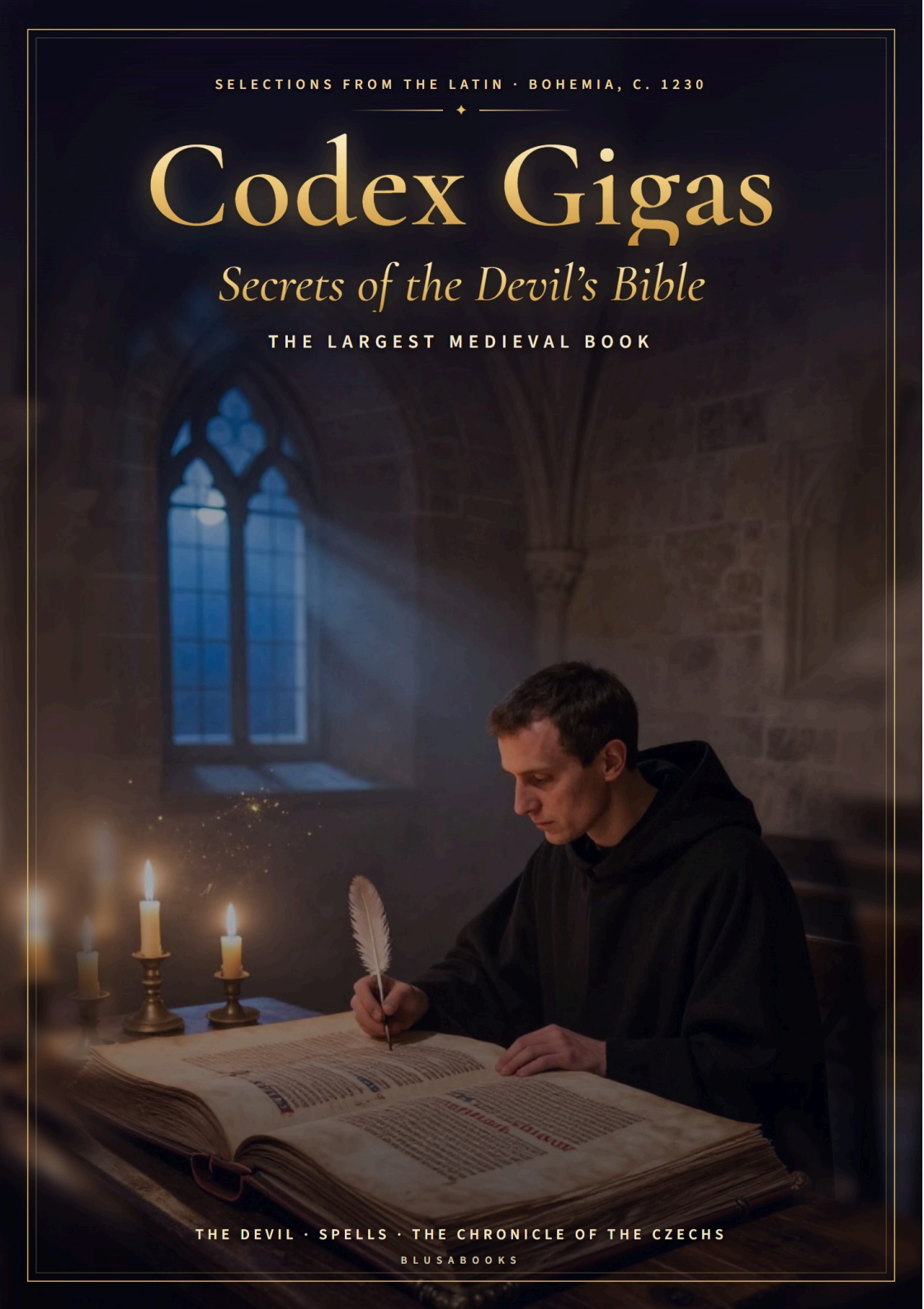
SELECTIONS FROM THE LATIN · BOHEMIA, C. 1230

