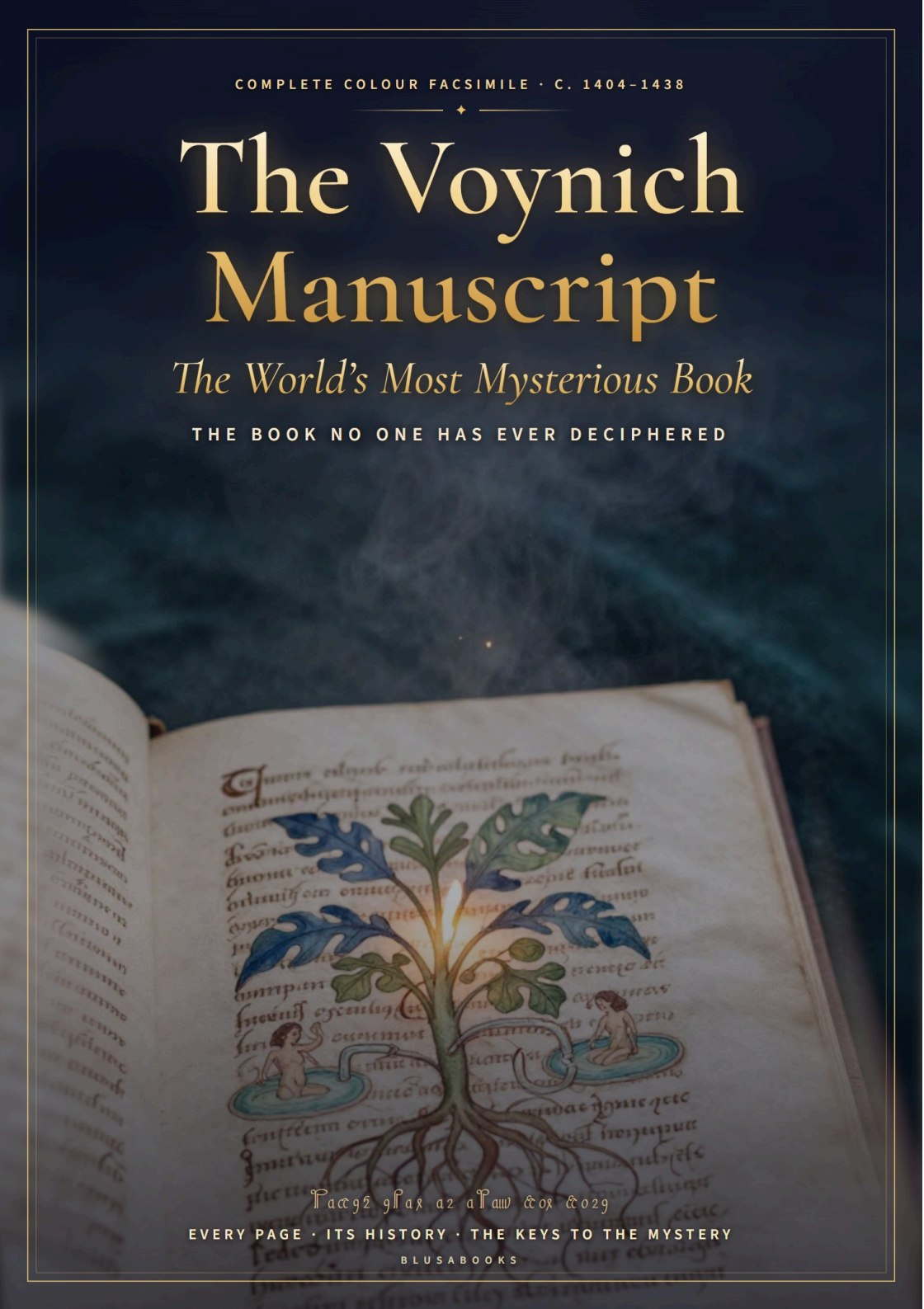
COMPLETE COLOUR FACSIMILE · C. 1404–1438

The Voynich Manuscript

The World's Most Mysterious Book

THE BOOK NO ONE HAS EVER DECIPHERED



EVERY PAGE · ITS HISTORY · THE KEYS TO THE MYSTERY

BLUSABOOKS

BOOKS OF WISDOM

The Voynich Manuscript: The World's Most Mysterious Book

The Complete Colour Facsimile · c. 1404–1438

Every page of the manuscript, the fold-outs section by section, the covers and spine, with the history of the mystery, the attempts at decipherment, a table of the Voynich letters, the readable passages and the statistics of the text. The manuscript is undeciphered; we invent nothing.

