

ESSAIS B. B. R.

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Fin Juillet 1955

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THIS IS NOT THE PLACE TO ATTEMPT AN ACCOUNT
OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARITHMETIC.

THE ART OF COMPUTATION

WAS STUDIED THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, AND SOME OF THE
CALCULATIONS OF THE ANCIENTS, FOR EXAMPLE THOSE

WITH WHICH THEY PREDICTED

ECLIPSES OF THE SUN, COMMAND OUR ADMIRATION TODAY. NUMERICAL
WORK HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE BASIS OF COMMERCE.

THE OLDEST WRITTEN 'DOCUMENTS' WHICH SURVIVE IN THE WORLD
WERE PRODUCED ABOUT 5,000 YEARS AGO AT ERECK

IN MESOPOTAMIA BY THE SUMERIANS

ON CLAY TABLETS, THEY WERE PRIMITIVE BOOKS OF ACCOUNTS, AND
THEY SHOW THE SEVERELY PRACTICAL REASONS WHICH PROMPTED
THE INVENTION OF THE SUMERIAN ALPHABET.

THOUSANDS OF YEARS LATER, WHEN MOVABLE TYPE WAS INVENTED
AND THE FIRST PRINTING PRESS WAS SET UP IN EUROPE BY GUTENBERG,
MOST OF THE BOOKS WHICH HE PUBLISHED AT FIRST WERE TEXT-BOOKS
OF COMMERCIAL ARITHMETIC.

NEVERTHELESS A FEW HUNDRED YEARS AGO THE ART OF
COMPUTATION WAS NEITHER COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD NOR WIDELY
PRACTISED. IN 1662, PEPYS, WHO WAS THEN IN CHARGE OF THE
CONTRACTS BRANCH OF THE ADMIRALTY, FOUND IT NECESSARY TO PUT
HIMSELF TO SCHOOL, AND TO RISE BY CANDLELIGHT AT FOUR
O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING IN ORDER TO LEARN HIS MULTIPLICATION
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