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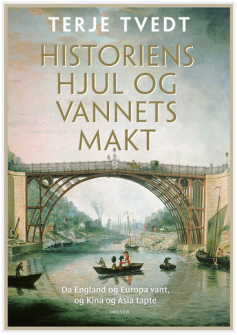

Water is the Missing Link

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A New Interpretation of the Rise of the Modern World

Water is the Missing Link delivers a bold, fresh reinterpretation of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the modern world, challenging the conventional wisdom that has shaped our understanding of modern history. Terje Tvedt argues that the most transformative phase of the Industrial Revolution, up until 1820, wasn't driven by steam engines or coal, as nearly everyone believes. Instead, the true catalyst lay in the harnessing of waterpower in the idyllic English countryside—far from the smoky, overcrowded cities that have become the revolution's enduring image. It was the humble waterwheel, not the steam engine, that powered all the first factories, while goods and heavy stuff like iron and could were transported not by steam locomotives or horse wagons on roads but by boats and barges pulled by human and animals along rivers and canals.

Tvedt's groundbreaking approach shifts the focus from fossil fuels to the natural water landscapes that had shaped societies for millennia. He compares 11 countries - China, England, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Spain - exploring how each of them exploited their water resources to strengthen industrial growth and build national transport networks. This comparative analysis uncovers a hidden history about what happened prior to and during this radical shift in the course of history and in power relations in the world.

Terje Tvedt

Terje Tvedt is a Dr. philos and historian, professor of geography and political science who has written extensively on world history and water, colonial history and the international aid system. He is also the series editor for the 12-volume work "A History of Water" to which scientists from over 80 countries contributed. He has made several TV-documentaries, as the award-winning series "A Journey in the History of Water" and "A Journey in the Future of Water" (on Netflix). His latest books have been bestsellers in Norway. He has received the prestigious Fritt Ord (Free Speech) Foundation Award and the prize for excellent research dissemination by the Norwegian Research Council. His "The River Nile in the Age of the British. Political Ecology and the Quest for Economic Power" was shortlisted by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies as one of the best books on the Middle East in 2005. His books have been translated into many languages, as Chinese, Swedish, Serbian, Danish, Ukraine, German, Dutch and English.

Other titles
World History: With the Past as a Mirror (2020)
The Nile. History's Greatest River (2018)