S-32 – 12th Annual Symposium of the Social History of Military Technology

International Committee for the History of Technology

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Abstract:
The Symposium on the Social History of Military Technology, a regular part of the ICOHTEC annual meeting since 2005, strives to move beyond the narrow material focus of fans, antiquarians, and even some historians. The history of military technology usually centers on weaponry, warships, fortifications, or other physical manifestations of warfare, emphasizing how they were made or how they worked. Historians have also tended to assume a strictly utilitarian and rational basis for military technological invention and innovation. However necessary they may be, such approaches largely ignore some very important questions. What are the contexts of social values, attitudes, and interests, non-military as well as military, that shape and support (or oppose) these technologies? How does the social order reciprocally interact with military technology? Or, more generally: How do social and cultural environments within the military itself or in the larger society affect military technological change? And the indispensable corollary: How does changing military technology affect other aspects of society and culture? In brief, this symposium will address military technology as both agent and object of social change, taking a very broad view that encompasses not only the production, distribution, use, and replacement of weapons and weapon systems, but also communications, logistics, medicine, and other technologies of military relevance as well as sciences of military interest.

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