In *Pythagoras and Renaissance Europe: Finding Heaven*, Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier offers the first systematic study of Pythagoras, the ancient Greek sage, and his influence on mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, religion, medicine, music, the occult, and social life – as well as on architecture and art – in the late medieval and early modern eras. Spanning the period between Dante and Petrarch in the fourteenth century and Kepler and Galileo in the seventeenth, this book demonstrates that Pythagoras’s influence in intellectual circles – Christian, Jewish, and Arab – was more widespread than has previously been acknowledged. Joost-Gaugier shows that during this period admiration for Pythagoras was great throughout Europe. She also shows how this admiration was translated into ideas that were applied to the visual arts by numerous well-known architects and artists who sought, through the use of a visual language inspired by the memory of Pythagoras, to obtain perfect harmony in their creations. Among these were Alberti, Bramante, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Thus, she suggests, some of the greatest artworks in the Western world owe their modernity to an inspirational force that, paradoxically, was conceived in the distant past.

Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier is an internationally known and distinguished scholar. A three-time graduate of Harvard, she has published extensively in research journals, conference proceedings, and international catalogues on subjects ranging from classical literature to medieval architecture to Renaissance art and intellectual history. A recipient of grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Philosophical Society, the Delmas Foundation, the Fulbright Association, and the National Endowment for the Humanities among others, she is the author of *Jacopo Bellini: Selected Drawings*, *Raphael’s Stanza della Segnatura: Meaning and Invention*, and *Measuring Heaven: Pythagoras and His Influence on Thought and Art in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. In 2005 she was awarded an Honorary Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard University for lifetime achievement.
Frontispiece: Montepulciano, San Biagio (Antonio da Sangallo the Elder) Photo: Allan Foy
PYTHAGORAS AND RENAISSANCE EUROPE

Finding Heaven

CHRISTIANE L. JOOST-GAUGIER
First of all, I never get down to writing except at dead of night when it’s absolutely quiet and deep silence reigns over all … in short, when there’s such complete peace that if Pythagoras were alive he would be able to hear the music of the spheres quite clearly. At such a time gods and goddesses delight to hold converse with pure minds.

*Erasmus, Dialogus Ciceronianus (trans. Betty I. Knott)*
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The present volume, following from one that aimed to set the stage for Pythagoras and his influence in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, is devoted to recapturing his influence for the Renaissance and to speculating on its effect on the visual arts and architecture. The subject of Pythagoras's influence on the Renaissance, and specifically on the visual arts, has been obscured by our modern tendency to view different disciplines as separated from each other. The broadly interdisciplinary nature of this problem is challenging because it requires the wider perspective that was understood in the Renaissance. The substructure of thinkers and ideas that lies deeply embedded in the culture of the Renaissance is fertile ground. The testimony of its sources is so suggestive it cannot be overlooked. Our knowledge respecting the contributions of these thinkers to each other is much fuller than is frequently realized. While my understanding may be imperfect, I have here attempted to indulge my curiosity in how Pythagoras served as a conduit enabling those who sought to imitate the past to achieve an original and stunning modernity. I hope my readers will understand that this volume does not purport to give a complete synthesis of Pythagoras and his importance for the Renaissance, but only to offer some suggestions for future exploration and for evaluating his importance for the history of art and architecture. It is this interest that has encouraged me to enlarge my own studies and to seek understanding of the past by listening to its own language. For this gratification I am indebted to many institutions and many people.

First and foremost, those who inspired me in the beginning with the thrill to understand the past left an indelible example for me. These were, especially, Millard Meiss and Federico Zeri, my mentors at Harvard, and Giuseppe Billanovich, who kindly opened his house at Padua to me on many occasions. Among the many libraries that opened their doors to me, I am grateful to the Harvard University libraries, especially the Houghton and Dumbarton Oaks research libraries, as well as to the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, the Library of Congress, the Library of the Folger Institute, and the National Library of Medicine. During
the time of my work on this volume, my most beloved home, however, was in the Library of the National Gallery at Washington, where the entire staff was always patient, kind, knowledgeable, and helpful.

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