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CONTENTS

Foreword 6

The History of the Mystery 8

How People Have Tried to Read It 16

The Voynich Letters: the EVA Alphabet 20

What Can Be Read 23

What the Numbers Say 27

The Facsimile: Cover and Opening 32

The Herbal 35

The Heavens: Astronomy, Cosmology and the Zodiac 157

The Bathers: the "Balneological" Section 190

The Rosettes: the Great Fold-out 211

The Pharmacy: Roots and Jars 230

Recipes with Stars 270

The End of the Book: Covers, Spine and Edges 296

We Tried It Ourselves 306

Can You Read It? 314

FOREWORD

This is a book that nobody can read.

It is small, about 23 by 16 centimetres, written on calfskin vellum, and it has around 240 pages. Almost every page is illustrated: plants that no botanist has ever found in any meadow; stars and circles; naked women bathing in green pools joined by strange pipes; nine enormous circles on a fold-out sheet that, opened, is larger than the book itself. And between the drawings, text. Smooth, flowing lines written by a confident hand, without corrections, as if the writer knew exactly what he was writing. Only nobody else knows any more.

The script resembles no known writing. It is not Latin, Greek, Hebrew or Arabic. Words repeat in ways no language repeats them, and yet the text has an order that can be measured. The finest codebreakers of the last century, the people who broke the wartime ciphers of Japan and Germany, spent years on this book and gave up.

The book bears the name of the man who found it in Italy in 1912 and showed it to the world: Wilfrid Voynich. Today it is kept in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University in New Haven, and in 2009 radiocarbon dating of the vellum showed that it was made at the beginning of the fifteenth century, between 1404 and 1438.

What you will find in this book. First, the history of the mystery: how the book reached Emperor Rudolf II for 600 ducats, how it travelled from Prague to Rome, how Voynich found it in a Jesuit villa, and how, in the twentieth century, cryptographers of American military intelligence worked on it. Then, the attempts to read it: the theories and the "decipherments", and why scholars have so far rejected them. Then the script itself: the Voynich characters, which

researchers write down with Latin letters (the so-called EVA alphabet), the places that really can be read, and the numbers that can be calculated from the text even without understanding it.

And then THE WHOLE MANUSCRIPT, PAGE BY PAGE: every page in colour, the fold-outs shown section by section, with the covers, spine and edges. For every page we write **what we see** and, where there is one, **what researchers think**.

HONESTLY, ABOUT WHAT WE DO NOT DO. We do not pretend to have deciphered the Voynich manuscript. No one has done so in a way that other researchers can check and accept. So there is no "translation" in this book and no invented meanings. Where researchers have made guesses (that a plant resembles a viola, for example, or that a later hand wrote the names of months on the zodiac pages) we say that it is a guess and who made it. The rest we leave to you.

Perhaps it is a wise physician's secret book of remedies. Perhaps an alchemist's cipher that guarded knowledge from unwelcome eyes. Perhaps an artificial language that someone invented for pleasure. Perhaps a fifteenth-century hoax that still works. One thing is certain: this book has kept its secret for six hundred years. Open it and see for yourself.

> **IN PLAIN WORDS**
>
> *The Voynich manuscript is a real medieval book with drawings and text in an unknown script. Its vellum dates from the early fifteenth century. The text has not been deciphered. This edition contains every page of the manuscript in colour, with our notes on what can be seen on it.*

THE HISTORY OF THE MYSTERY

The story of the Voynich manuscript is almost as gripping as the book itself. Its path leads through the alchemists' Prague, the Jesuit libraries of Rome, antiquarian bookshops in London and New York and the offices of wartime cryptographers, to a library vault in New Haven.



