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*On the cover - Leonardo da  
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# PIERCING TRUTHS: PYTHAGORAS, WESTERN CIVILIZATION, AND HOPE

*Steven Armstrong, FRC, MA, MDiv*

Western Civilization is in crisis. World Civilization is in crisis.

G.K. Chesterton wrote about this feeling of crisis in 1906:

O God of earth and altar,  
Bow down and hear our cry,  
Our earthly rulers falter,  
Our people drift and die;  
The walls of gold entomb us,  
The swords of scorn divide,  
Take not thy thunder from us,  
But take away our pride.<sup>1</sup>

William Butler Yeats also expressed similar feelings in 1919:

Turning and turning in the  
widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the  
falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot  
hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the  
world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,  
and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is  
drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while  
the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.<sup>2</sup>

These descriptions from the early twentieth century are even more accurately borne out in the barrage of negative news we receive daily from electronic and print media in the twenty-first century.

## Hope?

In 2015 the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC launched a powerful new site, <http://www.hope2050.org/>, visualizing that our world in crisis would experience “the passage” in the third decade of

the twenty-first century and enter a new Golden Age. This is consistent with many world traditions about the notion of cycles, including the Vedic Yugas,<sup>3</sup> the Greco-Roman Ages of the World,<sup>4</sup> and Joachim of Fiore’s Age of the Spirit, so central to Simon Studion’s *Naometria*, which had tremendous influence on the Tübingen Circle and the emergence of Rosicrucianism in the 1600s.<sup>5</sup>

We must ask ourselves: How is this breaking through to a new Golden Age – this piercing through what seem like impossible environmental, cultural, economic, and policy issues – going to take place?

It seems impossible.

And for a good reason: it is...

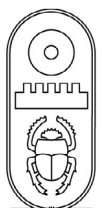
...unless you know what scholar, initiatic storyteller, and spiritual teacher Peter Kingsley knows:

Civilizations do not just happen; they are created by those whose place it is to grow them, and when a civilization comes to an impasse, to pierce through to a new path.

Civilization has been in crisis before, and our crises are often thought of as being cyclical. There is a way to pierce through them though, as an examination of the origins of Western Civilization can reveal. The very thing that helped give rise to today’s civilizations can help see us through their crises.

## A Path of Discovery

Lifelong mystic<sup>6</sup> Peter Kingsley is the author of many books, articles, and lectures.<sup>7</sup> In particular three of his works are an initiatic journey into the roots of our Western Civilization in Magna Graecia



(what is today most of coastal southern Italy) and beyond.

Through his books *In The Dark Places of Wisdom*, *Reality*, and *A Story Waiting to Pierce You*,<sup>8</sup> Kingsley leads readers on a path of discovery to the origins of our civilization in southern Italy, the Mediterranean, and Central Asia. The tale will continue in the Fall of 2018, in Kingsley's upcoming *Catafalque: Carl Jung and the End of Humanity*,<sup>9</sup> connecting our civilization's origins with the ideas and writings of Carl Jung and his associate, the well-known scholar of Sufism and Islamic mysticism, Henry Corbin.

One of the connections between our origins and Jung is Jung's conception of creativity: "True creation is to give birth to the primordially ancient in a world that is new."<sup>10</sup> This sentiment is shared by many, including the Pythagoreans (as will be explained below), Professor J.R.R. Tolkien,<sup>11</sup> and the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, which recently launched a video, "Ancient Wisdom for a New World."<sup>12</sup>

Reading Kingsley's works is far from simply an intellectual experience, although his scholarship is impeccable, and for those interested, the endnotes provide ample and erudite substantiation of the truths he reveals. He is thoroughly engaged with the sacred tradition at the origins of the West.

This brief introduction is no substitute for reading Kingsley's books for oneself. The Alchemical maxim applies here: *Lege, lege, lege, relege, ora, labora et invenies* (read, read, reread, pray, work, and thou shalt find).<sup>13</sup>

### **Magna Graecia**

Today we think of Italy as Italian; however beginning in the eighth century BCE, Greek colonies were firmly established in the Mediterranean from southern Italy to Spain and even south to Libya and north to the Black Sea.<sup>14</sup> The Romans called southern Italy *Magna Graecia* (Great Greece). Even today, the

Italo-Greek Catholic Church – a Church of Byzantine Tradition – has Eparchies (Dioceses) in southern Italy and Sicily.<sup>15</sup>

In Kingsley's books, the story begins in Velia in southern Italy, and with the Pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides (late sixth – early fifth centuries BCE), a priest of Apollo, and healer.<sup>16</sup> Modern historians consider him the founder of metaphysics, ontology, and logic.<sup>17</sup>

The story then proceeds to Akragas in Sicily and encounters Empedocles (around 490 – 430 BCE), whom modern philosophy considers an early scientific thinker.

Behind both men stands Pythagoras of Samos (about 570 – 495 BCE), who founded his school and mystical community in Croton in the southern Italian region of Calabria. Today he is considered the founder of Western math and geometry and all school children learn his "Pythagorean Theorem," concerning a right triangle: the square of the hypotenuse (the side opposite the right angle) is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.<sup>18</sup>

Parmenides, Empedocles, and other Pre-Socratic Philosophers such as Zeno of Velia were closely associated by ancient writers with the Pythagoreans, and even said to be Pythagoreans themselves.

Modern historians of philosophy often disregard this association because the approaches of these Pre-Socratics were so original and creative that the historians find this incompatible with belonging to a mystical group like the followers of Pythagoras.<sup>19</sup>

Kingsley adroitly leads readers to discover that Parmenides and Empedocles were indeed Pythagorean in their approach, something standard scholarship hesitates to affirm completely, since they do not seem to foreground Pythagorean doctrine as we know it.



Pythagoras Emerging from the Underworld by Salvator Rosa (1662).

He explains why in *The Dark Places of Wisdom*.

Originally, Pythagoreans weren't so concerned with fixed ideas or doctrines as they were with something quite different: something that didn't just tolerate creativity and originality but encouraged them, nurtured them, guided people to their source. This is why the Pythagorean tradition managed to stay so elusive – why it was so open-ended, blending with other traditions, defying our modern ideas of orthodoxy or self-definition.

The evidence is still there to show how highly valued individuality and creative freedom once were in Pythagorean circles. That can sound such a paradox to us; we're so used to thinking of religious groups or sects as made up of brainwashed, mindless men and women. But as a matter of fact this is one of the least paradoxical things about Pythagoreanism.<sup>20</sup>

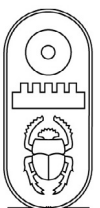
The problem, Kingsley explains, is not with the ancient Pythagoreans, or the Pre-Socratics, but with us. The modern world has such a superficial concept of being creative and original, that it isn't easy for us to think in any other way.<sup>21</sup>

### Shamanism at the Foundations

In fact, Parmenides and Empedocles received all of what they taught through shamanic journeying to the Underworld, where the Goddess Persephone taught them. Pythagoreanism is about accessing the source of truth and wisdom, and that source is divine. In a careful reading of their surviving poetry, it becomes patently clear that the origins of Western Civilization are mystical and spiritual.

This naturally has parallels with Egyptian Shamanism and some of the most famous ancient Egyptian texts. As author Jeremy Nadler has argued, the true purpose of the *Pyramid Texts* and *The Book of Coming Forth by Day* (*The Book of the Dead*) involved journeying to the Am Dwat.<sup>22</sup>

The most fundamental shamanic project is “To die before you die.” It is, through meditative practices, to journey to the Underworld, the realm of death, to gain divine wisdom.<sup>23</sup> It is humanity's oldest spiritual practice. It is present among all ancient peoples and traditional societies. Even modern spiritual exercises such as those of Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits have profoundly shamanic elements, such as the deathbed meditation



and visualizing one's self in the events of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, although they are not usually thought of in this way.<sup>24</sup>

Our modern arrogance blinds us to the importance of these sacred, foundational practices in what we call “primitive societies.” It would be more accurate to refer to these ancient and aboriginal societies as pristine or primordial, as they contain the seeds of all culture.

### **True Philosophy and Logic**

Today we think of logic as cold and rigid. A modern icon for logic is the stoic Star Trek race of Vulcans. But logic in its original Greek meaning (from λόγος—*logos*) is union with the word, the self-revelation of the Divine, and the pattern of all that is. It is ecstatic, and so was the shamanic work these philosophers accomplished.

For them, philosophy was “the love of wisdom,” a true, spiritual love of Divine Wisdom. This changed when Plato and Aristotle took the stage:

We can still trace out how, well over two thousand years ago, the schools of Plato and Aristotle put the seal on what was to become the most enduring Athenian contribution to intellectual history in the West: instead of the love of wisdom, philosophy turned into the love of talking and arguing about the love of wisdom. Since then the talking and arguing have pushed everything else out of the picture – until now we no longer know of anything else or can even imagine that there could be.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, one can see that the West has taken a 2,500-year hiatus – perhaps necessary – from its actual origins and purposes. Kingsley shows us that it is time to return to the roots of our civilization once again.

### **Pythagoras**

After these discoveries about Parmenides and Empedocles in *The Dark Places of Wisdom and Reality*, Kingsley then turns to the older figure standing behind these lovers of Divine Wisdom: Pythagoras, in *A Story Waiting to Pierce You*.

It is common in modern scholarship not to take our ancient ancestors at their word. After all, they were less advanced than we are, and were superstitious and credulous, right?

Of course, none of that is true of the ancient authorities we are dealing with, and Kingsley rightly takes ancient sources very seriously.

We are very familiar with the figure of Pythagoras, the mystic, teacher, musician, healer, mathematician, and geometer.<sup>27</sup> He was renowned for his travels,<sup>28</sup> but it might surprise you to know that there is very good evidence that he travelled even further, to Hyperborea.

Today, many may associate Hyperborea with the Sword and Sorcery fantasies of Robert E. Howard (Conan) and the *Hyperborean Cycle* of Clark Ashton Smith.<sup>29</sup> However, Hyperborea was quite real for the ancient Greeks. Meaning “The Land Beyond the North Wind,” it lay far to the east and north.

Pythagoras had several encounters with a very strange figure from afar in the Greek world. He is attested in several places in ancient Greek histories as Abaris the Hyperborean.<sup>30</sup> Abaris appeared in the areas of the Greek settlements carrying an arrow. He is consistently described as from Hyperborea, and as an “air walker.” Both Parmenides and Empedocles were also known as wonderworkers.<sup>31</sup>

Hyperborea was the home of that most Greek of deities, Apollo,<sup>32</sup> who is consistently “Hyperborean Apollo,” in Greek literature. While in Greece, he yearns to return to his beloved Hyperboreans.<sup>33</sup>

As Kingsley explains, we know that the ancient East and West were well connected by what we call today, The Silk Road. Hyperborea, the home of both Apollo and Abaris, is referring to Central Asia and Mongolia.

