

## Preface

Had the family and friends of L.E. Sigler not seen to the publication of his translation of Fibonacci's *Liber abaci*, I would not have thought to translate *De practica geometrie*. Earlier in 1987 Professor Sigler had translated Fibonacci's *Book of Squares* into English. Perhaps this prompted him to begin the more ambitious project, one that he was not destined to see through to publication. Regardless, Professor Sigler accomplished a remarkable feat for Fibonacciana that had received new momentum with the incisive analysis of *Liber abaci* by Heinz Lüneburg in 1993. The international conference held in Pisa in 2002 honoring the eighth centenary of the first edition of *Liber abaci* brought together outstanding scholars to laud, explain, and expostulate upon the work of the greatest continental mathematician of the Middle Ages. This critical translation of *De practica geometrie* would advance the appreciation of Fibonacci's pre-eminent talents.

Most readers are familiar with what the word *translation* implies, although I have much to say about this farther on, yet their curiosity about the modifier *critical* deserves satisfaction here. I have compared the printed transcription of Baldassarre Boncompagni with many of the extant manuscripts to establish what I offer as the closest approximation in American English to what Fibonacci presented in Latin, in the year 1220. On the other hand, and with the help of others, I have located most of the resources from which he drew, arranged this gargantuan work, and determined what he contributed. The results of these activities define the word *critical*. To these I have added my observations as commentary.

Two able historians have monitored my work at various times. Jeffrey Oaks of the University of Indianapolis read and critiqued the entire translation. Mahdi Abdeljaouad of the University of Tunis taught me a great deal about medieval Arabic mathematicians and their works. Regardless of the few times I did not follow their advice, their irreplaceable assistance improved this research. I am immensely grateful. Many thanks also to Frank Swetz for the foreword. The Ruth and Karl Bjorkman Fund financed the project. A Vatican Film Library Mellon Fellowship at Saint Louis University, Missouri, provided me with the time and place to study microfilm of several manuscripts used in

this research as well as the invaluable assistance of the staff there. I am grateful to both. I thank too the staff at Springer/New York who saw this work through its production, including the unknown referee who kept me from “flogging a dead horse.” Finally, as Fibonacci remarked in the introduction to *Liber quadratorum*, “Cum omnibus habere memoriam et in nullo peccare sit divinitatis potius quam humanitatis, nemo sit vitio carens et undique circumspectus.” I hope my readers enjoy Fibonacci’s *Practical Geometry* as much as I do.

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