Codex Gigas

Secrets of the Devil's Bible

THE LARGEST MEDIEVAL BOOK



THE DEVIL · SPELLS · THE CHRONICLE OF THE CZECHS

BLUSABOOKS

BOOKS OF WISDOM

Codex Gigas: Secrets of the Devil's Bible

Selections from the Largest Medieval Book · Bohemia, 1204–1230

The Devil and the Heavenly City, spells and the confession of sins, medieval remedies, Isidore on magicians, the calendar of the dead and the complete Chronicle of the Czechs by Cosmas of Prague — translated from the Latin, with the original pages and notes

BlusaBooks · MMXXVI

Modern English text, notes, foreword and commentary © 2026 SIA "Blusa Entertainment".

Source: Codex Gigas ("the Devil's Bible"), Bohemia, 1204–1230; Stockholm, National Library of Sweden (Kungliga biblioteket), A 148. Images of the codex: Kungliga biblioteket, photographs by Per B. Adolphson, licence CC BY 4.0 (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0); the images have been cropped and toned. Cosmas's chronicle is translated from the edition of B. Bretholz (Berlin, 1923; Codex Gigas = manuscript B), Isidore from the edition of W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), the calendar from the manuscript and the edition of B. Dudík

(1852), the other parts directly from the manuscript. The colour illustrations are modern.

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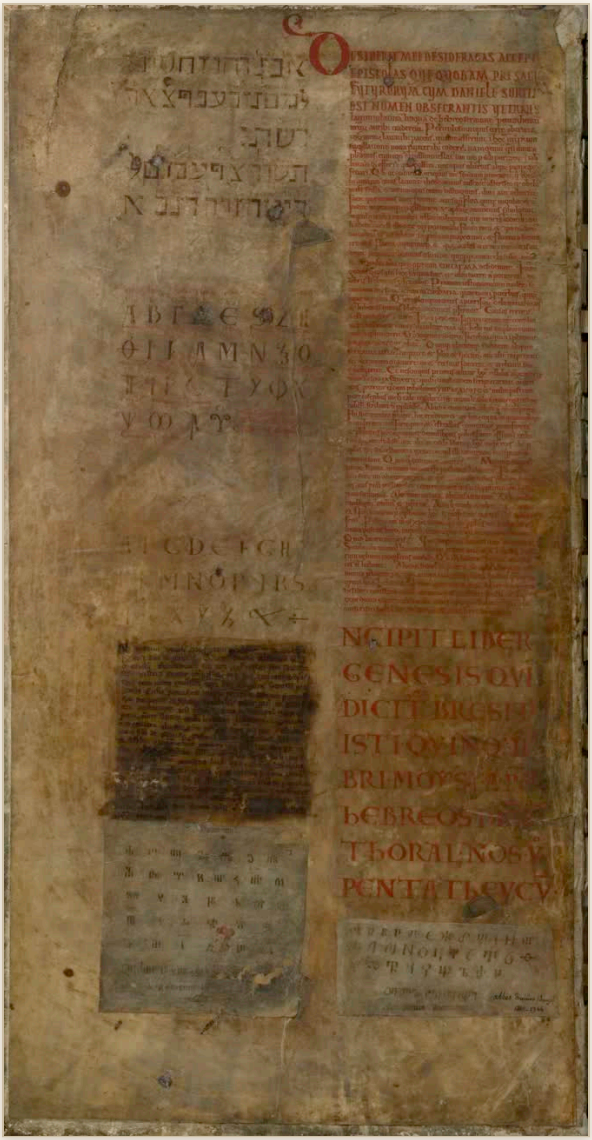
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FOREWORD

The giant book. In Stockholm, in the National Library of Sweden, there is a book that the Middle Ages called "Gigas librorum", the giant among books. Its leaves are almost ninety centimetres tall and half a metre wide. It has 309 parchment leaves and weighs about seventy-five kilograms. It is the largest medieval manuscript book to survive in Europe. It was written in Bohemia, in today's Czech Republic, in a Benedictine monastery at the beginning of the thirteenth century, between 1204 and 1230. Every page is laid out in two columns of one hundred and six lines, and as far as the handwriting shows, the whole book was copied by a single hand. People call it "the Devil's Bible", because one of its pages shows the Devil, full-length.

