

Decimal point 150 years older than thought

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A new discovery has excited mathematicians around the globe. Recently-unearthed documents show a decimal point in the records of a merchant named Giovanni Bianchini, who lived in Venice in the 1440s. Historians have hailed the find as being

significant, as it means the decimal point is 150 years older than was previously thought. Bianchini was a keen astronomer. He made many notations about his observances of the heavens. He also provided Venetians with horoscopes based on astrological calculations of the alignment of stars and planets. Mathematician Dr Glen Van Brummelen noticed the use of a decimal point in one of Bianchini's treatises between 1441 and 1450.

Decimal points are such an integral part of life today that it seems they would have been used for thousands of years. Historians say some versions of decimals have existed for over 1,000 years. Records show a form of the mathematical dot being used in the Islamic world in the 900s. It is likely that Bianchini travelled to the Middle East and was influenced by scholars there who were key in forging many mathematical concepts. Other historical evidence shows intellectuals using a form of the point in China in the 1200s. Before the recent discovery, the earliest known definitive use of the decimal point was in 1593. Then, German mathematician Christopher Clavius used a system of decimals in his study of astronomy.

Sources: phys.org / msn.com / livescience.com

Writing

It is important to understand the history of maths. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

discovery / mathematician / documents / merchant / decimal point / horoscope / stars / life today / historians / the Islamic world / the Middle East / intellectuals / astronomy

True / False

- 1) Maths teachers worldwide are excited about a new decimal point. T / F
- 2) The oldest known decimal point was used in Venice in the 1440s. T / F
- 3) A merchant from Venice wanted to go to heaven. T / F
- 4) The merchant used the decimal point for his astronomy studies. T / F
- 5) Different forms of the decimal point existed more than 1,000 years ago. T / F
- 6) One form of the decimal point was used in the Middle East in the 900s. T / F
- 7) Another form of the decimal point was used in China in the 1100s. T / F
- 8) The second-earliest known use of the decimal point is from 1593. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. discovery | a. applauded |
| 2. unearthed | b. studies |
| 3. hailed | c. notions |
| 4. the heavens | d. uncovered |
| 5. treatises | e. essential |
| 6. integral | f. authoritative |
| 7. versions | g. find |
| 8. forging | h. space |
| 9. concepts | i. advancing |
| 10. definitive | j. variations |

Discussion – Student A

- a) How useful is the decimal point?
- b) Are you surprised that the decimal point is so new?
- c) 'Maths' is British English; 'math' is American English. Which is best?
- d) How interested are you in astrology?
- e) How useful is being good at maths?
- f) Which is more important, astrology or astronomy?
- g) What do you think of horoscopes?
- h) What do you know about the stars and planets?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. A new discovery has excited mathematicians | a. and planets |
| 2. Recently-uneearthed | b. heavens |
| 3. his observances of the | c. evidence |
| 4. horoscopes based on astrological | d. use of the decimal point |
| 5. the alignment of stars | e. around the globe |
| 6. Decimal points are such an integral | f. concepts |
| 7. influenced by | g. calculations |
| 8. key in forging many mathematical | h. part of life today |
| 9. historical | i. scholars |
| 10. the earliest known definitive | j. documents |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- What would life be like without a decimal point?
- How important is astronomy?
- How often do you use decimal points?
- How important are mathematicians?
- What do you know about maths and the Islamic world?
- What three adjectives best describe this story, and why?
- What questions would you like to ask a mathematician?

Spelling

- a rmhceant named Giovanni Bianchini
- Bianchini was a keen stoaonrmer
- He also provided Venetians with orshocopes
- based on taolgosiracl calculations
- the iamngelnt of stars and planets
- in one of Bianchini's ratiteses
- such an etignarl part of life
- decimals have sxiteed for over 1,000 years
- influenced by ahcolssr
- key in finrgrog many mathematical concepts
- Other historical cvneieed
- the earliest known inifeetidv use

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. d	3. a	4. h	5. b
6. e	7. j	8. i	9. c	10. f

Role Play

Role A – Maths

You think maths is the best school subject. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their subjects. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): art, English or cooking.

Role B – Art

You think art is the best school subject. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their subjects. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): maths, English or cooking.

Role C – English

You think English is the best school subject. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their subjects. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): art, maths or cooking.

Role D – Cooking

You think cooking is the best school subject. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their subjects. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): art, English or maths.

Speaking – School subjects

Rank these with your partner. Put the best school subjects at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| • English | • Maths |
| • Music | • Art |
| • I.T. | • History |
| • Cooking | • Literature |

Answers – True False

1	F	2	T	3	F	4	T	5	T	6	T	7	F	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.