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# UNKNOWN ALPHABET

## Photo credit

All images from the Voynich Manuscript courtesy  
of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library,  
Yale University.

Siv Bugge Vatne

## Photos of own work:

1. *Unknown alphabet*. Hand-drawn copy of the large Voynich foldout, scale 4:1, 180 x 180 cm, pen, pencil, coloured pencils on paper, 2026
2. *Humming*, Installation view. The National Museum, Oslo, 2022. Wood, thread, gravel.
3. *Humming*, Installation view. Nils Aas Kunstverksted, Inderøy, 2022.
- 4-5. *Humming (Skogene Blomstrer)*. The pilgrim road, Tankepass 2, Granerudsjøen, 2025. Stone.
6. *Humming (Voynich Studies)*. 2021. Pencil on paper.
7. *Humming (Voynich Studies)*. Installation view, Sandefjord Kunstforening 2024.
8. *Humming (Voynich Studies)*. 2022. Pencil on paper
9. *Humming (Voynich Studies)*. 2026. Pencil and pen on paper.

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## UNKNOWN ALPHABET



1

### FROM WORDLESSNESS

My practice has long been shaped by an interest in materials and words. This grew out of a period of illness, when I experienced heavy brain fog. Words were difficult to find, and I struggled to complete sentences. It was frightening. I felt my ability to communicate slipping away, to tell, to explain, to express myself, even to defend myself. I feared becoming isolated, and losing my work as an artist.

My solution to this was to start the project *Humming*. For me, *Humming* meant singing without words. Through *Humming* I created a place where I could work without words.

My practice was as follows. On my way to the studio, I would gather materials like gravel and wood.



2

In my studio, I arranged these materials or carved the wood.



3

Many of the forms were botanical.



4

In the plant world, I found a place where I could be without words.



5

I found that our lives are totally interwoven with plants.

Somewhere along this path, I came across the Voynich Manuscript.

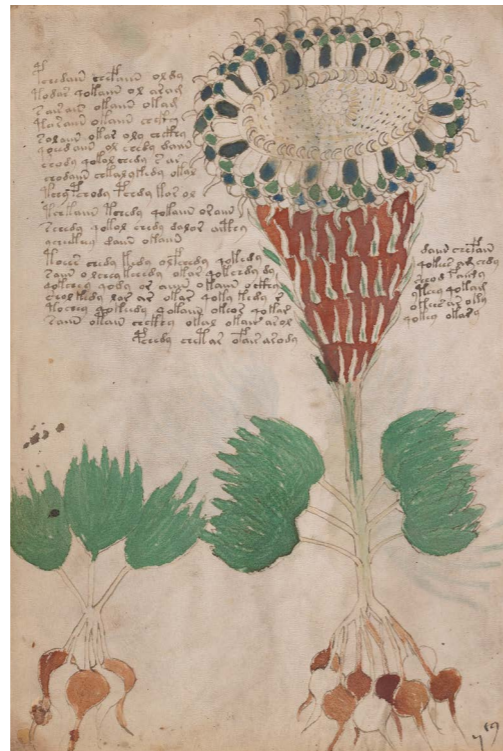
Its images of plants are half abstracted and half realistic. Around them flows text written in an unknown alphabet. In my wordless practice, I could relate to these images. The text was like a beautiful humming around the plants.

### THE VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT

The Voynich Manuscript is a mystery. Since the book dealer Voynich discovered it in 1912, numerous codebreakers, linguists, statisticians, historians, botanists and amateurs have tried to decode its ciphered text without success. Both the cipher and the many hand drawn images resist comparison to known traditions. No interpretation has gained acceptance. Without context, both text and image remain open.

We know the manuscript is European in style, and its vellum has been carbon dated to between 1404 and 1438. Beyond that, little is certain. Apparently, the cipher is based on Roman minuscule characters, and its owner describes it as a scientific or magical text.\*

About half of the manuscript is known as the botanical section. The rest is divided into what are called the balneological, cosmological, pharmacological, and recipe sections. Whether these labels are accurate is uncertain, but they reflect what the manuscript might be.

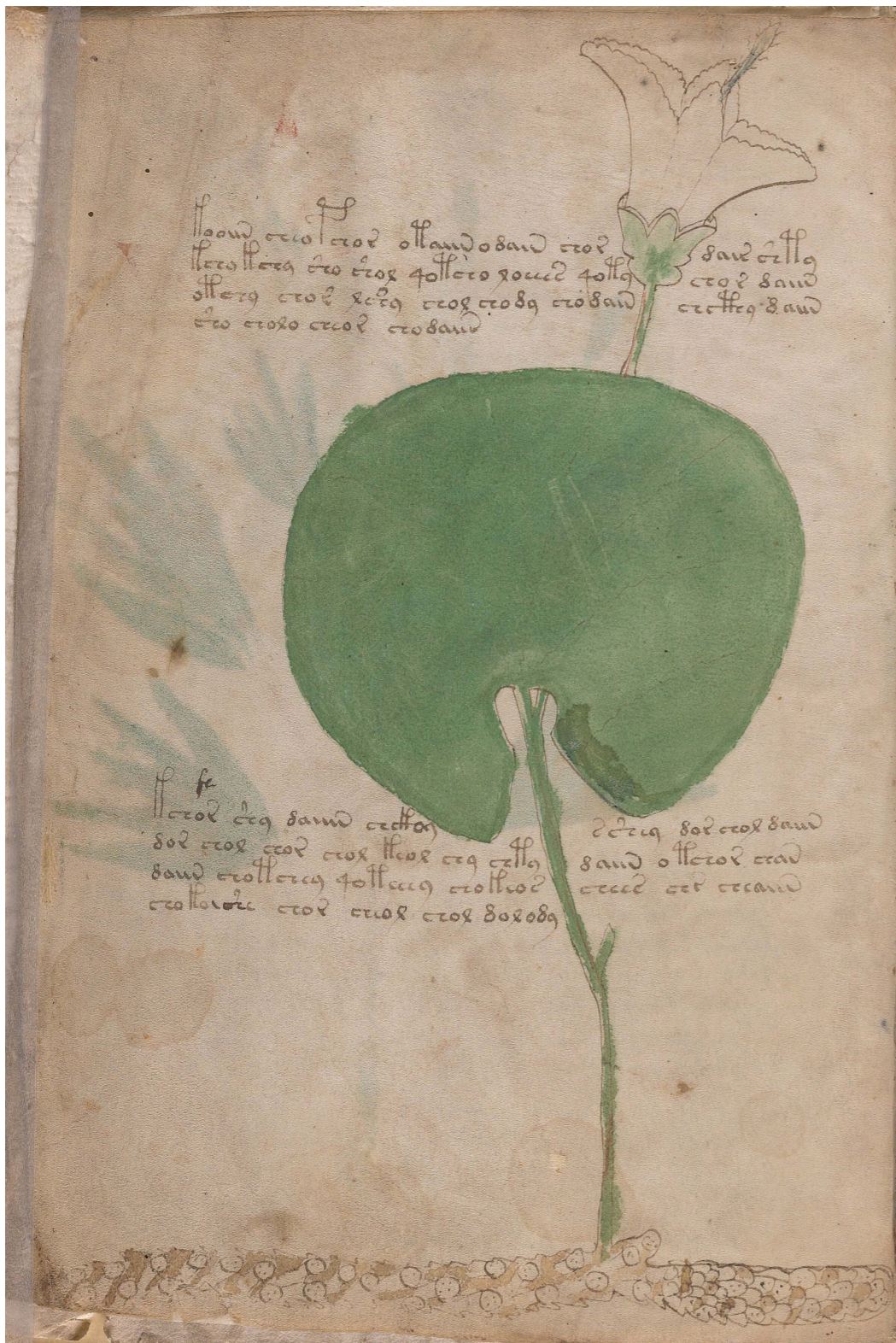


Folio 40v and 33r, the botanical section.

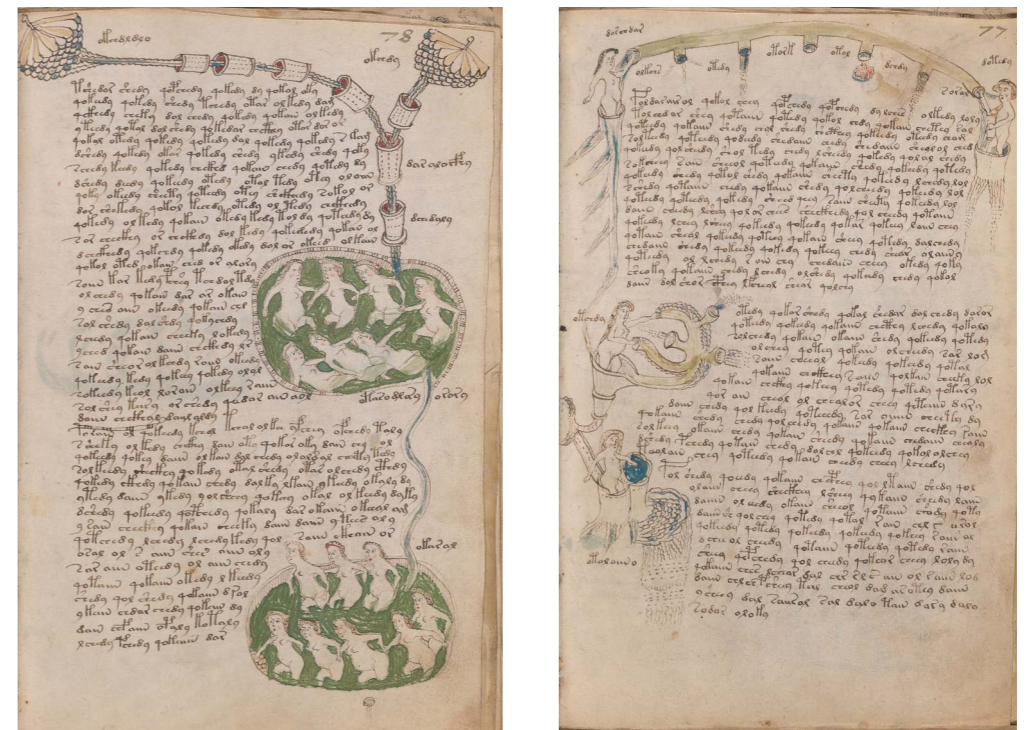
\* Catalogue record, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.



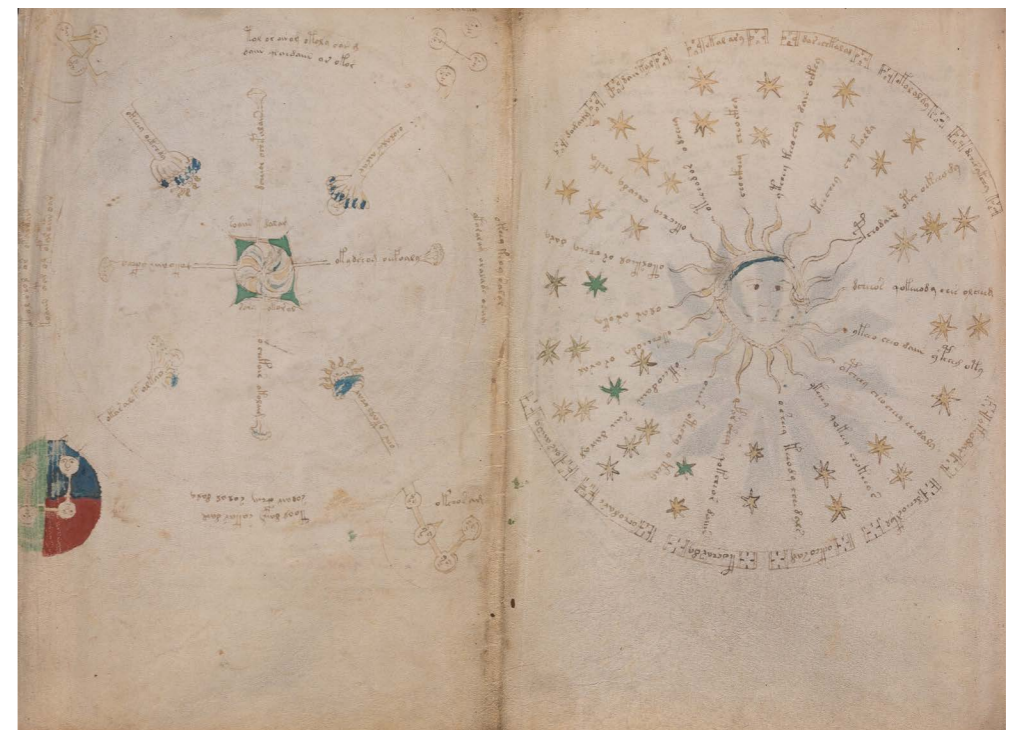
Folio 33v, the botanical section.



Folio 2v, the botanical section.



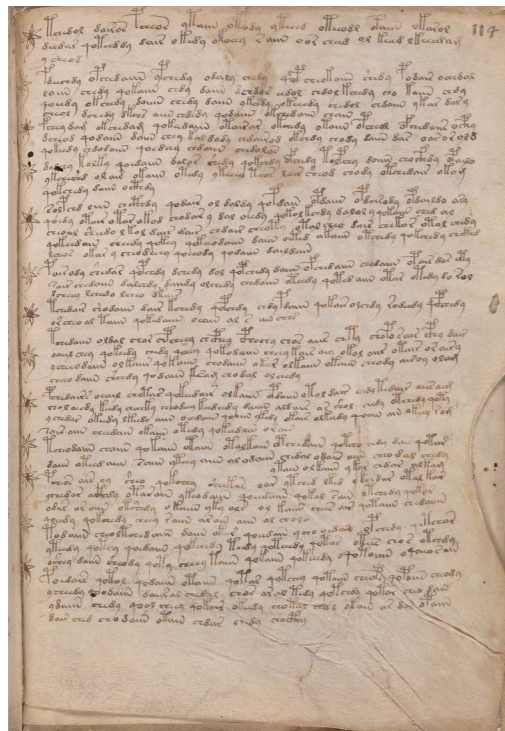
Folio 78r and 77r, the balneological section.



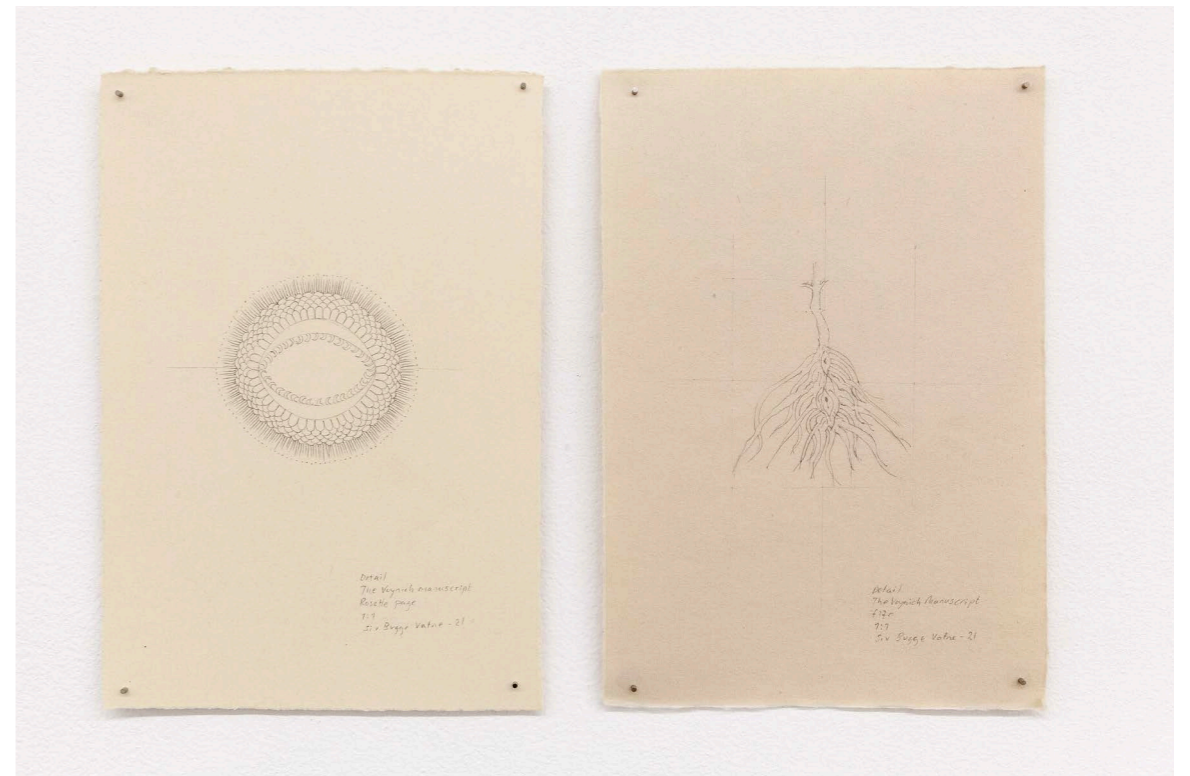
Folio 67v2 and 67v1, the balneological section.



Folio 89v, the pharmacological section.



Folio 114r, the recipe section.



### CRACKING THE VOYNICH CIPHER

I realized that Voynich-like shapes started to appear in my sculptures. I began to engage more directly with the manuscript's images, first by copying small details at a 1:1 scale.

My curiosity grew. What plants were depicted? Why were they depicted in this exact way? How were the plants related to the diagrams?

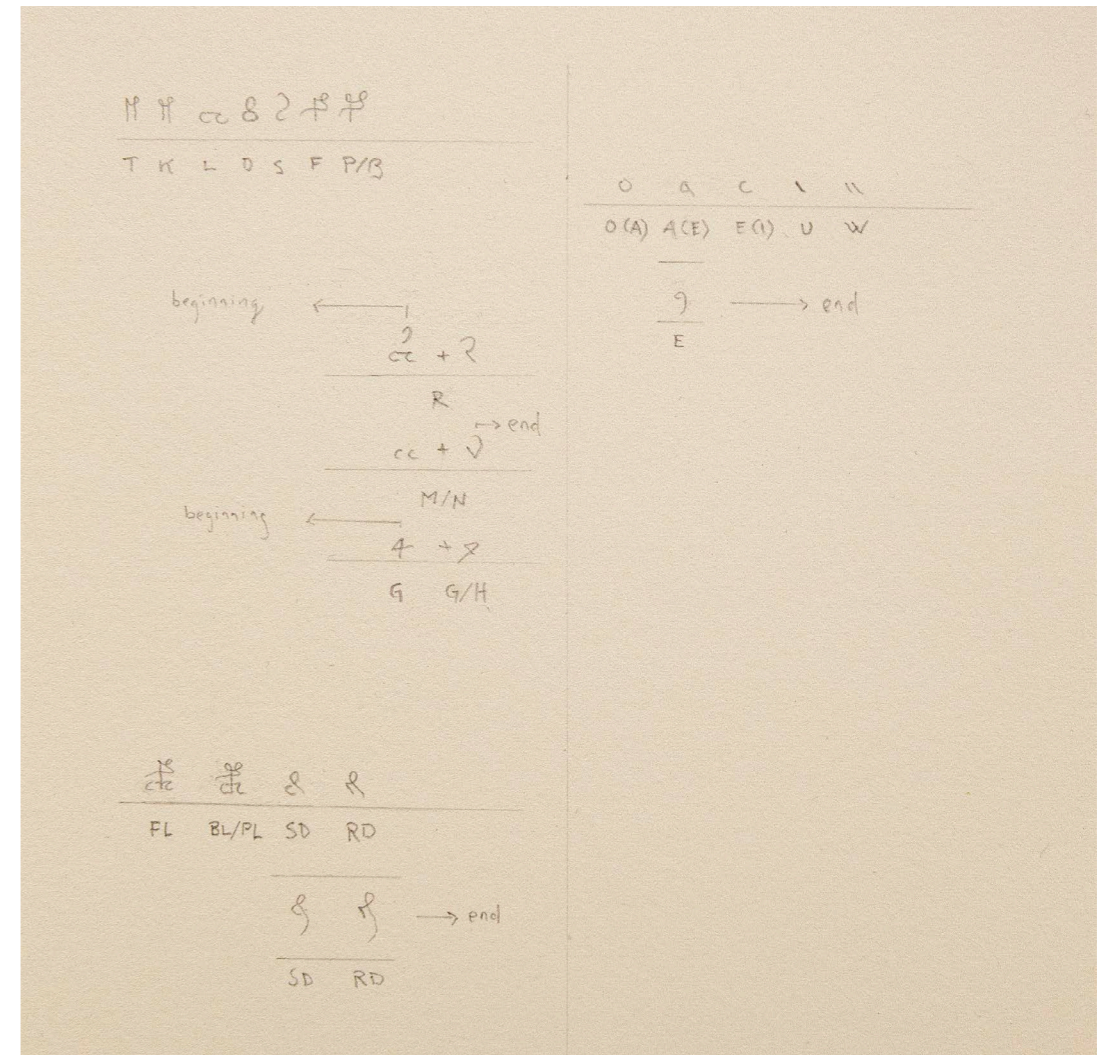


7

The project took a turn. I became increasingly drawn to the text itself, to the words. I wanted to know what the text said about the plants. Why was the text written in code? What knowledge was hidden in the text? Why were these plants so important to the creators of the manuscript?

