

International Study Group on the Relations Between HISTORY and PEDAGOGY of MATHEMATICS NEWSLETTER

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Message from our Chairperson

A century ago

In the first period of the life of ICMI (International Commission on Mathematical Instruction) from 1908 to 1920, eighteen countries published 187 books or pamphlets on the status of mathematical instruction. One of the 53 reports published by Germany concerned the use of the history of mathematics in teaching (author Martin Gebhardt, Teubner, Leipzig, 1912). I think it may be interesting to know how the subject was viewed in those times, thus I report the review appeared (in French) in the journal *L'enseignement mathématique* (1913, a.15, 345-346) The author of the review is Arnold Reymond (Neuchâtel). The modern readers can consider which questions have been answered or are out of fashion and which are still under discussion.

The history of mathematics in secondary teaching

Die Geschichte der Mathematik im mathematischen Unterricht der höheren Schulen Deutschlands, von Gebhardt Martin. - The history of mathematics does not have the place it deserves in secondary as well as in tertiary education. This is the fact that M. Gebhardt emphasizes in his very rich and precise study on this subject.

By examining the mathematics schoolbooks he shows that, apart from a few exceptions, the historical hints are rare. Notwithstanding the teaching of mathematics based on its history could be made alive and more interesting for pupils, especially for those who dislike the

formulas of which they do not see the meaning. Some problems become clear only if they are set in the original context where they are born. To understand the weight of differential and integral calculus it is important to compare Archimedes's methods with the methods created by the mathematicians of the seventeenth century, which are on the ground of modern analysis.

But the history of mathematics may be seen from a more general point of view. It is indispensable for those who like to have a classical and wide culture, because the development of sciences and of philosophy is intimately linked to that of mathematics. It is not necessary to insist on this point. It is very difficult to choose the essential questions in the history of mathematics. To make this choice easier M. Gebhardt put in the last chapter of his book a short analysis of works treating the historical development of mathematics. He also gives a detailed list of references (unfortunately only in German) of studies concerning a period or a particular subject.

Fulvia Furinghetti

The conference celebrating the anniversary of Cardano's birth

