor. When this piece of metal was suspended in water, it always pointed north. This unexplainable occurrence led to the stone's use in feng shui, the Chinese art of finding the right location. However, it was the Italians, more than a thousand years later, who discovered the ultimate destiny of the lodestone and unleashed its formidable powers. In Amalfi sometime in the twelfth century, the compass was born, crowning the Italians as the new rulers of the seas and heralding the onset of the modern world. Retracing the roots of the compass and sharing the fascinating story of navigation through the ages, The Riddle of the Compass is Aczel at his most entertaining and insightful.

From School Library Journal Adult/High School-Prior to the invention of the compass, a merchant or sailor who wished to cross a large body of water was forced to navigate by studying the winds and stars or by never sailing out of the sight of land. Long ocean voyages were impossible and even sailing the Mediterranean could be a lengthy and hazardous voyage. The compass changed all of this. Mariners could now strike out on an azimuth and have a reasonable chance of arriving at their destination. This led to the Age of Exploration and the expansion of the European kingdoms into economic empires. Yet as important as the compass is, its origins are shrouded in mystery. The small town of Amalfi, Italy, claims to be the birthplace of the inventor of the compass, but China has an even stronger case. Aczel examines the myths, legends, and facts behind the dispute and provides a logical, although not indisputable, conclusion on which nation can claim the compass as its own. He also provides a layman's overview of the development of navigation from the earliest days to the 15th century. Although the author is primarily known for his scientific books, Riddle of the Compass contains little or no jargon and a minimum of scientific terminology. A worthwhile and interesting addition. Robert Burnham, R. E. Lee High School, Springfield, VA Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Despite its brevity, this book covers its topic completely. In this detailed history, Aczel (God's Equation; Bentley Coll.) takes us back in time to Amalfi, Italy, where between 1295 and 1302 the compass as we know it was developed. Aczel points out, however, that the actual discovery of materials that followed magnetic lines, or at least consistently pointed in a specific direction (south), is attributed to the Chinese in 1040. The story of the compass is also the story of navigation, which the author admirably combines. Debunking the myth that sailors followed the coastlines of countries until they met their desired location, the author describes how they navigated the open seas using the sun, stars, wind, and even the migration of birds. While this book is not a page-turner, it is an accurate account of the important historical events that lead to the compass's development. Tellingly, Aczel grew up on a ship and was navigating straits in the Mediterranean long before he could drive a car.

Recommended for public as well as academic libraries whose readers want to go beyond the account generally given in an encyclopedia.- James Olson, Northeastern Illinois Univ., Chicago Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Scientific American The compass, Aczel says, was "the most important technological invention since the wheel" because its contribution to navigation "allowed goods to be transported efficiently and reliably across the seas and opened up the world to maritime exploration." Inspired by that thought, Aczel (associate professor of mathematics at Bentley College) set out to trace the history of the device. "The compass," he found, "was invented in antiquity in China, where it did not immediately improve navigation but was used in feng shui." It was the mariners of Amalfi, then a maritime city-state in Italy, who around 1300 transformed the instrument into the compass we know today. Citing it and other devices that only gradually found their technological niche, Aczel concludes that it "seems to be a law of nature that a technology is developed and then waits a long time for people to discover their need for it, rather than the other way around." Editors of Scientific American