The cabinet of curiosities of Emperor Rudolf II at Prague Castle, around 1600 (illustration)

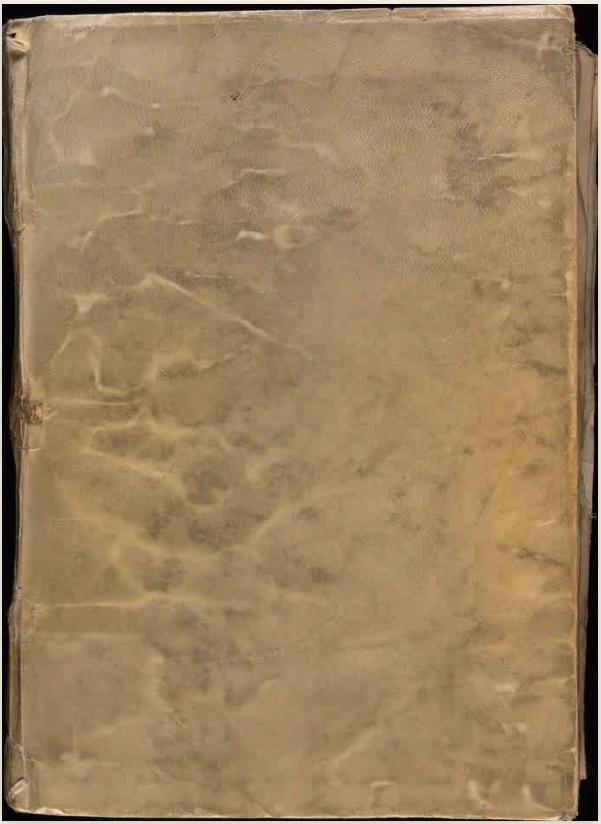
WHAT THE BOOK IS LIKE

The manuscript is small: its leaves measure about 23.5 by 16.2 cm, and with its binding the book is about five centimetres thick. It is written on vellum (prepared calfskin) with iron-gall ink and a quill. The drawings are coloured with simple,

THE FACSIMILE: COVER AND OPENING

Here the complete facsimile of the manuscript begins. The pages are shown in the order in which they are in the book, each in colour. In the upper right corner a later hand wrote the leaf numbers (folios): "1r" is the front of the first leaf, "1v" its back. The fold-outs are shown whole and section by section.

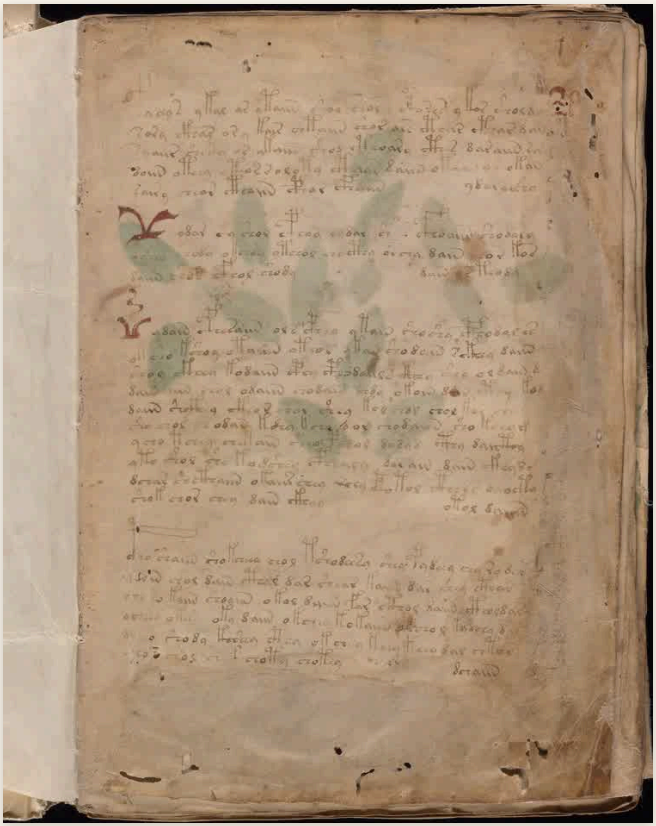
Front cover



THE HERBAL

The largest part of the manuscript: more than a hundred pages, each with one plant with roots, stem, leaves and flowers, and text around it. Many plants look as if assembled from parts of different plants, and researchers venture to compare only a few with known species.

