



The nine-rosette fold-out, ff. 85v-86r, Beinecke Library, Yale

MANUSCRIPT • EARLY 1400S

The Voynich Manuscript

A book of 102 leaves, written in an unknown script of about two dozen letters. Its pages show plants no one has identified for certain, star charts, and small figures bathing in green pools. The parchment dates to 1404–1438.

Where it stands, in four statements

AS OF 24 OCTOBER 2026

A The book is genuine and early fifteenth century.

The parchment is dated 1404–1438, the hands and pigments fit the period, and five scribes worked to a plan, a sheet at a time.

ESTABLISHED F-001 • F-003 • F-014

Page 2

B It is not a simple cipher of a known European language.

Letter-for-letter ciphers of five languages find no key, though the same tests find keys we plant ourselves.

ESTABLISHED F-013 • F-021 • F-022

Page 3

C The text follows rules of its own, set by the word, the line and the page.

Each glyph has a fixed place in the word, spellings change at the end of the line, and neighbouring pages share vocabulary, as in real texts.

ESTABLISHED F-006 • F-111 • F-027

Page 3

D No one has read any of it.

No proposed reading, including our own first one, has produced a dictionary word on pages it wasn't built from.

ESTABLISHED F-037 • F-042

Page 4

102

leaves survive, of about 116

38,000

words of text

~25

different glyphs

5

scribes

1921

first claimed reading

247

tests run here

A The book is genuine and early fifteenth century.

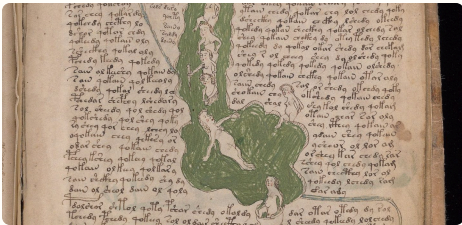
A book of 102 leaves, written in an unknown script of about two dozen letters. Its pages show plants no one has identified for certain, star charts, and small figures bathing in green pools. The parchment dates to 1404–1438.



Herbal. Plants, most not identified



Astronomical. Star charts and a zodiac



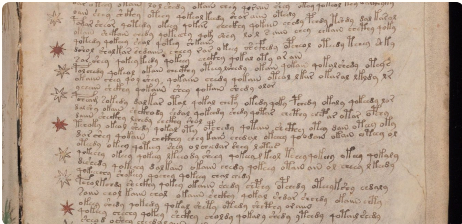
Bathing. Figures in pools and pipes



Cosmological. A fold-out of nine rosettes



Pharmaceutical. Jars and roots



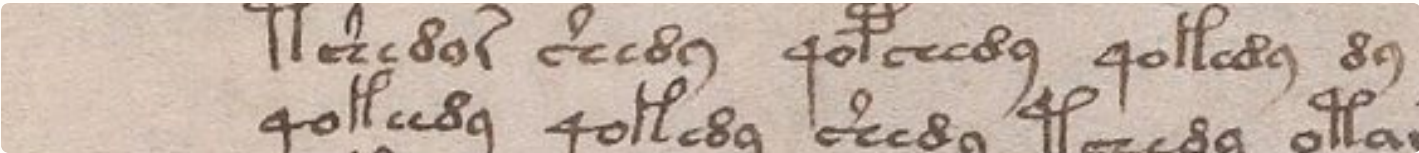
Recipes. Short starred paragraphs

Six hundred years, to scale



At a glance

Held by	Beinecke Library, Yale (MS 408)
Parchment	Calfskin, dated 1404–1438
Size	102 leaves in 18 quires, about 23 × 16 cm
Text	About 38,000 words
Script	Unknown; about two dozen glyphs
Scribes	Five
First record	Prague, about 1610



The script, from folio 78r: about two dozen glyphs, written left to right, never yet read

The evidence for A

ESTABLISHED F-001 Parchment from 1404–1438 Four leaves were radiocarbon-dated at the University of Arizona in 2009. The ink and pigments fit the period.	ESTABLISHED F-003 Five scribes Five hands wrote the text, identified from their letterforms. The two 'languages' found in the 1970s partly line up with them.	ESTABLISHED F-014 Made a sheet at a time Pages on one sheet of parchment share vocabulary; neighbours from different sheets don't. The book was rebound out of order. different sheets same sheet ≈ 9.4
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B It is not a simple cipher of a known European language.

Letter-for-letter ciphers of five languages find no key, though the same tests find keys we plant ourselves. Each test was first run on texts we enciphered ourselves, to show it would have found a key.

ESTABLISHED

F-021

Letter-for-letter ciphers find no key

Tried on five languages, with a solver that recovers keys we plant ourselves.

99 % planted keys found

0 % keys found in the manuscript

ESTABLISHED

F-022

Other classic ciphers are excluded

Each was tested with controls that show the test would have found it.

