

Maria Sticco, Publicist
e-mail: mes5@pitt.edu
tel: (412) 383-2493 fax: (412) 383-2466

3400 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260
tel: (412) 383-2456 fax: (412) 383-2466
www.upress.pitt.edu

For immediate release October 30, 2012

Texas author's new book on math myths described as delightful exposé

PITTSBURGH—In *The Cult of Pythagoras: Math and Myths*, Alberto A. Martínez discusses several popular myths from the history of mathematics: that Pythagoras proved the hypotenuse theorem, that Archimedes figured out how to test the purity of a gold crown while he was in a bathtub, that the Golden Ratio is in nature and ancient architecture, and many more. Some stories are partly true, others are entirely false—but all show the power of invention in history.

Pythagoras emerges as a symbol of the urge to conjecture and “fill in the gaps” of history. He has been credited with fundamental discoveries in mathematics and the sciences, yet there is almost no evidence that he really contributed anything at all to these fields. Martínez asks: how does history change when we subtract the many small exaggerations and interpolations that writers have added for over two thousand years?

“Mathematics is the last subject one would expect to be infested with mythology, but even mathematicians can fall for myths, particularly those concerning the history of their subject,” said John C. Stillwell, University of San Francisco. “In this delightful exposé, Martínez finally busts the many myths of math, and the results are both sobering and fascinating.”

“Martinez not only rigorously compares the exciting myths about Pythagoras with the sparse, and mostly contradictory, historical sources, he also explains why we have these myths and the purposes they serve,” stated Jeremy Gray, The Open University. “His book will be a natural first port of call for people who like to get this sort of thing right.”

Martínez is associate professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *Science Secrets: The Truth about Darwin's Finches, Einstein's Wife, and Other Myths*; *Kinematics: The Lost Origins of Einstein's Relativity*; and *Negative Math: How Mathematical Rules Can Be Positively Bent*.

#

The Cult of Pythagoras: Math and Myths by Alberto A. Martínez is published by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

288 pp. • 6-1/8 x 9-1/4 • 42 illus. • ISBN 978-0-8229-4418-8 • Cloth \$27.95