

## A propos de Platon (427 - 387)

Extrait de  
**An Introduction to the History of  
Mathematics**  
Howard Eves.

With the end of the Peloponnesian War, Athens, although reduced to a minor political power, regained her cultural leadership. Plato was born in or near Athens in 427 B.C., the year of the great plague. He studied philosophy under Socrates there, and then set out upon his extensive wanderings for wisdom. He studied mathematics under Theodorus of Cyrene on the African coast and became an intimate friend of the eminent Archytas. Upon his return to Athens around 387 B.C., he founded his famous Academy, an institution for the systematic pursuit of philosophical and scientific inquiry. He presided over his Academy for the rest of his life, dying in Athens in 347 B.C. at the venerable age of eighty. Almost all the important mathematical work of the fourth century B.C. was done by friends or pupils of Plato, making his Academy the link between the mathematics of the earlier Pythagoreans and that of the later, longlived school of mathematics at Alexandria. Plato's influence on mathematics was not due to any mathematical discoveries he made, but rather to his enthusiastic conviction that the study of mathematics furnished the finest training for the mind and, hence, was essential for the cultivation of philosophers and those who should govern his ideal state. This explains the renowned motto over the door of his Academy: *Let no one unversed in geometry enter here.*

Extrait de  
**Les Lois**, Livre 5 (747 b-c).  
Platon

« En effet, de toutes les sciences qui servent à l'éducation, il n'en est aucune qui soit d'un plus grand usage que celle des nombres pour l'administration des affaires domestiques ou publiques, et pour la culture de tous les arts. Mais le plus grand avantage qu'elle procure est d'éveiller l'esprit engourdi et indocile, de lui donner de la facilité, de la mémoire, de la pénétration, et, par un artifice vraiment divin, de lui faire faire des progrès en dépit de la nature.

Ainsi on peut mettre cette science au rang des meilleurs et des plus puissants moyens d'éducation, pourvu que d'ailleurs on ait soin, par d'autres règlements et d'autres disciplines, d'étouffer tout sentiment bas, tout esprit d'intérêt dans l'âme de ceux à qui on voudra rendre profitable l'étude des nombres. Sans quoi au lieu de lumières, on leur donnera, sans s'en apercevoir, cette habileté misérable qui ne sert qu'à tromper les autres...»