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On this day: Richard de Fournival

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NCR Today

On this day in 1201, Richard de Fournival was born in Amiens "to Roger de Fournival (a personal physician to King Philip Augustus) and Élisabeth de la Pierre. He was also half-brother of Arnoul, bishop of Amiens (1236-46). Richard was successively canon, deacon, and chancellor of the cathedral chapter of Notre Dame d'Amiens. He was also a licensed surgeon, by the authority of Pope Gregory IX and this privilege was confirmed a second time in 1246 by Pope Innocent IV."

-- Wikipedia.

Richard de Fournival was a trouvère. Many of his songs were about love, but not all. In his poem, "De Vetula," he described various methods of fishing, and he calculated "the number of possible outcomes from the throwing of three dice, including potential transpositions".

He "wrote the following equation illustrating the entire number of equally probable cases when tossing three dice: $6 \times 1 + 30 \times 3 + 20 \times 6 = 216$."

--*Theory of Probability*, by Boris V. Gnedenko, CRC Press, 1998, page 414. For a shortened version of his table calculating different values of sums of numbers on all three dice, see page 415. "All calculations made by de Fournival are without errors and all arguments presented by him are logical and relatively contemporary."

Click here for a video of "Onques n'amai tant que jou fui amee," a chanson by Richard de Fournival, sung by Adolpho Osta.

The work for which de Fournival is best remembered is *Master Richard's Bestiary of Love and Response*,

a book which differed from other medieval bestiaries by using animal behavior to mock erotic love instead of drawing religious or moral lessons from the beasts.

Richard de Fournival devised a classification system for library books, "coordinating desk or shelf letters or numbers with different kinds of letters and colors of letters. The first division of the library was devoted to philosophy, which Fournival further broke down into nine categories on eleven shelves, arranged partly according to volume size". His categories were Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Geometry and Arithmetic, Music and Astronomy, Physics and Metaphysics, Metaphysics and Morals, Melanges of Philosophy, and Poetry.

His personal library, which he left to Gerard d'Abbeville, Archdeacon at Amiens, was included in d'Abbeville's bequest to the Sorbonne.

-- "Foundation of the Library of the Sorbonne, and 'Perhaps the Earliest Specific and Organized System of Book Arrangement in a Library,'" by Jeremy Norman.

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