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**Engammare, Max. Soixante-Trois: La peur de la grande année  
climactérique à la Renaissance**

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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**Engammare, Max.**

*Soixante-Trois: La peur de la grande année climactérique à la Renaissance.*

Geneva: Droz, 2013. Pp. 246. ISBN 978-2-600-00553-1 (paperback) € 25.

*Soixante-Trois* is a book concerning the intellectual history of the Renaissance; in particular, how ancient fears of the great climacteric—the number 63 or 63<sup>rd</sup>—were reactivated in this period. The author, Max Engammare, is a specialist on the preaching and daily life of John Calvin, the history of biblical exegesis in the sixteenth century, the history of the Bible as a book, and the hermeneutic of biblical illustration. *Soixante-Trois* moves into a different area of expertise. In 2004, Engammare wrote a book entitled *L'Ordre du temps: L'invention de la ponctualité au XVIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz). More recently, with Nicole Guenier, he published a critical edition of Sébastien Castellion's *Les Livres de Salomon (Proverbes, Ecclésiaste, Cantique des cantiques) 1555* (Geneva: Droz, 2008). In *Soixante-Trois*, Engammare seeks to follow the developments of a discourse that was new to the Renaissance. He analyzes texts that discuss the climacteric number 63 or 63<sup>rd</sup> and even the numbers 7 and 9, divisors of 63, to bring to light the importance of this notion. As such, his book is addressed to Renaissance specialists. Eight chapters lead us to discover and analyze texts dealing with 7, 9 or 63 (or other multiples of 7 and 9). He has done an enormous amount of research for this book, as evidenced by 75 pages of notes, the bibliography, and the index.

Engammare begins by examining sources from Antiquity to show that Pliny the elder, Aulus Gellius, Censorinus, and Julius Firmicus founded the first modern discourse on the climacteric year of one's life through their influence on Petrarch. He analyzes dictionaries from the Renaissance (chapter 2) to show that fear of the great climacteric year was a Renaissance reality. In his third chapter, which deals with numerological texts from the Renaissance, he elucidates the significance of numbers 7 and 9: the first was linked to illnesses of the body and the second to illnesses of the mind; their multiplication led to the fatal 63. In the fourth chapter, dealing with astrological texts, Engammare demonstrates that the climacteric years (multiples of 7 or 9) were of the utmost significance to the French people. In chapter 5, however, where he deals with medical texts, he advances the idea that doctors were hardly interested in the concept of a climacteric year, with two notable exceptions: the first is Liemens Lemmens, for whom it was a superstition; the second is François Rabelais, the doctor who caused the word to enter the French language, giving proof that such a discourse on the climacteric really did exist in this time period. In chapter 6, Engammare's study of historical and political texts shows that, in a century where people tried to predict everything, the idea that states, too, had critical periods was very credible and had an enormous importance. In the seventh chapter, concerning theological texts, he demonstrates that for theologians like Théodore de Bèze and Simon Goulart, their Lord was God, but also astrology!

In his final chapter, Engammare reveals that Marsilio Ficino and not Petrarch was the true originator of the discourse on the climacteric in the Renaissance; that even Erasmus was once afraid of his climacteric year. Engammare then discusses recurring themes before concluding that the discourse on the climacteric was part of a larger mentality in the Renaissance, where comprehension of the visible world was seen as a means of understanding the invisible world: the secret workings of God.

Demonstrating thorough research, Engammare includes works that have no obvious impact on the question at hand. For the most part, though, his choice of texts enables him to prove his point very well. While he does not always develop his ideas to their full extent, he makes up for this with the terrific conclusion in chapter 8.

*Soixante-Trois's* main contribution is to show that, in the social imaginary of the sixteenth century, people believed that by understanding the significance

of certain numbers one could comprehend the mind of God. In this way, Engammare convincingly brings to light a new aspect of the Renaissance.

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