Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier. *Pythagoras and Renaissance Europe: Finding Heaven.*
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xiv + 320 pp. $103. ISBN: 978–0–521–51795–9.

This wide-ranging, well-written study tells the Renaissance story of Pythagoras, whom the age's philosophers and historians re-created in their own image as a thinker of enormous stature, the founder of a number of disciplines, and a moralist

and sage of such lofty grandeur that he anticipated the virtues of Christianity's greatest saints, if not of Christ himself. Joost-Gaugier's second chapter is entitled indeed "The Emergence of 'Saint' Pythagoras in the Early Renaissance." Ralph Cudworth in the mid-seventeenth century nominated Pythagoras "the most eminent of all the ancient philosophers," implying that his school surpassed the Academy and the Lyceum. In sum, Renaissance thinkers were captivated by the notion of either a magisterial pre-Platonic Platonist, or a Greco-Jewish mystagogue whom they could set beside Moses and invest with a like authority — and especially since St. Ambrose had intimated that Pythagoras was a Jew.

This identification was taken up in the sixteenth century in what chapter three characterizes as "the apotheosis of Pythagoras." Particularly striking is the claim of Johannes Reuchlin that the Samian "drew his stream of learning from the boundless sea of Kabbalah," and that he was uniquely able to understand the secrets of Moses. Instead of being a purveyor of the ancient theology of the Gentiles, as he had been for Ficino, Pythagoras became a mediator between Christianity and ancient Jewish wisdom, a wisdom to which Paracelsus too was drawn, though he thought of Pythagoras as a magus and alchemist who had found the philosophers' stone. Two important Franciscans, Francesco Zorzi and Egidio of Viterbo, championed the notion that Moses was the source of the wisdom that Pythagoras transmitted to Plato, while Guillaume Postel entertained the bizarre idea that the ancient French Druids had inherited Pythagoras's number symbolism and mathematical wisdom, notably his account of the five regular solids. These solids also famously obsessed Johannes Kepler, who looked to Pythagoras and Plato as his true preceptors in astronomy and cosmology. Even the mocking spirit of Gianpaolo Lomazzo testified to the enormous prestige of Pythagoras, this time as a transmigrationist. In his *Libro dei sogni* the sage's soul leaves the body of Pietro Aretino, just as it had formerly left the gorgeous body of Helen of Troy and the bodies of other sexually active women, as well as the body of an Indian ant.

Joost-Gaaugier's book is a sequel to her equally wide-ranging and informative *Measuring Heaven: Pythagoras and His Influence on Thought and Art in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (2006); and the two together constitute an encyclopedic study of what we might call the Pythagoras myth from its inception in the sixth century BCE to the coming of the Enlightenment. Divided loosely into three parts dealing with Pythagoras the Man, the "Many Facets of Renaissance Pythagoreanism," and "Pythagoreanism in Architecture and Art," this second volume is subdivided into ten chapters that begin from Pletho, Cusanus, and Ficino and close with the theme of divine proportion in Venice and "the theology of arithmetic" in Spain. Two appendixes present Pythagorean works in six Renaissance libraries and an English translation of Beroaldo's *Symbola Pythagorica* of 1503.

The book is preeminently a rich survey, though some will find it insufficiently discriminating in that too many people are characterized as Pythagoreans because they expressed an interest in mathematical proportion, for instance, in numerology, or in the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus*. In this generous error, the book treats scores of people who might have been influenced by or indebted to a Pythagoreanism that it

presents as the presiding philosophy of the Renaissance. After reading her analyses of Masaccio and Raphael, for example, I am still skeptical that Masaccio "appears to have been acquainted with Pythagorean ideas" (171), or that "the most intensely Pythagorean of all Renaissance works of art is the Stanza della Segnatura" (225). Indeed, one might argue that the book's considerable erudition and enthusiasm is to some degree dissipated as it turns from one thinker or artist interested in ratios or triangles or the harmony of the spheres to another. Despite these reservations, I remain impressed by the daring of the enterprise, its sense of attack, and its élan: the two volumes are a considerable achievement.

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