

Algorizmi [Al-Khwarizmi] said: ... I had seen that the Indians had set up IX symbols in their universal system of numbering ... for the sake of its ease and brevity, so that this work, to be sure, might be made easier for the seeker after arithmetic. ... So they made IX symbols, whose forms are these: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 ...

But when X was put in the place of one and was made in the second place, and its form was the form of one, they needed a form for the tens because of the fact that it was similar to the form of one, so that they might know by means of it that it was X. So they put one space in front of it and put in it a little circle like the letter o, so that by means of this they might know that the place of the units was empty ... and these were the forms of the tens: the form of X is thus 10, the form of XX [is] 20.

-Abu Jafar Muh Al-Khwarizmi, "The Hindu Art of Reckoning" (original written in the 9th century, copied in the 13th century, translated into English in 1990) excerpt.