Nicolas Chuquet Biography

Nicolas Chuquet

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Biography

Although a great deal remains unknown about Chuquet's life, his contributions to the development of mathematics are significant. Chuquet's accomplishments are known mainly from a book published in 1520 by a fellow Frenchman, Etienne de la Roche, who also went by the name Villefranche. De la Roche plagiarized Chuquet's mathematics throughout his own book; however, it is likely that without de la Roche's unscrupulous behavior, Chuquet's work would have gone largely undocumented.

Chuquet was born in Paris, France, where he pursued many studies, concentrating specifically in the field of medicine. How he became interested in mathematics and teaching has not been recorded; however around the 1480s, it is believed that Chuquet was teaching arithmetic in Lyons, France. Known as the "master of algorithms," Chuquet demonstrates a solid grasp of algebra in his book, *The Triparty*, which was written about 1484 but not published until 1880. The book consists of three parts, the first section covering computation with rational numbers, the second, concerning computation with roots of numbers, and the third explaining algebra and the theory of equations. It is in this final section that Chuquet introduces our familiar numerical terms billion, trillion, and quadrillion. He also clarified the use of fractions, or "broken numbers," as he referred to them. Chuquet's work with fractions led to his discovery of an iterative method involving interpolation that makes it possible to solve any algebraic problem having a rational solution. Chuquet was not as progressive in his treatment of negative numbers, referring to them as "absurd numbers." However, Chuquet's many other improvements of algebraic methods helped influence future mathematicians, particularly Italian Luca Pacioli (1445"-1514"), who published a work on bookkeeping by double entry entitled *Summa de arithmetica, geometria, proportioni et proportionalita* in 1494.