I began to study the letters. They felt familiar. Compared to the Latin alphabet, and to my own handwriting, I could recognize shapes resembling o, e, i, a, w, f, p, s, r, k, t.

When reading the Voynich text with these letters, it sounded like a blend of German, English, and Norwegian, perhaps something like Dutch. Not meaningful, but a sound, with occasional glimpses of sense.



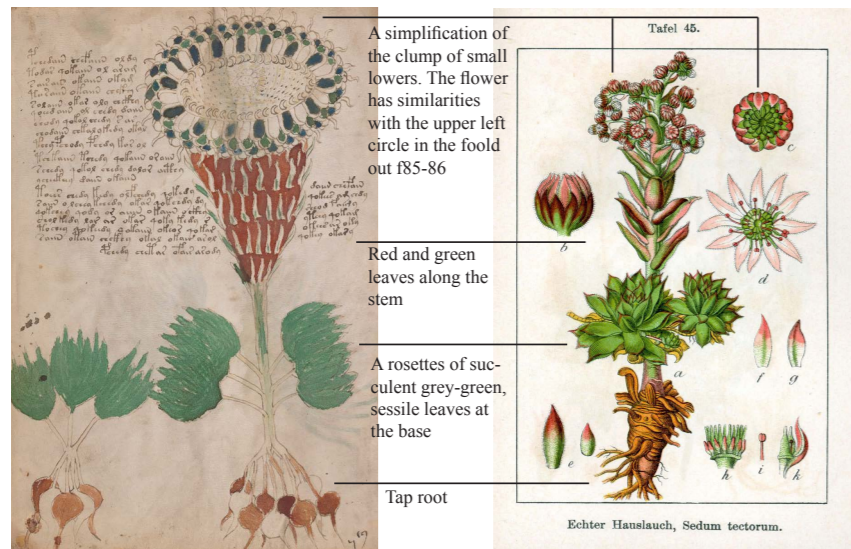
8

IDENTIFYING PLANTS

I tried to identify the plants. Despite their abstraction, many could be compared to real species.

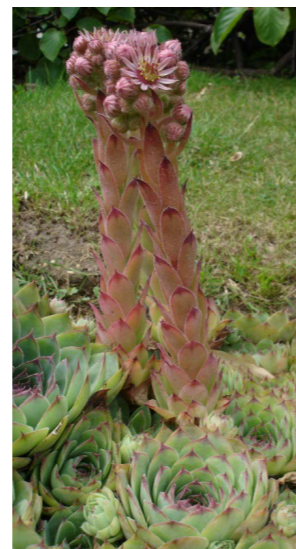
Using my tentative reading of the letters, I began searching for plant names.

f40v *Sempervivum tectorum* / Roof houseleek, earwort, thunderplant



F40v.

*Sempervivum tectorum*. Johann Georg Sturm, Jacob Sturm, Deutschlands Flora in Abbildungen (1796).

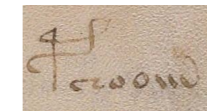


*Sempervivum tectorum*. By Bouba, CC BY-SA 3.0

WINDFLOWER

One of the first names was *blouwin*. The first letter could be read as *p* or *b*. In the middle were shapes resembling *o* and *u*, and at the end something like *w* and *n*. Since the flower in the image was blue, I searched for names related to "blue" and "wind."

I found *windflower*. The resemblance was striking. Windflower has a distinct form, with a single large blue flower with a brush-like tip in the middle, a taproot, and two types of leaves. The higher leaves are brush-like, while lower down there is a set of carrot-like leaves.

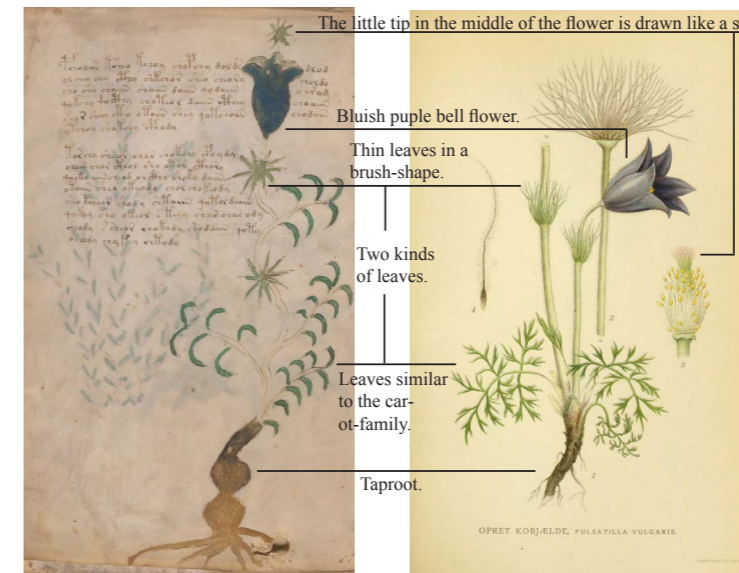


Transliteration: blouwin  
 Middle English: blouwind (also, win, vind)  
 Translation: blue wind



Folio 4v.

f4v *Pulsatilla vulgaris* / Windflower



F4v.

*Pulsatilla vulgaris*. *Billeder af nordens flora*, Carl Axel Lindmann, (1917).



*Pulsatilla vulgaris*, Marco Schmidt CC BY-SA 3.0

COMMON DOCK

Another folio where both words and image correspond to the same species is 14r. The second word on this folio is “lapach”, close to Lapacia, a Middle English plant name for any dock-like plant. The image shows a plant that resembles common dock, with its red, unbranched stem and arrow-shaped leaves that grow from a rosette at the ground and along the stem. The leaves point upwards, its root forms creeping rhizomes, and at the top it has clumps of racemes with tiny red flowers that later become purplish.

The first word on the folio, “blodviving”, can indicate the plant’s medical use, as it can be translated to “blood-vivifying.” This aligns with, for example, Culpeper’s description of docks:

“All Docks are under Jupiter; of which the Red Dock, which is commonly called Bloodwort; cleanseth the blood and strengthens the liver.”

“Bloodwort is exceeding strengthening to the liver, and procures good blood, being as wholesome a pot herb as any growing in a garden.”

Abbreviations in the following pages:

MED: The Middle English dictionary: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>

TH: Tony Hunt, *Plant Names of Medieval England*, D.S.Brewer, Cambridge, 1989.

\* Nicholas Culpeper: *The Complete Herbal* (also published as *The English Physician*) 1652. under *Dock*.

blod(vi)v(inj) lapaz  
 blod-viving Lapacia  
 blod-vivifying dock

MED: *Lapacia* = any dock-like plant  
 Modern English: *Common dock* = *Rumex acetosa*



Folio 14r.

f14r *Rumex acetosa* / *Common dock, sorrel*



F14r.

*Rumex acetosa*. Blackwell, E., *curious botanical* (1737-1739)

*Rumex acetosa*. Donald Hobern. CC BY 2.0  
 Close up by Stefan.lefnaer, CC BY-SA 4.0

## DWARF ELDER

I began to use the register *Plant Names of Medieval England* by Tony Hunt to find more plant names. In folio 23r, the text begins with the word “birth-lith-worting.” It can be interpreted as “a herbal preparation for birth-relief.” *Lith* means relief in Middle English, and in the register of Tony Hunt, *lith* is also found in the plant name *lithwort*, used for dwarf elder.

The Greek physician, pharmacologist, and botanist Dioscorides (40–90 AD) writes about the dwarf elder in his *De materia medica*, a precursor to all modern pharmacopeias:

“Boiled with water for bathing, it softens the womb and opens the vagina, and sets to rights any disorders around it.”\*

A similar use of dwarf elder is still found in England in 1652, when Culpeper writes in *The Complete Herbal* or *The English Physician*:

“It mollifies the hardness of the mother, if women sit thereon, and opens their veins, and brings down their courses.”\*\*

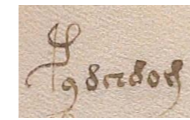
To “mollify the hardness of the mother” means to help relax the uterus.

The Voynich image matches dwarf elder very well, with its opposite pinnate leaves bearing five to nine leaflets. Its flowers are white and purple, and the plant grows in large groups, spreading through horizontal underground stem rhizomes.

There are other features in the illustration that can be compared to dwarf elder. It seems that propagation methods are noted in the drawings. Dwarf elder is notable here because it propagates easily through multiple methods: root cuttings (1), layering of branches (2), division (3), basal cuttings (4), and seeds (5).

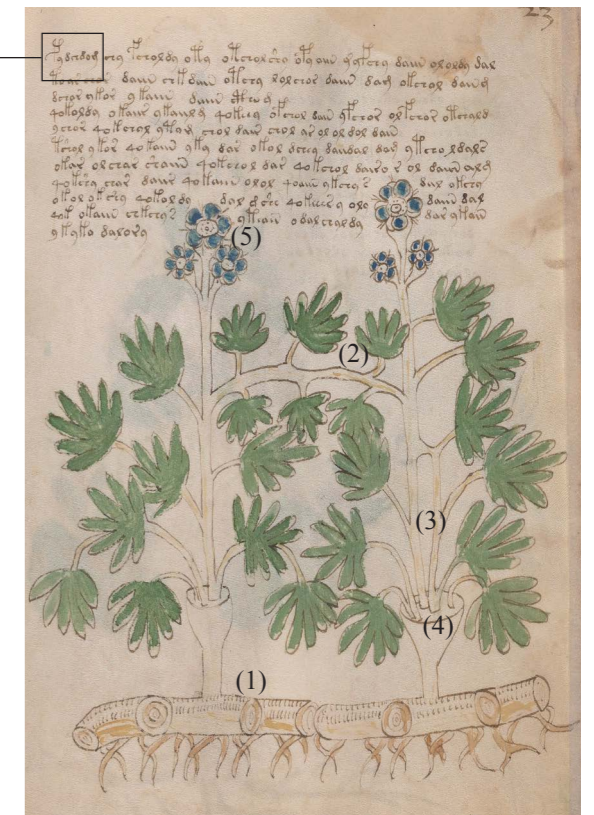
\* Dioscorides, *de materia medica*, 4-175. CHAMAI AKTE.

\*\* *The Complete Herbal* (also published as *The English Physician*), Nicholas Culpeper, 1652, under *The Dwarf Elder*.



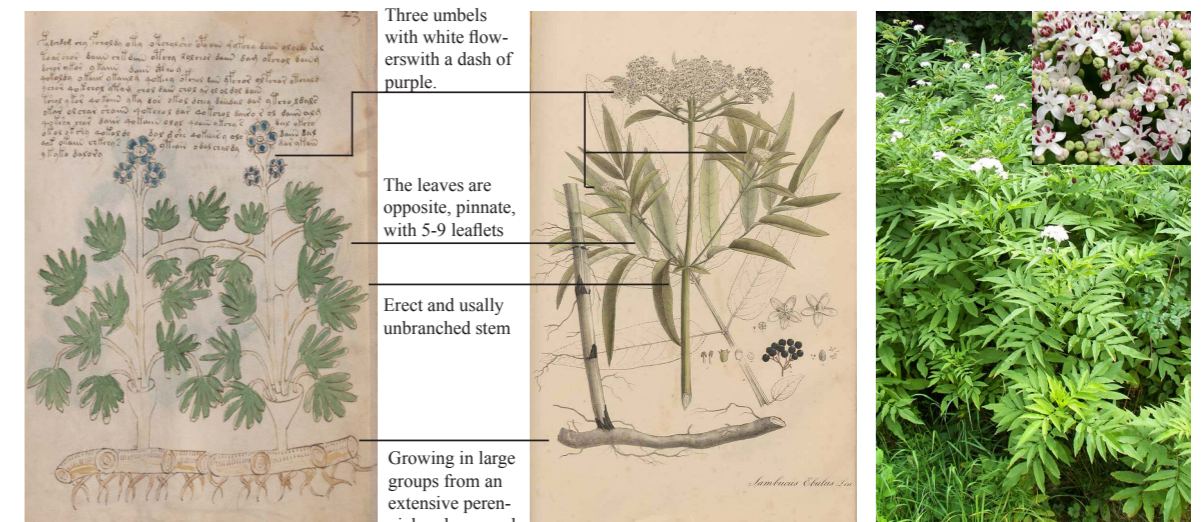
b(ij)(rd) (li)d w(a)(rdnj)  
birth lith-worting  
birth-relief-herbal preparation

TH: *Lithwort* = *Sambucus ebulus*, dwarf elder



Folio 23r.

## f23r *Sambucus ebulus* / Dwarf elder



F23r.

Three umbels with white flowers with a dash of purple.

The leaves are opposite, pinnate, with 5-9 leaflets

Erect and usually unbranched stem

Growing in large groups from an extensive perennial underground stem rhizome

*Sambucus ebulus*, Nees von Esenbeck, T.F.L., Wijhe (Weyhe), M.F., *Plantae medicales* (1828-1833).

*Sambucus ebulus*. Willow - CC BY 2.5 and Аймагна хикари - CC0



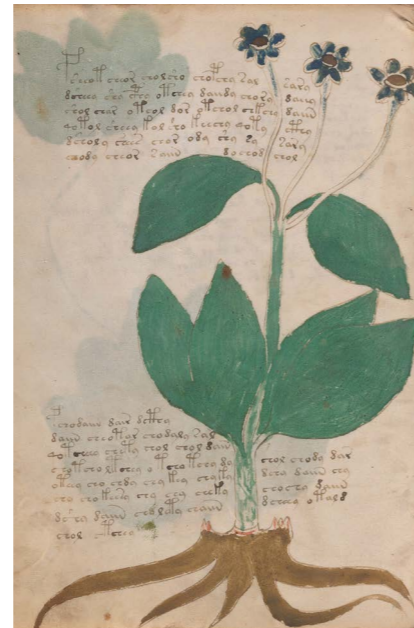


The large foldout can be assumed to provide a context for the entire manuscript, as its images recur in various sections.

The umbrella shape in the foldout can be associated with the “umbrellas” in the balneological section, while the tower-like shapes at the centre of the foldout can be compared to the jars in the pharmacological section. The herbs in the pharmacological section also appear in the botanical section.



One of the umbrella-like circles in the foldout (above). A similar umbrella-shape appears in folio 75r, in the balneological section.



The tower-like jars in the foldout (left) resemble the jars in the pharmacological section, like the one in f 99r (right)



The same root and leaf are depicted in both folio 47v, in the botanical section (above), and in folio 102r2, in the pharmacological section (below).

### COPYING AS METHOD

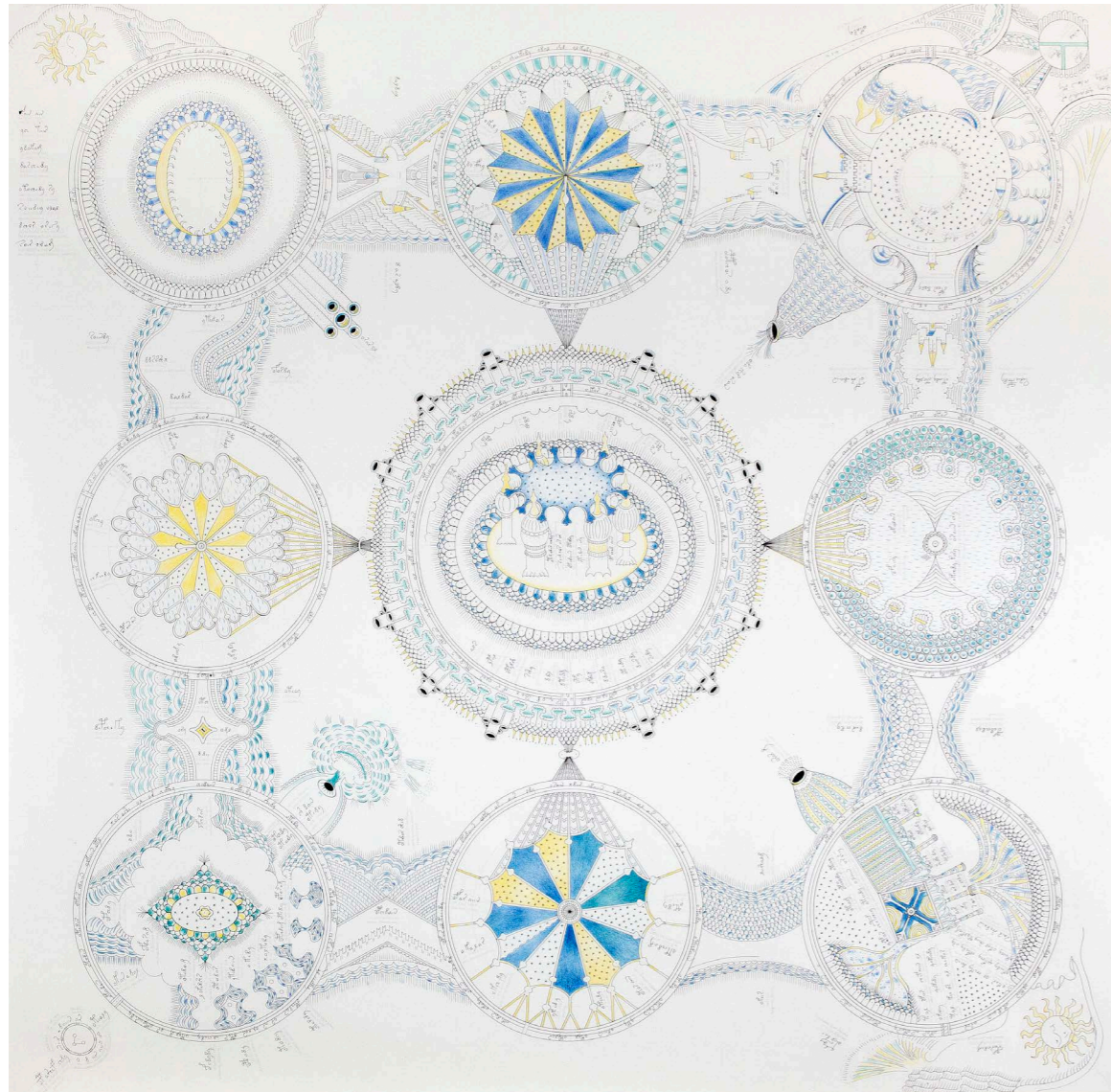
My method to continue the decoding of the images and text, was to copy the foldout by hand. Drawing is a way of seeing, and when context is missing, careful observation became both method and foundation.

I first drew the foldout at double size, learning its forms, testing and adjusting the decoding, moving back and forth between words and images, circling around the system.

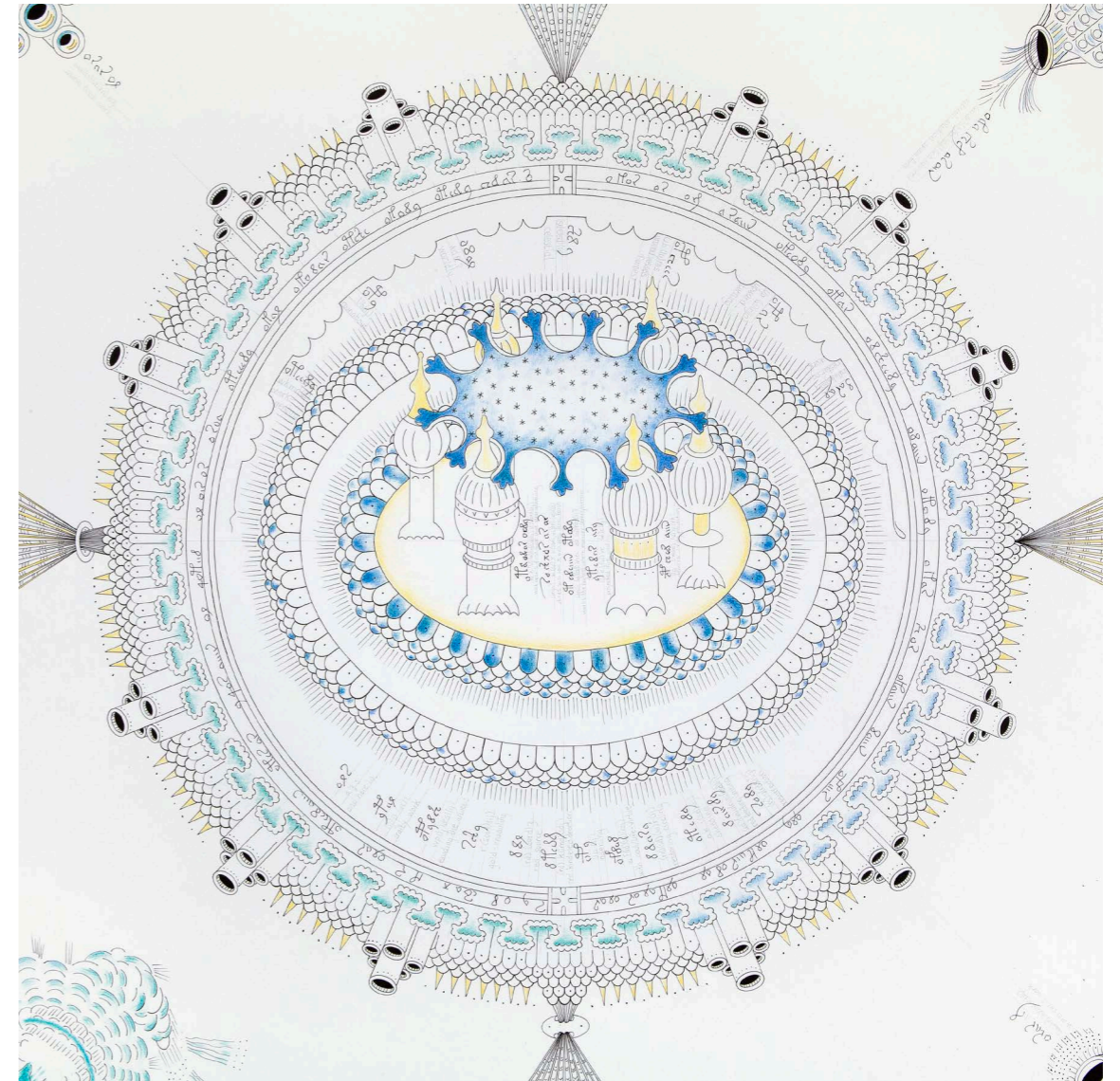


Foldout study, 90 x 90 cm, pencil, gouache and ink, 2023.

