



The Pythagorean Theorem: A 4,000-Year History

Eli Maor

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By any measure, the Pythagorean theorem is the most famous statement in all of mathematics, one remembered from high school geometry class by even the most math-phobic students. Well over four hundred proofs are known to exist, including ones by a twelve-year-old Einstein, a young blind girl, Leonardo da Vinci, and a future president of the United States. Here--perhaps for the first time in English--is the full story of this famous theorem.

Although attributed to Pythagoras, the theorem was known to the Babylonians more than a thousand years before him. He may have been the first to prove it, but his proof--if indeed he had one--is lost to us. Euclid immortalized it as Proposition 47 in his *Elements*, and it is from there that it has passed down to generations of students. The theorem is central to almost every branch of science, pure or applied. It has even been proposed as a means to communicate with extraterrestrial beings, if and when we discover them. And, expanded to four-dimensional space-time, it plays a pivotal role in Einstein's theory of relativity.

In this book, Eli Maor brings to life many of the characters that played a role in the development of the Pythagorean theorem, providing a fascinating backdrop to perhaps our oldest enduring mathematical legacy.

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