



▲ The tetractys

THE PYTHAGOREAN BROTHERHOOD

THE LEGENDARY PHILOSOPHER-MATHEMATICIAN
CREATED A SECRET SOCIETY BASED ON THE OCCULT
THAT GAVE RISE TO A POWERFUL POLITICAL FORCE
IN ANCIENT ITALY.

The ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras was, by any century's standards, a genius. Born about 570 BCE on the island of Samos, he gained his knowledge of mathematics and mysticism during his extensive travels to Egypt, Babylon and India, where he studied with priests and poets.

Pythagoras made important mathematical discoveries such as the theorem that bears his name, relating to the three sides of a right triangle. According to legend, he devised the *tetractys*, the triangular figure that adds up to the perfect number, 10, and promoted the importance of sacred geometry, in which mystical symbolic and religious meanings are ascribed to certain geometric shapes and proportions. The foremost philosophical doctrine he introduced to Western consciousness was *metempsychosis*—essentially, reincarnation—the belief that the soul survives death and is reborn into another human or an animal. Pythagoras believed in strict vegetarianism, a basic underlying tenet of all reincarnation religions.

In about 532 BCE, Pythagoras established a small community of pupils in Crotona in southern Italy. The philosopher offered his followers a grand vision of a spirit world as well as his thoughts on geometry and the relationship of mathematics to astronomy and music.

By the middle of the fifth century BCE, the Pythagorean Brotherhood had become powerful and politically dominant in the towns of southern Italy. During a

period of local political turmoil, a man named Cyron—whom Pythagoras had refused to admit into the Brotherhood because of his reckless behavior—organized an assault on the group's headquarters. The mob burned the Brotherhood's meetinghouse to the ground, killing many of the members inside. Pythagoras fled into exile and died about 495 BCE.

Many believe that the ideas of the Pythagoras Brotherhood established the foundation for later traditions such as Rosicrucianism and secret societies, including the Freemasons. ▶

INITIATION INTO THE PYTHAGOREAN BROTHERHOOD

Candidates for the Pythagorean Brotherhood had to undergo an arduous process of initiation. They swore an oath on the sacred triangle *tetractys*, gave their worldly possessions to the Brotherhood and took a five-year vow of silence. The initiation included an unusual diet that incorporated poppy, sesame and cucumber seeds, honey, and the skin of a sea onion. The Brotherhood placed great importance on gymnastics and exercise as a means of bringing the human body into harmony.

◀ Pythagoras of Samos lived a life devoted to science and religion, yet because of the secrecy of his brotherhood, there are no known copies of his writings in existence.