

BOOK REVIEW

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LEONARD OF PISA

by

Joseph and Frances Gies

Thomas Y. Crowell Company has just published a book entitled Leonard of Pisa with the sub-title, and the New Mathematics of the Middle Ages.

The authors, faced with the well-known paucity of biographical material on their subject, have sought to reconstruct the picture of social life and mathematical practice current in the circumstances in which Leonard of Pisa lived. Their efforts in this direction are quite successful with the result that they have produced a very readable and interesting book.

Since they were dealing with the life of a mathematician, it was necessary to give some idea of his contribution to the progress of this field. This they have done in a manner that is devoid of forbidding technicalities and suitable for the general reading public. In particular, Chapter VI presents a clear summary of what is to be found in Liber Abaci. Chapter VII deals with the Fibonacci sequence which began in an incidental way in Leonard of Pisa's work, but which has achieved considerable development in modern times. It may be noted that the Fibonacci Association is mentioned as part of the continuing history of Leonard of Pisa and in a final note the efforts of Dr. Grimm and Mrs. Marguerite Dunton in producing a reliable English version of Liber Abaci are brought out.

Being a popular work, written by non-mathematicians, certain limitations could be expected. The impression is left, for example, that Leonard of Pisa was almost solely responsible for introducing the Hindu-Arabic system, whereas there were others involved as well in this process (see Boyer, History of Mathematics, John Wiley, 1968, pp. 279ff). Likewise, one could read into the text that there were no notable mathematicians from 1200 to 1500 (pp. 98-99).

A couple of errors might be noted. A. H. Church (p. 82) was not the discoverer of phyllotaxis; he has numerous references to earlier pioneers in [Continued on page 323.]