f. 1r — The first page: text only



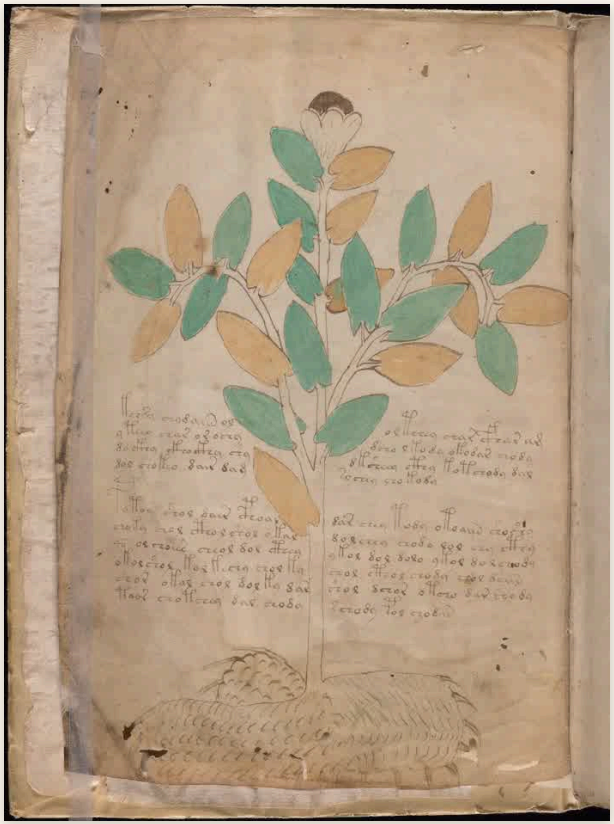
Text: about 220 words · Currier language A · scribe 1

What we see. The manuscript's first page has no drawing: four paragraphs in the mysterious script. The green patches are a plant showing through from the other side of the leaf. The second and third paragraphs open with large red symbols, and another red mark stands at the end of the first line. Some words at the ends of paragraphs are pushed to the right margin. In the right margin, a later hand added a string of Latin letters, a, b, c, d..., not quite aligned with the lines of text; some letters have faded. At the bottom of the page almost nothing can be seen, but under ultraviolet light a faded signature appears.

What researchers think. The faded signature belongs to Jacobus Horcicky de Tepenecz[1], who owned the manuscript in the early seventeenth century. It is one of the earliest firm facts in the book's history. Many see the alphabet in the margin as a later reader's attempt to match the unknown signs to Latin letters; it unlocked nothing. The text is in Currier language A, written by Hand 1.

1 Jakub Hořčický of Tepenec (c. 1575–1622), a Prague chemist and physician who served at the court of Emperor Rudolf II.

f. 1v — A plant with two-coloured leaves



Text: about 80 words · Currier language A · scribe 1

What we see. An upright stem with branches carrying long leaves, alternately green and pale brown; small thorns are drawn on the branches. At the top, a white flower with a dark, round fruit or bud. Below, a broad, scaly root like a small mound. The text is in two paragraphs, split in half by the stem. In the left margin, old tape holds the leaf in the binding.

What researchers think. Researchers have compared this plant with deadly nightshade (Atropa belladonna) or black nightshade, but there is no convincing identification. The same plant seems to reappear later in the "pharmaceutical" section.

f. 2r — A plant with three flower heads



Text: about 80 words · Currier language A · scribe 1

What we see. From a small red-brown root, shaped like a branching stick, grows a slender plant with reddish stems and deeply cut green leaves, like open hands. At the tips are three fringed, pale flower heads on green, dotted bases. The text is in two paragraphs: the upper one broken up between the flowers, the lower one on either side of the stem. In the right margin, beside a leaf, stands a single separate word or label. A bluish stain shows through from the other side.

What researchers think. Researchers have compared this plant with the cornflower (Centaurea cyanus) and its relatives.

f. 2v — A plant with one large round leaf



Text: about 60 words · Currier language A · scribe 1

What we see. A long, thin stalk bearing one huge, round, dark green leaf with a notch at the stem, almost like a heart. Above it, a small cup-shaped flower drawn only in outline. Below, a long horizontal root with many round buds or knots. There are only eight lines of text in two groups, divided by the plant.

What researchers think. To many, the leaf shape suggests a water plant; researchers have compared it with the fringed water-lily (Nymphoides peltata) or the Egyptian lotus.

f. 3r — A plant with a fan of striped leaves



Text: about 110 words · Currier language A · scribe 1

What we see. A striking plant: at the top, a large fan of wavy leaves with alternating green and red bands and dots along the edges. Below, a bare stem and a bushy red-brown root with many offshoots. The text on the left runs to several paragraphs, about twenty lines; a few lines continue to the right of the stem. A later folio number "3" is written in the top right corner, and a drawing shows through from the other side.