If anyone has any doubts that Pythagoras also journeyed to Mongolia, Kingsley points out that after the destruction of the Pythagorean community of Croton, there was a last outpost of Pythagoreanism at Tarentum in Apulia in southern Italy. The community and school had a great fascination with Pythagoras's Hyperborean connections, and there was even a Western portrait of a Mongol to be seen there.<sup>34</sup>

### Pythagoras and Abaris

Now in the West, Abaris the Skywalker, a Mongolian shaman, had come in an ecstatic trance to purify the areas of the Greek settlements, including southern Italy, to prepare for what was to come. He was able to do so, because he was possessed by his god, Hyperborean Apollo. In their spiritual journeying, these shamans had learned the paradox that the key to

travelling great distances rapidly is not to move quickly: it is to be perfectly still.<sup>35</sup>

It is this stillness – *ἡσυχία* (*hēsukhía*, “quiet”) – that Parmenides employs in his healing work in the Temple of Apollo, incubation.<sup>36</sup> Empedocles sees this stillness as the state of perfection opening to reality.<sup>37</sup> Pythagoras insists on five years of silence – which must have included stillness as part of the discipline – to enter

his inner community. The stillness is paired with the Divine gift of *μῆτις* (*mêtis*, “wisdom,” skill), to perceive the sacred reality around us.<sup>39</sup>

This same stillness is practiced by Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholic Christian Hesychasts,<sup>40</sup> and is at the root of the Quakers' and other groups' Quietism.<sup>41</sup> It is practiced in virtually all traditional mysticism, including the Sufis. It is the polar opposite of much of contemporary society, in which there is no stillness, no silence, but a constant cacophony. We cannot get anywhere because we cannot be still.<sup>42</sup>

Abaris's arrow represented his authority, and also his ability to travel in stillness. When, possessed by his god Apollo as he was, he encountered Pythagoras, he recognized that Pythagoras was an actual incarnation of Hyperborean Apollo himself. He therefore bestowed his arrow

on Pythagoras as a sign of the divine authority to plant the seeds of Western Civilization. The commission is sent from the East to the West.<sup>43</sup>

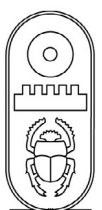
And plant the seeds of Western Civilization Pythagoras did.

Alfred North Whitehead once quipped that “[t]he safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.”<sup>44</sup> If this is true, we can see what went wrong: they didn't go far enough back, to our civilization's actual origins.

It is from Pythagoras that virtually all the fundamental components of Western Civilization flow. It is from this divine



Pythagoreans Celebrate Sunrise, by Fyodor Bronnikov (1869).



incarnation from Mongolia wielding his arrow of authority that the seed that would grow to be the West was born. Far to the East, to another continent, other messengers had gone almost 40,000 years earlier, to seed civilization there as well.

The heirs of these two civilizations would meet and exchange when the founders of the United States learned from the Iroquois Confederacy, and the arrows came to be grasped in the talons of the American Eagle<sup>45</sup> on the Great Seal. On its obverse our prophecy is written: *Annuet Coeptis: Novus Order Saeclorum*, “[The Divine] has approved the New Order of the Ages.”

Today, we must learn to be still. We must be ready to receive the gift that will pierce through the impossible barriers that have grown up to block our way.

Virgil foresaw the prophecy on the Great Seal in his Fourth *Eclogue*, from which the text is adapted:

Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis  
aetas;  
magnus ab integro saeculorum  
nascitur ordo.  
Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt  
Saturnia regna;  
iam nova progenies, caelo  
demittitur alto.  
Tu modo nascenti puero, quo  
ferrea primum  
desinet, ac toto surget gens aurea  
mundo,  
casta fave Lucina; tuus iam regnat  
Apollo.<sup>46</sup>

At last the Final Time announced  
by the Sibyl will arrive:

The procession of ages turns to its  
origin.

The Virgin returns and Saturn  
reigns as before;

A new race from heaven on high  
descends.

Goddess of Birth, smile on the  
new-born baby,  
In whose time the Iron Prison will  
fall to ruin  
And a golden race arises  
everywhere.  
Apollo, the rightful king, is  
restored!<sup>47</sup>

As we come to this place of stillness,  
Peter Kingsley encourages us.

At the end of *A Story Waiting to Pierce You*, he concludes that initiatory journey  
thusly:

And although we may appear to  
have arrived at the end of this little  
incantation, there really is no end to  
it at all – any more than there is an  
end to the joy of being present with  
those who watch over and give birth  
to worlds.<sup>48</sup>

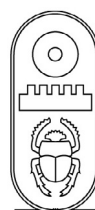
We too can continue the story that has  
no end.

Let us watch. Let us be still. Read, read,  
reread, pray, work, and thou shalt find.

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# ROSICRUCIANISM AND STOICISM

Grand Master Julie Scott, SRC

In the year 300 BCE, following a shipwreck in which he lost his fortune, Zeno, a merchant from Cyprus, founded Stoicism in Athens, Greece. Initially Stoicism included metaphysics, logic, and ethics, however the Romans, who embraced Stoicism centuries later, focused primarily on ethics and how to live a good and tranquil life. As we will see, Stoicism and Rosicrucianism have a lot in common.

Much of what is known about Roman Stoicism comes from the writings associated with Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

Seneca was a Roman dramatist, statesperson, and the tutor and then advisor to the Roman emperor Nero. He was born in the year 4 BCE and went through transition in the year 65 CE. A number of his writings survive to today. In them, Seneca discusses the questions that occupied him in a way that invites his readers to think about issues in their own lives. His writings are still very relevant today.

Epictetus lived from ca. 50 to 135 CE. He was born to a slave and was therefore a slave himself. One of his owners (a freed slave) allowed him to study philosophy, where he met the Stoic Musonius Rufus, who became his teacher and mentor. Later Epictetus's master granted him his freedom. When the Roman emperor Domitian banished all philosophers from Rome, Epictetus moved to Nicopolis, Greece, where he led his school of philosophy until his transition at the age of eighty-five. Epictetus probably did not write anything himself. His disciple, Arrian, an esteemed historian, military commander, and philosopher, transcribed

excerpts of Epictetus's lectures in a book called *Discourses* and wrote the *Handbook*, which is a compendium of all of Epictetus's philosophical principles.

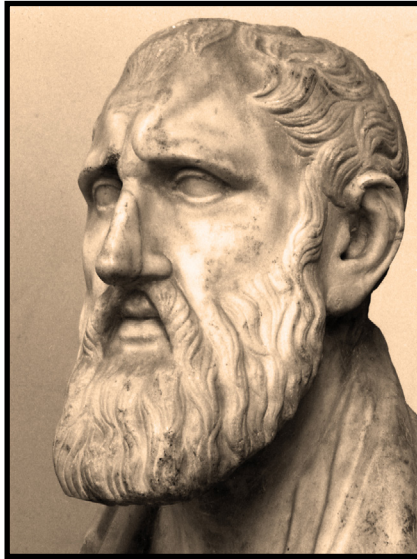
Marcus Aurelius was born in the year 121 and died in 180. He was from a prominent family but was not in line to be the Roman emperor. The Roman emperor Hadrian had no children so he adopted a man named Antonius, with the stipulation that Antonius would adopt Marcus, who would succeed him. Marcus was profoundly influenced by the work of Epictetus and was a devout Stoic. The book that is today called *Meditations* was actually Marcus's personal diary, published after his death.

## What is Stoicism?

Some people believe that the goal of Stoicism is to not have any emotions, like a robot. However, the goal of Stoicism is not to suppress or stop experiencing emotions. It is to have few negative emotions and to spend less time wishing things were different and more time enjoying them.

The Stoic philosophers stressed that to be alive means to be open to the challenges that arise in our lives, including those that are no fault of our own, and that the attainment of happiness is a matter of ceasing to desire things we do not need to desire.

The four foundations of Stoic ethics will sound familiar to Rosicrucians and Martinists. They are: wisdom, strength, justice, and temperance. Wisdom is knowing how to make the best decision in all circumstances. Strength is having the courage to do that and to face



Zeno.

unpleasantness. Justice is social justice or humanism – treating every human being with fairness and kindness. Temperance is self-control.

### **Similarities between Rosicrucianism and Stoicism**

There are many similarities between Rosicrucianism and Stoicism. For example, the Roman Stoic Hierocles encouraged people to greet each other as *frater* or *soror* (brother or sister) as Rosicrucians do. He believed this helps to remind us that we are all part of one big family.

A number of people important in the Rosicrucian Tradition were very familiar with Stoicism or were practicing Stoics – Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola (the great Italian Renaissance Humanists who helped to perpetuate the ancient Mysteries), Giordano Bruno, Francis Bacon, and René Descartes.

Below are a few practices that Rosicrucianism and Stoicism have in common.

#### **Choose a role model**

Like the Rosicrucian teachings, Stoicism encourages us to choose a role model. In the Fifth Temple Degree monographs we are introduced to some of the greatest sages of ancient Greece and are encouraged to attune with them. There are many individuals who were Stoics or were highly influenced by Stoicism who could serve as our role models, for example, U.S. President George Washington, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl, and South African President Nelson Mandela. Or we could choose Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, or H. Spencer Lewis, or Ralph Lewis, or our Emperor Christian Bernard.

We can call on these role models to help us throughout the day, in whatever situations arise.

Let's do that now. Choose your role model and ask her or him to stand with you throughout your day. Imagine a situation that has the potential to be challenging and

see your role model right there with you, providing guidance and support.

#### **Review your day**

Like Rosicrucianism, Stoicism encourages people to review the day. Benjamin Franklin and the Pythagoreans also practiced this.

Seneca shared many examples of reviewing the day. When doing so, he wrote in the third person, in a way that anyone can relate to. For example, he wrote that Seneca was at an event where people made jokes at Seneca's expense and he did not just brush them off. He then assessed the situation. In this case, he concluded that Seneca should keep away from low company.

Try this yourself. Review something challenging that has happened recently, as dispassionately as possible and from a third person perspective. Then assess the situation, again from the perspective of the third person.

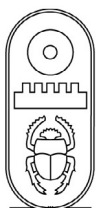
#### **Some things are in our control and others not**

The first lines of Epictetus's *Handbook* state: "Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are the body, property, reputation, authority, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions."

This sounds a lot like the modern "Serenity Prayer":

God grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I  
can, and  
Wisdom to know the difference.

When choosing what to focus our energy on, we can consider placing things we can control in one stack and the things that we cannot control in another stack. We will find that the stack with things we can control is much smaller than the one with the things we cannot control. Those things do not concern us. There is nothing we can do about them. It's helpful to remember that just because something



affects us, doesn't mean that we have control over it.

Some modern Stoics suggest that there is a third stack for things that we have some control over, but not complete control. For example, if we are running a race, we can develop our muscles, build our endurance, eat right, and get plenty of rest, but we cannot guarantee that we will win the race. A Stoic's goal would be to run our best race possible, irrespective of who wins.

In the same way, we cannot guarantee that someone will love us. This is not within our control. It is within our control, however, to act in as loving a way as possible. Also, we cannot control whether or not we will get a promotion, however it is within our control to do our job as well as we are able.

This resonates with the Rosicrucian practice to bring the best of ourselves to every situation, something that we have control over.

Think of a situation now where you can apply this practice. For example, rather than trying to get someone to love us, imagine that we are as loving as possible to this person. The focus is on our actions, something we have control over.

### **Prescribe a character for yourself**

Rosicrucians are encouraged to visualize in the morning how we want the day ahead to go. Stoics would do this too, however they would also prepare for when things don't go as expected, in order to achieve a secondary goal in every situation – that is, to stay true to our values and character. Rosicrucians might call this living up to the Rosicrucian ideal.

Epictetus wrote that we should prescribe for ourselves a certain character when we are alone and keep our will aligned with it, no matter what we might encounter during the day.

Think about a situation that you expect to encounter that has the potential to be challenging. Perhaps you will be meeting with someone who doesn't fully support you. Visualize the meeting going well

for everyone involved and then prepare yourself for something unpleasant to arise. Make your second goal be staying true to your values, behaving in the ideal way that you have prescribed for yourself.

### **Observe yourself**

Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* includes his personal observations. He asked himself what motivated his actions and how did they reflect his values. Were they governed by reason or by something else?—The soul of a child? A tyrant? A dumb ox? A wild beast?

Carl Jung may have referred to these aspects as our shadow sides. We're embarrassed to think that we may have acted like a child or a tyrant, however by acknowledging that this is indeed what happened, we can understand why we thought this was a good idea. We can understand what motivated our actions and in what way we thought acting this way reflected our values. When we shine light on and embrace our "dark side," it feels heard and no longer needs to act out.

