

Practical arithmetic in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

The paper gives a survey about the state of mathematics, especially arithmetic, in the medieval West. The translations from Arabic into Latin in the 12th century were the beginning of new activities in mathematics. At the newly-founded universities, only theoretical mathematics and its impact on philosophical questions were treated. But from the 13th century on, practical mathematics became more and more important, especially for merchants and other practitioners. Special schools were founded where the mathematics needed by tradesmen was taught. These schools started in Italy and later became important in France, Spain, Germany, England and other countries, too. The teachers at those schools (called: maestri d'abbaco or Rechenmeister) were not only important for the introduction of the Hindu-Arabic numerals and the methods of calculation with them, but also contributed to algebra, especially to the introduction of symbols and to the solution of the cubic and quartic equations.