What is in the giant book. The Codex Gigas is much more than a Bible. It is a whole monastic library between two covers. In order, it contains the Old Testament, Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* and *Jewish War*, the encyclopedia of Isidore of Seville called the *Etymologies*, medical books, the New Testament, a confession of sins, a picture of the Heavenly City, the Devil, spells, the *Chronicle of the Czechs* by Cosmas of Prague, a list of the people of a monastery and a calendar with a book of the dead. Later hands wrote Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets on the back of the first leaf. According to a note on the page, the Glagolitic alphabet was added in the fourteenth century on the orders of Abbot Dionysius of Břevnov.



f. 1v: Hebrew, Greek and Latin alphabets, the note of 1295 and pasted-in Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets; on the right, the beginning of the Old Testament

This book is a selection. We have not translated the biblical text here; it can be read in any language. Instead we have taken the parts of the codex that made it famous and that are hard to find elsewhere. They come in the same order as in the giant book, so that the reader leafs through it from beginning to end. First comes Isidore's chapter "On Magicians", which shows what a learned medieval monk knew about magic and its kinds. Next come selections from the medical books, and then the confession of sins, written in large letters on darkly painted parchment. After that come the two famous picture pages, the Heavenly Jerusalem and the Devil. Immediately after the Devil are the spells against the falling sickness and for catching a thief. Most of this book is the *Chronicle of the Czechs* by Cosmas of Prague, complete in all three books. At the end come the people of the monastery of Podlažice and the calendar of the dead.

Cosmas and his chronicle. Cosmas was dean of the church of Prague. He was born around 1045 and died on 21 October 1125; the last lines of the chronicle, added by another hand, record his death. He wrote his chronicle in old age, roughly between 1119 and 1125, and dedicated it to his friends Severus, provost of Mělník, and Clement, abbot of Břevnov. It is the first history of the Czechs. It begins with the Flood and the Tower of Babel. It tells of Father Bohemus, who led his people into an empty land, and of wise Krok and his three daughters. It tells of the prophetess Libuše, who chose the ploughman Přemysl as her husband and foretold Prague, and of the war of the maidens. It tells of the conversion, of St Wenceslas and his brother Boleslav. Then the story comes ever closer to Cosmas's own lifetime: wars with Germans, Poles and Hungarians, quarrels between dukes, bishops and miracles. Cosmas himself says that for the ancient times he follows "the tales of old men", while for recent times he writes what he saw himself or heard from eyewitnesses. He is witty and sometimes biting. He quotes Virgil, Ovid and Lucan, and he does not shy away from stories of sorceresses, pagan idols and the Devil's tricks.

Why this text. Cosmas's chronicle survives in many manuscripts. The Codex Gigas is one of the most important: it gives the whole text, and Marquard Freher's printed edition of 1607 was made from this very codex while it was still in

Prague. Our translation follows the critical edition of Bertold Bretholz (Berlin, 1923), in which the Codex Gigas is manuscript B; Bretholz himself collated the text against the codex in Stockholm. We checked sample passages against the pages of the giant book. The differences are small, but one chapter, chapter 38 of Book One, is missing from the Gigas copy. We translate it and say so in a note. The other parts (the confession, the spells, the medicine and the calendar) we have translated directly from the pages of the manuscript.

From Bohemia to Sweden. The history of the codex is as strange as its size. It was made in the Benedictine monastery of Podlažice in eastern Bohemia. The poor monks pawned it to the Cistercians of Sedlec. In 1295 Abbot Bavor of Břevnov bought it back and wrote that it was so huge that "it may be counted among the seven wonders of the world". When the monastery of Břevnov was destroyed in the Hussite wars in 1420, the book went to its daughter house at Broumov. In 1594 it was taken to Prague, to the castle of Emperor Rudolf II. In 1648, in the last months of the Thirty Years' War, a Swedish army took Prague Castle and carried its treasures off to Stockholm, the giant book among them. In 1697 fire broke out in the royal castle in Stockholm, and the codex was thrown out of a window to save it. The binding suffered, and the present binding dates from 1819. More than three hundred years later, in 2007–2008, the book returned to Prague for a few months for an exhibition.



