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News

Women in the history of mathematics



"Mathematics is not only for men" says Patricia Rothman of University College London, author of the booklet "Women in the History of Mathematics from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century". "From antiquity women have also worked in this field, a fact that is not sufficiently well known", she says. Some years ago while reading "Men in Mathematics" by E.T. Bell^[1], in a chapter entitled "Master and pupil" she came across a woman mathematician as pupil to the master, Weierstrass. The pupil was Sofya Kovalevskaya also winner of the Prix Bordin of the French Academy of Sciences in 1888. Further reading revealed a number of remarkable women mathematicians, and led to the author writing about some of them in this illustrated booklet, which also contains a useful reading list.

As well as Kovalevskaya there are a further eight biographies, including a renowned teacher and author in the 5th century, Hypatia of Alexandria; Augusta Ada Lovelace who was for a time associated with Charles Babbage, the inventor of the first computer; and Mary Somerville, after whom Somerville College, Oxford was named.

A free copy of the booklet was issued to schools and Sixth Form colleges in the Autumn term 1996 for their libraries. The work is not meant to be comprehensive. Patricia Rothman hopes that "those who have an interest and an ability in mathematics may find within these short biographies, an inspiration that will encourage them to proceed with their education and further their understanding of the 'Queen of Sciences'". Further copies at a cost of £1 each (payable to University College London) are available from Departmental Administrator, The Mathematics Department, University College London, Gower St, WC1E 6BT.

For more information about women in mathematics see <http://www.agnesscott.edu/lriddle/women/women.htm>.

[1] Men of mathematics, E.T. Bell, London, 1937.



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