First name :

Frederic

Last name :

Metin

Personal title :

Dr

Affiliation :

university of Burgundy / ESPE

Preliminary title :

Didier Henrion and the transmission of Dutch mathematics in Paris

Abstract :

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At the end of the 16th century, very little mathematics was taught in French colleges, even in Paris where theology and law remained the major topics. As Jean Errard complained in his Geometry in 1594, the young noblemen had to travel abroad in order to complete their instruction in sciences and, for some of them, engineering sciences. Though this is not perfectly clear today, it seems that mathematics teaching has developed in Paris from the very first decades of the 17th century, through military academies like Pluvinel's, or directly with private lessons. One of the most prolific teachers signed under the pen name 'DHPEM', which stands for "Didier Henrion professeur és mathematiques". Henrion, whose birthdate and birthplace are unknown yet, published many books between 1613 and 1632, writing on various subjects from arithmetic to fortification including trigonometry, and even logarithms, the slide rule (in the manner of Gunter's) and mathematical recreations. Most of his declared sources are linked to the Low Countries: Simon Stevin, Michel Coignet, Jacques Alleaume, Samuel Marolois, etc. So Henrion can be seen as the one who introduced the Duytsche Mathematique in France. This leads us to hazard the hypothesis that Henrion was educated in the vicinity of the Leyden School of engineers. He himself testified he had spent several years as an engineer in the service of the Dutch Republic, but shall we believe him? We'll say that his writings plead for our hypothesis, because as far as we know, Henrion can be considered as the first

French author on trigonometry, logarithms and the proportional compass, but also on the new manner of Dutch fortification. Many things are still to discover about him, especially his real relationship with another (or not?) mathematics teacher, Pierre Herigone, the author of the famous Cursus mathematicus (1634), which has been often compared to Henrion's Memoires mathematiques (1624). According to the contents of their treatises, Didier Henrion and Pierre Herigone have been even mistaken in many library catalogues, which attribute indifferently the Memoires and the Cursus to one or the other. The fact is that the name Herigone appeared after the disappearance of the name Henrion. More intriguing is the lack of references to Henrion in Herigone's own bibliography published in 1642, whereas his Cursus has very strong similarities with his predecessor's Memoires. Who was the real author of the books? Who was the real introducer of Dutch mathematics in Paris? The question is not answered yet, but a close examination of the contents of the books as well as contemporary testimonies can suggest new considerations. This presentation is relevant to ICHME, as it deals with mathematics education in Paris in the 17th century, and it addresses the origin of two of the most popular series of books published then for the mathematical instruction of young French noblemen. References: Henrion, Didier, Memoires mathematiques recueillis et dressez en faveur de la noblesse françoise... Premier volume: Paris, s.n., 1613; Second volume: Paris, l'auteur en l'Isle du Palais, à l'Image S. Michel & Samuel Thiboust, 1627. Henrion, Didier, Canon manuel des Sinus, Touchantes et Couppantes. Supputé par B. Pitiscus, & corrigé en ceste Edition, en laquelle sont adjoustées toutes les choses principales & necessaires à la Trigonometrie, extraites des traictez de la doctrine des triangles, tant rectilignes, que spheriques, faits par D. Henrion, Mathemat.: Paris, Abraham Pacard, 1619. Henrion, Didier, Usage du compas de proportion, par D. Henrion Mathem. Paris, Michel Daniel, 1618. Hérigone, Pierre, Cursus mathematicus nova brevi et clara methodo demonstratus, Per notas reales et universales... / Cours mathematique, demonstré d'une nouvelle, briefve et claire methode, par Notes réelles & universelles... Volumes I to IV: Paris, l'auteur & Henry Le Gras, 1634; Volume v: Paris, l'auteur & Henry Le Gras, 1637; Volume VI: Paris, Simeon Piget, 1643.