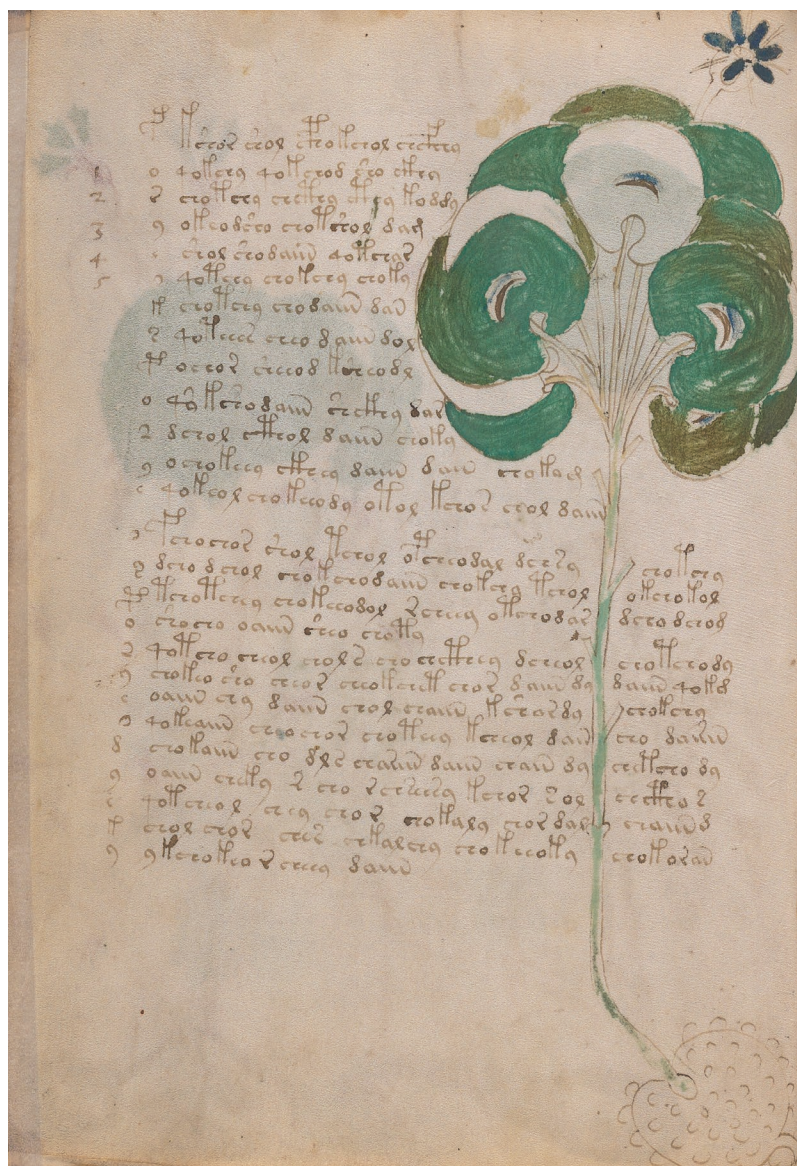# *The Riddle in folio 49v*

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F88r. Photo source: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The riddle

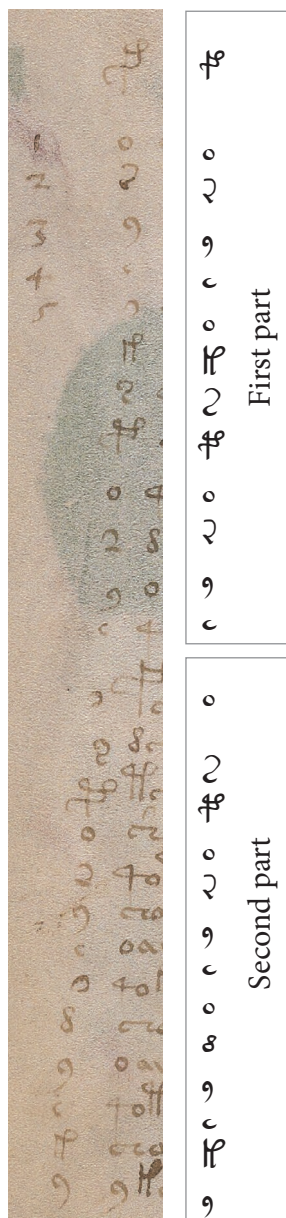To the left of the main text in folio 49v there is a column of numbers and a column of letters.

The numbers are
1 2 3 4 5

The letters are

There is one letter for each line of the main text, as if the column is part of the main text. At the moment it is unclear how it is related to the main text. But, it is possible to make sense of the column of numbers and letters in itself. It is a riddle.

STEP ONE

The main text in folio 49v is divided in two by a space. This divides the column of letters in two as well. In these two parts of the column the sequence *sborei* is repeated.

Part one:
f o r e i o t s b o r e i

Part two:
o s b o r e i o d e i t e

⧕ represents both *b* and *p*. It means that ⧕ can be read *sborei* or *sporei*. In the Voynich manuscript **i** or **e** is typically omitted when the vowel is short, for example when it perceeds a consonant pronounced with pressure. With an **i** added to *sporei*, it is close to the Middle English word **siphre**. **Siphre** means *The arithmetical symbol for naught* or *Any arithmetical symbol, a cipher*. Etymologically it comes from Arabic, **sifr**, Latin **cifra** and old French, **cifre** and means *digit.* In the riddle above, it makes sense if *sporei* means *digit* or *number*.

STEP 2

Other sequences that remind of Middle English words in the riddle are *orei* and *eite*. Here marked in pink.

Part one:

f	o r e i	o t	s b o r e i

Part two:

o	s b o r e i	o d	e i t e

Orei is close to *arai* and means *array* or *sequence. Sequence* makes sense as the text is placed close to a sequence of numbers. *Eite* (used in South of England) means *wealth*.

There are a few remaining letters in the riddle. *O* can represent either *a* or *of*. *T* and *d* represents *this* and *the*. The first letter in the riddle, *f*, can be read *fei* or *fai*. It can be the verb *fay* (also *feien*) that means *to combine* or *add*.

STEP 3

Using the translations in step 1 and 2, the riddle says:

1 2 3 4 5

	1	2	3	4	5				
Cipher									
Interpretation	f	orei	o	t	sborei	a sborei	o d	eite	
Middle English	*fay*	*arrai*	*o té*	*siphre*		*a siphre*	*o the*	*eite*	
Translation	**add sequence of this number**					**a number of the wealth**			

The riddle tells that if you add the sequence 12345, you will get the number of wealth. 1+2+3+4+5 is 15. It is possible that one should continue the add the numbers. From 15 one can add 1+5 and get 6. Either 15 or 6 is the number of wealth.