

INTERESTING TO NOTE

SEVERAL technical historians have commented on the strange dearth of invention that plagued classical Mediterranean society. Before, in Egypt, and later in the colder northern areas, invent on rose to more normal rates, but the Greeks and Romans never even came close to what might be considered an average of human inventiveness. Scholars traditionally blame the fact that this was essentially a slave society and that slaves don't invent or solve problems (p 72) and their masters don't have to because the labor is cheap—if not practically free.

Dr S. Colum Gillilan takes active issue with this belief, and for several interesting reasons. First, he says slaves are by no means free labor and that ancient artisans (who might have done the real inventing of the time) were for the most part *not* slaves. Second, the lack of raw materials or the transportation to bring timber, fuels, and metals to the Mediterranean lands tended to stultify invention. Third, and to us the most interesting, is what Gillilan calls a genetic explanation.

"From about 150 B.C. in Rome, when Greek cooking was introduced for the wealthy, and probably about three centuries earlier in Greece, the diet of the upper classes was full of lead, especially in their wine and their grape sirup, their favorite substitute for absent sugar (save honey). It was sheer poison, the way the Romans made it. Into their wine they put lead in as many as seven different ways; since they apparently had little idea of the poisonousness of the diet. Modern medicine . . . Knows that lead in women produces sterility, abortion, and stillbirth, and in children brings death or mental damage. A tiny dose daily—only 1 mg is safe—is enough to exterminate a race in a century. This lead poisoning could explain . . . the rapid and repeated extermination of the Roman aristocracy, leaving it almost childless. When everyone who could make, marry, or mate with money went on a lead diet and exterminated his generation . . . we can well imagine what this would do to the native intelligence of the race, first to the patricians and then to the lower ranks, whose ablest or handsomest members were continually promoted to replenish the decimated plutocracy. . . ."



1st Century carving of a crane driven by windmills.