

CONTENTS

1. The System of Numbers: An Overview	1
1.1 From natural to real numbers	3
1.2 Imaginary numbers	9
1.3 Polynomials and transcendental numbers	11
1.4 Cardinals and ordinals	15
2. Writing Numbers—Now and Back Then	17
2.1 Writing numbers nowadays: positional and decimal	17
2.2 Writing numbers back then: Egypt, Babylon and Greece	24
3. Numbers and Magnitudes in the Greek Mathematical Tradition	31
3.1 Pythagorean numbers	32
3.2 Ratios and proportions	35
3.3 Incommensurability	39
3.4 Eudoxus' theory of proportions	42
3.5 Greek fractional numbers	45
3.6 Comparisons, not measurements	47
3.7 A unit length	50
Appendix 3.1 The incommensurability of $\sqrt{2}$. Ancient and modern proofs	52
Appendix 3.2 Eudoxus' theory of proportions in action	55
Appendix 3.3 Euclid and the area of the circle	59
4. Construction Problems and Numerical Problems in the Greek Mathematical Tradition	63
4.1 The arithmetic books of the <i>Elements</i>	64
4.2 Geometric algebra?	66
4.3 Straightedge and compass	67
4.4 Diophantus' numerical problems	71
4.5 Diophantus' reciprocals and fractions	78
4.6 More than three dimensions	80
Appendix 4.1 Diophantus' solution of Problem V.9 in <i>Arithmetica</i>	83

5. Numbers in the Tradition of Medieval Islam	87
5.1 Islamicate science in historical perspective	88
5.2 Al-Khwārizmī and numerical problems with squares	90
5.3 Geometry and certainty	94
5.4 <i>Al-jabr wa'l-muqābala</i>	97
5.5 Al-Khwārizmī, numbers and fractions	100
5.6 Abū Kāmil's numbers at the crossroads of two traditions	103
5.7 Numbers, fractions and symbolic methods	107
5.8 Al-Khayyām and numerical problems with cubes	111
5.9 Gersonides and problems with numbers	116
Appendix 5.1 The quadratic equation. Derivation of the algebraic formula	120
Appendix 5.2 The cubic equation. Khayyam's geometric solution	121
6. Numbers in Europe from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Centuries	125
6.1 Fibonacci and Hindu–Arabic numbers in Europe	128
6.2 Abbacus and coss traditions in Europe	129
6.3 Cardano's <i>Great Art of Algebra</i>	138
6.4 Bombelli and the roots of negative numbers	146
6.5 Euclid's <i>Elements</i> in the Renaissance	149
Appendix 6.1 Casting out nines	150
7. Number and Equations at the Beginning of the Scientific Revolution	155
7.1 Viète and the new art of analysis	157
7.2 Stevin and decimal fractions	163
7.3 Logarithms and the decimal system of numeration	167
Appendix 7.1 Napier's construction of logarithmic tables	171
8. Number and Equations in the Works of Descartes, Newton and their Contemporaries	175
8.1 Descartes' new approach to numbers and equations	176
8.2 Wallis and the primacy of algebra	182
8.3 Barrow and the opposition to the primacy of algebra	187
8.4 Newton's <i>Universal Arithmetick</i>	190
Appendix 8.1 The quadratic equation. Descartes' geometric solution	196
Appendix 8.2 Between geometry and algebra in the seventeenth century: The case of Euclid's <i>Elements</i>	198
9. New Definitions of Complex Numbers in the Early Nineteenth Century	207
9.1 Numbers and ratios: giving up metaphysics	208
9.2 Euler, Gauss and the ubiquity of complex numbers	209
9.3 Geometric interpretations of the complex numbers	212
9.4 Hamilton's formal definition of complex numbers	215
9.5 Beyond complex numbers	217
9.6 Hamilton's discovery of quaternions	220

10. “What Are Numbers and What Should They Be?”	
Understanding Numbers in the Late Nineteenth Century	223
10.1 What are numbers?	224
10.2 Kummer’s ideal numbers	225
10.3 Fields of algebraic numbers	228
10.4 What should numbers be?	231
10.5 Numbers and the foundations of calculus	234
10.6 Continuity and irrational numbers	237
Appendix 10.1 Dedekind’s theory of cuts and Eudoxus’ theory of proportions	243
Appendix 10.2 IVT and the fundamental theorem of calculus	245
11. Exact Definitions for the Natural Numbers: Dedekind, Peano and Frege	249
11.1 The principle of mathematical induction	250
11.2 Peano’s postulates	251
11.3 Dedekind’s chains of natural numbers	257
11.4 Frege’s definition of cardinal numbers	259
Appendix 11.1 The principle of induction and Peano’s postulates	262
12. Numbers, Sets and Infinity. A Conceptual Breakthrough at the Turn of the Twentieth Century	265
12.1 Dedekind, Cantor and the infinite	266
12.2 Infinities of various sizes	269
12.3 Cantor’s transfinite ordinals	277
12.4 Troubles in paradise	280
Appendix 12.1 Proof that the set of algebraic numbers is countable	287
13. Epilogue: Numbers in Historical Perspective	291
<i>References and Suggestions for Further Reading</i>	295
<i>Name Index</i>	303
<i>Subject Index</i>	306