1697: in the fire at Stockholm Castle the giant book is thrown out of a window (illustration)

The legend of the monk and the Devil. The inventories of the treasure chamber of Prague Castle already call it "a great book written by the walled-up monk at Broumov". In the inventory of September 1648, when the castle was already in Swedish hands, it is "a great book which the Devil brought to a walled-up monk". The legend goes like this. A monk was condemned to death for a grave crime. To save his life, he promised to fill as much parchment as they would give him in a single night. At midnight he saw that he could not do it and called on the Devil for help. The Devil finished the book, and in gratitude the monk painted the Devil's portrait in it. This is a legend, not history. In the Middle Ages the word "walled-up" (Latin *inclusus*) usually meant a monk who was not allowed to leave the walls of his monastery or his cell, either as a punishment or by his own vow. Such a man, in years of solitude, could indeed have done such work. In the codex's own calendar, at 10 November, is the entry "Hermann, the walled-up monk". In 1852 the historian Beda Dudík suggested that he may have been the scribe. That is only a guess, but the entry is real, and you will find it at the end of this book.

How to read this book. The translation is complete, sentence by sentence; nothing has been shortened or softened. When the medieval author says "pagans", "sorceresses" or "God's punishment", that is what you will read. Explanations are in the notes at the foot of the page, where a word first appears. Roman dates are turned into modern dates in the notes. Cosmas's lines of verse are printed as verse. The colour pictures marked "Modern illustration" are modern work. All the other pictures come from the codex itself. At the end of the book there is a commentary, "In plain words", on what happens in each part and what we know about it today.

About the images. Images of the codex: National Library of Sweden (Kungliga biblioteket), Codex Gigas, photographs by Per B. Adolphson, licence CC BY 4.0. The images have been cropped and toned.

ISIDORE OF SEVILLE: ON MAGICIANS

In the giant book the history of Josephus is followed by the Etymologies of Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636), the encyclopedia from which medieval monks learned everything about the world. Book Eight, which deals with the Church and the heresies, has a chapter on magicians: who they are and what each kind of magic is called.

Etymologies, Book Eight, Chapter Nine: On Magicians

The first of the magicians was Zoroaster, king of the Bactrians,[1] whom Ninus, king of the Assyrians, killed in battle. Aristotle writes of him that, judging by the lists of his books, he composed two million lines of verse. Many centuries later Democritus[2] enlarged this art, at the time when Hippocrates' art of medicine flourished too. Among the Assyrians the magic arts are especially abundant, as Lucan bears witness:[3]

> Who can read the fates in the entrails,
> who interpret the birds, who watch the lightnings of the sky
> and search the stars with Assyrian care?

So this vanity of the magic arts, handed down from the evil angels, held sway over the whole world for many centuries. Through a certain knowledge of things to come and of things below, and through the calling up of the spirits below, were invented divination from entrails, augury, the so-called oracles, and necromancy.

1 Zoroaster (Zarathustra), the prophet of ancient Iran; ancient writers held him to be the inventor of magic. The *magi* were originally Persian priests.
2 Democritus (c. 460–370 BC), Greek philosopher, founder of the theory of atoms; later ages also ascribed writings on magic to him.
3 Lucan, *Pharsalia* VI 427–430. Lucan (39–65) was a Roman poet.

We need not wonder at the deceits of the magicians, whose arts of evil-doing went so far that they resisted Moses with very similar signs, turning rods into serpents and water into blood.[1] It is also told of Circe,[2] the most famous sorceress, that she changed the companions of Ulysses into beasts. We read also of the sacrifice that the Arcadians offered to their god Lycaeus:[3] whoever partook of it was changed into the shape of a beast.