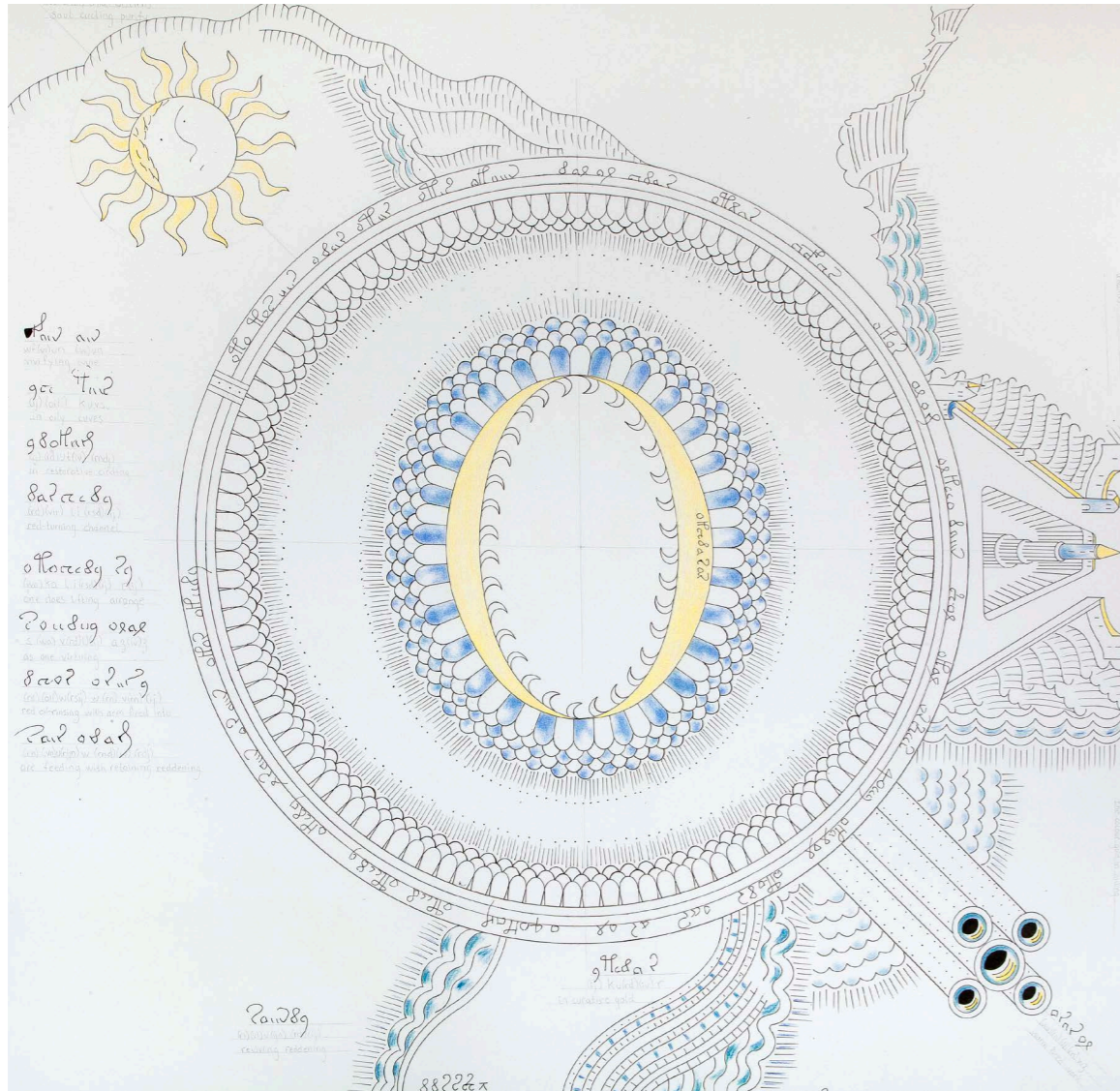
Then I copied it four times at 180 × 180 cm.



Foldout study, scale 4:1, 180 × 180 cm (2024-2026), pencil, coloured pencils and pen.  
Above: The original (45 × 45 cm) in relative size.



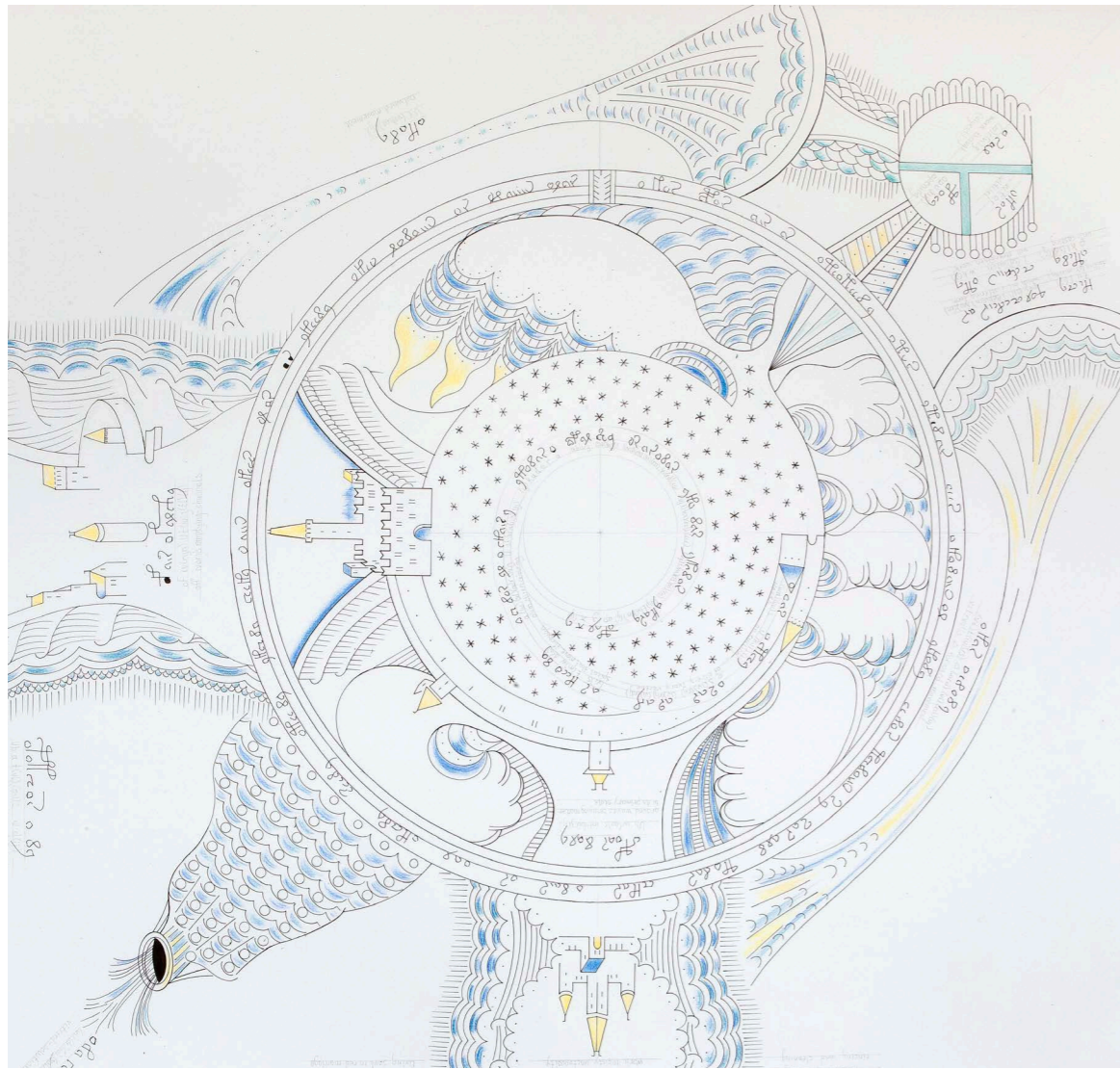
Detail, the centre circle.



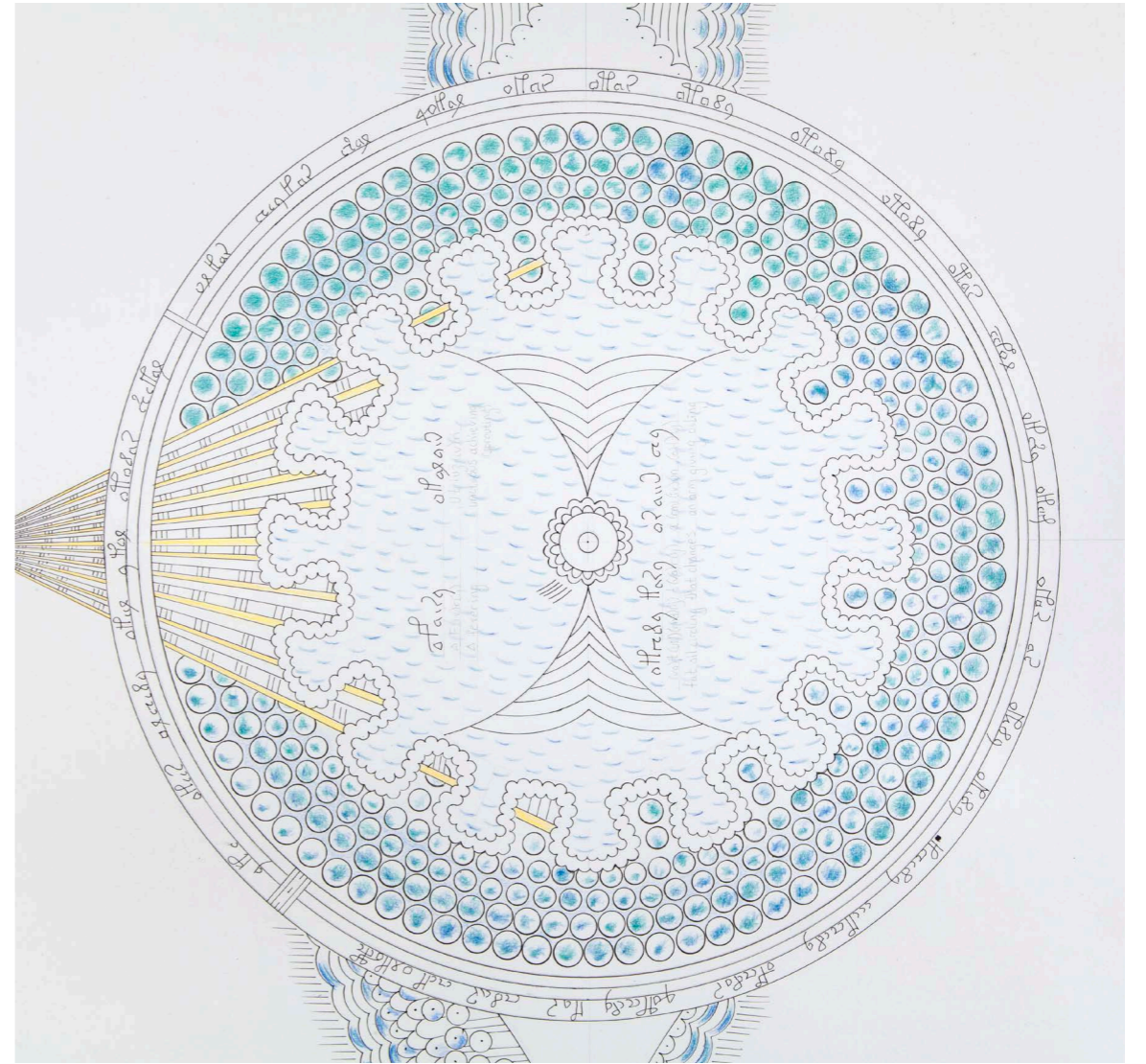
Detail, corner circle one.



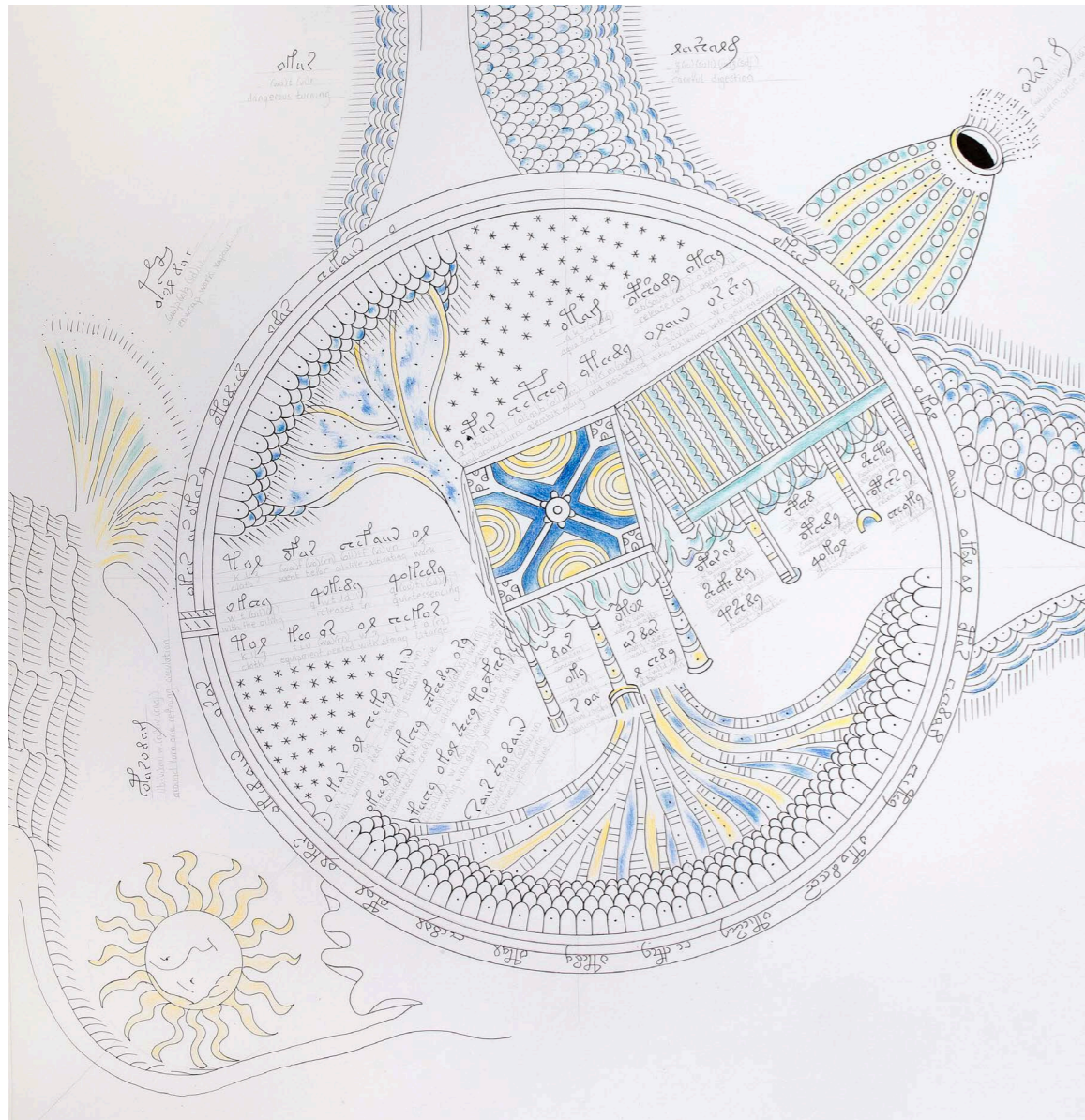
Detail, intermediary circle one, path two and three.



Detail, corner circle two.



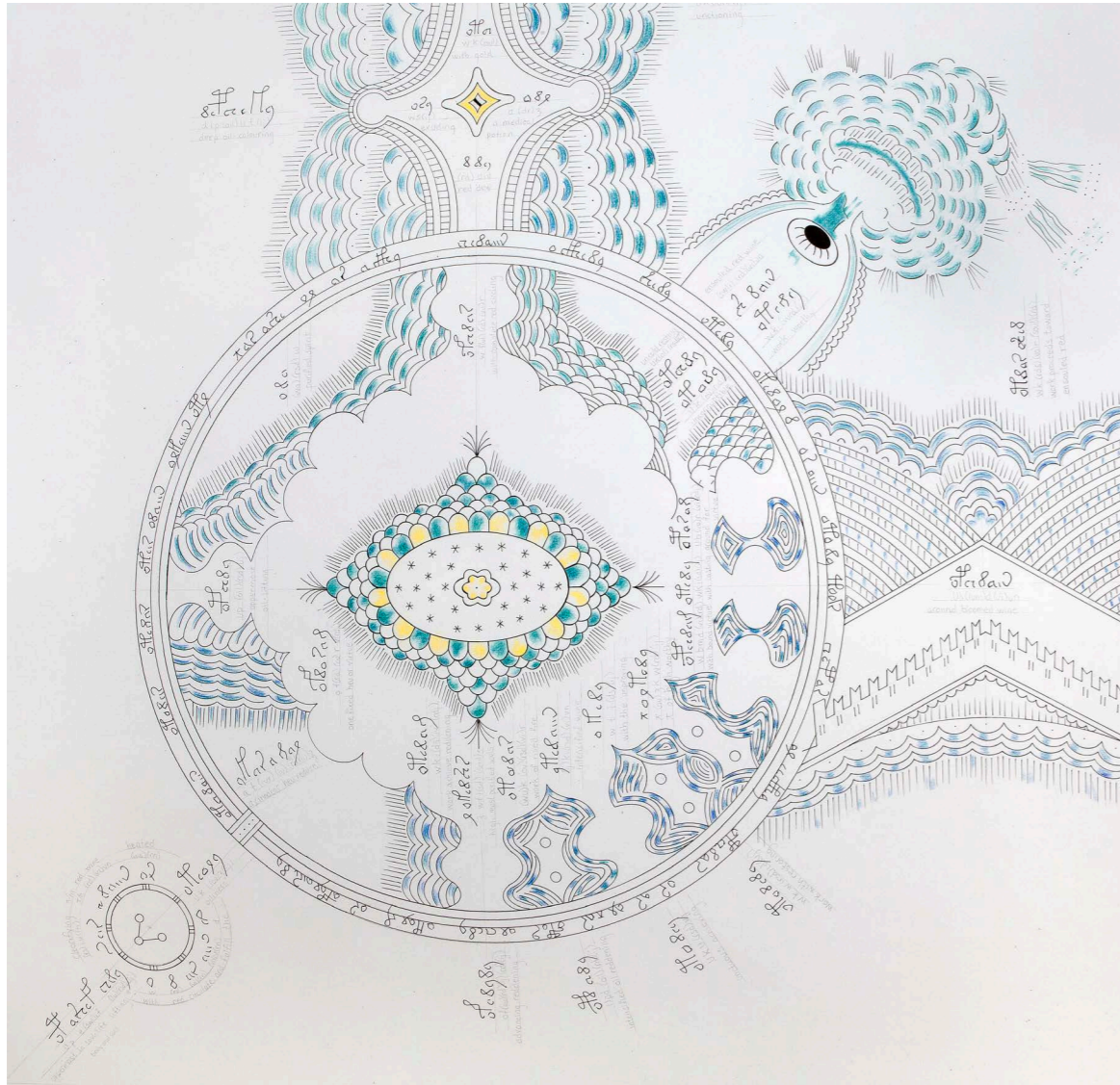
Detail, intermediary circle two.