Think about a recent situation in which you may not have been governed by reason. Who was in control at the time – The soul of a child? A tyrant? A dumb ox? A wild beast? (If you are having trouble coming up with an example, it may be helpful to imagine someone cutting you off in traffic.) Consider why you felt that you had to call upon this aspect of yourself rather than reason.

### **Justice**

In Stoicism, justice is social justice, which correlates to Rosicrucian Humanism – meaning treating others with kindness and respect.

Marcus Aurelius was in many ways an amazing example of Stoic Justice. His morning meditation went like this: "Today I shall be meeting with interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, ill-will, and selfishness – all of them due to the offender's ignorance of what is good or evil." He focused on treating others with kindness and respect, believing that their disloyalty, etc., was just due to ignorance.

Most of Marcus's nineteen-year reign was marked by conflict and war. Avidius Cassius, chief governor of the eastern provinces, claimed the title of emperor for himself. Of Marcus's eleven beloved children, eight died before he did. His only remaining son, the tyrant Commodus, schemed behind his back. Marcus wrote, "The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing," yet he stayed committed to helping others.

Marcus worked to protect the weak, to make life less difficult for slaves, and to rear and educate poor children. He wrote that he didn't do this for acknowledgment or thanks. He helped others because it was the right thing to do. It was his duty and happiness was his reward.

See yourself acting for the good of others with no expectation of thanks or acknowledgment. Envision yourself being a Rosicrucian Humanist.

Stoicism also provides excellent guidance for other challenging situations.

### **Insults**

Stoicism advises that when we feel insulted we should consider whether or not we respect the person who insulted us. If we don't respect the person, we shouldn't care what she thinks. If we do, then we should think about whether she might be right. We can also consider if she possibly doesn't have all the facts and would see things differently if she had more information. We are also reminded that we are the ones who have perceived the comment or action as an insult. We can change our perception of what was said or done.

### **Anger**

The Stoic philosophers also presented helpful techniques for dealing with anger. Marcus Aurelius wrote that we should remember that we too sometimes anger other people. We should also think about the impermanence of the world around us and notice that the things that anger us usually don't cause all that much harm.

Seneca recommended that we fight our tendency to believe the worst about others.

### **Grief**

Stoic philosophers acknowledged that grief is a normal emotion to feel when someone we love has passed on, however they recommended that we not extend our grief too long or allow it to incapacitate us. They also warned about "catching" grief from someone else.

The "Negative Visualization" described below helps us to prepare for being separated from those people we love. This can help to remove some of the shock when they do pass on and can inspire us to take full advantage of our relationships.

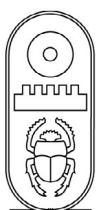
Seneca suggested that we remember that the person who went through transition would not want us to grieve for them forever, causing us to be unhappy.

### **Negative Visualization**

Also, like the Rosicrucian teachings, Stoicism reminds people to not overvalue wealth or fame. One of my favorite Rosicrucian monographs, which is in the First Atrium, deals with the concept of property and possessions. It's thought-provoking to consider – what do we really possess when everything is a gift of the Divine?

Roman Stoics worshipped a goddess named Fortuna, who controlled fate. She was depicted holding a cornucopia, the symbol of abundance, in one hand, and in the other, a rudder, showing that she was steering the course of life. She also stood with one foot on a wheel, symbolizing the endless changes of life. The Stoics believed that everything we have is on loan to us from Fortuna and she can take it back at any time.

Stoics encouraged people to practice what is called the "Negative Visualization," to remind us of the impermanence of things. For example, if we feel proud or overly attached to the car that we just had to have, or the house that we saved for years to buy, or to our great looks, we



should imagine not having that object or state. They are truly only on loan to us.

The goal of this exercise is to anticipate events that can cause us grief, thus softening the blows of life and helping us better appreciate what we do have.

Think of something now that you may be attached to (your car, your house, your job) and imagine that it is no longer in your life.

The Negative Visualization can be extended to our loved ones. Many people are uncomfortable giving even one thought to the fact that someday we and our loved ones will no longer be together on the earthly plane, although this is obviously an inevitable fact of life. They, and we, are going to go through transition some day.

This seems to me to be one of the major causes of strife and war in the world. Many people are in such deep denial about death and have created such elaborate belief systems perpetuating that denial, that if anyone threatens to dismantle that belief system (their religion, materialism, or something else), they fight to the death to protect it.

Epictetus wrote that we must remind ourselves that we love a mortal and that nothing that we love is our very own.

Stoic philosophers suggested that we visualize our loved ones no longer being with us, again using the Negative Visualization. I have found this exercise to be extremely powerful. It made it crystal clear how I want to act with my loved ones. When we think about the day that we and our loved one will no longer be together, it creates great appreciation for the time that we do have together, in the present moment. This can also prevent feeling guilty after the person has passed on, as we would have fully engaged in our relationship with him or her. In my experience, this exercise created a new commitment to my closest relationships. This doesn't need to be done often, as we don't want to start clinging to our loved ones.

If you like, let's practice this now: Imagine that you and your most beloved one no longer walk together on the earthly plane.

### **Julius Canus – my Stoic role model**

A man named Julius Canus is one of the most inspiring philosophers for me. He was a Roman Stoic whom the tyrant Caligula condemned to death. When the Emperor announced his order, Canus calmly replied, "Thank you, excellent prince." After the required ten-day waiting period, a soldier came to get Canus for the execution. He was playing a board game at the time and instead of begging for mercy or running, Canus simply asked to be allowed to count the points in order to show that he was ahead in the game. Then, as his execution was about to take place, one of his friends asked him what he was thinking about. Canus replied that he was preparing himself to observe whether at the moment of death the soul is aware of leaving the body.

That is how I want to approach my Great Initiation.

Take a moment now to consider how you want to face your transition. See yourself in your final moments living out the values you have chosen to embrace, acting in harmony with the character that you have prescribed for yourself, living the Rosicrucian ideal.

So Mote It Be!

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# DOMINA RECTINA'S LIBRARY: HERCULANEUM'S VILLA OF THE PYPYRI

*Benefactor Taciturnus*



*The Getty Villa, above, in Los Angeles, California, is an exact replica of the Villa of the Papyri.*

## August 24, 79 CE

For several years before 79 CE, Mount Vesuvius had been causing earthquakes around the Bay of Naples, south of Rome. Still, no one realized that Vesuvius was an active volcano.

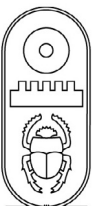
On August 24 of that year, the volcano exploded with one of the largest eruptions in recorded European history. Very well known is the city of Pompeii, a thriving Roman city south of Mount Vesuvius, which was buried by the volcanic ash.

Less well known, but equally important, was the Roman city of Herculaneum, nestled at the foot of the volcano, on

the Bay of Naples. It was wealthier than Pompeii, and was densely populated by Roman nobility, aristocrats, plutocrats, and their households.

We have an eyewitness account of what took place beginning the afternoon of August 24, 79 CE. Pliny the Younger, an eighteen-year-old from an important Roman family, was staying with his uncle, Roman naval commander Pliny the Elder, in Misenum at the northern end of the Bay of Naples.

They began to notice the plumes of smoke coming from the volcano, and Pliny the Elder began to ready his ship to sail across the Bay to investigate.



As Pliny the Elder was heading to his ship, a runner handed him a note from *Domina* (Lady) Rectina, whose villa was at the foot of Vesuvius, right on the bay, asking for help.

*Domina* Rectina's villa<sup>1</sup> was an enormous home, stretching some 820 feet (250 meters) along the Bay. The Getty Villa in Los Angeles is a reproduction of her home.

Rectina was justly concerned for the members of her household, and also for the safety of the villa's library, containing over 1,800 scrolls, one of the larger collections in the ancient world.

Sadly, the debris from the eruption prevented Pliny the Elder from reaching the shore of Herculaneum and Rectina's villa by the bay. He died onboard his ship, probably from the fumes and ash.

The villa, its inhabitants, and its library were buried under about sixty-five feet of ash and lava, as was all of Herculaneum.

All went silent. The cities were soon forgotten for over a thousand years.

### Rediscovery

On October 19, 1752, *cavamonti* (diggers) recovered the first scrolls from Rectina's villa. It was a moment of extraordinary importance. No one in early modern Europe had ever seen a scroll from the ancient world. Rectina's library was the only one that survived (albeit charred) from Greco-Roman antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the scrolls recovered were given to Napoléon Bonaparte,<sup>3</sup> while others were given to Britain's George IV.<sup>4</sup>

Even with such amazing finds, the excavations were halted in 1765 due to complaints from residents living above the work. The precise location of the villa was forgotten again.<sup>5</sup>

### The Villa of the Papyri

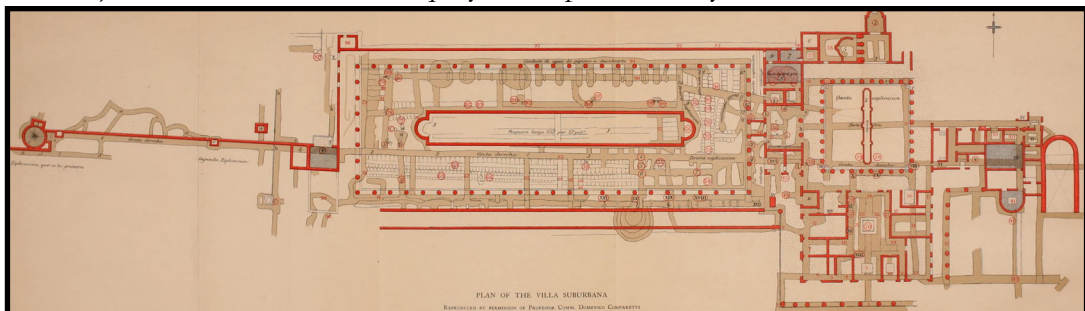
Archeologists began to study the eighteenth-century accounts during the 1980s, and were eager to recover more of the Rectina's library, now known as the Villa of the Papyri. On February 3, 1987, Baldassare Conticello, the Superintendent of Archeology for Herculaneum and Pompeii, made the breakthrough.

By the end of the 1980s, the inventory comprised 1,826 scrolls and fragments,<sup>6</sup> with more than 340 almost complete, around 970 partly decayed, and over 500 charred fragments. Most are held at Naples National Archaeological Museum.

As the only Greco-Roman Library to survive intact, the scrolls from the Villa of the Papyri are of immense interest to historians and classicists.

### Unrolling the Mystery

The scrolls in the library were carbonized by the heat of the pyroclastic flows from Vesuvius. Since this occurred very quickly, deprived of oxygen, they compacted into fragile blocks, and were preserved by the volcanic rock.<sup>7</sup>



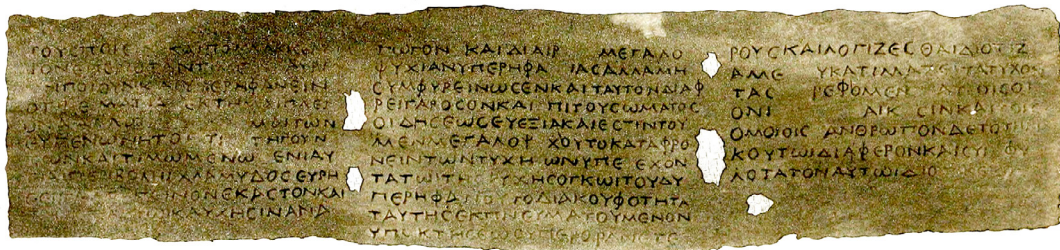
*Plan of the Villa of the Papyri, taken from the book Herculaneum, past, present & future by Charles Waldenstein, published in 1908.*

Reading the scrolls presents many layers of challenges. First, they are rolled and are blocks and are very fragile. Second, they are burned and charred so that, in many cases, the ink and the paper are indistinguishable from one another. Once these hurdles are overcome, translators must then painstakingly recover the text from Ancient Greek, and some Latin, no mean feat in itself, as reading manuscripts from the Classical Period often requires advanced paleographic skills.

