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Even today, in German one may say about a calculation that it is Adam Ries zufolge, “according to Adam Ries”. By far the most widespread book in German regions about practical arithmetic was indeed Adam Ries’ Rechenung auff der linien und federn, printed countless times during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

In the present book, Rainer Gebhardt undertakes to count the countless. He is not the first to try: in 1959 and 1961 Willy Roch and Fritz Deubner, one in the BRD and the other in the DDR, also tried their hands, but conditioned by the practical difficulties caused by the political division of Germany. For that reason alone, the book under review improves on their results; but it also covers new territory because of the many library catalogues that have been digitized and often made accessible online, and because of the collaborative effort within and around the Adam-Ries-Bund.

The book does more than counting the countless. It describes all known printings of the three editions of Adam Ries’s Rechenbuch: The Rechnung auff der Linien, the Rechenung auff der linien und federn, and the Practica; to this comes Ries’s Annaberger Brotordnung (“Bread Regulation”) and the Newes Nutzbar gerechnetes Rechenbuch of Adam’s son Isaak Ries.

The first printing of the Rechnung auff der Linien was made between 1518 and 1522. No surviving copies are known, whence the lack of a precise date. Three apparently pirated printings of this first edition were made between 1525 and 1530, after Ries had published his second edition.

Of the Rechenung auff der linien und federn, Gebhardt has verified 106 printings made between 1522 and 1629. Some apparent ghost editions and false inscriptions beyond this number have been eliminated, but the misleading evidence is presented and analyzed.

The Practica was written in 1525 but withheld by Ries until he obtained an Imperial privilege in 1550. A ghost edition from 1550 and two mistaken identifications from 1552 and 1563 are eliminated (but the supposed evidence still analyzed). In 1611, Adam’s grandson Carolus Ries made a new printing, covered by a renewed privilege.

The Brotordnung was printed in Leipzig in 1536 and emulated in other towns in the second half of the century (no details about this are given).

Two Czech adaptations (Nürnberg 1530 and Olomouc 1615) are described, together with the single printing of Isaak Ries’s Rechenbuch.

For all printings, detailed bibliographic information is given, together with an inventory of all known copies, extant as well as identified but lost; insofar as possible title pages and colophons are reproduced. In one case (p. 146) an auction house is exposed.
(in kinder words, but this is the meaning) for selling a stolen library copy but declining to reveal its source.

Jens Høyrup

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