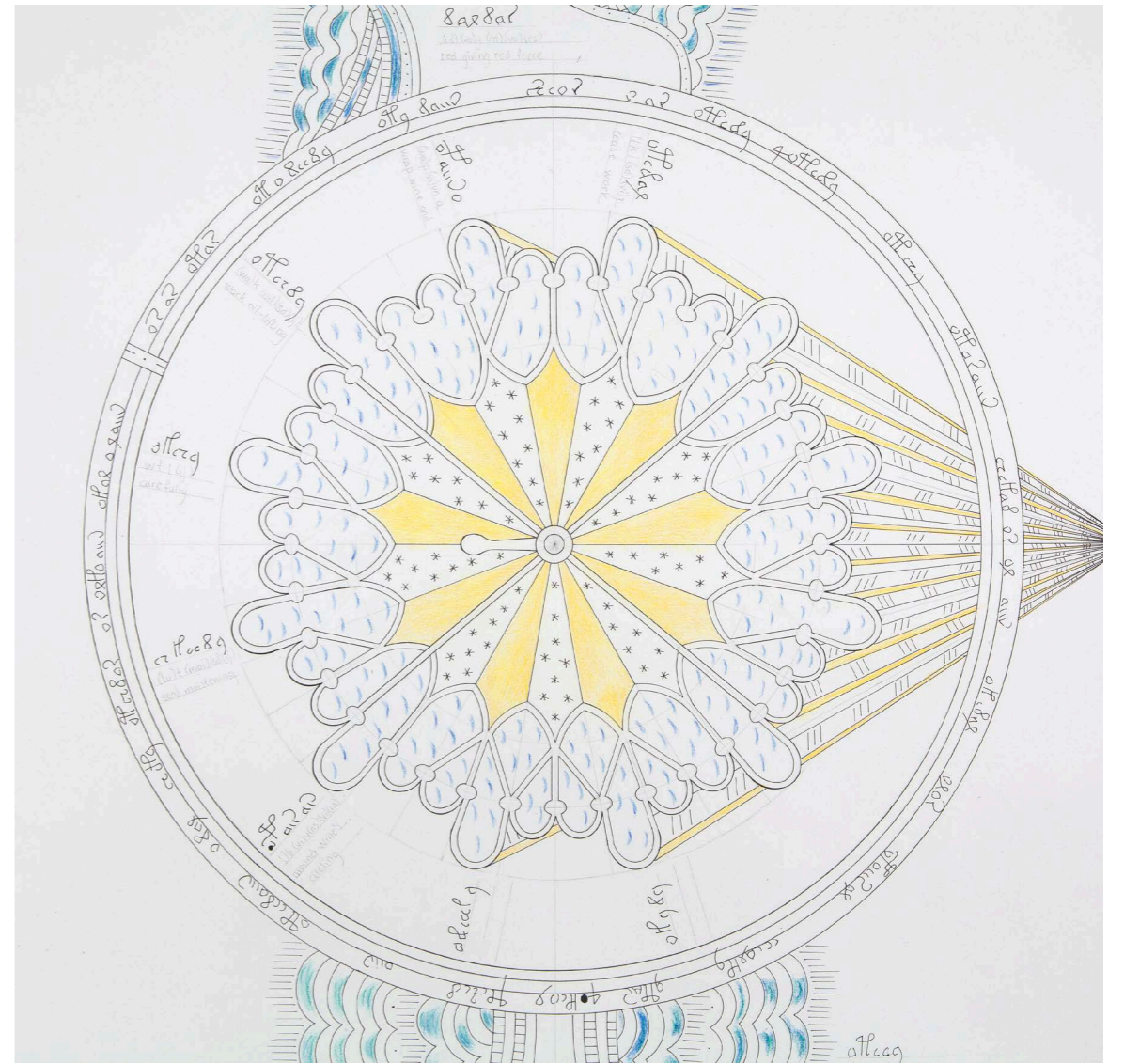
Detail, corner circle three.



Detail, intermediary circle three.



Detail, corner circle four.



Detail, intermediary circle three.

## STEP TWO OF THE DECODING

When drawing the largest copy, I noticed details in the letters that allowed them to be distinguished. Shapes I had read as the same cipher, like *o*, actually varied with one stroke, two, three, even four. Some had angles at the top, some at the bottom. These were entirely different letters. The same applied to other forms. Subtle details, like a curved or a straight ending, distinguished *p* from *b*, *f* from *v*.

By studying these variations, including overlapping strokes, I saw that ligatures went far beyond the obvious combinations. Some were easy to spot, like  $\text{p} + \text{p}$  (*pp*) and  $\text{cc}$  (*ll*) forming  $\text{cc}$  (*pl*). Others were more subtle, like the merging of *v* and *o*. Many combinations were common, like the examples in the table to the right. Others appeared only once, and letters could even bind across words.

With these details the short Futhark-like decoding from the first step could be extended into a complete alphabet. With a full alphabet, the earlier ambiguities when interpreting words were reduced, leaving only the usual challenges of reading old handwriting, like recognizing letters, interpreting words, and understanding language.

## THE LOGIC OF THE CIPHER

This second stage revealed a logic. A set of basic letters (right) could be combined into many forms (next page).

There is something suggestive in this. The letters merge, their individual shapes partly hidden. It feels as if the idea behind the system is combination, interweaving, or conjunction. At the same time, it is practical. It is efficient in both space and time.

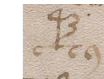
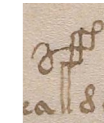
With this decoding, it was possible to work simultaneously with the images and words to build, or reveal, a context.

## Singel letters

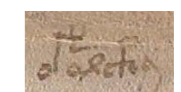
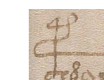
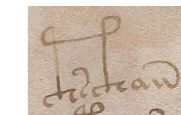
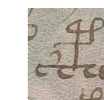
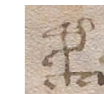
a	Δ	
b	⌘	
c		
d	8	
e	a/c	
f	⌘	
g	8 (gh/ch)	
h		
i	c	
j	)	
k	⌘	
l	cc	
m	cc	
n		
o	o	
p	⌘	
q	Δ	
r	2	
s	2	
t	⌘	
u	l	
v	ll o	
w	∩	

## Examples of ligatures

rd	8	sd	8	
	2+8		2+8	
rdj	8	sdj	8	
	2+8+		2+8+	
rn	2	sn	2	
	2+∩		2+∩	
rndj	8	<sup>(sh)</sup> srjn	2	
	2+∩+8+		2+∩+∩+	
<sup>(sh)</sup> sr	2	swl	2	
	2+2		2+∩+cc	
oil	cc	ul	cc	
	∩+cc		∩+cc	
kl	⌘	tl	⌘	
	⌘+cc		⌘+cc	
pl	⌘	bl	⌘	
	⌘+cc		⌘+cc	
ijn	∩	sla	2	
	∩+∩		2+cc+∩	
vi	a	vo	a	
	∩+c		∩+∩	
va	∩	wa	∩	
	∩+∩		∩+∩	
ij	∩	lu	a	
	∩+		∩+	



One of a kind ligature.



Some examples on how letters can be bound together across the word.

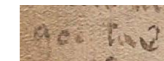
SINGLE LETTERS		COMBINATION LETTERS										SYMBOLS					
a	o	au	a	va	n												
b	ff	ff	ff	ff													
c																	
d	8	sd	8	rd	8	rsd	8	vsd	8	rnd	8	sdj	8	rdj	8	rdj	8
e	a																
f	ff	f/v	ff	ff	ff	ff											
g	e	ch	gh	g	g												
h																	
i	c	u	a	ij	g	ij	g	ij	g	ij	g						
j	j	ij	ij	ij	ij												
k	ff	kl	ff	tl	ff	fl	ff	vl	ff	pl	ff	bl	ff	kl	ff	ff	ff
l	cc	ul	cc	lu	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc	cc
m	cc	m	o														
n	n	o															
o	o	ou	o	ou	o												
p	ff	ff	ff	ff	ff	ff											
q	4	ff															
r	2	rn	2	rs	2	rl	2	rn	2	rn	2	rn	2	rn	2	rn	2
s	2	sn	2	so	2	sl	2	sn	2	sol	2	sol	2	sol	2	sol	2
t	ff	ff	ff	ff	ff	ff											
u	v	ou	o	ff													
v	ll	vl	a	ve	a	vl	ll										
w	o	wa	o	ff	ff												
x																	
y																	
z																	

PART 2

INTERPRETING THE IMAGES

Table of deciphering, 100 x100 cm, pencil on paper, 2026.

The following chapter presents interpretations of the Voynich texts. It is structured as follows:



1. Transliteration: (ij) (oil) kuvs
2. Middle English\*: ĩ oil cuves
- 3. English: in oil vats**

1. In the transliteration, ligatures (combined letters) are written in parentheses.

2. The transliteration is then compared to words in the Middle English Dictionary.

**3. The modern English translations are listed in the Middle English Dictionary.**

*Letters in cursive represent omitted letters.*

**Interpretations are written in bold blue.**



Folio 85v-86r, the large Voynich foldout.

## THE LARGE FOLDOUT

Paintings in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are, for the most part, anchored firmly in a story.\* I believe this is even more true for images in a manuscript that are accompanied by text.

The large foldout in the Voynich Manuscript forms a rich system of images. There is still little

agreement on how these images should be understood. For years, researchers and online forums have discussed them, often comparing them to illustrations in other medieval manuscripts.

A common theory, and often the first impression,

is that the foldout is a map. This comes from the presence of architectural forms such as towers, castles, and fortifications. There is also a path connecting the circles, and elements that resemble landscape, like cliffs, waves, clouds, mountains, suns, and stars. These figurative elements are the easiest to focus on.

Even though there *are* similarities to European cities, reading the image as a map has not led to a clear or meaningful interpretation.

When interpreting the foldout, I find it important to move beyond the recognizable forms and also consider the structure, as well as the abstract and graphic shapes.

## A DIAGRAM, NOT A MAP

The structure of the foldout consists of eight connected circles arranged in a square around a larger central circle. Four of the outer circles are directly linked to the center.

This structure can be read as a diagram rather than a map. If it is a diagram, the images can operate either literally or metaphorically, or both.

The corner circles differ from the intermediary ones. Outside them are small circular symbols, a sun in the upper left and lower right, a T-and-O-like form in the upper right, and a clock-like shape in the lower left.

Attached to the corner circles are inward-pointing forms that can resemble tubes, mountains, volcanoes, or clouds. In the upper-right circle, there are shapes like large waves, with smaller wave-like forms appearing along the path and within several circles.

Although the diagram is circular, it seems to have a beginning. A path appears at the upper-left corner of the foldout and continues into one of the circles, suggesting a starting point in line with the European convention of reading from

the upper left.

As the path moves through each circle, it changes shape. This is one of the key observations.

## SOUL AND THE CHANGING PATH

In engaging with the diagram, I looked for a framework that would allow the elements to make sense together.

The first insight came through a single word and its placement. Positioned at the starting point of the path in the upper-left corner, I read *sooul*, assuming it was a spelling variation of “soul.”



The first word in the upper left corner of the diagram.



When this word is combined with the idea of a path changing shape and moving through stages, one possible context becomes especially compelling, the alchemical purification of the soul.

The alchemical purification of the soul can be understood in several ways. It can be seen as a path of transformation, like a pilgrimage, involving both the earthly and the spiritual. It is often expressed through images of sun, stars, water, mountains, towers, flowers, and landscapes with cliffs and mines.

At the same time, it also has a practical side, in the making of gold, and in the distillation of substances used in medicine. The context of medicine opened up when I came across the picture in the next page, from Hieronymus Brunschwig’s *Large Book of Distillation* (1512)\*.

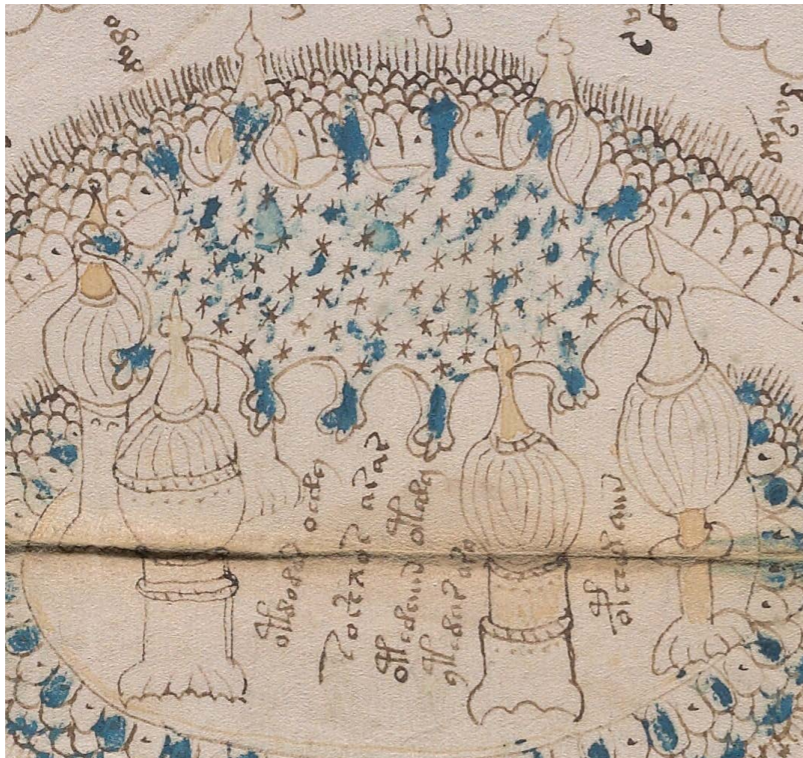
\* *Changes of signification in Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights*. Albert Cook, Oud Holland, 1984, Vol. 98, No. 2, p. 76.

\* *Liber de arte distillandi de compositis*, Hieronymus Brunschwig, Strasbourg (1512).

Two pharmacists making potion. Page XCIII, Brun-  
schwig, Hieronymus, *Liber de  
arte distillandi de compositis*,  
Strasbourg, 1512.



At the center of the Voynich  
diagram there are six  
tower-like vessels holding a  
vault with stars.



## THE MEDICINE VESSELS

In Brunshwig's picture (left, above), two phar-  
macists are preparing a potion. The jars on the table between them are vessels used in the process  
of making medicine. They can be understood as  
medicinal vessels.

These jars closely resemble those in the central  
circle of the Voynich diagram (left, below). Sim-  
ilar vessels also appear in the pharmacological

section of the Voynich Manuscript (under).

It is evident that scholars like Brunshwig  
"practiced the art of the apothecary to make  
medicine, but, more important, to save their  
souls."\*\*

This suggests that medicine and the soul were  
connected, and that the medicine jars can con-  
tribute to the reading of the word soul and of a  
changing path.

Brunshwig  
The pharmacist's  
medicine jars



Voynich  
The large foldout diagram



centre circle

Voynich  
The pharmacological section



Folio 89r2



Folio 99r.

\*\* Laurinda S. Dixon, *Bosch's Garden of Delights Triptych: Remnants of a "Fossil" Science*, *The art Bulletin*, Vol LXIII, No 1 (March 1981), p. 99.

THE DISTILLATION VESSELS

A third addition to the medical context emerged when I further examined Brunschwig's book\* and found his vessels for distillation. These vessels were used to produce medicinal waters.

What initially appeared in the Voynich diagram to be part of the landscape, such as mountains, volcanoes, and clouds, took on new meaning when compared with Brunschwig's distillation vessels.

In one circle, a form resembles equipment used to extract the *quintessence* from gold (1). In another, it recalls a vessel for *circulation* and

digestion (2). A third mirrors apparatus for producing *aqua fortis* (3). In the last, a cloud-like shape resembles a vessel for distilling wine, *aqua vitae* (4).

Alchemists often referred to their vessels as "mountains,"\*\* so a dual interpretation, as both mountains and vessels, is consistent with historical practice.

Brunschwig's *Large Book of Distillation* was published in 1512. This is later than the carbon dating of the Voynich Manuscript's vellum (1404–1438), but his book draws on chemical and pharmacological knowledge and techniques that were in use in earlier centuries.



\* *Liber de arte distillandi de compositis*, Strasbourg, 1512.

\*\* Laurinda S. Dixon, *Bosch's Garden of Delights Triptych: Remnants of a "Fossil" Science*, *The art Bulletin*, Vol LXIII, No 1 (March 1981), p. 106.

1. Extracting quintessence from gold



Page CXXXI \* : Instruments of good clay, "especially made for the subtle method by which one can extract or obtain the quintessence from gold."

2. Circulation and digestion



Page XXXVII \* : A vessel "for digestion and circulation, called *circulatorium*, their forms are of many kinds".

3. Distilling aqua fortis



Page XXXVI \* : Attachment glass to "distill strong water (*aqua fortis*), wherein to receive the spirits and vapors."

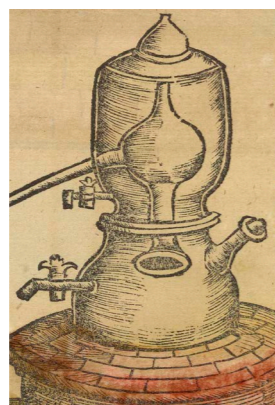
4. Distillation of wine, aqua vitae



Page XXXIX \* : The vessels "in which wine is commonly distilled".

AQUA VITAE

To continue the investigation of Brunschwig, distillation of medicine and the concept of the soul, the circle in the lower left corner of the diagram is particularly interesting. This is the circle with the cloud-like form resembling Brunschwig's vessel to distill *aqua vitae*.



Brunschwig's vessel for distillation of wine, *aqua vitae*.

Brunschwig did not consider himself an alchemist. His work focused on the technical distillation of medicinal waters. Yet his craft drew heavily on earlier alchemists such as John of Rupescissa (c. 1310–1370) and Geber (d. c. 806–816).

Rupescissa is closely associated with *aqua vitae*, distilled wine, also called the soul of wine.

When the Voynich shape resembling Brunschwig's vessel for distilling wine is oriented correctly, the clock-like form on the opposite side of the circle aligns with the alchemical symbol for *aqua vitae*.

For Rupescissa, *aqua vitae* was a medicine. It was incorruptible, capable of extracting the virtue, the *quintessence*, the vital essence, from substances such as plants. He used many names for this vital essence, calling it "our heaven," "quintessence," and "brennyng watre, the soule of wyne or the spirit of wyne, and aqua vite, watre of life."\*



The fourth corner circle.



The symbol for aqua vitae in *Basil Valentine's Last Will and Testament*, 1671.

In the text around the symbol of aqua vitae, using the decoding from step two and the Middle English Dictionary, I read something like an instruction:

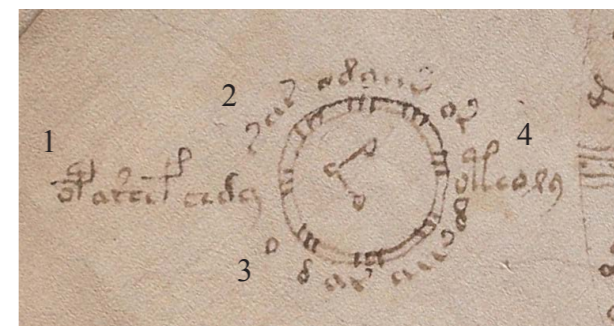
"uppermost, with the body and soul, oil-lifting, purify with red (toxic) substance heated, with redcircling, marrying (uniting) the unctuous essence."

It reads as an instruction to fully purify the body

and soul by heating and circulating the red toxic substance, to marry (unify) the oiliness. Red is the symbolic color of the final stage in the alchemical Great Work, and this is the last corner circle in the diagram.

According to the Middle English Dictionary, the word "oil" was used alchemically to refer to "a substance extracted from metals or other elements, a quintessence."

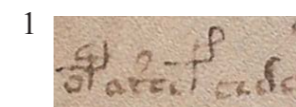
purify with red toxic substance heating



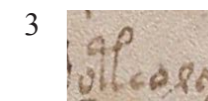
uppermost with body and soul oil-lifting

unctuosity (oily essence)

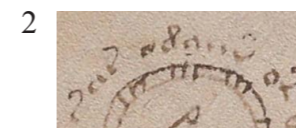
with red circulation unifying the



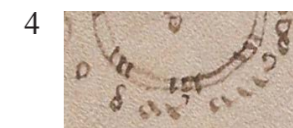
Up e (sul)if (lu)(rsd)(ij)  
up ē soul-lif\* lushing\*\*  
**uppermost in soul-life/body and soul lifting**



UkiU3(ij)  
unctuōsitē  
**oiliness/unctuosity**



(sr)iu(m) e (rd) (iv)un (wa)(rnij)  
skīren ē red vevyn warming  
**purify in red (toxic) substance heating**



(wo) rd (vi)v(ijn) d  
with red vēring\*\*\* wiving the  
**with red circulating marrying the**

\* Page 106-107. Halversen, Marguerite A. *The consideration of quintessence: an edition of a Middle English translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de consideratione de quintae essentiae omnium rerum with introduction, notes and commentary*. Thesis, 1998. Transcription of Rupescissa, The Consideration of Quintessence, Book I.

\* MED: *Lif*: The body, the bodily members as a whole. *Lif and soule*: body and soul, as adv.: wholly, altogether. *Soule and lif*, all of oneself; as adv.: wholly

\*\* MED: *Luchen*: cp. MnE dial. lutch to lift.

\*\*\*MED: cp. MScot. vire, wire to turn, wind about or whirl (sth.), throw.

## QUINTESSENCE

*Aqua vitae* was considered incorruptible because it was an extraction of the *quintessence*.

*Quintessence* was believed to be the fifth element, incorruptible, life-giving, and healing. It existed in all things and could be extracted through careful distillation processes, often aligned with the movements of the sun and stars.

How Rupescissa associated the medicinal *aqua vitae* with heaven and *quintessence* is particularly striking in relation to the center circle of the Voynich diagram (right, above). In the central circle, medicine vessels hold a dome filled with stars.