In the twentieth century, 585 rolls and fragments were fully unrolled, and 209 partially unrolled. Around 200 were deciphered and published, while 150 were deciphered but not yet published.<sup>8</sup>

astronomers capture light beyond the ordinary frequencies that human eyes can see. These include the infrared, for example. In so doing, investigators are able to retrieve far more information than is available in visible light. Since the infrared range includes vibrations at a length of 1000 nm (nanometers = one billionth of a meter), this is particularly useful for recovering burned or otherwise damaged documents.

To the naked eye, the text appears to be black ink on black paper, and is, in spots, virtually unreadable. Viewed at 1000nm, there is a distinct difference between the reflectivity of



*An example of a carbonized scroll from Herculaneum, in an image taken from the 1858 book Tesoro letterario di Ercolano (Herculaneum Literary Treasure), by Giacomo Castrucci.*

Twentieth-century and earlier attempts met with both successes and tragic failures. In some cases, the scrolls exploded into hundreds of fragments.

### The Answer is in the Stars

Beginning in 1999, Brigham Young University in Utah began using Multispectral Imaging (MSI) on the unrolled scrolls.<sup>9</sup> Around 800 trays of fragments were analyzed and digitized over nineteen years, so that scholars could begin work on deciphering and translating them.

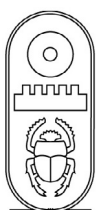
The technique is from the world of Space Exploration:

Multispectral Imaging originated in the world of space science, as

the ink and the paper, thus rendering the text legible.

In parallel, other modern technologies, such as digital processing of ultraviolet scanning, X-rays, and visible light have led to the full reading of ancient documents.<sup>10</sup>

Other modern efforts include a team from Kentucky and the Institut de Papyrologie that used X-rays and nuclear magnetic resonance in 2007 to analyze the structure of some of the scrolls,<sup>11</sup> and another team in 2009 from the Institut de France and the French National Center for Scientific Research that employed X-ray micro-computed tomography (micro-CT) which creates cross-sections of an object that can be used to create a 3-D model.



This technique is similar to the one used for the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum's child Mummy Sherit.<sup>12</sup>

Still the problem of unrolling the delicate charred scrolls remained.

On April 1, 2018, CBS's *60 Minutes* told the story of the competition between two Italian scholars, Graziano Ranocchia and Vito Mocella, and Dr. Brent Seales,<sup>13</sup> Chair of Computer Sciences at the University of Kentucky, from 2015 to the present, to successfully use the powerful Synchrotron X-ray phase-contrast tomography to virtually unroll the scrolls. Seales's method shows the most promise.<sup>14</sup>

Efforts are ongoing using Synchrotron X-ray phase-contrast tomography, as *Domina Rectina's* library at the Villa of the Papyri may someday yield all its secrets, including the newly discovered library of Latin papyri found in a lower level of the villa.<sup>15</sup>

### From Ashes to Atoms

From the hundreds of scrolls already analyzed and translated, we have a very good idea of the content of the library.

The bulk of the collection seems to be works of Epicurean philosophy. Large portions of Epicurus's *On Nature* have been found, as well as works by other Epicureans such as Philodemus of Gadara.<sup>16</sup> Sections of *On Providence* and *Logical Questions* by the Stoic Philosopher Chrysippus have been identified,<sup>17</sup> as well as other literature, including a section of a lost work on Plato by Apuleius, the author of *The Golden Ass*.<sup>18</sup>

What is significant about Epicureanism in considering ancient mystical traditions?

For most people today, the word "Epicurean" means what the *Macmillan Dictionary* gives as "relating to the enjoyment of things such as good food and drink."<sup>19</sup> While the Ancient Greek Philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BCE) did

hold pleasure (ἡδονή—*hēdoné*, the root of our modern term "hedonism,") to be the highest good, he taught that the way to pleasure was to live moderately, to learn about the workings of the world, and to limit one's desires.<sup>20</sup>

The basis of his philosophy was an adaptation of Democritus's theory of the atomic nature of all reality. "Atom" comes from the Greek adjective ἄτομος (*átomos*), literally "a" (not "tomos" (cut or divisible).

Epicurus held that the elementary constituents of nature are undifferentiated matter, in the form of discrete, solid, and indivisible particles ("atoms") below the threshold of perception, plus empty space, that is, the complement of matter or where matter is not.<sup>21</sup>

This provided him with a foundation for a kind of spiritual materialism, leading to an ethical life, no fear of divine retribution nor fate, and no fear of death. Friendship was of great value to Epicurus, and he considered his followers as a community of friends.<sup>22</sup> For Epicurus, the deities exist, but they did not manipulate people or the universe, which operates according to universal laws.<sup>23</sup> Some scholars believe that for Epicurus, the deities were mental creations,<sup>24</sup> an idea of mental creation not dissimilar to that proposed by David K. Stoloritz in a *Rose-Croix Journal* Paper in 2007. Stoloritz proposed that the polytheistic gods might be mental creations in the Kabbalistic Formative World (*Yetzirah*), either being emanated from above, or created by human consciousness from below.<sup>25</sup>

Many Greeks of his time were frightened that after death, they would suffer in Hades. Epicurus taught that there was nothing to fear, as at death, the person's components, including the soul, are simply re-absorbed into the cosmos, a kind of reintegration.

The library at the Villa of the Papyri seems to have been filled with Epicurean works, and so we can suppose that Rectina's household followed this noble philosophy of life.

One of the authors represented included Philodemus, who encapsulated Epicurus's teaching as:

Don't fear the Divine  
Don't worry about death;  
What is good is easy to get, and  
What is terrible is easy to endure.<sup>26</sup>

Latin speakers in Rome had been introduced to Epicureanism by the Roman poet and philosopher Titus Lucretius Carus (ca. 99-55 BCE), whose vast poem *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*) is an exposition of Epicurean Philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

Influential and admired in the ancient world, Lucretius's Epicurean poem disappeared from Western Europe during the Middle Ages. A single copy was recovered from a German monastery by Papal Secretary, bibliophile, and book-hunter Poggio Bracciolini in 1417. It was copied and distributed, with wide effect on Western thought, leading to the development of Atomism, and the construction of Christian Humanism, as well as being one impetus for the Italian Renaissance.

The whole fascinating story of *De rerum natura*'s narrow rescue and its effects are told in a most informative and entertaining fashion by Stephen Greenblatt's 2012 Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*.<sup>28</sup>

### What's Past is Prologue

During the next several decades, the careful and painstaking process of excavating, digitizing, deciphering, and translating the philosophical and literary treasures in the Villa of the Papyri will likely continue apace now that momentum

has built, and the appropriate technologies and scholarship have been marshaled.

Even though the work will be long and arduous, it seems fitting that such immense efforts be taken on behalf of a library from the city named for Hercules, famed for his Twelve Labors.

With the immense positive impact that Lucretius's *De rerum natura* had on Western Civilization, we can only hope that some of the materials in this unique surviving Greco-Roman Library will have a salubrious effect on a world much in need of healing.

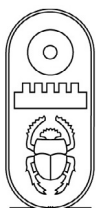
Our gratitude reaches back, across the millennia, to Domina Rectina, her husband, and household for lovingly curating the library of the Villa of the Papyri, so that its ancient mystical wisdom would not perish.

The very atomic theory taught by Epicurus is at the basis of much of the technology that is now capable of transmitting this ancient light to us, just as, when we gaze up at the stars, we are seeing the light of times long gone: the light of the cosmos, and of wisdom, which never fades.

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### Endnotes

1. The identity of Rectina's husband has remained controversial to the present day. Candidates include Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, Julius Caesar's Father-in-Law (Hornblower, Simon and Antony Spawforth. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 3rd ed. New York, 1996) and the Epicurean Philosopher Philodemus of Gadara (Ethel Ross Barker, *Buried Herculaneum*. London: A & C Black, 1908, 82. Accessed June 14, 2018. <https://archive.org/stream/buriedherculaneu00barkuoft#page/82/mode/2up>)
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# FRANCIS OF ASSISI

*Elisa Cuttjohn, SRC*

Francesco di Bernardone was born in the ancient hill town of Assisi, in central Italy, in 1181. His father, Pietro, was a successful cloth merchant who frequently traveled to France. His mother was from a wealthy and possibly noble family.

Francis was described as a charming, fun-loving teenager who freely used his family's resources to fund his active social life with his friends. He sometimes traveled with his father to France and was especially fond of the musical tradition of the troubadours of Provence.

In 1202, when he was twenty-one years old, Francis enthusiastically went to war for Assisi with dreams of chivalric glory. During Assisi's devastating defeat, Francis was captured and held for ransom under harsh conditions for nearly a year. His less privileged comrades, who hadn't died in battle, had been hunted down and killed. Upon his release, Francis fell seriously ill.

The Francis who returned to Assisi was a different man. Instead of the happy-go-lucky youth he had been, Francis was now moody and haunted by nightmares and war-related flashbacks. He gave away his clothes, begged from passersby, and practiced self-mortification. He wandered the nearby forests.

Eighteen months later, an old friend convinced Francis to join another military campaign. However, on the way he had a dream that caused him to return to Assisi. Abandoning his dreams of knighthood, he sold his horse, his equipment, and his clothes.

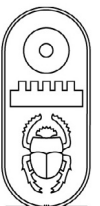
## Francis's Conversion

Following a pilgrimage to Rome in 1205, Francis stopped to pray before an icon of the crucified Christ in a side chapel of San Damiano, a century-old, run down church outside of Assisi, begging the Divine to guide him. Later he wrote down the words to his prayer and reported his experience:

Most High,  
Most glorious God (Divinity),  
Enlighten the darkness of my  
heart.  
Give me true Faith,  
Certain Hope, and  
Perfect Charity;  
Give me perception and  
knowledge, of you Lord,  
That I might carry out  
Your holy and just commands.  
Amen.

Francis had a mystical vision in which the crucified Christ on the cross came to life and said to him three times, "Francis, go and repair My house, which, as you can see, is falling into ruins." It seems that Francis interpreted this to mean that he should repair San Damiano Church, which he did. He also built a small hut next to it and lived there.

Francis spent more and more time in this church and eventually became a penitent attached to the church. Still, he was not well. He became so abnormally thin and unkempt that townspeople yelled curses and threw mud at him. Francis's father, Pietro, intervened and locked him in his house. Francis escaped.





*Statue of Francis in front of the Papal Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi.  
Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.*

In 1206, Pietro decided to take Francis to court, with the claim that he was disregarding his responsibilities. Francis claimed that he was an ecclesiastical person and refused to recognize the authority of the court, so the case was sent to the local bishop. The bishop encouraged Francis to give up all claims to his family's resources (Francis had a fifty-percent stake in his mother's rich dowry). Francis willingly complied. Then he went into a nearby room, took off the clothes his father had given him, and placed them at his father's feet. Standing nearly naked before his father, Francis stated that from then on "Our Father who art in heaven" was his father, not Pietro di Bernardone.

Shortly after this, Francis found himself near some people affected by leprosy. He later wrote:

The Lord granted me, brother Francis, to begin doing penance this way: When I was in my sins, just to see lepers was very bitter for me. And the Lord himself took me among them, and I showed mercy to them. And on leaving them, what seemed bitter to me had turned for me into sweetness of body and soul. And afterwards I waited a little and left the world.

