Suter, Heinrich | Encyclopedia.com

Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography COPYRIGHT 2008 Charles Scribner's Sons
4-5 minutes

(*b*, Hedingen, Zurich canton, Switerland, 4 January 1848; *d*. Dornach, Switerland, 17 March 1922)

mathematics, Oriental studies.

Suter was the son of a farmer and a keeper of posthorses. In 1875 he married Hermine Frauenfelder, sister of a famous philanthropist and preacher of Schaffhausen cathedral, Eduard Frauenfelder; they had three daughters.

Beginning in 1863 Suter attended the Zurich cantonal school, where he learned Latin and Greek. At the University of Zurich and at the Eidgenössiche Technische Hoschschule he studied mathematics, physics, and astronomy under Christoffel, K. T. Reye, C. F. Geiser, and Rudolf Wolf; he then completed his training under Kronecker, Kummer, and Weierstrass at the University of Berlin, where he also attended lectures on history and philology. Suter received the doctorate from the University of Zurich in 1871 for the dissertation *Geschichte der mathematischen Wissenschaften, I; Von den ältersten Zeiten bis Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*, in which the significance of mathematics for cultural history was emphasized. Although Suter set forth the goal of treating the history of mathematics in terms of the history of ideas, he was prevented from attaining it because of the paucity of available data.

Following a temporary appointment at the Wettingen teachers' training college (Aargau canton) and as a part-time teacher at the Gymnasiums in Schaffhausen (1874) and St. Gall (1875). Suter taught mathematics and physics at the cantonal schools of Aargau (1876) and Zurich (1886 – 1918). At the latter he acquired a thorough knowledge of Arabic under the Orientalists Steiner and Hausheer. His chief studies, in addition to numerous minor publications that appeared mainly in *Bibliotheca mathematica* (1889 – 1912), are "Das Mathematiker-Verzeichnis im Fihrist des . . . an-Nadîm" and "Die Mathematiker und Astronomen der Araber und ihre Werke." The outstanding expert of his time on Muslim mathematics, Suter was awarded an honorary doctorate of philosophy by the University of Zurich shortly before his death.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I Original Works. Suter's writings include *Geschichte der mathematischen Wissenschaften, I. Von den ältesen Zeiten bis Ende Des 16. Jahrhunderts* (2nd rev. ed., Zurich, 1873), and II, *Vom Anfange des 17. bis gegen Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Zurich, 1875); "Die Mathematiker auf den Universitäten des Mittelalters," in *Wissenschaftliche Beilage zur Programm der Kantonnsschule* (Zürch, 1887); "Das Mathematiker-Verzeichnis im Fihrist des . . . an-Nadîm," in *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der mathematischen Wissenschaften*, **6** (1892); "Die Mathematiker und Astronomen der Araber und ihre Werke," *ibid*., **10** (1900); his edition of "Die astronomischen Tafeln des Muhammad ibn Müsäal-Khwârizmî," in *Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskabs Skrifter*, 7th ser., **3** , no. 1(1914); and "Berträge zur Geschichte der Mathematik bei den Griechen und Arabern," J. Frank, ed., in *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin* (1922), no. **4** , with autobiographical sketch.

II. Scondary Literature. See E, Beck, "Heinrich Suter," in *Jahresberichte des Gymnasiums Zürich* for 1921 – 1922; J. Ruska, "Heinrich," in *Isis*, **5** (1923), 408 – 417, with portrait and bibliography; and C. Schoy, "Heinrich Suter," in Neue Zürich Zeitung (8 Apr. 1922), also in *Vierteljahrsschrift der Naturforschenden Gesellschaft in Zürich*, **67** (1922), 407–413, with bibliography.

J. E. Hofmann