In medieval imagery, such a dome represents heaven. In this way, the dome above the medicine vessels can be understood as “our heaven,” the *quintessence*, and the medicine itself.

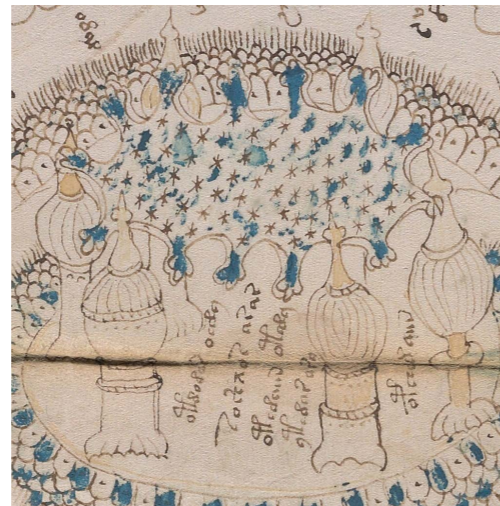
At the very center of the fourth corner circle, the circle of *aqua vitae*, the *quintessence*, is a flower among stars (right, middle). Flowers were sometimes used as symbols for *quintessence*. One particularly interesting example is a diagram associated with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1690) (right, below).

In Leibniz’s diagram, the four elements, *fire*, *air*, *water*, and *earth*, are arranged around qualities such as *heat*, *moisture*, *cold*, and *dryness*. At the center lies the fifth element, *quintessence*, represented as a flower.

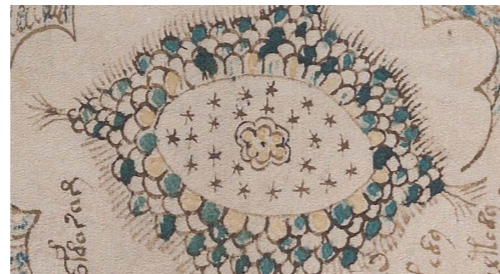
This is significant not only because the flower is representing *quintessence*. This diagram also helps illuminate the structure of the Voynich diagram.

Although Leibniz’s diagram postdates the Voynich Manuscript, it interprets the logical system of Ramon Lull (c. 1232–1316). Rupescissa is considered part of the Pseudo-Lullian tradition, and the structure of eight connected circles surrounding a central circle is, at its core, the same as the Voynich diagram.

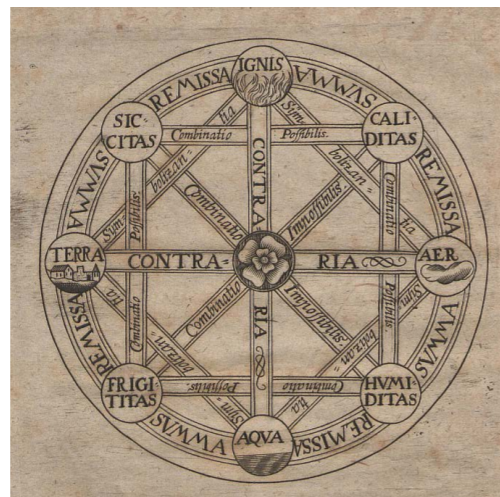
\* *The consideration of quintessence: an edition of a Middle English translation of John of Rupescissa’s Liber de consideratione de quinta essentia omnium rerum with introduction, notes and commentary.* Halversen, Marguerite A. Thesis, 1998. Transcription of Rupescissa, *The Consideration of Quintessence*, Book I, p 115.



The image in the central circle.



The flower among the stars at the centre of the fourth corner circle



Quintessence as a flower. Frontispiece of *De Arte Combinatoria*, G. W. Leibniz, 1690.

## CIRCULAR DIAGRAMS

Hieronymus Brunschwig cites and draws on John of Rupescissa in his *Large Book of Distillation*.\* Rupescissa, in turn, cites and draws on works attributed to Ramon Lull.

Ramon Lull and the Pseudo-Lullian corpus are often associated with circular diagrams. These diagrams typically describe processes that are cosmological, philosophical, or chemical.

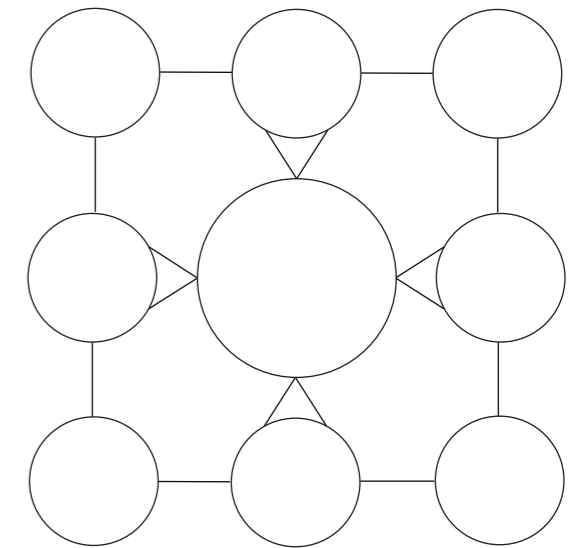
One of the earliest works attributed to Lull, *Testamentum*, was widely read in the 14th and 15th centuries. The Voynich diagram bears notable resemblances to one of its circular diagrams.

In a 1573 copy, the diagram is presented in a squared foldout similar to the Voynich diagram (below, left). The same diagram is found in a version from c. 1425–1450, contemporary with the carbon dating of the Voynich Manuscript (1404–1438) (right, below).

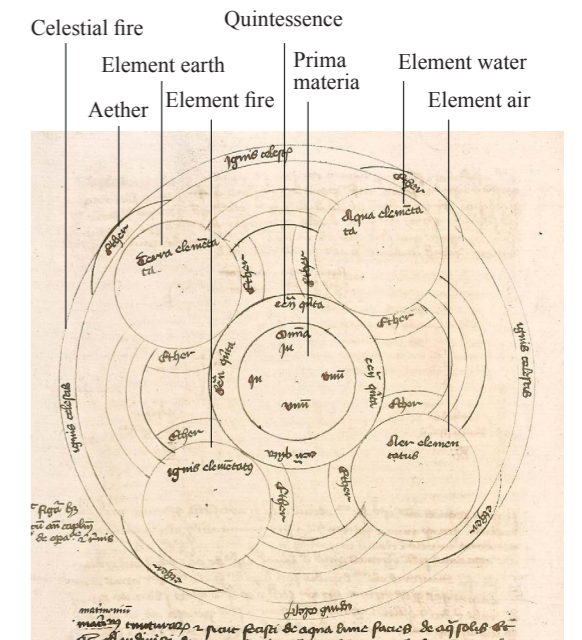
In the *Testamentum*, alchemy is described as a secret art and “a science aimed at producing a single, universal medicine that may be used to achieve many particular ends.”\*



*Testamentum*, 1573, Cologne.



The structure of the Voynich diagram.



*Textus alchymici*, 1425-1450, f 54v. Pseudo-Raymundus Lullus, Arnaldus de Villanova. XXIII.D.132; Národní knihovna České republiky; Praha; Česko. Provided by bi3mw, at <https://www.voynich.ninja/thread-1745-page-9.html>

\* *Distilling Reliable Remedies: Hieronymus Brunschwig’s Liber de arte distillandi (1500) Between Alchemical Learning and Craft Practice.* Tillmann Taape. *Ambix*. 2014 August ; 61(3): 236-256, p. 1.

\*\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700.* Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020, p. 44.

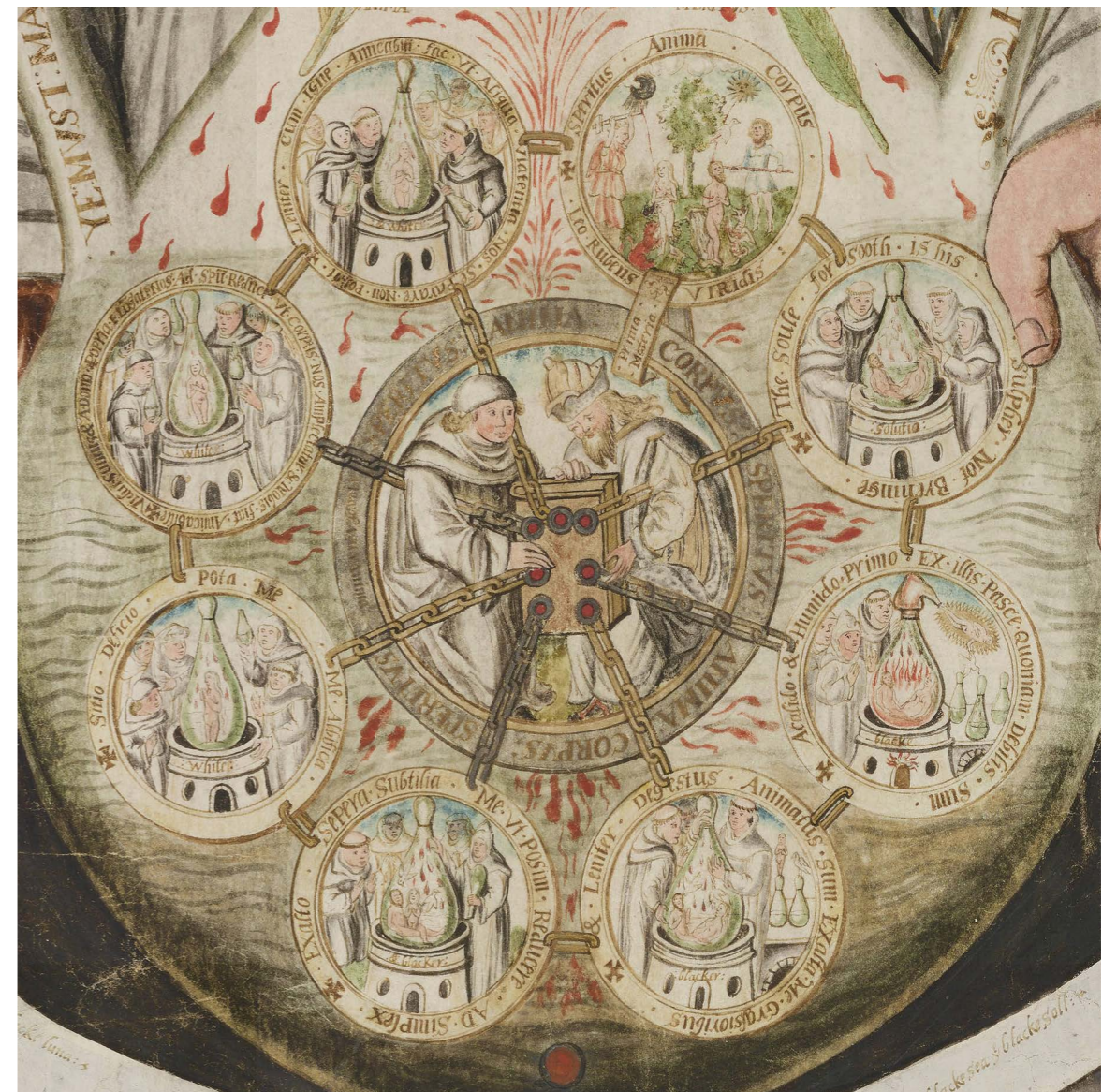
What distinguishes the Voynich diagram is its richness of imagery. While the underlying structure is quite similar, the Voynich system is overlaid with symbolic, figurative, and landscape-like elements. It is as if an abstract system has been wrapped in a visual narrative, or a associative and symbolic connection.

Because the Voynich diagram is rich in imagery, it is useful to compare it to other Pseudo-Lullian illustrations, such as the *Ripley Scroll*. *The Ripley scroll* combines metaphorical and symbolic elements within a circular structure typical of the Pseudo-Lullian tradition.

*The Ripley Scroll* is associated with the English alchemist George Ripley, meaning that the original is broadly contemporary with the carbon dating of the Voynich Manuscript (1404–1438).

Ripley's work survives in several later copies. In one detail of the scroll, the alchemical Great Work is depicted (right). In this illustration, eight circles surround a larger central circle, much like the Voynich diagram and the diagram from *Testamentum*. These eight circles are generally understood as representing stages in the alchemical process, with vessels placed on furnaces within them.

A notable difference is that the *Ripley Scroll* includes human figures, whereas the Voynich diagram relies on abstract shapes, possibly symbolic forms. Yet both employ landscape, architecture, and vessels, creating a shared visual language.



\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700.* Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020, p. 45.

A detail from a copy of *The Ripley Scroll*. Huntington Digital Library, second half of the 16th century.



The fan vault of Bell Harry Tower (1498) with a square structure consisting of a central circle surrounded by eight larger circles, the same arrangement as the Voynich diagram. In addition, three of the Voynich circles contain forms that can be associated with this type of fan vault. Photo: Tobiasvonderhaar, CC BY-SA 3.0.

#### CIRCLES WITH CELESTIAL IMAGES

The circular structure is not only found in alchemical Pseudo-Lullian diagrams. It also appears in Gothic architecture. Some of the architectural forms in the Voynich diagram resemble

vaulted ceilings found in medieval churches. These ceilings often symbolised heaven.

In the paper *Above and Beyond Voynich Canopies: Tents as a Recurring Motif in Beinecke MS 408*, Koen Gheuens and Cary



Detail of the fourth, and last, intermediary circle. Detail of Bell Harry Tower



The cloud border in the second intermediary circle (above) versus the cloud border above the sun in the *Ripley scroll*.

Rapaport show how the shapes in three of the intermediary circles of the Voynich diagram can be associated with vaults, canopies, and tent roofs, as well as their decoration (below).

They state that: *“The custom of heavenly symbols on canopies goes far back into antiquity but we typically see such stars in medieval architecture on ceilings of churches like the Scrovegni chapel in Padua and the Sainte Chapelle in Paris. This is a clear expression of the conception of the sacred space as an image of the cosmos and its ceiling as the heavens”*

According to this interpretation, the forms in three of the intermediary circles in the Voynich diagram that resemble star-like vaults, and be

associated with heaven or the celestial.

One intermediary circle differs. However, it has a cloud border. Cloud borders in medieval illuminations typically surround, for example, heaven, God, or something exalted, such as saints.

A cloud border is also found above the sun in the *Ripley Scroll* (above) and in Gheuens’ and Rapaport’s examples of medieval tent decorations (below).

When the vault shapes and cloud borders are read as representations of the heavens, a symmetrical pattern appears. All the intermediary circles are dominated by a celestial element.



**Figure 6:** Three fragments of tents from the Wenceslas Bible: f219 (A), f240 (B) and f277 (C). The inventory of decorative patterns for tents is very similar to what we see in the VM: wavy, undulating lines, parallel lines and rays, asterisks (B), (dotted) bands of scallops.

This celestial imagery not only creates coherence. These circles are also the ones directly connected to the centre, where “our heaven”, the quintessence, appears as a star-filled vault above the medicine vessels.

The central circle can be understood as the central celestial sphere. This sphere is connected by ray-like forms to celestial images in the four intermediary circles. It is as if it projects its celestial principle or aspect onto the surrounding path.

### THE COLOURS OF QUINTESENCE

The circles in the Voynich foldout are continually infused with the colours blue, bluish-green, yellow, and uncoloured areas.

In *The Consideration of Quintessence*, Rupescissa writes that “quynte essence is of the nature and colour of heuene and our sunne.”\*

Yellow is a typical colour for the sun, and blue the colour of heaven. If this diagram represents quintessence, one can assume that heaven and the sun influence every part of the diagram.

Rupescissa writes that the heavenly sun (gold) and the heavenly heaven (quintessence) are joined together and influence the earth, restoring life and nature:

“And thees two ioigned togedres, that is to seye, quynte essence and gold, haue the condicions of heuently heuene that is aboue and of heuently sunne as possible may be in nature, of creatures that been deedly to restore life and nature loste and renue youthe clerely. And it yeueth kindly helthe as man desireth to haue.”\*

The green colour cannot be explicitly explained

through Rupescissa. Green may be understood as a mixture of the two, blue and yellow combined.

In this sense, it could represent a union of principles: sun (gold) and the heavenly heaven (quintessence), water and fire, or mercury and sulfur, forming something like living nature.



A simplified mapping of the colours: Blue, green, yellow and clear.

\* *The consideration of quintessence : an edition of a Middle English translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de consideratione de quinta essentia omnium rerum with introduction, notes and commentary.* Halvorsen, Marguerite A. Thesis, 1998. Transcription of Rupescissa, *The Consideration of Quintessence*, Book I. Page 109-110

### GRAPHIC SHAPES IN THE DIAGRAM

The key observation of a changing path was useful as an initial clue, directing attention toward alchemy. The exact shapes the path takes after each circle could carry meaning.

A graphic simplification of the paths can be made (right). When simplified, the shapes can be compared to medical, chemical, and alchemical symbols.

Adam McLean writes about these symbols that:

“From the beginning of alchemy, as can be seen through the earliest manuscripts and books, alchemists have always used little graphic symbols, alike to modern day icons, to represent substances or aspects of their alchemical work. Of course, many of these were idiosyncratic, even devised for a single piece of writing, but alchemy matured through the centuries, a body of established alchemical symbols arose, many of which could be universally recognized across the whole of Europe.”\*

### ALCHEMICAL, MEDICAL AND CHEMICAL SYMBOLS

In the following pages, the shapes in the diagram are compared to symbols in:

(1) Basil Valentine’s *Last Will and Testament*, (1671).

(2) A larger collection of symbols from *Medis-inisch-chymisch-und alchemistisches Oraculum*, (1755). Hereby called *Oraculum*.

Since such symbols were never fully standardized, it would be difficult to use them to determine the exact meaning behind the changing shapes of the path. However, they offer a possible reference point for understanding the visual language of the diagram.

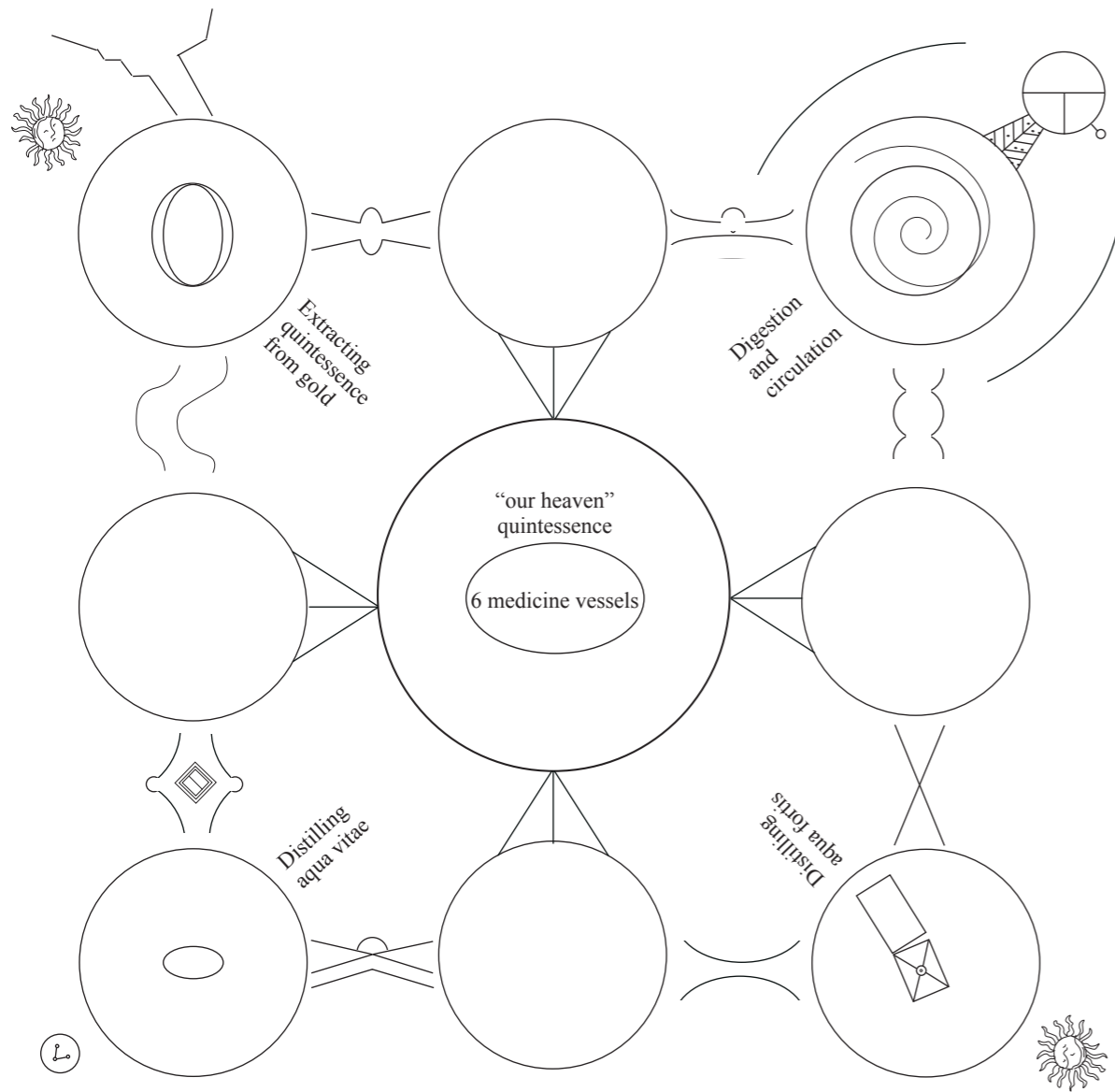
\* *Alchemical Symbols from Medis-inisch-chymisch-und alchemistisches Oraculum*, 1755. Adam McLean, p 1.