This was Francis's conversion. With zeal, he dedicated his life to helping those whom no one else wanted to help.

### ***Sortes Sacrae***

Francis's life was simple – he cared for people affected by leprosy and prayed in and repaired San Damiano Church. Two years later, two men asked to join Francis in his life of prayer and penance. Francis didn't know how to proceed so he asked a nearby parish priest to perform a *Sortes*

*Sacrae*, which was a common practice of lay people at this time, although considered superstitious by most educated people. The *Sortes Sacrae* involved a priest opening a Bible, lectionary, or missal three times, revealing three verses that would guide the questioner.

In this case, the following three verses were revealed:

Mark 10:17-21 “Go, and sell all you own and give to the poor and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.”

Luke 9:1-6 “Take nothing for the road, no staff, no bag, no bread, no silver. Not even two tunics. Whatever house you go into, stay there, and leave from there.”

Matthew 16:24-28 “If anyone wishes to be my follower, deny yourself and take up the cross and follow me.”

Francis and the two brothers memorized these verses. These words guided Francis for the rest of his life.

After meditating on these verses for a year, Francis decided to ask the pope for approval of his way of life. Although there are conflicting reports of how he was able to achieve this, Francis was allowed to meet with Pope Innocent III, who permitted Francis to recruit brothers and instructed him to preach. (While at the same time, this pope, who named himself Innocent, was fanatically exterminating other Christian groups that he considered heretical, an example being the Cathars.) Francis had originally desired to spend time in nature and pray in solitude to the Divine; now he was responsible for a group of eleven men and was expected to recruit others.

### Clare

In 1212, after hearing Francis preach, eighteen-year-old Chiara (Clare)

Offreduccio (ca. 1194-1253), who was from an extremely wealthy noble family, asked Francis to help her live according to the Gospel. She became the first woman to join Francis in his work. She and Francis created the Order of Poor Ladies of San Damiano (today called the Order of Saint Clare). The sisters chose to live in poverty and seclusion. Like the brothers, the Poor Ladies sought to imitate the life of Jesus. They spent their days in manual labor and prayer in a church near San Damiano. In 1216, Clare became the abbess of the order.

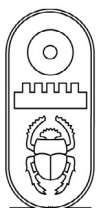
### The Rule

Eventually the group of brothers grew so large that Francis needed help with governance. On several occasions, other people led the group, however Francis was usually nearby to advise the leader and to keep the brothers true to his original vision. At times, usually in his absence, changes were made, which he generally reversed on his return.

Francis stayed true to his interpretations of the three Bible verses. This manifested in the *Rule*, a code of conduct that he wrote as guidance for the brothers. In support of the Luke verse “Whatever house you go into, stay there, and leave from there,” the early Franciscans were prohibited from owning property. They rented their churches and housing. In support of the verse from Mark “Go, sell what you have,” those who joined Francis were required to give away all of their belongings.

The brothers could not accept money, although later concessions were made to accept alms for people affected by leprosy. Francis wrote:

Our Lord teaches in the Gospel: “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life



does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” ... We should not consider money or coin to have any more use than stones. ...So let us be careful not to lose the kingdom of heaven for such a trifle.

Francis instructed the brothers that they should: “Apply themselves diligently in doing good works, as it is said, ‘Always be busy in some sort of good work so that the devil will find you busy,’ and ‘Idleness is the soul’s enemy.’” During the day, the brothers performed manual labor and preached. At night they devoted themselves to prayer.

Francis began calling the brothers Lesser Brothers. Many had been wealthy; others had been destitute. Francis accepted them all, with no waiting period, although this was later changed. In support of the Matthew verse “deny yourself...,” Francis instructed the Lesser Brothers to consider themselves subservient to everyone (with just a few exceptions), even if they believed the other person was wrong. He instructed them to “Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.”

Priests were accepted into the Order and were allowed to study the Bible, however Francis forbade illiterate brothers

to learn how to read, so that they would not be tempted by arrogance (for example, in order to know more than the other brothers) or by ambition (for example, in order to become a priest). Francis referred to himself as an *illiteratus*. He believed that the best way to preach was through example.

People who knew Francis reported that he had a deep affinity with animals. He would lovingly speak with them and, like many people, they were attracted to

Francis. He praised animals for living day to day, without thinking about whether or not they would have food the next day, serving as examples for Francis and his followers to trust the Creator to supply their needs. In support of the verse from Luke “Take nothing for your journey...no bread...,” Francis prohibited the brothers from carrying food over from one day to the next. He once told a brother that he could not soak beans overnight in order to cook them the next day.



*The oldest surviving depiction of Francis.  
Fresco in Subiaco (Italy) Abbey, 1228.*

### **Francis and the Sultan**

Francis encouraged the brothers to travel as missionaries in order to convert “unbelievers,” which he did as well. In 1219, he traveled to Egypt to try to convert the Muslim leader there in order to end the Fifth Crusade, a brutal war in

which Christians were trying to regain the Holy Land from the Muslims. At this time, Muslims were generally portrayed as “beasts” and pagans by European Christians.

The leader of Egypt, the Kurdish Sultan Malik al-Kamil, a nephew of Salah ad-Din (Saladin), was a cultured man known in Egypt for his wisdom and fairness. When he was eleven years old, the English king Richard the Lion-Hearted had granted him knighthood. The war wasn't going well for al-Kamil so he made several offers to the Crusaders to give them Jerusalem in exchange for peace, however the Roman Catholic Church directed this Crusade and the papal legate, Cardinal Pelagius, repeatedly refused these offers. He wanted to crush the Muslims.

While al-Kamil was waiting for a response to one of his offers of peace, Francis and a companion, knowing that they might be killed, walked across enemy lines into the Sultan's camp and asked to meet with al-Kamil. They were eventually allowed to do so. The Sultan asked Francis if he was there as an emissary of the Crusaders. Francis informed him that he was an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ and was there to save the Sultan's soul.

Al-Kamil generously welcomed Francis and his companion and eventually arranged for an exchange of ideas between his teachers of Islam and Francis. Al-Kamil later safely returned Francis to the Crusader camp. Francis then returned to Assisi.

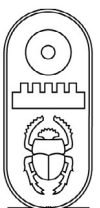
Later, after defeating the Crusaders, al-Kamil arranged to have food sent to the starving Crusader troops and their animals. Although Francis did not convert al-Kamil, his example inspired many Franciscan missionaries to come and his

calls for peace became more fervent after this. Al-Kamil's generous reception of Francis and his compassion to the defeated Crusaders have become legendary.

### **“Canticle to Brother Sun”**

Francis became a passionate preacher and sometimes when addressing a group he would become so inspired during his praise of the Divine that he would begin dancing or singing. In 1224, he wrote the “Canticle to Brother Sun,” a prayer of thanksgiving to and for the Divine, that he and other brothers sang.

Most High, all-powerful good  
Lord,  
Yours be the praises, the glory, and  
the honor,  
And all blessing.  
To you alone, Most High, do they  
belong  
And no one is worthy to mention  
your Name.  
Praised be you, my Lord, with all  
your creatures, especially Sir  
Brother Sun,  
Who is the day, and through whom  
you give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant  
with great splendor,  
And bears a likeness of you, Most  
High One.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through  
Sister Moon and the stars,  
In heaven you formed them clear,  
and precious and wonderful.  
Praised be you, my Lord,  
Through Brother Wind, and  
through the air,  
Cloudy and serene, and every kind  
of weather,  
Through whom you give  
sustenance to all your creatures.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through  
Sister Water,



Who is very useful, and humble,  
 and precious, and chaste.  
 Praised be you, my Lord, through  
 Brother Fire,  
 Through whom you light the  
 night.  
 And he is beautiful, and playful,  
 and robust and strong.  
 Praised be you, my Lord, through  
 our Sister, Mother Earth,  
 Who sustains and governs us,  
 And produces fruit with colored  
 flowers and herbs.  
 Praise and bless my Lord and give  
 him thanks  
 And serve him with great humility.

### **Pardon One Another For the Divine's Sake**

Towards the end of Francis's life, he suffered horrible pain from various illnesses. While in retreat, trying to recuperate, he was informed about a feud between the chief magistrate of Assisi, Don Oportulo, and Bishop Guido of Assisi. This eventually escalated to the point that Don Oportulo made it a crime to make any agreements with the bishop and the bishop ex-communicated Don Oportulo.

Francis was deeply saddened that no one had intervened to try to make peace. He had already written the "Canticle to Brother Sun" and added the following stanza to the end of that song to be sung to the parties involved in this feud. He sent a brother who, on Francis's behalf, instructed Don Oportulo and the bishop to meet outside the bishop's palace and sent two brothers to sing the revised "Canticle," ending with these words:

Praised be you, O my Lord, for all  
 who show Forgiveness and  
 Pardon one another for Your sake,

And who endure weakness and  
 tribulation.  
 Blessed are they who peaceably  
 endure,  
 For you, Most High, shall give  
 them a crown.

Don Oportulo was so moved that he fell to the bishop's feet begging for forgiveness and withdrew all of his orders. The bishop had no choice but to ask for forgiveness in return, thus ending this altercation.

### **Returning Home**

At the age of forty-four, Francis was very ill. He was nearly blind, unable to walk, and could barely eat or speak. He was moved to San Damiano, where Clare and her sisters took care of him. Later he went to the bishop's palace in Assisi for medical treatment. There, the brothers often sang songs of joy to him. In the last days of his life, Francis asked to be taken to the little hut that he had built next to San Damiano Church, where the Christ on the icon had directed him to rebuild his church. There, Francis went through transition on October 3, 1226.

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# HERMETICISM AND THE PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS

Christian Rebisse, FRC

The capture of Constantinople in 1453 allowed Greek culture – in particular the works of Plato, who was only known from various extracts – to penetrate Italy. Cosimo di Medici, the ruler of Florence, was aware of the importance of this event, and so he created the Platonic Academy of Florence and requested that Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499) translate Plato. An indefatigable traveler, Ficino would provide the West with its first translation of Plato, as well as translations of Plotinus, Proclus, Iamblicus, and Dionysius the Areopagite. Soon afterwards, an important development took place. The *Corpus Hermeticum*, often mentioned in the

it would be reprinted sixteen times until the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

## *Philosophia Perennis*

Marsilio Ficino was convinced that the original text of the *Corpus Hermeticum* had been written in Egyptian. Hermes Trismegistus was also described as an Egyptian priest who had originated and transmitted all of the secret wisdom. Marsilio Ficino, in his *Theologia Platonica*, published in 1482, devised a family tree of philosophers to whom this knowledge had descended from Hermes: Zoroaster, Orpheus, Aglaopheme, Pythagoras, Plato.<sup>2</sup> This vision gave birth to a new concept, that of the

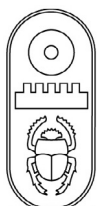


*A portrait of Marsilio Ficino, as seen in a fresco in the Santa Maria Novella Church in Florence, Italy.*

Middle Ages, had disappeared and the *Asclepius* was the only text still extant. Then, in 1460, a monk in the service of the Medici obtained a manuscript of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Cosimo I considered the document to be so important that he asked Marsilio Ficino to interrupt his translation of Plato so as to work on the newly discovered material. Shortly thereafter, in 1471, Ficino published the first translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. This edition garnered such a widespread readership that

Primordial Tradition, a primal revelation that was perpetuated from age to age, from initiate to initiate. This concept, previously endorsed by St. Augustine, experienced a renewal due to Ficino. It was formalized in 1540 by Agostino Steuco (1496–1549), in his concept of *Philosophia Perennis* – the eternal philosophy.

