

Review of the book
"Historische Notizen zur Informatik"
by Friederich L. Bauer
Springer
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1 Important note

You should notice that the book is written in german, not english. Nevertheless, this review is in english, since most IACR-members speak this language.

2 What the book is about

The book gives you a mixture of different publications from the magazine "Informatik-Spektrum" or talks the author has given. The publications date from 1973 to 2009. The topics vary from different continued fractions to calculate π , history of the development and break of the ENIGMA, development of logical algebra (with e.g. the works of Ries and Vieta mentioned and handled). Even simple milestones, such as the use of the character 0, are mentioned. Very interesting is also the historic origin of different characters, which were used to describe a division.

There are also things mentioned, which have maybe a little more to do with computer science, such as the development of different stages of calculating machines and tools, programming languages or the life of computer-pioneers. Even the development of the word "Informatik" itself is mentioned.

I think it is not productive to list all the occurring chapters and discuss their content. The word "mixture" describes them very well and it seems wrong, to describe them as anything else.

3 What the book is like

As you can see from the above survey, the topics vary quite a lot. Since there is hardly any criteria to sort them by, the author has decided to sort them by the date they got published. This may seem a little disturbing, if two chapters e.g. about the breaking of the ENIGMA are separated by a lot of stories about different topics. But the single chapters were written to be read standing for themselves, one by one. Therefore it is only a minor annoyance. In fact, it is quite relieving, as you may have noticed that monographic texts can get a little exhausting.

This does sometimes lead to a little repetition, but as I stated above, it does in no way reduce the fun reading the book. I really could not lay the book aside. Readers, who are also affected by the "trivia"-texts, e.g. about a movie, will know what I mean.

The book gives lots of interesting information. They sometimes seem a little more mathematical than strictly computer scientific, but if you are a little deeper into the latter, you will most likely not have any strong dislike for mathematics. In exchange, you can see a lot of good recherche. The author describes a lot of facets and gives "unknown" information by correcting other authors and presenting new evaluations of different material. One example is the secret report by the Germans about the German cryptography, dating from 1945.

I have to note again that the book is written in German. There are some English phrases, which do not disturb much, since almost everybody speaks English. But there also occur some French and Latin phrases, which are as well as the English ones not explained in any way. This may be hard to understand for some people.

4 Recommendation

I cannot say that this book was anything else but a real pleasure to read. Of course, if you are not interested in the topic, it is not the right book for you. If you want to spend your time with serious work, with learning, it is also the wrong book. Nevertheless it seems to be a good book for a gift, whether to someone else or to yourself is omitted at this point.

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