



An Introduction for to Lerne to Recken

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This book is a facsimile of the second edition of the earliest printed work in English entirely devoted to Arithmetic. The author is unknown, although the book comprises a compilation of material from two other works, one Dutch and one French, translated into English and with the addition of some new material. It was imprinted in Aldersgate Street, London by Nicolas Bourman in 1539. The first edition was produced two years earlier by John Herford, whose press was located in the abbey of St Albans and who printed under the patronage of the abbot, Richard Boreman. It was long thought that no copies of the first edition were extant, with the exception of a small fragment in the British Library. However, in 2005 a complete text turned up at a Sotheby's auction in New Bond Street, London. This rare survivor sold under the hammer to the British Library for the staggering sum of £97,500. Among the problems posed in *An Introduction* is the "rule and question of a catte". This concerns a cat which climbs a 300 foot high tree, ascending 17 feet each day but descending again 12 feet each night. The problem to be solved is – how long does the cat take to reach the top? The answer given is 60 days, which of course is quite wrong. Another problem concerns "The rule and question of zaracins, for to cast them within the see". Given that on a sinking ship there are thirty merchants, 15 of whom are Christian and the other 15 Saracens, half of whom must be thrown overboard to save the ship, how should they be ordered so that counting off by nines will always result in a Saracen being sacrificed and never a Christian? Not a problem that fits easily with current ideas about political correctness. Then there is "a dronkart who drynketh a barell of bere in 14 days", but "when his wife drinketh with him" they empty it in 10 days How quickly, the reader is asked, could his wife drink it alone? These are just a few of the beguiling puzzles set within the pages of this fascinating book.

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