It is quite understandable that this concept of eternal philosophy would find such a favorable reception in Florence. It was claimed that after the Flood, Noah



had established twelve cities in Etruria (i.e., Tuscany), and a legend even claimed that his body was buried near Rome. From this arose the notion that the Tuscan dialect had its source in Etruscan, and was thus older and superior to Latin.<sup>3</sup> Little effort was needed to connect Florence with the very sources of civilization – and even to the author of the *Corpus Hermeticum* – seeing that Hermes Trismegistus was claimed by some to be a contemporary of Noah. These ideas, debated fiercely within the Academy of Florence, were particularly cherished by Cosimo de Medici, who felt they provided proof of the superiority of Florence and Tuscany over the rest of Italy.

### Natural Magic

Although the *Corpus Hermeticum* mentioned the secret knowledge of the Egyptians, it was rather imprecise concerning its implementation. In treatise thirteen of the *Corpus*, Hermes Trismegistus taught his son Tat the principles of mystical regeneration which could be obtained by suppressing the senses, in negating the ill-omened influences of the stars, and allowing the Divinity to be born in us.<sup>4</sup> Marsilio Ficino was not only a priest but a physician; and thus, he had a sense of the concrete. He sought the application of these theories in Neoplatonism – primarily in the *Picatrix*, the works of Abu Ma'shar, and in the writings of his compatriot Peter of Abano (ca. 1250 – 1316), who had studied Arab magic.

Ficino arrived at a “natural magic” which linked these theories with the Christian

concept of the Creator's Word. His natural magic achieved considerable refinement. He made use of the sympathies – such as the planetary characters inscribed in all the elements, minerals, plants, as well as perfumes, wines, poetry, and music (Orphic hymns) to capture the *spiritus mundi*,<sup>5</sup> the subtle energies of Creation. Marsilio Ficino is a prominent figure in the history of Western esotericism, not only for his role as translator and commentator on the ancient texts, but also for such works as *De Triplici*

*Vita*, which exerted great influence. As Antoine Faivre has remarked, thanks to Ficino “esotericism formed itself into a philosophy until being made an integral part of the thought of the Renaissance.”<sup>6</sup>



Peter Paul Ruben's Portrait of Cosimo de Medici.

### Endnotes

1. Regarding Marsilio Ficino, see Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficin* (1433–1499) (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1958).
2. He sometimes gives a different hierarchy in which Moses either preceded or followed Hermes.
3. Alfredo Perifano, *L'Alchimie à cour de Côme 1er de Médicis, savoirs, culture et politique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), 144–150.
4. André-Jean Festugière, trans. *Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1983), 2: 200–207.
5. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 62–83; and Daniel-Pickering Walker, *La Magie spirituelle et angélique de Ficin à Campanella* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988). English edition: *Spiritual and Demonic Magic From Ficino to Campanella* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1975).
6. *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidentale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 128. English edition: *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

# LEONARDO DA VINCI: ARTIST, SCIENTIST, MYSTIC

*Staff of the Rosicrucian Research Library*

Leonardo da Vinci (April 15, 1452 - May 2, 1519) typifies the art, science, and spiritual yearnings of the Italian Renaissance. During this vibrant transitional period, medieval Western Europe was reawakening to the knowledge and wisdom of the ancient world. This was transmitted to them through reexamining what had been preserved in the West, but even more dynamically, from Constantinople and the Byzantine Roman East, as well as through Islamic science, art, and literature. The result of this fusion was the Renaissance of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, which ushered in the modern Western world.

Leonardo's work in all areas of his life typifies this period, a vital connection that links the modern world with ancient civilizations and cultures through this Renaissance in Italy and elsewhere in Western Europe.

Leonardo's full name was Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, which means "Leonardo, son of Messer Piero, from Vinci." He lived at a time when our modern custom of last names had not yet arisen; although he is popularly known as "da Vinci," this was simply the name of his hometown. The signature he most frequently used

was "Leonardo" or "Io, Leonardo" ("I, Leonardo").

In this article, we will explore Leonardo's art, science, and mysticism through his paintings, inventions, and the legacy he left for the generations that followed him. Few figures have inspired such lasting admiration

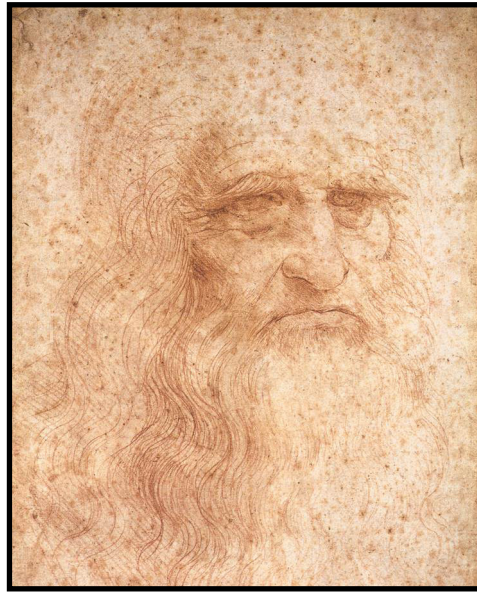
and been the source of such mystery, as this master of the Italian Renaissance.

Leonardo spent his life investigating the orderly laws that govern the universe and humanity. We can follow his path through the beauty and wisdom he has left for us across the centuries to seek these same truths, discovering the design of nature, revealing nature's ultimate source.

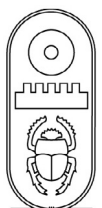
## **Early Life and Work**

Leonardo was born in Vinci, Italy, on April 15, 1452, the son of a notary, Ser Pietro, and a peasant woman, Caterina. He lived with his father in Florence, beginning school at the early age of five. Even as a young man, his ability to draw was notable, and after Leonardo's father showed the painter Andrea del Verrocchio his work, the latter accepted Leonardo as an apprentice at the age of fourteen.

Art was changing as Leonardo grew up. The work of the masters of the previous century was now carried forward with even more self-expression, humanism, and emotion. Apprenticing with Andrea



*Although not confirmed, this is widely presumed to be a self-portrait in red chalk by Leonardo da Vinci at about the age of sixty.*



allowed Leonardo to learn the crafts necessary for his many future artistic endeavors. In 1474-1475, he collaborated with his master on the *Baptism of Christ*. Leonardo finished the background and the angel on the left. In his first painting *The Annunciation*, his early skill in taking a traditional subject and imbuing it with drama is clear.

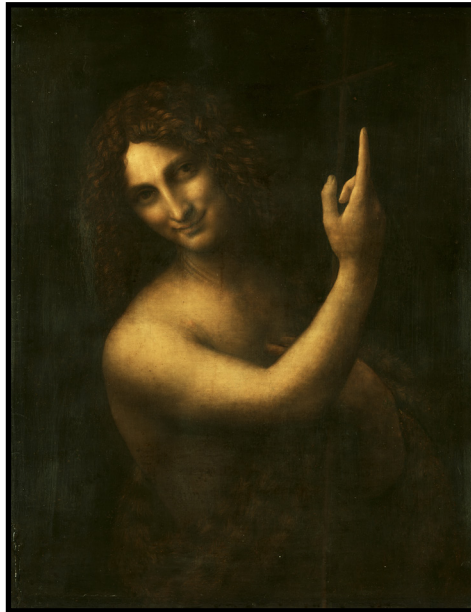
Early on, Leonardo's keen intellect and sensitivity for all the beauty and life around him were remarkable. For at least part of his life he was a vegetarian, and even a vegan, speculating at one point that taking milk from cows was theft. This was only one way in which Leonardo inherited the spirit of the ancient Pythagoreans. His first biographer, Giorgio Vasari, reports that he would purchase caged birds on the streets of Florence only to set them free. It would be the first work of many in Leonardo's life that strove to set life free from artificial constraints so that all beings could participate in their own Divine natural order.

### Leonardo's Career and Originality

After completing his apprenticeship with Andrea del Verrocchio, Leonardo set up his own studio in Florence in 1476. His talent soon brought him to the attention of the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza. From around 1482 to 1499, Leonardo operated his artistic studio and accepted apprentices under this patronage. The French capture of Milan in 1498 eventually impelled Leonardo to move elsewhere, and by 1500 he entered the employ of Cesare Borgia

of Florence, the son of Pope Alexander VI, working as a military architect and engineer. During the period 1500-1515, he accepted commissions and worked in Florence, Milan, Rome, and elsewhere on the Italian peninsula, while creating a body of work that included paintings, sculptures, drawings, engineering, inventions, and scientific works.

From 1515 to his death in 1519, Leonardo was in the service of the French king, Francis I, setting up his studio and shop next to the king's residence at the Château d'Amboise. He became very close to Francis, and one legend says that he died in the king's arms. At Leonardo's request, his funeral cortege was made up of sixty homeless people.



Leonardo da Vinci's John the Baptist.

Leonardo was never content to leave an art form as he found it, always seeking new ways to use the understanding of the natural laws around him to bring beauty to light. Two of

the painting techniques he is best known for pioneering are *chiaroscuro* and *sfumato*.

*Chiaroscuro* (Italian: Light-Dark) allows the artist to work with the natural light and dark in a scene to manifest a sense of realism, depth, and motion in a painting. His *John the Baptist* (1513-1516) demonstrates the effectiveness of this technique, which would become dominant in Italian and Flemish art during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Using the *sfumato* (Italian: Smoky) technique, the artist paints "without lines or borders, in the manner of smoke or beyond the focus plane" (Leonardo).

This effect is created by painting layers of translucent color, which then give the impression of form, volume, and depth. There should be continuous gradations of color, without perceptible lines of transition. A famous example is the face of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (1503-07), where the shading around the eyes demonstrates this technique perfectly.

### Leonardo's Vision of the World

As an artist, inventor, engineer, and mystic, Leonardo always worked to see how the pattern of all being worked, both large and small, and how all of the parts of the greater system functioned harmoniously.

Modern scholar Martin Kemp describes how Leonardo had to “embrace a wide range of natural sciences and mathematics, as he searched for scientific rules governing both humanity and the universe. It was these rules, which provided the basis for his imaginative reconstruction of nature in masterworks such as *The Last Supper*, *The Mona Lisa*, and *St. John*, which reveal his increasingly complex vision of humanity in the context of nature. And towards the end of his life, Leonardo became fascinated with the mathematics underlying the ‘design of nature,’ behind which lay the ultimate force of the ‘prime mover,’ as manifested with supreme power in his Deluge

drawings.” (Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci*)

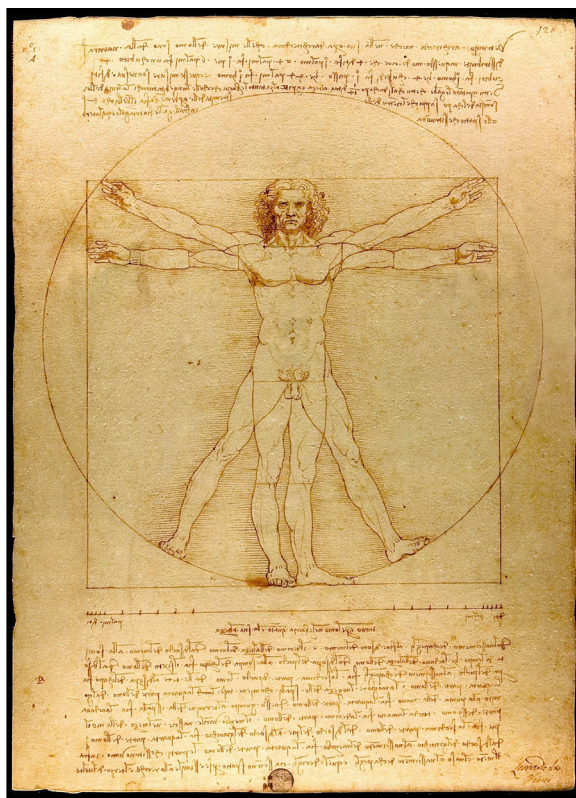
This quest has been true of all mystics from the beginning of time. Pythagoras and his school in the sixth century BCE said that “the Divine geometrizes,” echoing the wisdom of ancient Egyptian and other, older sources. Leonardo found inspiration for this in the newly rediscovered works of Vitruvius. One of his most famous drawings, *The Vitruvian Man* (1490), clearly illustrates his understanding that human beings and our workings are a microcosm of the whole creation. Expanding on a passage from Vitruvius's *De Architectura* 3.1.3, Leonardo encloses the human

form in a circle - a symbol of the spiritual world, and a square - a symbol of the material world.

