



Welcome to our December book, Historians!

Our next meeting is **Tuesday, December 8 at 6:30 on Zoom to discuss *The Map of Knowledge: A Thousand Year History of How Classical Ideas Were Lost and Found* by Violet Moller** published in 2019. Moller is an independent historian who earned her Ph.D. in History from The University of Edinburgh. In this book, Moller follows the works of three famous Greek authors--Euclid, Ptolemy and Galen--as their works travel through the centuries through the seven great cities of learning: Alexandria, Baghdad, Cordoba, Toledo, Salerno, Palermo and Venice. She begins with Alexandria which not only collects these works but uses them for further scientific work. And then as the works travel through translation, what links the cities that preserve and develop these ideas? And why does Constantinople preserve but never develop the ideas? What fuels scientific endeavor and what is required for it to happen? This book is a broad overview, so keep that in mind. But it is a fascinating fast paced and knowledgeable historical survey of the roads traveled by knowledge in the Middle Ages.

Moller writes this book as a narrative history of the History of Ideas, hoping to introduce this field as a way to study history to a wider audience. As you can imagine, since my degree from UTD is in the History of Ideas, I am delighted to share this book with you. As well, Moller wants to show her readers the vast amount of scholarship that was being developed in the "Dark Ages." While we do better now, traditionally history books have skipped from the Romans to the Renaissance. Moller is one of the historians making a wider audience aware of the significant scientific contributions of Islamic scholars and medieval Christian scholars. There was no "Dark Ages" in our human history of ideas. Euclid,

Ptolemy, and Galen will provide the framework for intellectual knowledge for hundreds of years.

One of the most significant themes in *The Map of Knowledge* is the question of what is necessary to promote a spirit of scholarship and scholarly exploration. Moller argues for "an atmosphere of tolerance and inclusivity towards different nationalities and religions." Is she correct? Are stable and prosperous empires, tolerance and intellectually curious rulers necessary for knowledge to flourish? If so, what does that say about our present time?

Moller is another historian who reminds us that in our studies of the history of ideas, we have neglected the role of Arab scholarship, often giving credit to European scholars for the work of their Arab predecessors. But it is not just the scholars who play a crucial role. The conquering Normans prove to be an intellectually curious people who encourage learning, even when it goes against the status quo. So perhaps an element of risk taking is also necessary in a scholarly culture? There is, after all, a risk in crediting non-Christians and in challenging prevailing ideas.

And there are also practical considerations to the spread of knowledge. Until paper arrived in Baghdad from China via the Silk Road, the transmission of knowledge is difficult. But now this all changes. In its heyday, Cordoba will produce 70,000 to 80,000 books per year.

The Map of Knowledge: A Thousand Year History of How Classical Ideas Were Lost and Found by Violet Moller is a fascinating trip through history, introducing you to people and places that you have possibly never heard of and yet have an enormous impact on our world today. There will be much to discuss when we gather Tuesday, December 8 at 6:30 on Zoom for our final Fall meeting. Looking forward to seeing you!

Donna McBride