

# The Culture Of Astronomy Origin Of Number

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readable jargon free book examines the earliest endeavors to count and record numbers initial attempts to solve problems by using equations and origins of infinite cardinal arithmetic surprisingly exciting choice

among the speculative questions which arise in connection with the study of arithmetic from a historical standpoint the origin of number is one that has provoked much lively discussion and has led to a great amount of learned research among the primitive and savage languages of the human race a few simple considerations will however show that such research must necessarily leave this question entirely unsettled and will indicate clearly that it is from the very nature of things a question to which no definite and final answer can be given among the barbarous tribes whose languages have been studied even in a most cursory

manner none have ever been discovered which did not show some familiarity with the number concept the knowledge thus indicated has often proved to be most limited not extending beyond the numbers 1 and 2 or 1 2 and 3 examples of this poverty of number knowledge are found among the forest tribes of brazil the native races of australia and elsewhere and they are considered in some detail in the next chapter at first thought it seems quite inconceivable that any human being should be destitute of the power of counting beyond 2 but such is the case and in a few instances languages have been found to be absolutely destitute of pure numeral words the chiquitos of bolivia had no real numerals whatever 1 but expressed their idea for one by the word etama meaning alone the tacanas of the same country have no numerals except those borrowed from spanish or from aymara or peno languages with which they have long been in contact 2 a few other south american languages are almost equally destitute of numeral words but even here rudimentary as the number sense undoubtedly is it is not wholly lacking and some indirect expression or some form of circumlocution shows a conception of the difference between one and two or at least between one and many these facts must of necessity deter the mathematician from seeking to push his investigation too far back toward the very origin of number philosophers have endeavoured to establish certain propositions concerning this subject but as might have been expected have failed to reach any common ground of agreement whewell has maintained that such propositions as that two and three make five are necessary truths containing in them an element of certainty beyond that which mere experience can give mill on the other hand argues that any such statement merely expresses a truth derived from early and constant experience and in this view he is heartily supported by taylor 3 but why this question should provoke controversy it is difficult for the mathematician to understand either view would seem to be correct according to the standpoint from which the question is approached we know of no language in which the suggestion of number does not appear and we must admit that the words which give expression to the number sense would be among the early words to be formed in any language they express ideas which are at first wholly concrete which are of the greatest possible simplicity and which seem in many ways to be clearly understood even by the higher orders of the brute creation the origin of number would in itself then appear to lie beyond the proper limits of inquiry and the primitive conception of number to be fundamental with human thought

among the speculative questions which arise in connection with the study of arithmetic from a historical standpoint the origin of number is one that has provoked much lively discussion and has led to a great amount of learned research among the primitive and savage languages of the human race a few simple considerations will however show that such research must necessarily leave this question entirely unsettled and will indicate clearly that it is from the very nature of things a question to which no definite and final answer can be given among the barbarous tribes whose languages have been studied even in a most cursory manner none have ever been discovered which did not show some familiarity with the number concept the knowledge thus indicated has often proved to be most limited not extending beyond the numbers 1 and 2 or 1 2 and 3 examples of this poverty of number knowledge are found among the forest tribes of brazil the native races of australia and elsewhere and they are considered in some detail in the next chapter at first

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this is a book which though small bears evidence of a wonderful amount of research and labor the author professor conant has drawn from every possible source to give the reader information upon the origin of number the use of numerals the terms used in mathematics in the weights and measures and in every conceivable direction where number comes into use at first sight the book seems to be dry or to say the least adapted only to the comprehension of those to whom mathematics is a delight or a necessity but as one looks over the pages very interesting matter is revealed and there is an immense amount of information written in a very attractive style the buffalo commercial prof l l conant of the worcester polytechnic institute in his opening chapter on counting in his just published work on the number concept its origin and development says among the speculative questions which arise in connection with the study of arithmetic from a historical standpoint the origin of number is one that has provoked the most lively discussion and has led to a great amount of learned research among the primitive and savage languages of the human race prof conant can find no trace in the history of even the most barbarous tribes where there is not at least some familiarity with the number concept this knowledge is in some cases extremely limited among some of the forest tribes of brazil and the native races of australia the knowledge of numbers does not go beyond 1 and 2 or 1 2 and 3 but there is the knowledge all the same there is at least the concept even in the lowest condition of savagery of a difference between one and two or at least between one and many some idea of the scope of this most interesting work may be had from the chapter titles counting number system limits origin of number words miscellaneous number bases the quinary system and the vigesimal system the work shows great research and prof conant has drawn as far as possible upon original resources he has also taken great care in the selection of his authorities and makes his work an attractive one even to those who have little or no interest in mathematics the boston daily advertiser

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the book explores the science of numeration as it has developed all over the world from europe to china via the classical world mesopotamia south america and above all india and the arab lands

the book addresses for the first time the dynamics associated with the modernization of mathematics in china from the nineteenth to the mid twentieth century from a transcultural global historical perspective rather than depict the transformations of mathematical knowledge in terms of a process of westernization the book analyzes the complex interactions between different scientific communities and the ways in which the past modernity language and mathematics were negotiated in a global context in each chapter andrea br ard provides vivid portraits of a series of go betweens such as translators educators or state statisticians based on a vast array of translated primary sources hitherto unavailable to a non chinese readership they not only illustrate how chinese scholars mediated between new mathematical objects and discursive modes but also how they instrumentalized their autochthonous scientific roots in specific political and intellectual contexts while sometimes technical in style the book addresses all readers who are interested in the global and cultural history of science and the complexities involved in the making of universal mathematics while the pursuit of modernity is in the title entanglement is of as much interest using the famous nine chapters as a framework br ard considers a wide range of that entanglement from divination to data management br ard s analysis and thought provoking insights show once again how much we can learn when two cultures intersect a fascinating read john day boston university

georges ifrah is the man this book quite simply rules it is outstanding a mind boggling and enriching experience the guardian london monumental a fascinating journey taking us through many different cultures the times london ifrah s book amazes and fascinates by the scope of its scholarship it is nothing less than the history of the human race told through figures international herald tribune now in paperback here is georges ifrah s landmark international bestseller the first complete universal study of the invention and evolution of numbers the world over a riveting history of counting and calculating from the time of the cave dwellers to the twentieth century this fascinating volume brings numbers to thrilling life explaining their development in human terms the intriguing situations that made them necessary and the brilliant achievements in human thought that they made possible it takes us through the numbers story from europe to china via ancient greece and rome mesopotamia latin america india and the arabic countries exploring the many ways civilizations developed and changed their mathematical systems ifrah imparts a unique insight into the nature of human thought and into how our understanding of numbers and the ways they shape our lives have changed and grown over thousands of years dazzling kirkus reviews sure to transfix readers publishersweekly

looks at counting systems and the history of the number zero

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