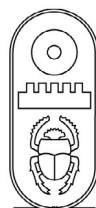
This image of the linkage between humanity and the world here “below” with the whole of creation and beyond is perhaps the most vivid representation of the ancient Hermetic adage “As Above, So Below; As Below, So Above.” The power of this

imagery is demonstrated by its resonance down through the centuries, from William Blake's *Albion or Glad Day* (1796) to the modern Italian 1 Euro coin. Leonardo's vision is as inspiring and powerful today as it was over 500 years ago.

### Leonardo's Notebooks



Leonardo da Vinci's The Vitruvian Man.



In addition to his painting and sculpture, Leonardo kept detailed notebooks of his scientific, philosophical, and artistic studies, sketches, inventions, and plans for machines. Although their content is brilliant, Leonardo's notebooks fell into oblivion after his death, and were not recollected and recognized until the nineteenth century. Historian Lewis Mumford has suggested that the artist made a deliberate decision not to publish his journals, so that his inventions and knowledge would not be available to those who would misuse them against humanity, in particular his extensive designs for weaponry.

Today, we have over 13,000 pages of material from this master of all the arts. Most of the notebooks and pages have found their way into museums, but one, the *Codex Leicester* (formerly the *Codex Hammer*), a collection of scientific work, is owned by Microsoft's founder Bill Gates, who exhibits the Codex once a year in a different part of the world.

True to the spirit of the Renaissance, and consistent with Rosicrucian thought, Leonardo did not see the sciences and the arts as separate from one another, but simply as complementary approaches to the wonders of the world around him. Leonardo's ideas, writings, and sketches in the areas of the sciences and engineering are as much works of genius as his painting.

Leonardo's approach to science was based on observations rather than theory. He attempted to observe the most minute

details of whatever he was studying, and then recorded these details with utmost accuracy. He was continually observing all of nature and humanity around him with a keen eye and kept his notebooks in mirror writing – that is, backwards script that would appear normal in a mirror. As a left-handed writer, it was easier to “drag” the quill pen rather than push it. This also gave a certain level of security to his journals.

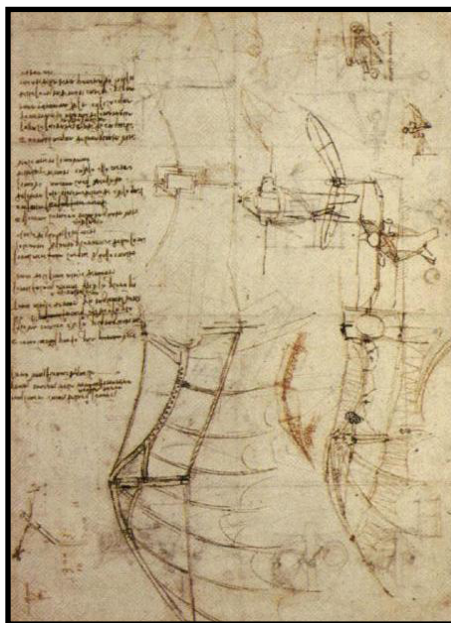
From the time of his apprenticeship to Andrea del Verrocchio to the end of his life, Leonardo explored human physiology, as is evident from both his notebooks and art. He was given permission to perform dissections in the morgues of several major Italian cities in order to further his researches. Around the year 1495, he created the first known description of how to construct a human-like robot, but there is no evidence that he attempted to build such a machine.

## Leonardo the Visionary

Although much of the material in Leonardo's notebooks and journals is keen observation of the natural world, the artist often goes beyond his own world and dreams of what might be. Inspired by the ancient science described by the work of Vitruvius and other classical writers circulating during the Italian Renaissance, he knew that human society had once been more

advanced, and that nothing theoretically stood in the way of even further growth and discovery.

One of Leonardo's fondest dreams was that of flight. His notebooks are



*One of Leonardo da Vinci's sketches for a flying machine.*

full of sketches and designs for flying machines, both bird-winged and similar to a helicopter. True to his method of close observation, he tracked and recorded the flight of birds with amazing accuracy.

Leonardo is said to have tested one of his gliders in an unsuccessful bid to fly in 1496. His wind-screw would not have worked, due to the rotation of the whole construction. However, his design for a light hang glider was built and test-flown in 2005 for a PBS documentary. With sufficient time and materials, it is likely Leonardo would have succeeded in his own lifetime.

In January 2005, researchers Alessandro del Meglio, Roberto Manescalchi, and Maria Carchio discovered Leonardo's secret workshop in Florence. It is a set of hidden rooms in what had once been the Friary of the Most Holy Annunciation, and contains many frescoes and other drawings strikingly similar to those in Leonardo's paintings and notebooks. These may have been painted by the master himself, or by his students. It was in these rooms that much of Leonardo's creativity was expressed in the years following his return to Florence in the early sixteenth century, including possibly the *Mona Lisa* and many of the studies on anatomy and other work in the journals.

Leonardo's tireless spirit of investigation and invention has continued to inspire all those who seek to learn natural laws in order to live in harmony with them, and achieve potentials yet undreamed.

### **Mysteries of Leonardo's Works**

With a person of Leonardo's brilliance in the arts and sciences, in addition to his knowledge of natural laws, it is little surprise that he may have left us some enigmatic messages in his works. Speculation and mystery have always surrounded certain aspects of his achievements. Some theorize

that he may have been responsible for the image on the Shroud of Turin, but no conclusive evidence has been established.

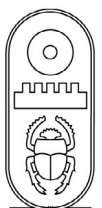
Certainly, Leonardo was not a typical believer of the fifteenth to sixteenth century. As his biographer Vasari wrote in his 1550 edition on the artist's life: "His cast of mind was so heretical that he did not adhere to any religion, thinking perhaps that it was better to be a philosopher than a Christian." Modern biographer Marco Rosci's 1976 *Leonardo* suggests that he "adopted an empirical approach to every thought, opinion, and action and accepted no truth unless verified or verifiable, whether related to natural phenomena, human behavior, or social activities...He still pinned his faith in logical certainty, in the often-repeated affirmation that mathematics and geometry were the true foundations of knowledge."

Leonardo followed a path of knowledge – what he could discover for himself, rather than belief in what someone else had told him. Throughout the centuries many have wondered whether he encoded some of his thoughts and ideas into his art.

Two famous examples of this are in his paintings, *The Last Supper* (1498) and *The Virgin of the Rocks*, painted in two versions (1483-1486 and 1495-1508).

In *The Last Supper*, the figure to Yeshua's right has traditionally been identified as John, "the beloved disciple." However, some have speculated (most recently, Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*) that this indistinct figure is, in fact, Mary Magdalene, whom some claim to be the wife of Yeshua. Others also point out that the raised finger gesture by the Apostle to Yeshua's left may be a hostile sign, intended by Leonardo to criticize the official positions of the Christianity of his time.

Leonardo painted two versions of *The Virgin of the Rocks*. Today, the earlier version is in the Louvre in Paris, while





*The two versions of The Virgin of the Rocks painted by Leonardo da Vinci. The version in the Louvre is on the left; the version in the National Gallery in London is on the right.*

the latter hangs in the National Gallery in London. In both, the Virgin has her arm around the shoulders of the infant John the Baptist and holds her hand in a seemingly menacing gesture over the head of the infant Yeshua. In the earlier version, the angel Uriel also points, not to Yeshua, but to John the Baptist. All of these factors have led some to speculate that Leonardo was pointing away from the mainstream religious patterns of his day to the more ancient traditions represented by John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. For example, many trace the imagery of the Virgin Mary back to the Egyptian goddess Isis and other images of the Divine Feminine. Another group, often associated with the ancient Gnostics, still exists in the Middle East. Called Mandaeans, they maintain that John the Baptist was the true Messiah.

It is likely that we will never know specifically what Leonardo was trying to convey through these ambiguities in his works. Nevertheless, we can certainly know that his own mysticism and spirituality, as expressed in all of his work, was dedicated to discovering the laws that govern the universe and humanity. Leonardo sought to convey those laws

through beauty and inventiveness to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

### **Mysticism Before and After Leonardo's Time**

Leonardo was by no means alone in his mysticism, or in holding views that challenged the mainstream patterns of thought. Before Leonardo's time, the twelfth-century Italian Christian monk, Joachim of Fiore, had taught that the Age of the Holy Spirit was fast approaching, when the structures of Church authority would no longer be needed, and that all would have direct access to the Divine. Needless to say, those in power at the time often did not favor these kinds of opinions.

Contact with the Christian East, with Islam, and with the Jewish community also began a return of ancient sources of wisdom to the West. This had accelerated during the time of the Crusades (eleventh through thirteenth centuries). Gnostic Christians also flourished across northern Italy and southern France during this same time, and carried with them many of the mystical ideals of the past. Finally, the impending fall of Constantinople and the

Eastern Roman Empire in the first half of the fifteenth century resulted in an influx of scholars and religious figures coming to Italy. They brought with them many valuable documents and ideas long lost to the West.

When the ancient Hermetic literature from Alexandria of the second century CE was reintroduced to the West at this time, great interest was aroused. This was quickly coupled with the wisdom of the Jewish Kabbalah that had been brought from Spain and the Middle East.

With this inspiration, Italian Renaissance mystics and scholars of esotericism began to study and teach the venerable wisdom once again. Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), in his biblical commentary, *Heptaplus*, advances the notion that all religions and spiritual traditions are harmonious, and point to the same eternal truths. It is little wonder that Leonardo found inspiration for his unorthodox ideas in such a rich climate of mysticism.

Following Leonardo's time, the tradition of inner spirituality continued, but was also opposed by civil and church authorities. Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), a brilliant scientist, philosopher, and mystic was burned at the stake in Rome for his works and teachings. Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) was also persecuted in Germany for his teachings that all had direct access to the Divine Wisdom.

After the Rosicrucian Manifestoes of 1614-1616, many mystics associated with this movement carried on Leonardo's search for understanding and living according to the Cosmic Laws, which bring together all things according to the ancient adage, "As Above, So Below; As Below, So Above." These include Michael Maier (1568-1622) in Germany, as well as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Robert Fludd (1574-1637) in Britain.

Throughout the centuries, the Primordial Tradition celebrated by Leonardo has continued to inspire great works of science, art, and spirituality, and this continues to the present day.

### Leonardo For All Times

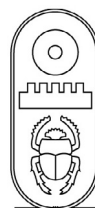
"Wisdom is the Daughter of Experience." (Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebook III*, 80b)

Having journeyed with Leonardo, connecting the ancient world to our own, it is not enough to stand in admiration of his genius and creativity. Women and men throughout history have been inspired by the same natural laws and principles to continue his work of discovery, beauty, and invention.

Pioneers in their fields such as Marie Curie, Booker T. Washington, and the Wright Brothers were not content to simply repeat what others had done, but advanced our knowledge and implementation of the laws which govern all things. Creative genius again and again employs these laws to reveal beauty, as in the works of Marie Corelli, Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, and Edith Piaf.