It may also be possible to see whether the more graphic aspects of the diagram contribute to the context of medicine, chemistry, and/or alchemy.



Graphic simplifications of the paths.

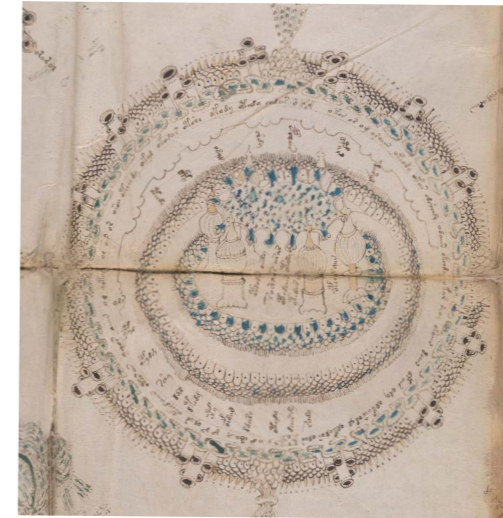
Saturne Lead	♄	♁	♂	♆	♅	Bismuth Bismuth Bismuth	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Jupiter Tinne	♃	♂	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Mars Iron	♂	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Sol Gould	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Venus Copper	♀	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Mercurius Quicksilver	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Luna Silver	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Acetum Acetum distillat	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Er Er	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Alumina Alumina	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Amatruma Amatruma	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Aurum Aurum	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Aqua Aqua	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Aqua Fortis Aqua Regia Aqua Vitæ	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Arcanum Arcanum	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
Ammoniac Ammoniac	♁	♁	♁	♁	♁	Calcare Calcare Calcare	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius	♁	♁	♁	Mercurius Mercurius Mercurius
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
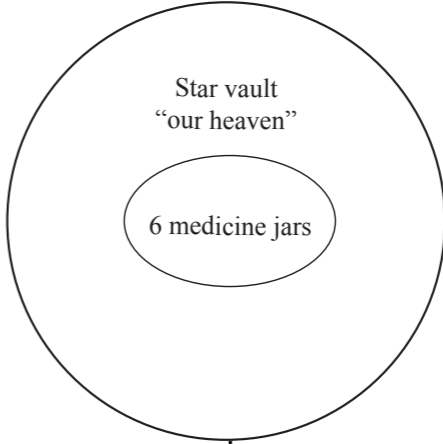

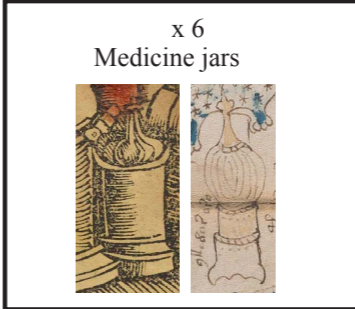
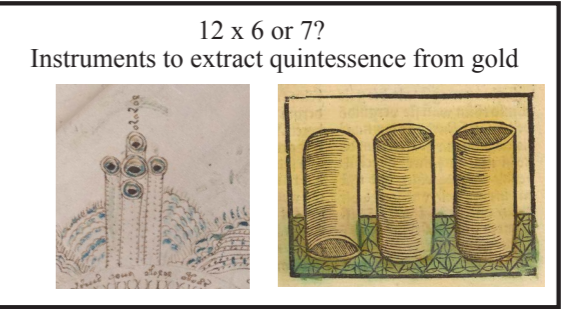

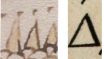


A graphic simplification of the diagram

COMPARISON TABLE

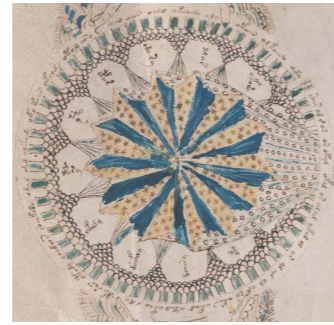
The centre circle



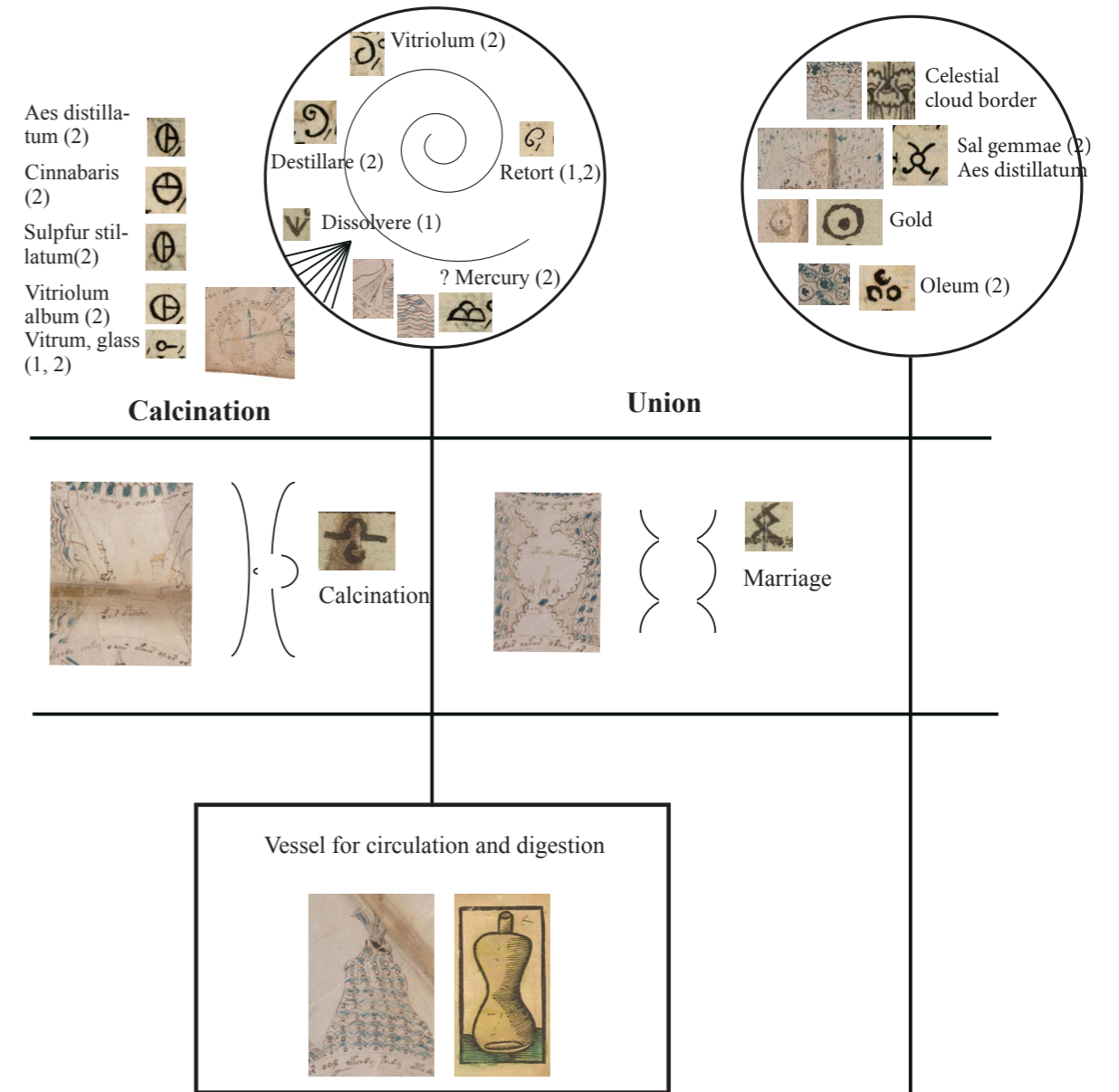
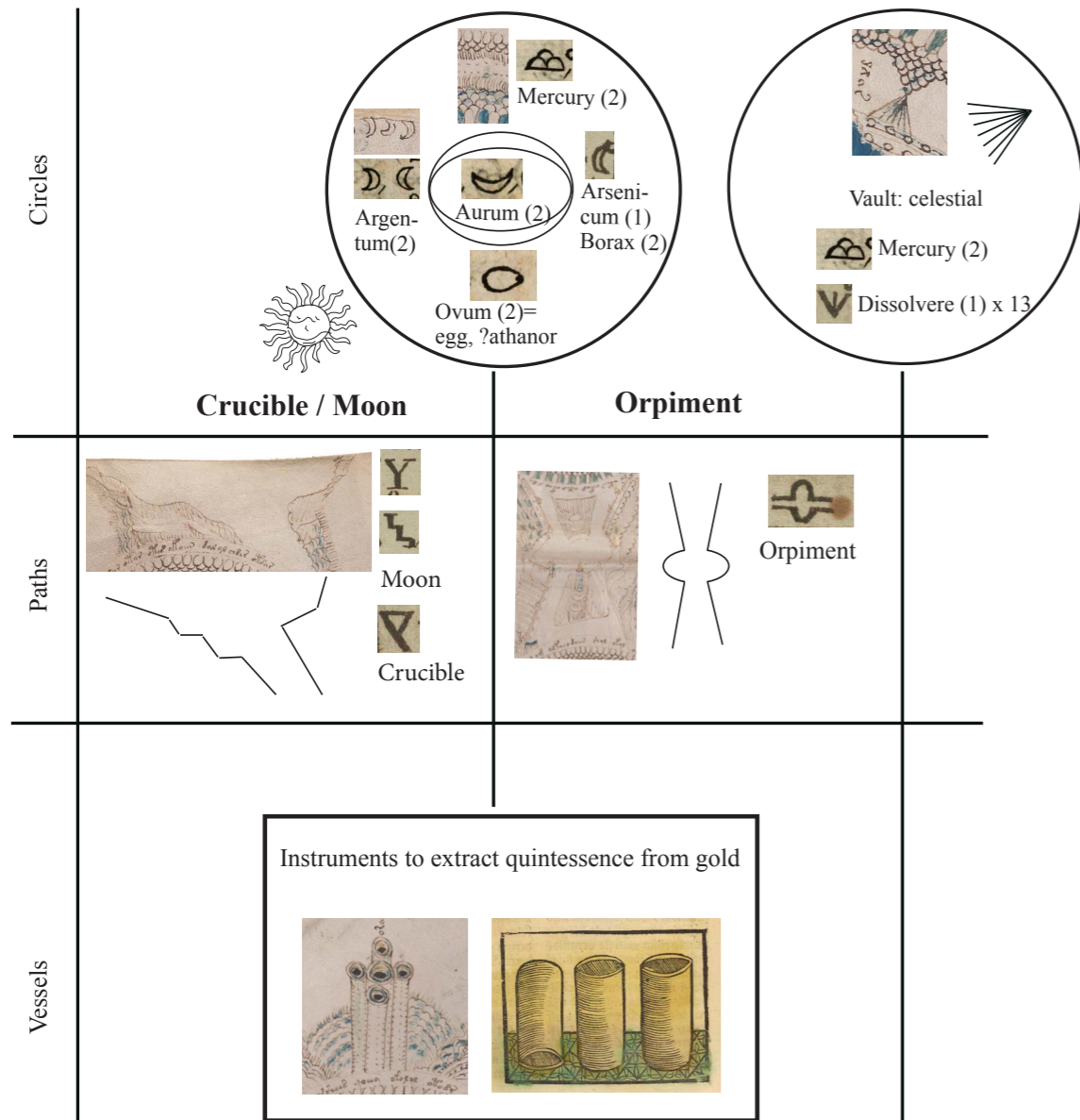
Circle	 Ovum (2) Egg = ?athanor	 Star vault "our heaven" 6 medicine jars	 3 layers (clear to blue) Argentum vivum (2)
Vessels	 x 6 Medicine jars	 12 x 6 or 7? Instruments to extract quintessence from gold	 Celestial cloud border
			 1 layer Ignis (2) Ignis lentus (2)



Athanor in Brunshawig's Large Book of Distillation.

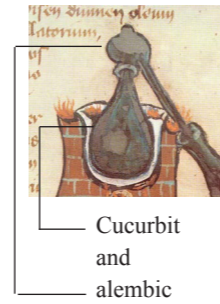


Smoke from a water bath. Alchemiae Gebri Arabis philosophi solertissimi libri (Bern, 1545).





Alchemist's Laboratory.  
Heinrich Khunrath. Ham-  
burg, 1595.



Cucurbit  
and  
alembic



Circles	Aqua fortis (2) Sal gemmae (2)  Salpetre (2) Albumen (2) Mensis (1,2)  Mercury (2)	Vault: celestial 4xSal commune (2)
	<b>Canvas</b>	<b>Mercury</b>
Paths	Toleum (canvas)	Argentum vivum (2) Realgar (1,2)
	Auripigment	
Vessels	Attachment vessel for making aqua fortis 	

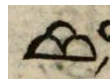
Aqua vitae (1,2)	Cucurbitum (2) Alumen (2) Antimony vitrum (2) Mercury (2)	Vault: celestial Sublimation (1) Purification (1) 3xGold (1) 3xSilver (1) 3xCopper (1) 2x Purification (2)
<b>Alembic / Coagulation</b>	<b>Spirit of wine</b>	<b>Spirit</b>
Alembic (2)	Spirit of wine Argentum Crystallus (2) Cupurum, Venus	Blood stone (2) Antimony spagyrica (2) Aurum (2)
		Spiritus (2)
	Vessel to distill vine 	

THE DIAGRAM READ THROUGH ORACULUM AND TESTAMENTUM

The correspondences between the graphic shapes in the Voynich diagram, and the medical, chemical, and alchemical symbols in *Oraculum*, provide a way to read the diagram. Since there appear to be several readings for many symbols, and the symbols were not fully standardized, a third source that can provide a theoretical or practical framework is needed.

The third source can be the *Testamentum*, with the circular diagrams similar in structure to the Voynich foldout (p 47). *Testamentum* is one of the first works attributed to Ramon Llull, probably composed in Latin in the early 1330s. It consists of three books: *Theoretica*, *Practica*, and *The Book of Mercuries*. To understand testamentum I have a fourth source: *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700* by Jennifer Rampling.

I will compare the symbols I find in the Voynich diagram with her chapters “*The Coming of Raymond*” (p. 43), “*Mineral Mercuries*” (p. 46), and “*Vegetable Mercuries*” (p. 51)



MERCURY

The most prominent and prevalent graphic shape in the Voynich diagram is the one that can be compared to *Argentum vivum* (mercury) in the *Oraculum*. It follows all the paths and appears in nearly every circle. With this comparison, mercury becomes the dominant symbol, substance, principle, or conceptual element in the Voynich diagram. This mercury changes colour from clear to blue, green, and yellow throughout the system.

Rampling writes that in the pseudo-Lullian

*Testamentum*, there are many mercuries. Two particular “mercuries,” or “argent vives,” can be separated from the multiple identities of mercury:

“One is a ‘mineral mercury’ drawn from metals; the other a ‘vegetable’ mercury whose origin is less clear. The identification of these two mercuries—mineral and vegetable—provides the spine of the pseudo-Lullian corpus.” \* (p. 45)

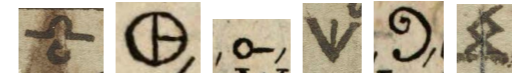
Rampling highlights a combinatorial wheel in a version of the *Testamentum*, from England, about 1450. This wheel notes 23 principles of matter, each marked with a letter of the alphabet. The wheel begins with A, *God*, the cause of everything. Second comes B, *mercury*, described as “the common substance existing in all corruptible bodies.” C is salpeter, and D is “vitriol azoqueus”.

Shapes resembling C (salpeter) is found in the third corner circle in the Voynich diagram, and D (vitriol) is found in the second corner circle.



A similar version of the combinatorial wheel, *Testamentum (Practica)*, Beati Raymundi Lulli, Biblioteca Nacional de Espana.

CORNER CIRCLE TWO



CALCINATION, VITRIOL, GLASS, DISSOLUTION, DISTILLATION AND MARRIAGE

In the upper left corner of the diagram (2) is a symbol resembling *vitriol*, D in the combinatorial wheel. Vitriol is part of a sequence of shapes that appear to represent *calcination* (1), *glassiness* (2), *dissolution* (3), *distillation* (4), and *marriage* (7). These stages may either depict the preparation of vitriol itself or the use of vitriol to dissolve metals, salts, or mineral mixtures, reducing them to a workable state.

Vitriol was associated with glassiness.\* (p.49) The vessel attached to this second corner circle resembles Brunschwig’s vessel for distillation and digestion (5). Above it, I read “*glasslike soul-lifting spiral-form*” (6). “Soul-lifting” can refer to the raising of the volatile spirit during this refinement.

Inside the symbol of vitriol (below), I read the instruction “*put into work (digest) vitriol opening.*” (2)

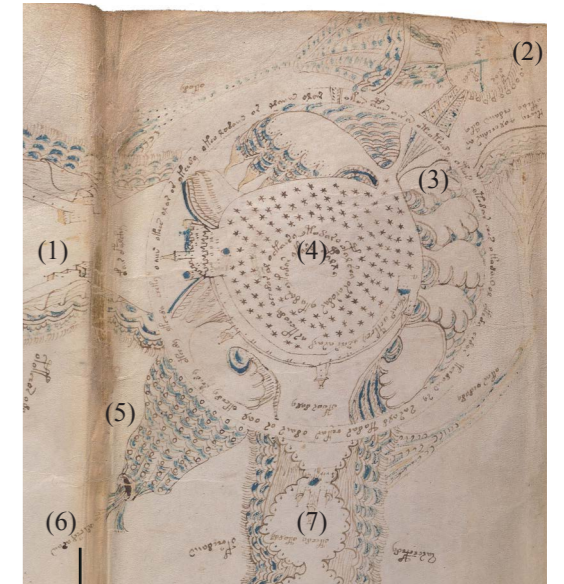
The path leading into this circle resembles *calcination* (1). Calcination was meant to open the body of vitriol. Alchemy often followed the principle *solve et coagula* (“dissolve and recombine”).

(vo)r (vi)ʒ  
forwischen\*  
**destruct/**  
**?put into work/**  
**?digest**  
\* Dutch *verwerken*: to process/digest.

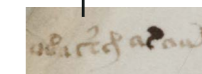
(vi)to(roul)  
vitoroul (*error fro vitriol*)  
**vitriol**

upo(nij)  
ōpening  
**opening**

Vitriol was itself an opener of bodies. It supported the “solve” phase and prepared the material for recombination, the marriage. The road leading out of this circle is shaped as a symbol for *marriage* (8).



The second corner circle.

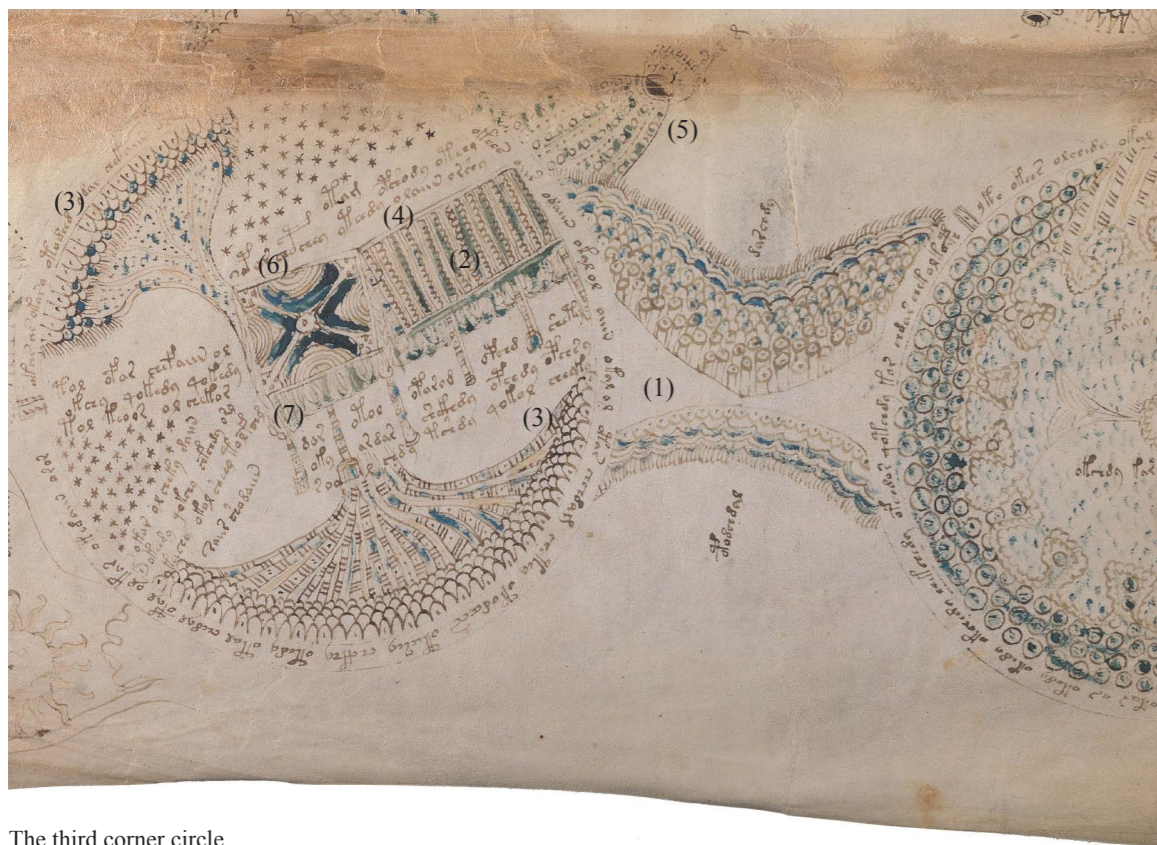


(vi)(dr)(iu) (sulij)(dsj) (vi)s (vo)u(rn)  
vitreous soul-luching\* vis\*\* -fourme  
**glasslike soul-lifting spiral\*\* form**

\* MED: *Luchen*: cp. MnE dial. lutch to lift.  
\*\*MED: *Vis*: Spiral stair.

