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## **THE OLDEST GERMAN BOOKKEEPING TEXT\***

### A Commentary to Recognize the Neglected Contribution of Grammateus to Bookkeeping

*Abstract:* This article brings to light the neglected contribution of Grammateus, the author of *Ayn New Kunstlich Buech* (A New Skill Book) which, although basically a mathematics text, contained a section on bookkeeping in the style of Paciolo's *Summa*. His work is analyzed to prove the technical competence and the historical nature of the bookkeeping system which he propounded. In order to substantiate the conclusions, the full translation of the first edition (1521) is included in modern English.

Some eight hundred years ago the seed of modern bookkeeping was sown in Florence, Italy. Fragments dated 1211 of the account book of a Florentine banker present the earliest known evidence of the double entry system.<sup>1</sup> From this time the art of bookkeeping began to bud and continued to grow in the fertile soil of commercial practice in Italy. About three hundred years later the double entry concept came to full fruition in Venice.

In 1494 an Italian monk published a book on mathematics which included 36 chapters explaining double entry bookkeeping. In his book, *Summa*, Luca Paciolo wrote "we describe the method employed in Venice."<sup>2</sup> Paciolo thus made no claim to the invention of the double entry system, but its inclusion in his book has resulted in his being generally recognized as the author of the first published double entry bookkeeping text. Benedetto Cotrugli is believed to have written the first double entry bookkeeping book in 1458. It and other hand written manuscripts seem to have circulated in the Italian city states during the 15th century. Cotrugli's book was not published until 1573 so Paciolo may claim the first published text. Hatfield wrote "it is seldom the case that a first book on a subject has so dominated its literature as was the case with Paciolo's *De Computis et Scripturis*."<sup>3</sup>

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