

Preface

In order to commemorate the sesquicentenary of the death of Olinde Rodrigues, we organized a conference that took place on 1 December 2001 at the Department of Mathematics of Imperial College, London, supported by the London Mathematical Society and the Société Mathématique de France. It then became clear that although much progress had been made in the understanding of the life of Olinde Rodrigues, some work remained to be done. So, instead of publishing the papers as given on that day, we took the unusual step of considering the conference as a programme for further work. Not only did most of the scholars and mathematicians who attended the conference spend a considerable amount of time researching some of the questions that required elucidation, but they also invited some other distinguished mathematicians and historians to produce new contributions. The result is the book that we now present to the readers.

We hope that this publication will draw attention to a period of French history, the first half of the nineteenth century, that was extremely creative, as well as influential in Europe's intellectual and social development. The foundations of modern mathematics were laid, and some of the utopian ideas that flourished at that time, as is not unusual in revolutionary periods, later gave rise to great advances in the position of women in society, in the treatment of workers, and in the understanding of housing, banking, and transport as fundamentals for an equitable society. In all this Olinde Rodrigues took some part, as the pages that follow show.

Numerous acknowledgements are given in the individual chapters and need not be repeated here, but the editors would like to warmly thank the contributors to this book, who over many months had to endure our repeated requests for information and clarification. We would also like to thank the London Mathematical Society and the Société Mathématique de France for their support, without which this work would not have been possible. The editors are very grateful to Professor Peter Herzig and also to Mr. Sergio Plata for kind help in the preparation of the TEX files.

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