From this it is clear that there is no doubt at all about what the noble poet writes of a certain woman who excelled in the magic arts:[4]

> "She," she says, "promises with her chants to set free the minds
> of whom she will, and on others to send hard cares;
> to halt the water of the river and turn the stars backwards;
> she calls up the shades of the night; you will see the earth
> rumble beneath your feet and the ash trees come down from the mountains."

What more, if one may believe that the woman with the spirit of divination called up the soul of the prophet Samuel from the hiding places of the underworld and set it before the eyes of the living[5] — if indeed we believe that it was the prophet's soul, and not some phantom illusion made by the deceit of Satan? Prudentius[6] too says this of Mercury:

> It is told that, taking his wand in hand,
> he called back extinguished souls into the light,
> but condemned others to death.

And a little later he adds:

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1 Exodus 7:10–22: the Egyptian magicians imitated the miracles of Moses.

2 Circe, the sorceress of Homer's *Odyssey*, who turned the companions of Odysseus into swine.

3 On Mount Lycaeus in Arcadia sacrifices were offered to Zeus; legend said that whoever tasted the meat of the sacrifice turned into a wolf.

4 Virgil, *Aeneid* IV 487–491: Dido speaks of a priestess of the Massylians.

5 1 Samuel 28: the witch of Endor calls up the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel before King Saul.

6 Prudentius (348–c. 413), Christian Latin poet; the quotation is from his poem *Against Symmachus* I 90 ff.

> For with a magic murmur he could call up thin figures
> and skilfully enchant the ashes of the tomb.
> The same harmful art knew also how to rob others of life.

Magicians are those whom the people call evil-doers because of the greatness of their crimes.[1] They shake the elements, disturb the minds of men, and kill without any draught of poison, by the sheer force of a spell. Hence Lucan says:[2]

> A mind defiled by no draught of poison
> perishes, enchanted.

For, having summoned demons, they dare to send them out, so that each may kill his enemies by evil arts. They also use blood and sacrifices, and they often touch the bodies of the dead.

Necromancers are those by whose incantations the dead seem to rise again, to prophesy and to answer questions. For in Greek *nekros* means "dead", and *manteia* "divination". To question them, blood is poured on the corpse, for demons are said to love blood. And so whenever necromancy is done, blood is mixed with water, so that they may more easily be called up by the colour of blood.

Hydromancers are named after water. For hydromancy is calling up the shades of demons by looking into water, seeing their images or their illusions, and hearing something from them there; and when blood is added, they are said to question even the dwellers below. This kind of divination is said to have been brought by the Persians. Varro[3] says there are four kinds of divination: by earth, by water, by air and by fire. Hence the names geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy and pyromancy.

Diviners (*divini*) are so called as if "full of god": they pretend to be full of the divine and by a fraudulent cunning guess the future for men. There are two kinds of divination: art and frenzy.

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1 Latin *malefici*, "doers of evil"; from this word comes the medieval term for sorcery, *maleficium*.
2 Lucan, *Pharsalia* VI 457–458.
3 Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BC), Roman scholar who wrote widely on religion and antiquity.

Enchanters (*incantatores*) are those who practise their art with words.

Soothsayers (*arioli*) are so called because they utter wicked prayers around the altars (*arae*) of idols and offer deadly sacrifices, and at these celebrations receive the answers of demons.

Haruspices are so called as if "inspectors of hours": they watch the days and hours for doing business and work, and they look out for what a man ought to observe at each time. They also examine the entrails of cattle and foretell the future from them.

Augurs are those who attend to the flight and the voices of birds, and to other signs of things, or to unexpected sightings that happen to people. The same are also called auspices. For auspices are the signs that travellers watch for on the road. Auspices are so called as if "bird-watchings", and auguries as if "bird-chatter", that is, the voices and tongues of birds. Likewise augury as if "bird-borne", because birds bear it. There are two kinds of auspices: one belonging to the eyes, the other to the ears — to the eyes, of course, the flight; to the ears, the voice of birds.

Women with the spirit of divination (*pythonissae*) are named after Pythian Apollo,[1] because he was the author of divination.

