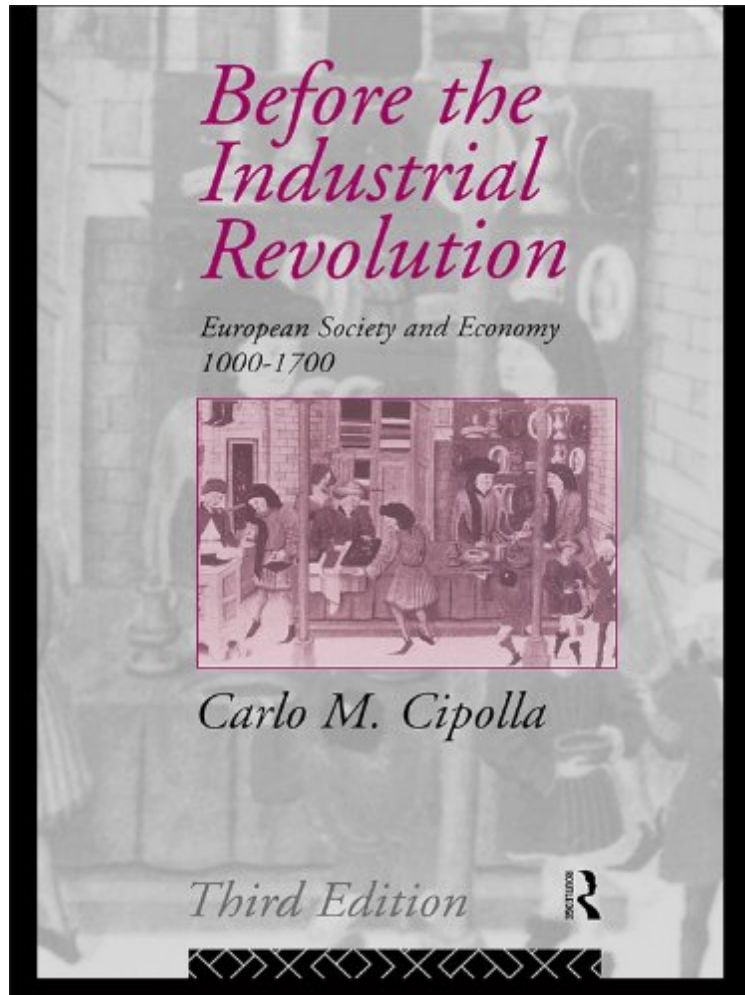


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Before the Industrial Revolution: European Society and Economy 1000-1700

Carlo M. Cipolla

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must-read economic history of pre-industrial Europe By DoubtfulReader
BOOK REVIEW: CIPOLLA, Carlo, Before the Industrial Revolution (ISBN-13: 978-0415090056) This is a very readable yet scholarly sound economic history of pre-industrial Europe, discussing the main social forces which would drive industrialization, written by a leading Italian economic historian long established in the USA. Having finished reading the historians (and biographer) in The Great Books of the Western World collection, I was left by Gibbon on the Middle Ages and wanted to bridge that to our times. It was clear the period I was lacking was one of deep social transformations brought about by European industrialization. So I turned to

Encyclopaedia Britannica, where I found, in the references, this wonderful book. Cipolla is a scholarly writer who masters his craft. This is a book for the general reader, which translates complex economic concepts into understandable words, in a clear prose, generously complemented with maps, tables and charts and graphs. About 40% of the 350-plus pages is made of by reference notes for the more erudite reader. The book is formally structured in two parts. In part one, Cipolla presents his reader with a static view of Europe's economy and its social preconditions at the start of his narrative. He deals with the demand side; the factors of production; and productivity and production. In part two, essaying a dynamic viewpoint, he deals with the urban revolution; population trends and plagues; technology; enterprise, credit, and money; production, incomes, and consumption; the emergence of the modern age; the changing balance of economic power in Europe. Throughout the text, Cipolla masterfully shows how intricate the patchwork of causal historical can be. He deconstructs several simplistic hypotheses, and while providing ample discussions furnished with evidence and references, his discussions are not unnecessarily long and only add fluidity and a fast pace to his narrative. But the main quality of Cipolla's writing is that his powerful command of both historical detail and sources, and his ability to see the big picture and present it in human terms makes the author a rare example of wisdom. It is in his wit and empathy for common folks feelings and in his confessions of how historians cannot pin the point as to why exactly a people - Florentines, Dutch or English - suddenly turn inspired in all sectors of life to produce awesome works, from a thriving economy, technological inventions, works of art, military prowess and literary genius, he hints at the most human, the most pungent realities that seem to remain yet hidden in the cold facts of sources and scholarly work, but try to sprint out and tell us something about ourselves and the indomitable character of human spirit. This is a book that inspires as much as it teaches, that provokes reflection as much as gives information. It does show some inaccuracies, as when the author says the Dutch market in the sixteenth century had quotations for Brazilian coffee, even if large scale production of coffee was introduced in this country only in the 19th century, or when he, seemingly following the state of the art in the time of writing, said almost no American silver or gold were taken by the Spanish to China via the Pacific route, something historians have recently started to doubt. Yet, anyone reading Plutarch or Gibbon or Thucydides will find errors there too; a careful reader will find there additional reasons to appreciate such masterpieces of History, to which Cipolla's book is a humble but deserving companion.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great book on life before the Industrial Revolution
By K. Ryan Kane
I thoroughly enjoyed this book. If you are interested in knowing what life was like before the Industrial Revolution, then this is the book for you. It contains economic and historical research that you would expect from a book like this. There are a lot of diagrams, graphs, tables, charts, and illustrations that keep you interested and help with your learning. The book is organized into parts such as Demand, Factors of Production, Productivity and Production, Population Trends and Plagues, Technology, Credit and Money, Production, Incomes, and Consumption, the Modern Age, the Changing Balance of Economic Power in Europe. The book examines the social history, economic development and economic growth of Europe prior to the Industrial Revolution. And you don't have to have a degree in Economics to understand the concepts presented, although it does help. You will not find a better, more readable book on what the world looked like before the Industrial Revolution! I would follow up this book with a book on the Industrial Revolution to complete your studies. This is definitely a 5-star book.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good book, had fun reading it
By Benjamin
First of all, I am not an historian, so I can't very much talk about its academic value. However, I wished to learn more about medieval times in Europe and this is one of the most well written and overall pleasant book I read on the subject so far. This book is exactly about what the title advertises : Socioeconomical Europe before the industrial revolution.

First published in 1993. Routledge is an imprint of Taylor Francis, an informa company.