

## About the cover

### Adrien-Marie Legendre and Joseph Fourier

The article by Peter Duren in this issue explains the cover. As he points out, this caricature, which has come down to us through a striking series of accidents, is probably the only extant portrait of Legendre. Although the name of Legendre is well known in our era, and his present renown reflects many significant accomplishments, he seems not to have been admired by all of his contemporaries. We do not know all the reasons for his poor reputation, but some of it may be due to his mathematical errors. One of these is alluded to in the caricature—the diagram of Pythagoras' Theorem—is there undoubtedly because to the public his fame rested on his textbook of plane geometry, which possibly held the record among mathematics books for the number of copies sold (at least until twentieth century calculus texts appeared). Although it is a valuable book, containing among other things a readable version of Lambert's proof of the irrationality of  $\pi$ , several successive editions contained false proofs of Euclid's fifth postulate, over which Legendre wasted much effort.

A beautiful copy of an early edition of Legendre's text is available on the website of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Dahlem: <http://echo.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/home>. We thank the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France for providing the image through their North American agent, Art Resource.

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