

I. Grattan-Guinness, "Hacia una biografia de Georg Cantor," *Mathesis* 6 (1990), 1-40.

Reviewed by

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This is the Spanish translation of a paper entitled "Towards a Biography of Georg Cantor" which appeared in *Annals of Science* in [1971]. Professor Grattan-Guinness is the well-known specialist in the history of mathematics to whom we owe the publication for the first time in [1970] of Cantor's *Prinzipien einer Theorie der Ordnungstypen*, and in [1971a] the correspondence between Cantor and Jourdain. He has contributed much to our present knowledge of the development of set theory and so the translation of any of his papers into Spanish is very welcome news for readers of that language. The present work offers a survey of Cantor's life including his personal and family origins and also his professional situation at Halle University. Grattan-Guinness's presentation avoids an apologetic tone and at the same time explodes the myth about Cantor's unbalanced personality created by Bell ([1937, chapt. 29]) and so cruelly supported by Russell in his *Autobiography* ([1967, 217]).

Professor Grattan-Guinness's paper is enhanced by certain manuscript sources and among the topics he touches on, three of them deserve special attention: Cantor's supposed Jewish ancestry, the episode of the succession to Heine at Halle and Cantor's mental illness.

Spanish or Portuguese forebears on his father's side lent weight to rumours of Cantor's Jewish origins, as did the fact that Moritz Cantor, a historian of mathematics at Heidelberg University at that time and no relation to Georg, was indeed Jewish. In fact, Cantor's father was Lutheran and his mother a Roman Catholic.

The second topic of interest treated in the paper is the question of the replacement of Heine, who died in 1881. When Cantor proposed Dedekind as Heine's successor in the following year, he imagined that the presence of this celebrated mathematician and his own at Halle would greatly enhance the prestige of this university as a center for mathematics. But Dedekind's refusal of the offer only served to increase Cantor's sense of isolation.

Thirdly, I would like to comment here how Grattan-Guinness illuminates the origin and significance of Cantor's mental illness. He suffered his first attack in 1884, after a period of cooperation with Mittag-Leffler, editor of *Acta Mathematica*. From 1884 until the end of his life he had several other seizures. Cantor's relations with his German