In each instance, we can hear the sage advice of Leonardo from his *Codex Atlanticus*: "Anyone who, in discussion, relies upon authority, uses, not the understanding, but memory." (75a)

Leonardo understood the ancient wisdom that the human person is a microcosm of the whole world. It follows that one can come to know whatever is needed by a careful study of creation, and inner meditation. In this way, we come to discover what Leonardo did, that we are truly *Capax Universi*, capable of all things. We can follow the path of discovery, invention, joy, and beauty that Leonardo blazed for us in our own lives today, working for the progress of humanity, and our entire planet. This kind of testament is one that Leonardo would most surely appreciate.



# MICHELANGELO'S PIAZZA DEL CAMPIDOGLIO

*David M. Aguilera, FRC, PhD, ABPP*



*The view at sunrise over central Rome from the Piazza del Campidoglio atop Capitoline Hill (Bruno/flickr).*

The influence of Michelangelo, one of history's most famous artists, is celebrated in Rome and the Vatican where some of his most important artwork resides. Atop the smallest of The Eternal City's famed Seven Hills, his influence presents itself alongside evidence of ancient cultures and mythology. Religious and art historians document important archeological finds at the site predating the Etruscan Civilization.

According to ancient sources, Capitoline Hill, with the piazza redesigned by Michelangelo during the *Quattrocento* (the fifteenth century), derives its name from the builders of the fifth century BCE Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus who discovered an intact human head while building this temple. The term *caput* (Latin for "head" or "top") was assigned to the site, becoming Capitoline Hill, which

remains a designation for governance and civic pride. Over the millennia, the site became an important repository of ancient mythological statues, as well as monuments to political figures, telling the history of changing regimes, civic opinions, and religion. The equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius currently centered in the piazza is a replica that replaced the original, now housed in the Capitoline Museum. Originally in the Apostolic Palace of the Lateran, a former residence of popes, the statue was utilized by ancient Romans as a symbol of justice. The "Philosopher Emperor" Marcus Aurelius was a proponent of Stoicism. His collection of writings, *Meditations*, is considered one of the world's greatest philosophical works, with the emphasis on virtue as the essence of happiness. Originally placed on a marble

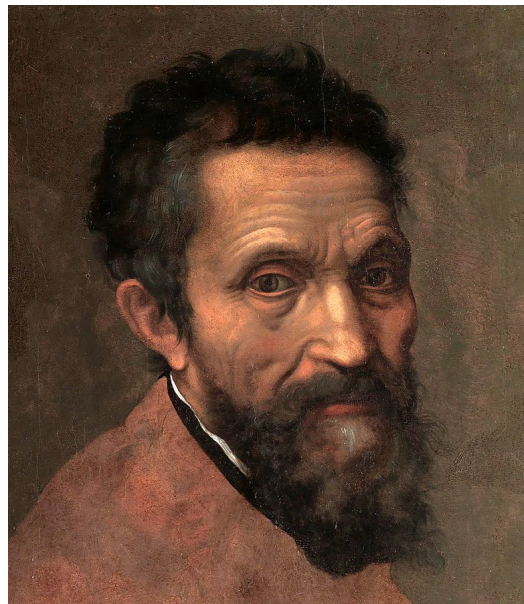
slab, subsequent work on the base of the statue was completed by Michelangelo, who created the graceful commemorative pedestal.

### **Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni**

Born into the High Renaissance and having lost his mother at age six, Michelangelo was taught and influenced by the luminaries of the day. As a child he was less interested in school, and while later ruing his ignorance of Latin, he would instead observe artists painting church frescos. He was apprenticed by his father for three years to a leading painter in Florence, but he left after two and joined the artists taking residence in the Medici Gardens. Lorenzo de' Medici, designated "The Magnificent" for his civic and artistic patronage, was so enamored by the work of the precocious thirteen-year-old that Michelangelo was invited into the family household. The Medici Gardens were a Renaissance center for art and Neoplatonic philosophy, but also the fiery preaching of the fanatical Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola whose puritanical views would set the stage for Michelangelo's later religious crises.

Marsilio Ficino, a Renaissance Man, was no stranger to either the Medici Gardens or Michelangelo. Over the decades, Ficino expounded his Neoplatonic philosophy, spiritual understanding, and medicinal concepts. Ficino's influence continued at the villa at Careggi given him by his patron Cosimo de' Medici, thereby establishing the Platonic Academy of Florence. Lesser known is Ficino's interpretation of the stars and planets, and that his villa was decorated with astrological symbols. At this location, Michelangelo was further influenced beyond traditional Christianity.

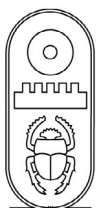
The clash between traditional, Church-enforced religiosity and his reflective nature was thematic of the existential, spiritual crises that enveloped Michelangelo's spirit throughout his lifetime. His deep religiosity was expressed in his famous paintings and statuary, many of which can be found in Rome. Less prominent are his architectural works such as the Piazza del Campidoglio, and least familiar would be his poetry. His poetry collection *Rime (Rhymes)* provides a view into the artist's soul for the interpretation of his work. Within the collection are found Michelangelo's most intimate thoughts, conflicts, and muses, contemporary with his works of art.



Michelangelo by Daniele da Volterra (1544).

### **Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara**

Vittoria Colonna, herself a Renaissance Woman, deepened Michelangelo's conflicted religiosity through her close relationship with him and her embrace of Luther's *sola fide* (justification by faith alone). Highly unusual for the social order of her time, Colonna was a celebrated



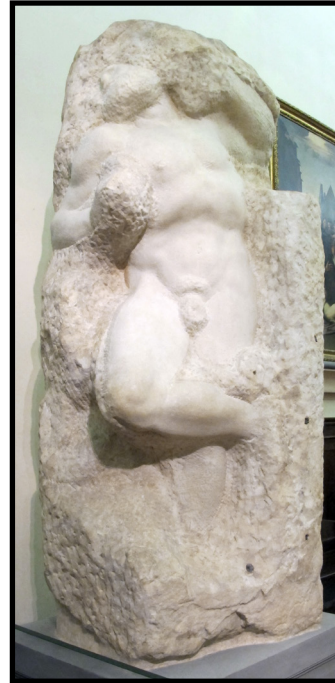
poet who was able to circulate in the highest social circles due to her role as a pious and chaste widow. Her spirituality also necessitated balancing religious and spiritual trends, so that while living in convents and familiar with the popes, she was also deeply involved in the belief that faith was more central to salvation than Church doctrine. A great Platonic friendship and spiritual affinity grew with Michelangelo, so much so that they each dedicated entire books of sonnets and *rime* to each other.



Vittoria Colonna by Sebastiano del Piombo (1525).

Torn in spiritual allegiance, persevering in the quest for salvation, some biographers describe Michelangelo as a tortured soul, searching for divine perfection. His art so closely mirrors human expression that his statuary has been described as superior to the human body itself. His renowned *David* and the Vatican *Pieta* evoke sensuality, ardent emotion, and inspired spirituality. Such work can be viewed as the expression of

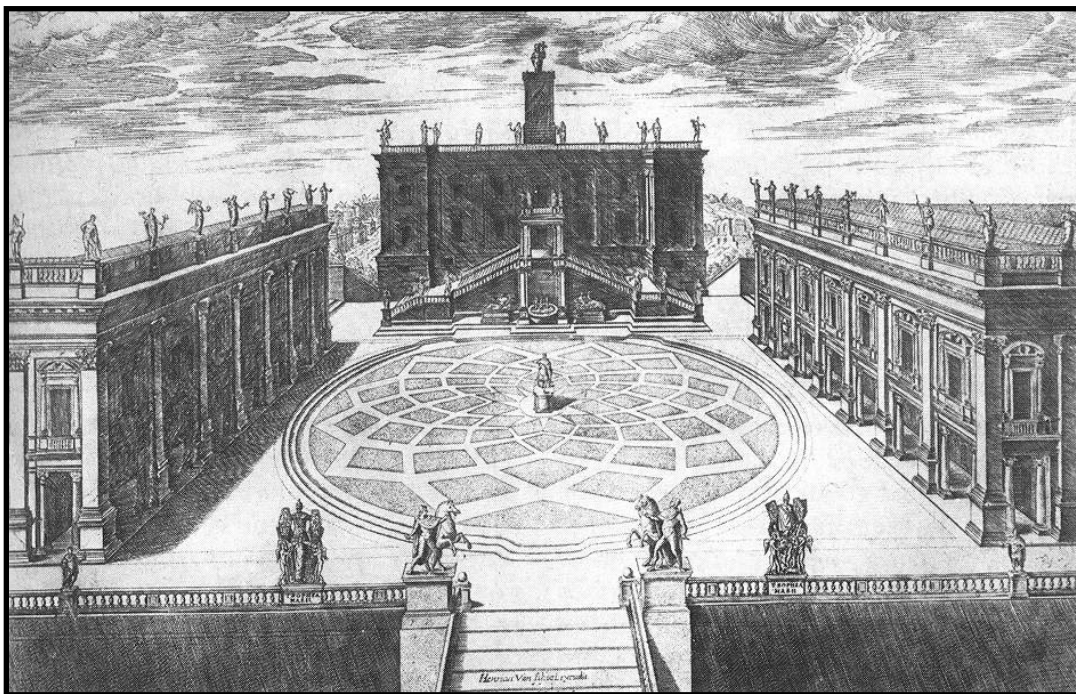
true imagination, of spiritual yearning, and also, at least at times, the felt distance from Divine Unity. His own poignant analogy was that the work of the sculptor frees the object from its stone entombment, just as the soul struggles to free itself from the material world.



Michelangelo's Awakening Slave.

### The Piazza and Michelangelo's Original Design

Modern tourists flock to Capitoline Hill marveling at the grandeur of the ancient statuary and Michelangelo's architecture, perhaps learning something of ancient Roman mythology at this anointed site. Central in the piazza is Michelangelo's pavement design, with its twelve points and the curvilinear lines resulting in the center circle, which can indeed be interpreted as astrological or zodiacal signs as taught by Ficino. The design was not placed there until the 1940s because the popes viewed it as a non-Christian symbol. Religiously however, the number twelve also signifies the Christian apostles, the Buddhist Twelve Links of Dependent Arising, the twelve successors



*A 1568 engraving by Étienne Dupérac shows Michelangelo's design for the Capitoline Hill in Rome.*

to Muhammad the Prophet, and the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Symbolically, and similar in design, is the Flower of Life, as seen in the rose windows in Chartres Cathedral, with twelve signifying completion, especially when surrounded by the sanctifying aureole, mandorla, or vesica.

At age fifty-seven, having experienced trials related to spiritual attainment, Michelangelo wrote: “My death is what I live on; seems to me I thrive, and happily, on unhappiness, on death and anguish—if you live on less come join me in fire’s mortal ecstasy.” And again, with Stoic sentiment: “Just as a flame, by wind and weather flailed, flares up, so every virtue prized by heaven is more resplendent, being more assailed...”

The significance of Michelangelo’s art can be illuminated by the perspective of a mystical initiate. From above,<sup>1</sup> the piazza design becomes that of rose petals, the symbol of the unfolding Soul, a concept dear to Michelangelo’s art, and indeed, his life’s work. Meditating on the symbol, one can imagine a fountain of peace and contentment, of virtuous love

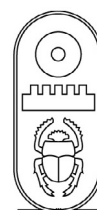
as portrayed in Michelangelo’s *Rime*. Such interpretations are made not only through artistic intention, but also by the individual mystic and from the wellspring of their own divine subconscious.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup><https://tinyurl.com/y8zxyay5> (Google Earth view, retrieved 08/23/18).

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