Letters to the Editor

Resurrecting Out-of-Print Books

We have all experienced the frustration of discovering that a favorite book of ours has gone out of print. Bringing such a book back into print is no easy matter. Publishers want some assurance that the book will sell well enough for them to recoup the costs of republishing. Even in today's world of on-demand publishing, someone (perhaps the author, if still alive) still has to go to the trouble of securing the copyright and then making the text available. Few will go to such trouble unless they know that the book is in demand, and the trouble is that ascertaining the demand seems to be difficult.

Fortunately, there is an easy way to estimate demand. At my suggestion, Klaus Schmid has set up a prototype website at `http://outofprintmath.blogspot.com` where anyone can suggest a title, and vote for titles that others have suggested. The site tallies votes and displays the total for everyone to see. I encourage all readers of the *Notices* to visit the site and participate.

A better long-term solution might be for a bookselling website to take over the job of collecting such votes (for any out-of-print book, not just mathematics texts). I have tried to contact several such sites but most have not responded, except for `Fetchbook.Info` and `Booksprice.com`, who said they would add the idea to their to-do list. In the meantime, I believe that experimenting with Schmid's prototype will not only yield valuable information about individual titles, but will tell us whether collecting votes in this fashion is a good idea, and if so, what needs to be done to make such a service work well.

—Timothy Chow
Center for Communications Research
Princeton, NJ
`tchow@alum.mit.edu`

(Received July 12, 2008)

Which Way Is Gauss Really Facing?

What happened? Is there something inconsistent with the two images of Gauss, *Notices of the AMS* (June/July, 2008, page 681)?

The picture of the German 10 DM bill is the mirror image of the colored portrait of Gauss by C. A. Jensen. For how many years has the bill been in error?

—Agnes M. Herzberg
—Allan E. Read
Queen's University, Kingston, Canada
`herzberg@post.queensu.ca`

(Received July 22, 2008)

Heironymus Georg Zeuthen

The August 2008 issue of the *Notices* features an article celebrating the centennial of some work of two great scholars: the Dane Johan Ludvig Heiberg and the Englishman Thomas Little Heath. However, the article makes short shrift of the contribution of the great Danish enumerative algebraic geometer and historian of mathematics Heironymus Georg Zeuthen. He is mentioned only once; on p. 777, we read: "Being a meticulous scholar, Heiberg returned to Constantinople in 1908 to refine and check his earlier work. Then satisfied with his notes, he was joined by a German [sic] colleague, H. G. Zeuthen, who assisted him in verifying a transcription of the text."

A fuller discussion of Heiberg, Zeuthen, and their collaboration is found in the 2002 Birkhauser collection, *Writing the History of Mathematics*, in three articles by Kirsti Andersen, Christian Marinus Taisbak, and Jesper Lützen. On p. 154, Andersen notes that, owing mainly to the work of Zeuthen and Heiberg, Elling Holst and Gustaf Hjalmar Eneström "the historiographical level increased considerably" in the last decades of the nineteenth century in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. On p. 443, Taisbak writes: "Heiberg's finest achievement, however, was the identification and reconstruction of the text of Archimedes' "Ephodos" (*The Method*) discovered in Constantinople in 1906. Owing to his familiarity with Archimedes' idioms and way of thinking, he was able to decipher almost immediately the barely-legible palimpsest, in which he was greatly helped by his friend, professor of mathematics H. G. Zeuthen, whose deep understanding of Greek mathematical problems was also a great asset."

On p. 575, Lützen writes: "When doing history of mathematics he [Zeuthen] wanted to uncover the ideas and motives of the ancient masters. These ideas, he argued, were usually formulated in an unfamiliar language, but since the ideas themselves had not changed over time, it was possible for a modern mathematician to appreciate the work of a colleague 2,000 years earlier. Still, Zeuthen repeatedly underlined that one cannot evaluate or understand mathematics of an earlier period on the basis of the mathematics of today. On the contrary, he thought it indispensable to be acquainted with the techniques and symbolism of former times in order to contrast those tools and what they could be used for with what they had actually been used for."

On p. 578, Lützen writes: "The Danish philologist Johan Ludvig Heiberg, who gained fame through his authoritative editions of the works of Greek mathematicians, was probably the person whom Zeuthen consulted most often in connection with his historical research. The achievements of these two connoisseurs of Greek mathematics stand out as remarkable examples of a fruitful collaboration between a scientist and a humanist. Many letters are preserved in which Zeuthen explains technical matters to Heiberg. Considering that the two experts met at least every two weeks in the Royal Danish Academy, there is no doubt that their collaboration was much more intense than the written evidence shows. They published two joint papers (1906 and 1907 [sic]), the first of which created a great sensation. It contained Archimedes' so-called 'Method', thought to be

lost, but which Heiberg had found as a palimpsest in Constantinople. Heiberg provided a translation of the text and Zeuthen wrote the mathematical commentary. The content particularly pleased Zeuthen, for it showed that the ancients had been in possession of an intuitive infinitesimal method by which they first found the results that they later proved by the method of exhaustion. This was what Zeuthen and others had guessed on the basis of mathematical analyses of the surviving sources. Thus, as Zeuthen himself pointed out, Heiberg's discovery brilliantly supported Zeuthen's approach to the history of mathematics."

—Steven L. Kleiman
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
kleiman@math.mit.edu

(Received August 14, 2008)

Submitting Letters to the Editor

The *Notices* invites readers to submit letters and opinion pieces on topics related to mathematics. Electronic submissions are preferred (notices-letters@ams.org); see the masthead for postal mail addresses. Opinion pieces are usually one printed page in length (about 800 words). Letters are normally less than one page long, and shorter letters are preferred.

Identifications

Affiliations of authors of "Letters to the Editor" are provided for identification purposes only. Opinions expressed in letters are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of their employers or, in the case of American Mathematical Society officers or committee members, policies of the Society. Committee reports to the Council of the Society and official communications of officers of the Society, when published in the *Notices*, appear in the section of the *Notices* "From the AMS Secretary".