Astrologers are so called because they practise augury in the stars.

Genethliacs are so called because of their study of birthdays. They describe men's births according to the twelve signs of the heavens and try, by the course of the stars, to foretell the character, deeds and fortunes of those being born — that is, under which sign each was born and what the course of life will be for one who is born. These are the people commonly called mathematicians;[2] the Latins call this kind of superstition "constellations", that is, the markings of the stars, how they stand when anyone is born.

At first these same interpreters of the stars were called magi, as we read of those who in the Gospel announced that Christ was born;[3] later only the

1 Pythian Apollo, the god of the oracle at Delphi; his priestess at Delphi was called the Pythia.
2 In Isidore's day a "mathematician" usually meant an astrologer.
3 Matthew 2:1–12: the wise men (magi) from the East who followed the star to Bethlehem.

mathematicians were given this name. Knowledge of this art was allowed only until the Gospel, so that after Christ was born no one should ever again read anyone's birth from the heavens.

Horoscopes[1] are so called because they watch the hours of men's births, with their unlike and varied fates.

Lot-casters (*sortilegi*) are those who, under the name of a feigned religion, profess the science of divination by certain lots that they call "the lots of the saints",[2] or promise the future by looking into any writings at all.

Twitch-readers (*salisatores*) are so called because, when any part of their limbs twitches, they declare that it means something lucky or sad for them.

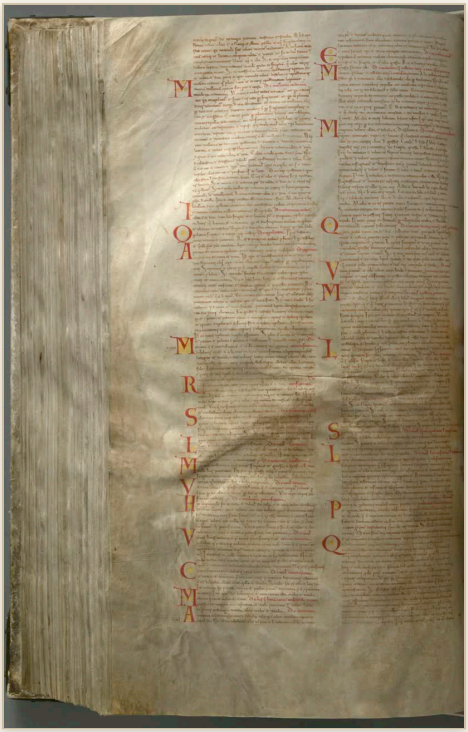
To all these belong also the ligatures of accursed remedies, which the art of physicians condemns, whether in incantations, or in written characters, or in any things hung up or tied on.[3] In all these things is the art of demons, sprung from a pestilent fellowship of men and evil angels. Therefore a Christian must shun them all, and reject and condemn them all with utter execration.

The Phrygians first invented augury from birds. Mercury is said to have been the first to invent illusions; an illusion (*praestigium*) is so called because it dazzles (*praestringat*) the sight of the eyes. A certain Tages is said to have been the first to give the art of haruspicy to the Etruscans. He dictated haruspicy from his own mouth and afterwards was seen no more. For the fable says that while a peasant was ploughing, he suddenly leapt up out of the clods and dictated the art of haruspicy, and on that same day he died. The Romans translated these books from the Etruscan tongue into their own.

1 Latin *horoscopi*, "hour-watchers"; here the word means the diviners themselves, not a chart.
2 A widespread medieval practice: opening the Bible or other holy writings at random and reading the future in the first verse one's eye falls on. The Church forbade it.
3 Amulets worn round the neck or tied to the body, with written signs. Compare the part of this book called "Spells", which in the codex are written as Christian prayers, not as amulets.

THE BOOK OF MEDICINE

After Isidore the codex has five medical books, mostly the Latin translations of Arabic physicians made by Constantine the African (died before 1099). Here is a selection: the properties of medicines by "degrees", and recipes.



f. 248v: a page of the medical books