

Re: What if we refuse to repeat this mistake of the Ancients: They had steam power w/o using it!

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<[giveitawhirl2008@xxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:giveitawhirl2008@xxxxxxxxxxx)> wrote in message  
[news:703c9354-6eff-48ec-aebb-cea3272425b8@xx](mailto:news:703c9354-6eff-48ec-aebb-cea3272425b8@xx)

I'm cross-posting this from soc.history.science, where I originally posted it. It has to do with technology in general, but is also heavily related to space.

There are a number of examples of ancient peoples having a potentially practical technology or knowledge in hand, yet who did nothing practical with it. One famous example is the Chinese and gunpowder. Another is the ancient Greeks and steam power.

This post is not about steam power ONLY, but I'll go with that example. (In fact, this post isn't about the ANCIENTS, only! It's about US not repeating the mistake of ignoring something useful that is in hand or known about, and refusing to develop it.) I know Archimedes boiled water in a closed vessel with two open holes, suspended on a rod above a fire, which would turn on its axis. I also heard that the ancient Greeks could open the doors of the temple of the goddess Diana with steam power, however slowly. They would run this device to impress foreign visitors with the belief that the goddess liked their offerings.

Now, what if they had thought this through, and developed at least steam-powered ships back in those times!? Can you imagine if ancient naval campaigns were fought with steam ships? How much more advanced might all kinds of technology be today if the ancients had decided to pursue the R&D of knowledge and technology which they actually had! There are many other examples, including use of a light beam as information carrier as far back as something like 1870.

Well, I'm wondering what kind of stuff like that could be happening NOW? Maybe we are missing no avenue of approach to technological advance these days. But what if, theoretically, centuries or millenia distant, they could look back at us and wonder why we didn't develop such-and-such?

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What things might we be putting too little R&D into, relative to their promise? Antimatter propulsion for spacecraft, maybe? Massively parallel AI machines, a la HAL 9000, maybe? Geothermal? What? Are you sure we aren't missing a thing?

I understand NASA has an office for dealing with this concern. Do other agencies, companies, industries, and even individuals do enough contemplating of this?

Hi, Giveit. I think you've outlined a serious topic here. What have you done with it?

Titeotwawki — mha [sci.space.policy 2008 Feb 24]

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