ABSTRACT

THESIS: Women, Whorls and Wheels

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Spinning, a task modern western society has eliminated from the list of household chores, was once a staple of every medieval woman’s life. This facet of medieval women’s work should not be neglected, since its shift appears to play a fundamental role in allowing industrialization through relocation of workload. When the new tool, the spinning wheel, was added to a woman’s possible ways of finishing this task, was it universally adopted? A look at the pervasive task from three perspectives shows that this new tool was slowly accepted and did not replace the original tool, the spindle. These perspectives are, first a literary review of how and when the term spinning wheel entered the the cultural vocabulary. The second is a pictorial review of what type of spinning implements are shown in artwork and when the spinning wheel joins these pictures. An archaeological review of spindle whorls form York and Sweden to see if the introduction of the spinning wheel can be inferred from their inertial values is last.