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Serendipity in Mathematics

Robert K. Merton's 'On the Shoulders of Giants' has had a good deal to offer the community of historians of mathematics as well as historians of science in general. His posthumous book on serendipity has come in for rather harsher treatment by both groups. This talk is designed to point out some of the theoretical features of the book which apply to mathematics and to illustrate how this fits into Merton's general view of the rationality of the scientific and mathematical enterprises.