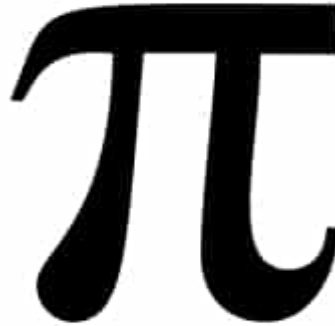




Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 14, 2011

Happy Pi Day! What 3.14, Archimedes, and the Constitution Have in Common

One of the earliest men to attempt an accurate calculation of Pi was renowned mathematician, engineer, and inventor [Archimedes](#) (287-212 B.C.). Not much is known for certain about his life. It is presumed that he was born in Syracuse, Sicily (a colony of Greece at the time of his birth). Ancient historians record that he lived for 75 years and was buried in his hometown. Cicero, the famed Roman orator, while serving as quaestor of Sicily, reportedly visited the grave of Archimedes.



The written works of Archimedes did not fare well, and most of his work is known only through citations in the writings of other scientists and historians. One copy of some of his remarkable work was made by an unnamed scribe living in the 10th century A.D., who transcribed several of the works onto vellum and bound them into one volume.

Sometime about two hundred years later, Christian scribes unbound the expensive and rare vellum manuscript, scraped off the text, washed away the remaining original ink, and folded the parchment pages in half, writing a liturgical book of 177 pages over the pages that once contained the copied writings of Archimedes.

After an original parchment is subjected to this type of deliberate scraping, washing, and copying over, it is known as a "palimpsest" — from two Greek words meaning, "I scrape."

This invaluable transcription of the works of one of the ancient world's preeminent scholars and thinkers, known to history as the [Archimedes Palimpsest](#), remained hidden for centuries until a biblical scholar named Constantine Tischendorf visiting Constantinople in the 1840s discovered the Greek mathematical notations still barely visible on some of the pages of the prayer book. In 1906, Johan Heiberg realized upon examining the book that the barely legible text was that of several otherwise undiscovered books of the great Archimedes.

Today, on this Pi Day, we should think of Archimedes and the palimpsest made of his work.

Americans too have a valuable work that was written hundreds of years ago on parchment. The ink on that cherished document is now being scraped, washed, and written over by designing legislators and presidents who consider the clauses thereof of no contemporary value and who place their own understanding and desires above those of the the noble Founding Fathers who deliberated and ordained that original charter.



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Through the passage of unconstitutional statutes; the incorrect and unsupportable interpretations of the Commerce Clause, the General Welfare Clause, the Necessary and Proper Clause, and others; the legislative, executive, and judicial branches are erasing the Constitution and rewriting it to the point where it is unrecognizable and is nothing more than a liturgical book full of the hymns of statism.

Many of these latter-day scribes who busy themselves scraping, washing, and writing over the Constitution insist that though the Founders did a serviceable enough job establishing a government for the America of the 18th century, they could not have anticipated these modern times and the particular challenges of governing facing their inheritors. Besides, they ridicule constitutionalists and charge them with revering the Constitution for no other reason than because it is old and they don't like change.

These usurpers are wrong on each of those points. The devotion demonstrated by constitutionalists to America's founding document is not a matter of paleolatry. That is to say, they do not honor the Constitution because it is old. They honor it because the principles of government set forth therein are timeless and not subject to the changing winds of political "progress."

Furthermore, constitutionalists do not insist that their elected representatives and presidents hew rigidly to the founding document because of its age. In fact, they don't even insist upon such faithful adherence because of their rightful respect and veneration for the men who wrote and ratified the Constitution.

They uphold the principles of the Constitution and hold their representatives up to that standard because it contains the finest, most functional scheme of republican government ever devised by mankind. On that old parchment is written some of the greatest, most remarkable, and irrefutable elements of self-government ever penned.

These enduring elements of the doctrine of natural law ever distilled into a workable, free government. James Madison and his fellows drank from the fountains of political wisdom — ancient and modern — and through the ink on the Constitution, that wisdom and learning was made law. And, the most convincing testimony of its timeless nature is that Americans still live under the liberty protected thereby.

May Americans continue to do so for another 224 years. May they learn from Archimedes and vigilantly protect that old parchment known as the Constitution, and keep it from one day being known in history books as the American Palimpsest.



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