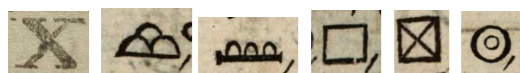
\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.

\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.



The third corner circle.

CORNER CIRCLE THREE



CANVAS, MERCURY, SALPETRE, AQUA FORTIS, MENSIS AND ALBUMEN

In the third corner circle there is a sequence of *canvas*, *mercury*, *salpetre*, *aqua fortis*, *mensis*, and *albumen*.

In this circle, the central image can be interpreted as two laboratories. The rooftop of one of these laboratories is a square covered with shapes that correspond to *salpetre* (2). A square is a symbol for *aqua fortis* (4).

Bringing along *vitriol* from corner circle two, combining it with *salpetre* (2), and adding mercury (3), echoes a process from *Testamentum*,

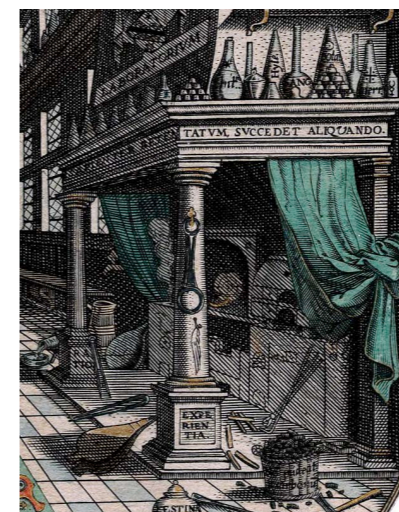
combining B (mercury), C (salpetre), and D (vitriol) from the combinatory wheel to obtain a solvent, a *menstruum* (E).\* (p. 47).

*Vitriol* (D) and *salpetre* (C) make *aqua fortis*, as in the roof top of the first laboratory (4). *Aqua fortis* is also found in the form attached to this circle, resembling Brunschwig's attachment vessel, the one he specified for the making of *aqua fortis* (5). The third place I find *aqua fortis* is in one of the headlines in this circle, where I read "*akuvortj*" which could be interpreted as a variation of *aqua fortis*.

The second rooftop in this circle resembles the symbol of *mensis* (6). One may wonder whether *mensis* and *menstruum* (E) from the *Testamentum* recipe are confused here. If the rooftop is intended to symbolize the *menstruum*, we obtain a coherent process. One takes the *aqua fortis* (C+D) made in the first laboratory and moves

on to the second laboratory where it is combined with *mercury* (B), depicted as a flow passing through it (3). One then obtains mercury chloride, the *menstruum* (E), which is erroneously symbolized by *mensis* on the rooftop.

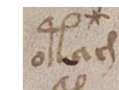
Reading the path into this circle as a shape resembling *canvas* (1) makes sense in the process of producing *aqua fortis* and the *menstruum*. *Canvas* can represent



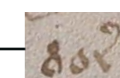
Alchemist's Laboratory. Heinrich Khunrath. Hamburg, 1595.



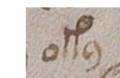
Headline:



aku(vo)(rdj)  
aqua forte  
aqua forte



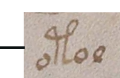
d(iu)(rijn)  
dūring  
during



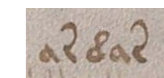
U(tz)(ij)  
ūching  
increasing



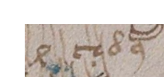
(srinij) (vi)(iu)  
shining feum  
shining vapour



wk (wa)3  
work wacche  
work watch

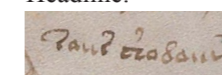


(vo)(rn) (sd)(ov)r  
(N) varn stöver  
block provisions



3 (wl)d e  
hi welletth ī  
it boils in

Headline:



rev(rsij) (sol)(vi)d (vi)vn  
reversing solved vevyn\*\*  
reversing dissolved substance\*\*

\*\* *Veyn* is used about substances like "sal petre (p. 147), quick siluer, sulphur, siluere, golde (p. 151).

MED:

*Venin*, also (error) *vevyn*: A toxic substance, a dye.  
*Venim*: Venom, toxin, a dye, *alch.* a secretion or product of distillation, perh. an acid.

\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700.* Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.

\*\* *The consideration of quintessence : an edition of a Middle English translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de consideratione de quintae essentiae omnium rerum with introduction, notes and commentary.* Thesis, 1998. Halversen, Marguerite.

covering, and the laboratories have curtains (7). These curtains may have served as protection, since the production of *aqua fortis* and *mercury chloride* involves highly poisonous vapours.

In this third corner circle, under the curtained construction with a roof possibly meant to be read as *menstruum*, I read the warning: “During increasing shining vapour, watch the work, block the provisions it boils in.”

At the center of the rooftop resembling *mensis*, or *menstruum*, is a shape that resembles *albumen*. *Albumen* fits with canvas, since the joint in the alembic had to be luted with cloth (canvas) and a paste of flour and albumen in this process.

The *Stinking menstruum* (E) quickly reduced all bodies (metals) to their first matter. This sublimation of mercury is one of the most widespread processes used in medieval alchemy. \* (p. 49).

The correspondence between *Testamentum* and the diagram as symbols can be continued. The solvent, *menstruum* (E), made in this third corner circle, is used in yet another *Testamentum* recipe, which echoes symbols I find in the fourth corner circle.

#### CORNER CIRCLE FOUR



#### MERCURY, AQUA VITAE, CUCURBITUM, ALEMBIC, MARRIAGE

In addition to mercury, I find a system of shapes resembling *aqua vitae*, *cucurbitum*, *alembic* and *marriage* in the fourth corner circle.

Ramplung describes a seventh substance, G, in the *Testamentum* combinatory wheel. It is called “G. vegetable,” “our mercury,” and it is the second of the two major mercuries (argent vives).

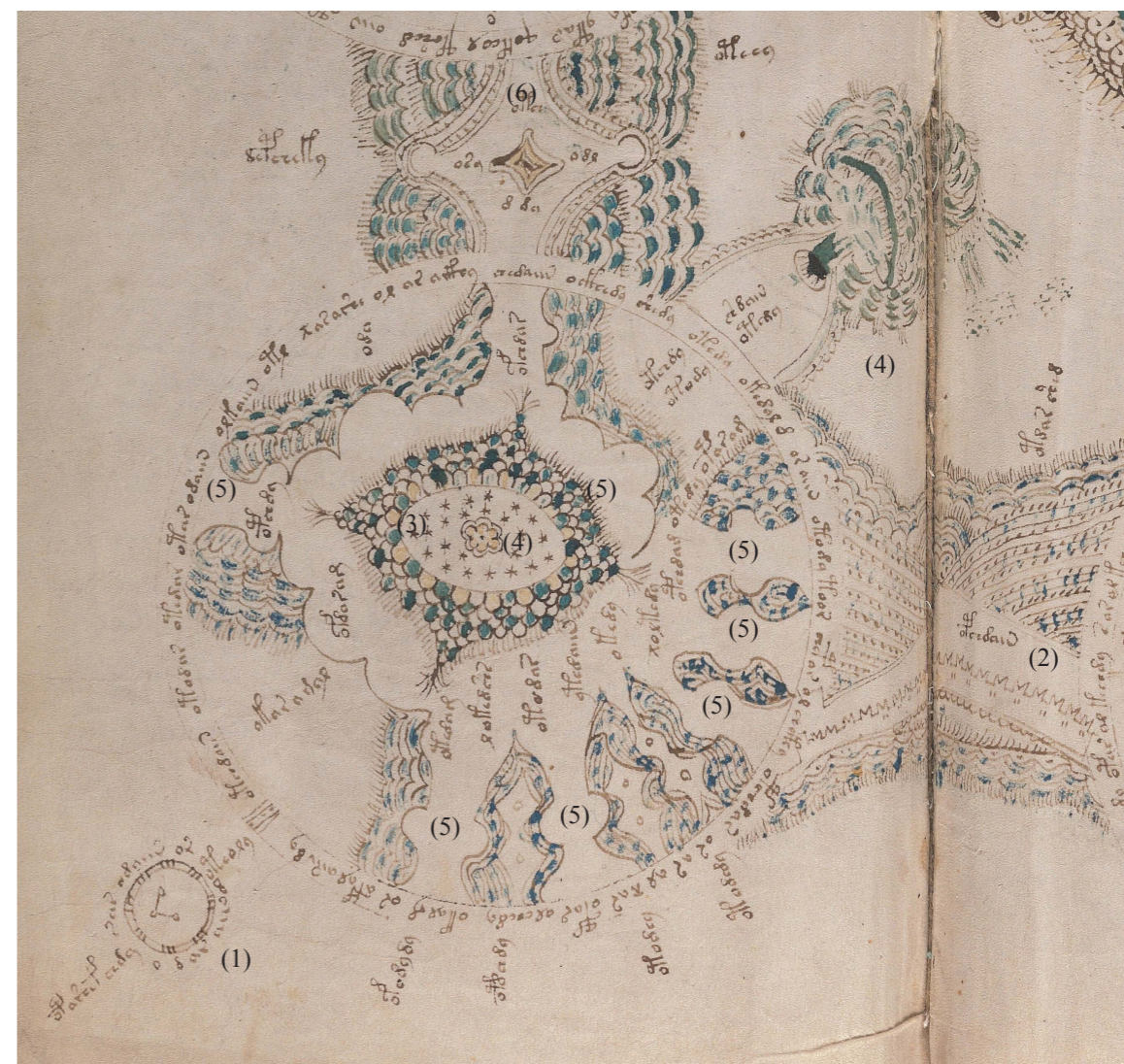
The first mercury is the *mineral mercury*. The second mercury is the *vegetative mercury*. \* (p. 50). In the Spanish version of the combinatory wheel, this *vegetable mercury*, G, is called “*mercurius philosophicum*,” philosophical mercury.

Ramplung writes that “Once combined with the *Stinking Menstruum E*, this *vegetable mercury* helps to draw another ‘mercury’ out of gold and silver,” and that “the identity of G must be deciphered in order to obtain the precious mercuries of gold and silver” \* (p. 50)

Thus, the *menstruum E*, which I suggested being produced in the third corner circle, seems to be combined with G in the fourth corner circle to extract yet another mercury, the mercury from gold and silver. The colour of the mercury in the fourth corner circle is green, vegetative. A hint of the identity of G, Ramplung writes, is provided in *Testamentum*’s recipe for “corruptible water” (*aqua corruptibilis*):

“Take 2 oz. of G. and draw out its humor with an alembic with two ounces of common nature, which is water of wine (*aqua vini*); and put one ounce of the gold which you wish to dissolve... After, congeal this matter, separating the water by alembic, and afterwards put into it again the juice of “*larien*,” otherwise called *lunaria*, as much as you will; and you shall see the gold dissolved into a vegetable water the color of the sun. And thus of three things we have formed the third circular figure, signed by K.” \* (p.51)

Using these recipes to read the symbols in the fourth corner circle, I find water of wine (*aqua vini*) represented by the symbol *aqua vitae* (distilled wine, ethanol) outside the circle (1). The *alembic* appears as a symbol in the shape of the path leading into the circle (2). This alembic requires a *cucurbitum* (3). The dissolving gold (and silver) may be represented by the yellow flower (4) at the centre of the cir-



cle, inside the cucurbitum. The “vegetable water the colour of the sun” I see in the green and yellow mercury (5). This is the mercury described to dissolve gold.

Ramplung writes that “the juice of *larien*” seems to be equated to G in this recipe.\* (p. 51) Yet, she writes, the identity is uncertain. In *Testamentum (Theoretica)* the writer instructs that *lunaria* can

be heated with a light fire, and “you shall have in your power one of our *argent vives* in liquor”. \* (p. 51)

From this possibility, albeit uncertain, I suggest the fourth corner circle to depict that:

The *menstruum E* (corrosive sublimate, mercury chloride) is dissolved in *aqua vitae* (ethanol) to

\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Ramplung. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.

\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Ramplung. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.

make *vegetable mercury G*, which in turn can dissolve silver and gold to obtain their “mercuries.”

A support to this can be found in *Rosarium Philosophorum*, published in 1550:

“The juices of Lunaria, Aqua Vitae, Fifth Essence, Spirit of wine, mercury vegetable, are all one. The juices of Lunaria is made of our wine, which thing is known but to few of our children, and with it is our solution made, and our potable gold is made, that being the mean thereof and cannot be without it.”\*

It also states with the illustration to the right that:

“We are the beginning and first nature of metals,  
Art by us maketh the chief tincture.  
There is no fountain nor water found like unto me.  
I heal and help both the rich and the poor;  
But yet I am full of hurtful poison.”\*

Adam McLean writes about the the picture:

“We interpret this series as a process for the integration of the three facets of man - the Body, Soul and Spirit. In our present state of evolution these facets do not work together in harmony. There are polarities and vast gulfs between the different realms within our being. It is the task of alchemical transmutation to unite these facets in a new harmony, into a perfected state of being where Body, Soul and Spirit mutually interpenetrate and work together.”\*\*

This echoes the Voynich text around the aqua vitae symbol, interpreted in page 45:

“uppermost, with the body and soul, oil-lifting, purify with red (toxic) substance heated, with red-circling, marrying (uniting) the unctuous essence.”

The road out of this fourth corner circle (right) has a text that corresponds to what is made from the “juices of lunaria,” according to the *Rosarium Philosophicum*: potable gold, or drinkable gold.

“red dew exuding vivifying drink with gold”



A copy of woodcut 1 in *The Rosary of the Philosophers*. One of three woodcuts introducing the *prima materia*, the substance of the work of transformation. Photo: Deutsche Fotothek

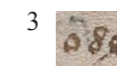
with gold  
exuding  vivifying drink  
red dew



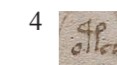
(rd) diu  
red deu  
red dew



ws(ij)  
wōsing  
evaporating/exuding/evaporation



(vi) (dr)3  
vive drich  
active/vivifying drink/medical potion



w g(ol)  
with\* gol  
with gold

\* See page 81 for typical abbreviations.

### SUMMARY ONE

By interpreting the diagram’s graphic shapes as symbols and cross-referencing them with Testamentum and Oraculum, we can reconstruct a sequence from the second corner circle to the fourth as follows:

#### Corner circle two:

*Vitriol* (D) is calcined to its glasslike state, then dissolved and purified.

#### Corner circle three:

The *vitriol* (D) is combined with *salpetre* (C) to make *aqua fortis*. This *aqua fortis* is combined with *mercury* (B) to make a corrosive sublimate, the *menstruum* (E).

#### Corner circle four:

The *menstruum* (E) is combined with ethanol, *aqua vitae*, to make G, a *vegetable mercury* used to dissolve silver and gold in order to obtain the “mercuries” of silver and gold.

Rampling writes that “Over the course of the fourteenth century, developments in medicine suggested a far more exciting explanation for the vegetable character of the philosopher’s prime matter: the inclusion of a literally vegetable ingredient, made by distilling wine.”\* (p. 51).

And here, Rupescissa and the *quintessence* come into the picture again. Rampling writes

that Rupescissa saw distilled wine, *aqua vitae*, as a powerful solvent, capable of drawing out the essence not only from animal and vegetable matter, but also from metals, including antimony and gold. He regarded his practice with *aqua vitae*, the *quintessence*, as medicine, in contrast to the pursuit of “alchemical gold.”

This distinction helped establish a new school of alchemical pharmacology. It would become “a staple of pseudo-Lullian alchemy. John of Rupescissa may have disdained transmutation (at least in the text), but his *quintessence* offered a promising line of inquiry for readers seeking to decipher the riddle of the Testamentum’s *chrysopoetic vegetable mercury*, the mysterious G.”\* (p. 53–54).

According to Rampling, there are examples of pseudo-Lullian works “splicing” the Testamentum and Rupescissa’s writings, such as *Liber de secretis naturae, seu quinta essentia*. It combines Testamentum’s mineral work with Rupescissa’s wine-based medicine. Here, the quintessence of wine and the “vegetable mercury” refer to the same material product. In this way, the *quintessence* can just as well be read into the interpretative space for “G vegetable”, “our mercury,” “the lunaria”\* (p. 54).

With this, I can suggest a continuous alchemical medical sequence from the second corner circle to the fourth. But what about the first corner circle?

\* <https://www.alchemywebsite.com/rosary1.html>

\*\* <https://www.alchemywebsite.com/roscom.html>

\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.

CORNER CIRCLE ONE



SUN, MOON, EGG, MERCURY,  
GOLD / SILVER, ORPIMENT

Into the circle enters a path resembling the symbol of the moon (4). It passes the sun (5).

The first corner circle is simpler than the other three. It contains only one short label, and the imagery shows two layers of mercury (1) surrounding a yellow oval (2). Inside this oval are symbols of gold, and possibly silver (3).

The oval, turned the same way as the text, resembles the symbol of egg (6).

Attached to the circle are shapes resembling Brunshwig's instruments to extract quintessence from gold (7).

The path leading out of the circle has the shape of orpiment (8). Orpiment can be a symbol for fire in the stone (the elixir), while quick gold (mercury is water).\*

In the label (5) I read: "untoiled force ver" (next page). It can be interpreted as something like "unprocessed force circulating." This suggests that this is the circling or circulating force not yet worked upon, which fits with the alchemical concept of an egg.

An idea of what an egg can illustrate is explained in Spike Bucklow's *The Alchemy of Paint*:

"In the egg, two elements play supportive roles—the shell (earth) provides external

protection and the membrane (air) maintains internal order—whilst the other two elements, yolk (fire) and albumen (water), can be magically transformed into a living chick. In the same way, the alchemist's ingredients can be converted into alchemical products. This led philosophers to use the egg as 'an illustration' of many natural and alchemical processes"\* (p. 96–97).

And: "In the Philosophers' Egg, fire and water (form and matter) generate gold. Mercury is albumen, the 'water,' and sulphur is yolk, the 'fire'"\*\* (p. 97).

He also writes that: "the eggshell symbolizes the athanor or furnace."\*\* (p. 96).

The words I read above the instruments to extract quintessence say: "warm-fire the work."

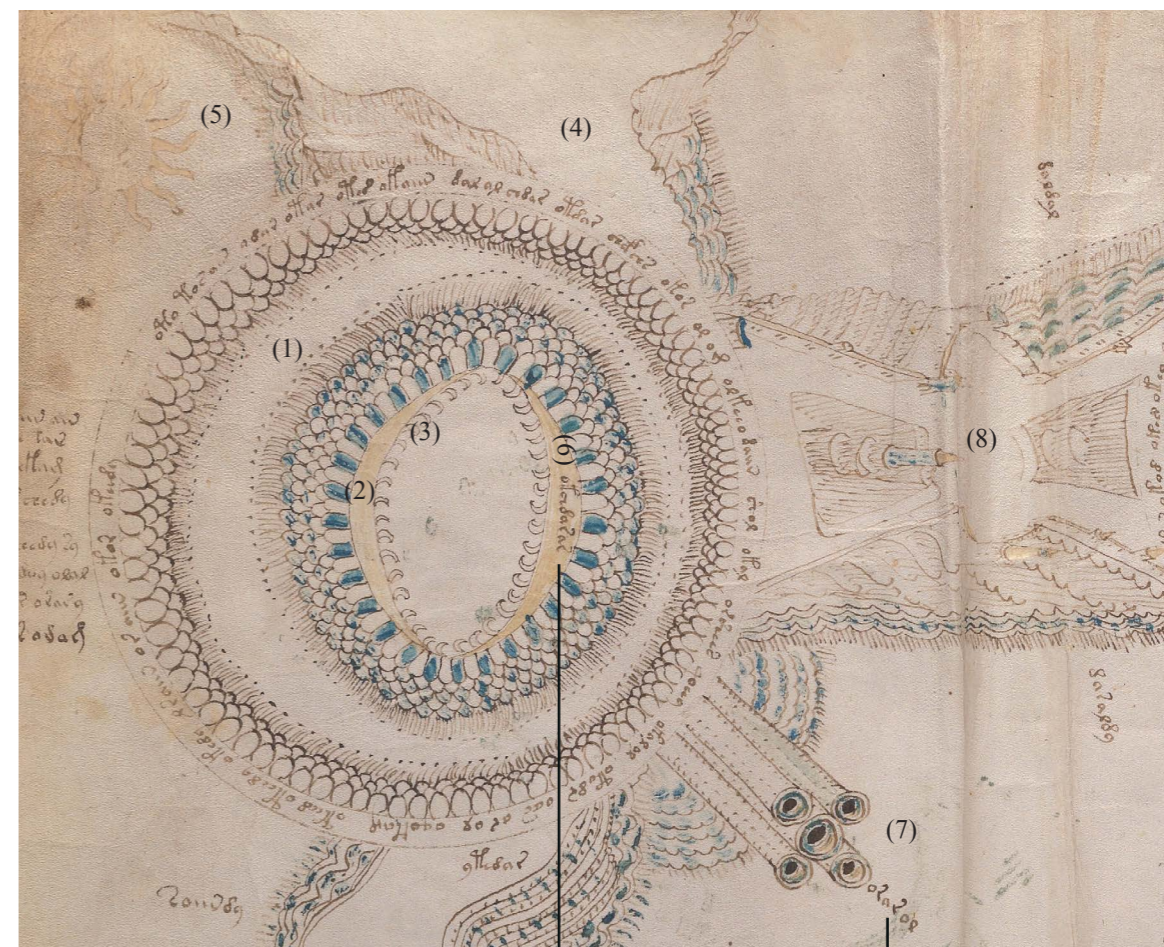
Brunshwig described using gentle or warm heat rather than strong fire when working toward quintessence. In his small book of distillation, he writes that the fire must not be too sharp, "for your waters will burn and stink, and your glass will break."\*\*\* He describes how to make a furnace of ashes and sand or water baths, or how to use free heat sources such as the sun, horse dung, and ant hills. This heat can be compared to the heat an egg needs to bear a chicken.

