Taking stock of the last 30 years: a project to survey the cultural history of mathematics. Preliminary report.

In 1972, Morris Kline’s Mathematical Thought from Ancient to Modern Times presented a 1200-page survey of the history of mathematics. In 1994, Ivor Grattan-Guinness’s Companion Encyclopedia, followed three years later by his own synthesis of that collective work The Rainbow of Mathematics revised and extended Kline’s picture, with different emphasis and some important use of work done up to the early nineties. Since then, trends in history of science and mathematics have markedly altered, many classic studies have been critically rethought, and a large amount of research production has enriched our picture of mathematics around the world. This talk will describe a work-in-progress, the Bloomsbury Cultural History of Mathematics, slated to appear in early 2021 under the general editorship of David Rowe and Joseph Dauben. This 6-volume collection aims at undergraduates above all, aiming to elucidate the role of mathematics in human cultures, and its often-key position in interactions between different cultures.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss this 50-author project from the point of view of a co-editor of two of the volumes, with an emphasis on the historiographic problems and approaches that we hope to highlight. (Received August 23, 2019)