

# Preface

In 2002, the year marking the bicentennial of Abel's birth, the Norwegian Parliament established the Niels Henrik Abel Memorial Fund with the objective of creating an international prize for outstanding scientific work in the field of mathematics—the Abel Prize.

In this book we present the Abel Laureates for the period of 2008–2012. It is a sequel to our first book.<sup>1</sup>

The present volume starts with the history of the Abel Prize written by the historian Kim Helsvig. He had unrestricted access to all sources and interviewed the key people involved in the creation of the Abel Prize, and he presents his independent view on the prize.

There is one chapter for each of the years 2008–2012. Each chapter starts with an autobiographical piece by the laureate(s). Then follows a text on the laureate's work: R. Lyons and R.M. Guralnik write on the work of John G. Thompson while F. Buekenhout writes on the work of Jacques Tits. The work of Mikhail Gromov is described by M. Bestvina, D. Burago, F. Forstnerič, L. Guth, Y. Eliashberg, A. Nabutovsky, A. Phillips, J. Roe and A. Vershik, coordinated and edited by D. Burago and Y. Eliashberg. J. Milne writes about the work of John Tate. H. Bass, M. Lyubich, and L. Siebenmann treat different aspects of John Milnor's work. Finally, T. Gowers describes the work of Endre Szemerédi. Each chapter contains a complete bibliography and a curriculum vitae, as well as photos—old and new.

Each year Martin Raussen and Christian Skau interviewed the laureate in connection with the Prize ceremonies, and the interviews have been broadcast on Norwegian national television. The interviews can be streamed from the Abel Prize web site [www.abelprize.no](http://www.abelprize.no) or the Springer web site <http://www.springerimages.com/videos/978-3-642-39449-2>. Transcripts of all interviews have been published in the *EMS Newsletter* and the *Notices of the AMS*.

We have included a facsimile of a letter dated September 25, 1828, from Niels Henrik Abel to his publisher August Leopold Crelle. The handwritten letter in Ger-

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<sup>1</sup>H. Holden, R. Piene (eds.) *The Abel Prize 2003–2007. The First Five Years*, Springer, Heidelberg, 2010.

man is transcribed and also translated into English. More interestingly, the letter is set into a historical perspective by Christian Skau. In 2007 the original was procured from Institut Mittag-Leffler, Stockholm, Sweden, thanks to a generous donation by Alf Bjørseth and the company Scatec. The original letter resides at the National Library of Norway in Oslo. Finally, we have included an update to the first volume in this series.

We would like to express our gratitude to the laureates for collaborating with us on this project, especially for providing the autobiographical pieces and the photos. We would like to thank the mathematicians who agreed to write about the laureates, and thus are helping us in making the laureates' work known to a broader audience.

Thanks go to Martin Raussen and Christian Skau for letting us use the interviews and to Marius Thaule for his  $\text{\LaTeX}$  expertise and the preparation of the bibliographies.

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Helge Holden and Ragni Piene

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