Word-for-letter Transposition

Position-keyed alphabets Nulls

Anagrams

ESTABLISHED

F-031

Not a period chancery key either

Mixed keys of the kind Italian chanceries used, tried in 216 configurations. Keys fitted to part of the text fail 9 to 12 of 12 tests on the rest.

0 of 216

key configurations reproduce the text

C The text follows rules of its own, set by the word, the line and the page.

Each glyph has a fixed place in the word, spellings change at the end of the line, and neighbouring pages share vocabulary, as in real texts. Each number is compared with real languages, or with text made by a procedure, under the same test.

ESTABLISHED

F-006

Each glyph has its place in the word

q starts 99 % of the words it's in and is followed by o 97 % of the time. A simple slot template covers most words.

99 % of q's start a word

97 % are followed by o

ESTABLISHED

F-008

The line is a unit

Paragraph-first lines open with a tall 'gallows' glyph far more often than other lines do.

84 % of paragraph-first lines

9 % of other lines

ESTABLISHED

F-111

Spelling changes at the end of a line

Words that can end in -m or -in use -m mostly at the line's end, as scribes shortened words to fit.

31 % at the end of a line

2.4 % inside a line

ESTABLISHED

F-017

Word order carries almost no information

Knowing one word barely helps predict the next. In 102 languages it helps three to ten times as much.

102 languages

Voynich 0.42 bits

ESTABLISHED

F-027

Neighbouring pages share vocabulary

As in real texts, and unlike text made by a procedure with no content.

procedures languages

Voynich z 16

ESTABLISHED

F-114

Herbal pages open with their own word

The first word of a herbal page appears on no other page, like the name of the plant drawn below it.

71 % first words unique to the page

31 % other words in the line

How a test works here

1 • Plant

Encipher a known text, Latin or Italian, with a random key of the kind being tested.

2 • Prove

The method has to recover the planted key. If it can't, its silence on the manuscript means nothing.

3 • Test and hold back

Only then run it on the manuscript, and check any result on pages kept aside until the end.

D

No one has read any of it.

No proposed reading, including our own first one, has produced a dictionary word on pages it wasn't built from. Our own first readings, from March 2026: 6 of 10 ruled out, none confirmed.

Published claims since 1921, and how they stand here

1921	William Newbold	Roger Bacon's cipher, read in microscopic strokes	RULED OUT	The strokes are cracks in the ink (Manly, 1931)
1944	William Friedman	An early artificial language	OPEN	Close to a candidate below
1976	Prescott Currier	Two 'languages', A and B, and several hands	HOLDS	Holds; matches the scribe evidence
2004	Gordon Rugg	A hoax made with tables and a grille	RULED OUT	Reproduces too little of the text's structure
2013	Montemurro & Zanette	Keywords cluster by section, as in language	HOLDS	Holds here too
2014	Stephen Bax	Readings of ten words, mostly plant names	OPEN	Too few words to test yet
2016	Hauer & Kondrak	Anagrammed text, perhaps Hebrew	RULED OUT	Anagram tests with controls found nothing
2020	Timm & Schinner	Made by copying and changing nearby words	UNSETTLED	Tests here can't yet tell
2020	Lisa Fagin Davis	Five scribes	HOLDS	Holds
2025	Michael Greshko	Each word encodes one letter	RULED OUT	Its output doesn't match the text's word patterns
2026	Layfield & Davis	Single leaves, not in the maker's order	HOLDS	Holds; the sheet evidence agrees

What it might be: readings still standing, and how each could fail

An infirmarian's handbook in cipher

Notes on plants, baths, timing and remedies for a house's sick, kept in a private cipher.

Fails if herbal pages didn't open with their own word

HOLDS

Herbal pages open with their own wordF-114

FAILS

Pharmacy labels reappear in the herbalF-113

FAILS

Short quantity words cluster in the recipesF-116

An encyclopaedia in a made-up language

Words built from parts that name categories, as in 17th-century philosophical languages, but earlier.

Fails if a word's first part says no more about its topic than a Latin first letter

HOLDS

First glyphs carry three times Latin's topic informationF-115

HOLDS

Words spelled alike are used alikeF-015

A notation for memorising

Each line a unit to recall, a heading word and then cue words, not sentences to be read.

Fails if neighbouring words turn out to constrain each other

HOLDS

Word order carries almost nothingF-017

FAILS

Whole lines repeat as patterns; only their openings doF-117

A spa physician's regimen

The baths at the centre; the herbal and pharmacy serve them and the zodiac says when.

Fails if the bathing pages' words are no closer to the herbal than to the pharmacy

UNTESTED

Bathing vocabulary closer to the herbal

The five key questions · marks show the questions under each

What is the object, and who made it? Partly answered	✓✓✓○○
What kind of text is it? Most likely: a notation or memory system	①①○○○
How was the text produced on the page? Most likely: the line is a unit of the system	①①○
What is the book about? Open	①①○
Can any of it be read? Open	○①

What would move it forward

What is the book about?	Q-030
Can any of it be read?	Q-040
Where was it made, and in what milieu?	Q-005

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