

Foreword

More than 500 years ago, in 1492, Adam Ries was born. In German-speaking countries he enjoys an almost legendary reputation as the ‘teacher of arithmetic of the German people’. His books of arithmetic were printed and reprinted for over a century and a half and provided the basis for the teaching of mathematics. Even today, the proverbial saying ‘Das macht nach Adam Ries ...’ <According to Adam Ries, that comes to ...> is used to support the accuracy of a calculation.

Despite his otherwise great popularity, Adam Ries is hardly known in his capacity as a Cossist, as scholars of early algebra were then called. In the first half of the 16th century he wrote two Cossic treatises, which he could not get printed, however. In the 17th century, these, together with other writings by Ries, were stitched together under the title of ‘Coss’. This compilation of manuscripts, written in his hand, comprises 534 pages. This invaluable document has been handed down to us. After a tortuous course through history the manuscript has returned to its place of origin, which is Annaberg in the Erzgebirge, a mountain range between Saxony and Bohemia. There it is preserved by the Erzgebirgsmuseum of Annaberg-Buchholz.

Although the ‘Coss’ was rediscovered in the 19th century, only extracts were published at the time. By courtesy of the Erzgebirgsmuseum and by the initiative and support of the Teubner-Verlag in Leipzig, Adam Ries’s ‘Coss’ was for the first time made accessible to the public in print on the occasion of the anniversary of his 500th birthday in 1992, thus commemorating Adam Ries, who holds a prominent place in the history of mathematics, not only as a teacher of arithmetic but also as a Cossist. This becomes evident, too, from the Codex Dresden C 349 written in his own hand.

We are grateful to Bernd Luderer (Chemnitz), the editor, without whose patient and persevering work this book would never have been published. Let the book contribute to the world-wide recognition of Adam Ries as a Cossist and mathematician.