

SHROUDED PILLARS OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

In school most of us learned that the foundational pillars of Western Civilization are classical Greece, Imperial Rome, the Bible, and the medieval Catholic Church. They are vital components of civilization. But this course is not about them. This course is about the other pillars of our civilization, ones that most school curricula ignored or got wrong.

For instance, Michael McCormick, in his *Origins of the European Economy*, demonstrates that the beginning of a European economy began in the so-called "Dark Ages" when the Carolingians established control over much of Northern Europe. Professor Thomas Noble, who has taught extensively about the Foundations of Western Civilization, states that "The Carolingian period was formative politically, institutionally, economically, governmentally, but also culturally, religiously, ethically, morally, and academically." They and other such "barbarians" created governments, chose bishops, established schools, eliminated Roman slavery and infanticide, and developed today's written grammar and form. In Spain Visigoths and Moors created a glorious culture. Meanwhile, Byzantium influenced Europe in many ways, and for centuries no one could become pope unless approved by the "Roman" emperor in Constantinople.

Western Civilization is also indebted to Islam's Golden Age (750-1258). Eamonn Gearon, an adviser to the U.S. State Department on Mideast and African affairs and a scholar on the history and achievements of that time, states that "from toothpaste to architecture, algebra, algorithms, astronomy, medicine, and mechanical devices--the wealth of this cultural legacy and scholarship is staggering." For instance, Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* was for centuries the fundamental textbook on medicine in much of Europe. In Baghdad classical Greek texts were preserved, translated, and passed into Western Europe. And Sir Christopher Wren, Britain's foremost architect, said that Gothic architecture should be called "Saracen" because of its Islamic style and inspiration.

Also, the works of Jewish thinkers such as Philo of Alexandria, Judah ha-Levi, and Moses Maimonides profoundly influence both Judaic and Christian theology to this day. As for Alexandria, in their history of this Egyptian city Justin Pollard and Howard Reid call it "the meeting place and crucible of all the great cultures and minds of the ancient world." It was a creative place. For example, in the 3rd Century BC Aristarchus posited that the earth revolves around the sun and Eratosthenes calculated the circumference of the earth. Later Hero designed the essence of a steam engine, 2000 years ago.

And we must give the Vikings their due. Besides pillaging and plundering, Scandinavia's Vikings developed a commercial network throughout Europe and into Asia, settled Normandy and eastern England, enabled Scotland to achieve a distinct identity, and inspired principalities to form in European Russia. Without these developments Europe and its civilization would have evolved much differently than what we now have.

This course is about these and other "Shrouded Pillars" on which our civilization stands. We shall address the essential contributions of these societies to the foundations of our civilization and we shall consider the lives and stories of intriguing individuals whose minds, imaginations, visions and actions helped to make Western Civilization what it is.

LEADER: Robert Nolan is an attorney who has a history degree from the University of Scranton, where he is on the adjunct faculty, a law degree from Harvard, and has previously presented Evergreen Forum courses on America's Revolutionary War, Civil War, and Old West.

LOCATION: Zoom

THURSDAYS: 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., 8 weeks beginning March 3 through April 21

MAXIMUM: Unlimited