*Atalanta Fugiens*, (1617), uses the egg and its heat as a metaphor: "So likewise the Philosophers have their Eggs, which will passe into birds of the same kind if they are nourished with a temperate heat such as the heat of a Hen that setts, remaining upon them continually."\*\*\*\*

This first circle could represent the beginning of the work, with the sun and the moon setting

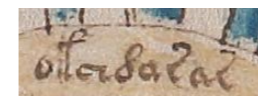
in motion the circulation of the unworked force. This beginning is like an egg, where water (mercury, silver, moon) and fire (sulfur, gold, sun)

appear as the albumen and the yolk. An egg that generates gold, from which one can extract the quintessence, the bird as a vapour.\*

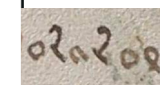


unprocessed force circling (or:/fire)

warm-fire (the) work



Ut(oil)d(vo)(sr)(vi)r  
untoiled-fors vēr/fīr (alos vir, ver)\*  
unprocessed/unmixed force/virtue circling//fire\*



(wa)(m)v(m) w3  
warm-fīren werch  
warm-fire (the) work

\* MED: *Fīr* (alos *vir*, *ver*): Alch. (a) Any of various kinds of heat or degrees of heat used as an agent in an operation; (b) such heat identified as to the operation in which it is used

\*Alchemically birds symbolized gasses: Laurinda S. Dixon, *Bosch's Garden of Delights Triptych: Remnants of a "Fossil" Science*, *The art Bulletin*, Vol LXIII, No 1 (March 1981), p 106.

\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.

\*\* *The Alchemy of Paint. Art, Science and Secrets from the Middle Ages*. Spike Bucklow, 2009. Marion Boyars Publisher Ltd.

\*\*\* *The Book of distillation, The first Book*, Hieronymus Brunschweig, transcribed into modern English by Adam McLean, 2006.

\*\*\*\* <https://www.alchemywebsite.com/at126-0.html> , Emblem XXX

SUMMARY TWO

The diagram to the right summarizes the Voynich diagram as read through the symbols from the *Oraculum*, combined with the theories and practices of the *Testamentum* and its combinatory wheel.

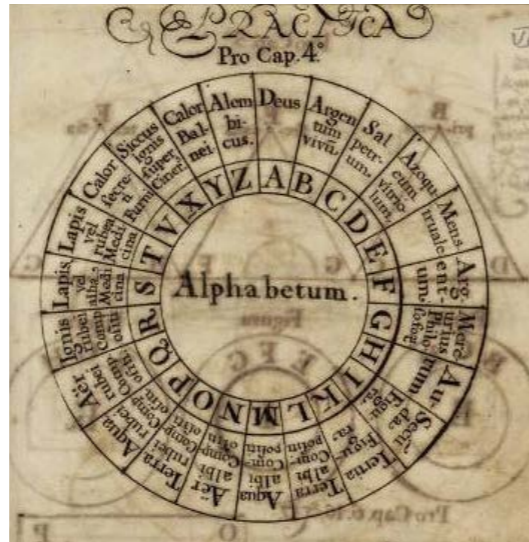
With this approach, the Voynich diagram appears to be situated within a tradition of many mercuries, where the mineral mercury and the vegetable mercury are the majore ones.

The diagram may follow what Rampling describes as the evolution from *Testamentum*, *Rupescissa*, and *Liber de secretis naturae, seu quinta essentia*. This was “a new tradition based on two ‘waters’: a toxic mineral solvent used to make alchemical gold and silver; and the heavenly quintessence used in medicine, which in some cases also could be adapted for use in transmutation”\* (p. 54). English alchemy achieved its greatest heights when melding the traditional emphasis on gold-making with medicinal applications of distilled wine.

But, on alchemical reading, Rampling notes: “As alchemists learned to read their sources on many levels, the range of possible interpretations of a given text increased, creating space for innovative readings based on personal experience, including new experimental observations.” “Reading alchemically meant reading philosophically, and reading like a philosopher meant reading metaphorically.” \* (p 43)

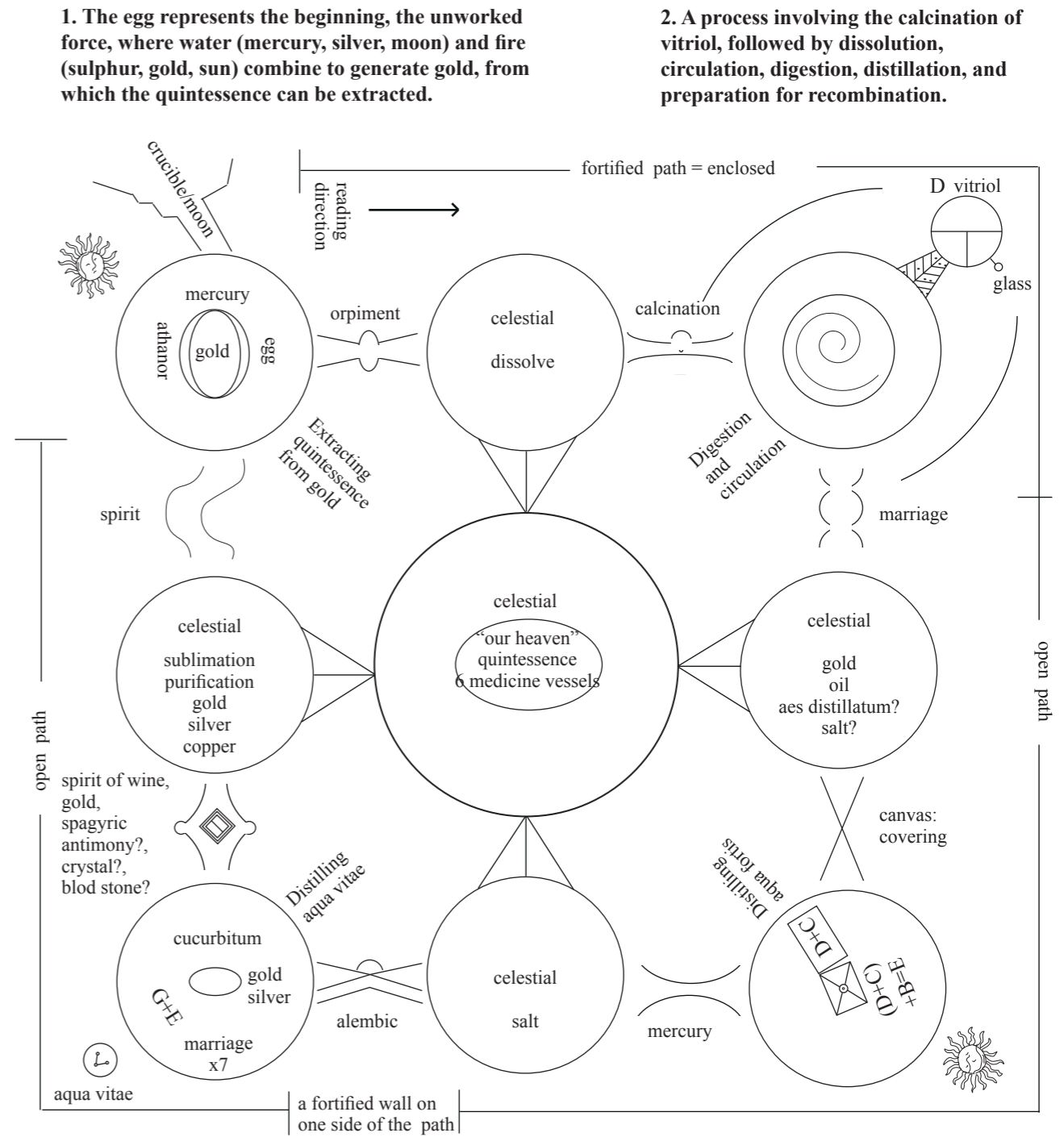
Pseudo-Lullian alchemy is marked by ambiguity, metaphor, and multiple levels of meaning. This has opened the way for centuries of experimentation and individual interpretation.\* Even though it is possible to read distillation processes in the diagram, and they align with other functional elements of the manuscript, such as the propagation methods noted in the plant drawings, there is likely more to the diagram than practical aspects.

\* *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020.



The combinatory wheel, *Testamentum (Practica)*. Beati Raymundi Lulli, Biblioteca Nacional de Espana.

- A = God
- B = metallic mercury
- C = salpêtre
- D = vitriol
- E = menstruum
- F = silver
- G = vegetal mercury (philosophical mercury)
- H = gold
- K = the third circular form (dissolves gold).

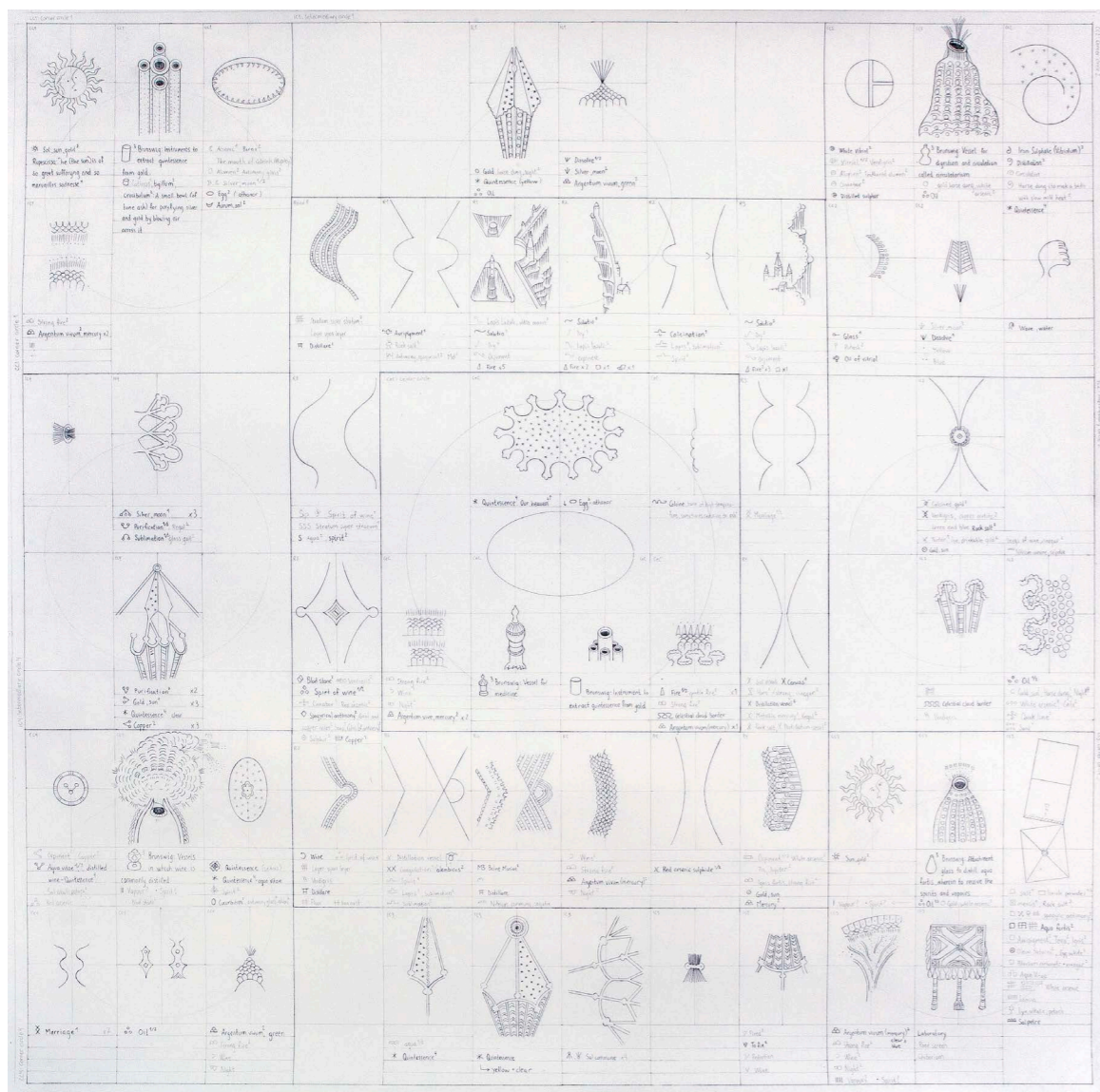


1. The egg represents the beginning, the unworked force, where water (mercury, silver, moon) and fire (sulphur, gold, sun) combine to generate gold, from which the quintessence can be extracted.

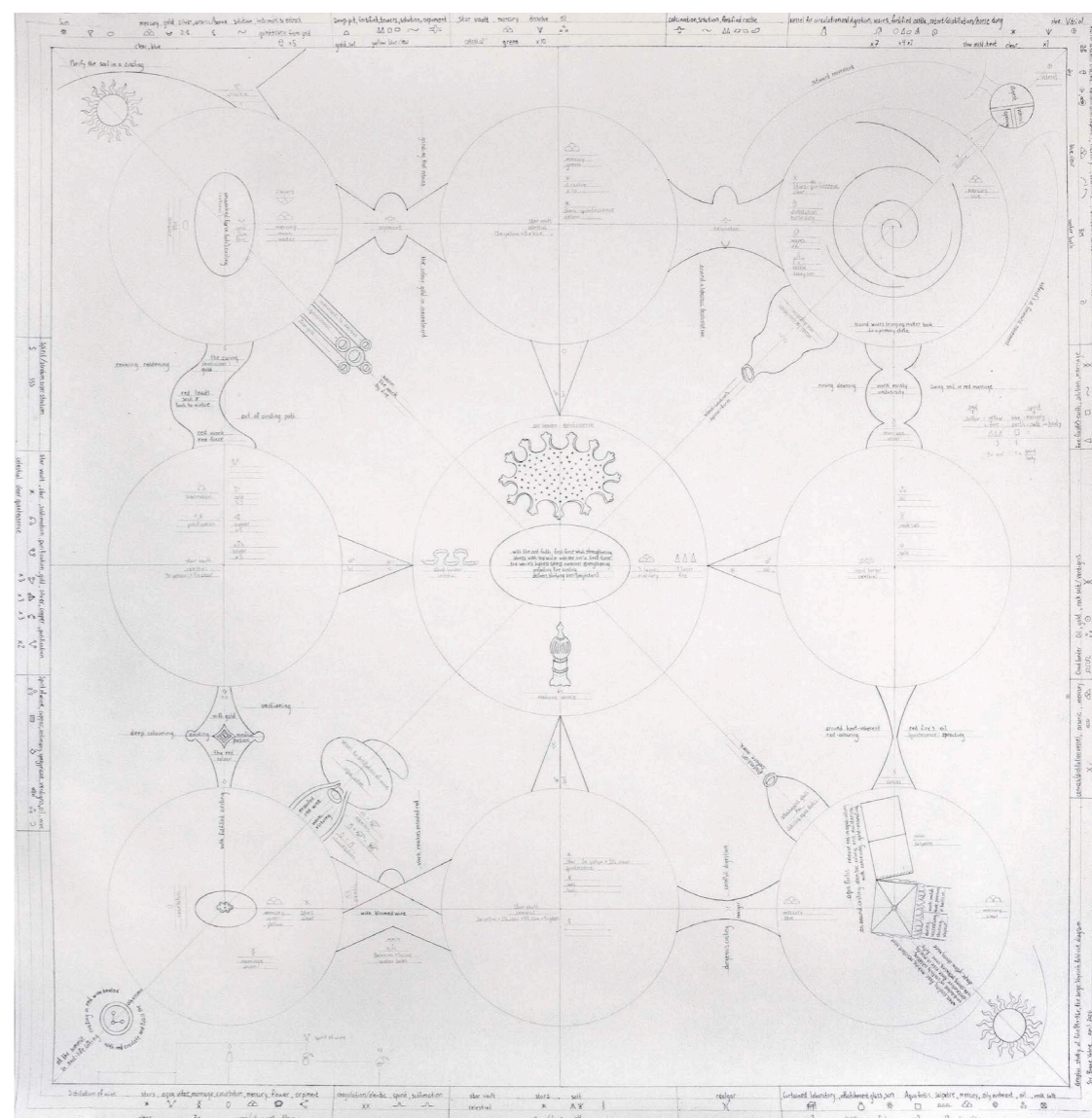
2. A process involving the calcination of vitriol, followed by dissolution, circulation, digestion, distillation, and preparation for recombination.

4. Corrosive sublimate (E) is combined with aqua vitae (ethanol) to produce vegetable mercury (G), which can dissolve silver and gold.

3. Combining aqua fortis—vitriol (D) + salpêtre (C)—with quicksilver (B) produces corrosive sublimate, mercury chloride, also known as the Stinking Menstruum (E).



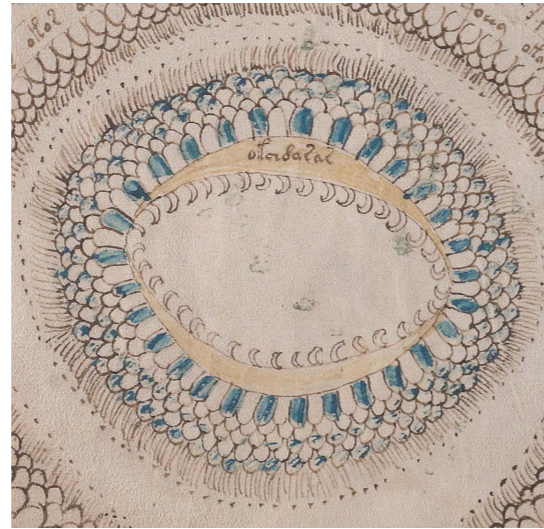
Comparison table, 100 x 100 cm, pencil on paper, 2026.



Graphic simplification of the diagram, 100 x 100 cm, pencil on paper, 2026.



F40v. Suggested to be a housleek.



The first circle in the diagram, when read through the lens of alchemical, chemical, and medical symbols, can represent mercury (water) and gold or sulfur (fire).

### HOUSELEEK

The botanical section of the manuscript reveals additional insights when considered alongside medical, chemical, and alchemical symbols.

One plant in the manuscript, which resembles houseleek (f40v), offers a connection to the foldout diagram and its graphic shapes.

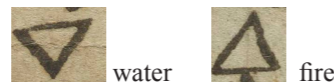
Its flower (above, left) is almost a mirror of the first circle in the diagram (above, right), as well as the symbols of mercury (water) and gold (fire).



This means that a relationship between water and fire can be found both in the diagram and in the plant itself.

When the aspects of water and fire are attributed to the plant, the same principles also appear in the stem. The outer shape of the stem resembles the alchemical symbol of water, a

triangle “standing” on one of its angles. Inside this water-symbol are many smaller symbols resembling fire.



This means that the opposite elements of water and fire are combined into a single form, both in the flower and in the stem.

Houseleek was traditionally grown on roofs to protect against lightning and fire. Its thick, succulent leaves are full of a watery fluid, making the plant a watery being that resists fire.

In medicine, houseleek was considered cold and moist. It was used to treat burns, inflammation, and other heat-related conditions. It acts as a cooling, water-like agent countering fire.

In alchemical terms, houseleek can be interpreted as containing both mercury (water) and sulfur or gold (fire): Mercury as the fluid, volatile, life-giving principle, and sulfur as fiery, active,

form-giving. In this way, houseleek resonates with the first circle in the diagram. Houseleek and the first circle may thus be seen as natural analogues, or even symbolic keys, to each other.

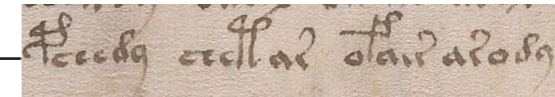
In the headline (beneath the paragraph) I read:

“boil-healing, oil-like force for a fever when being severely scorched”

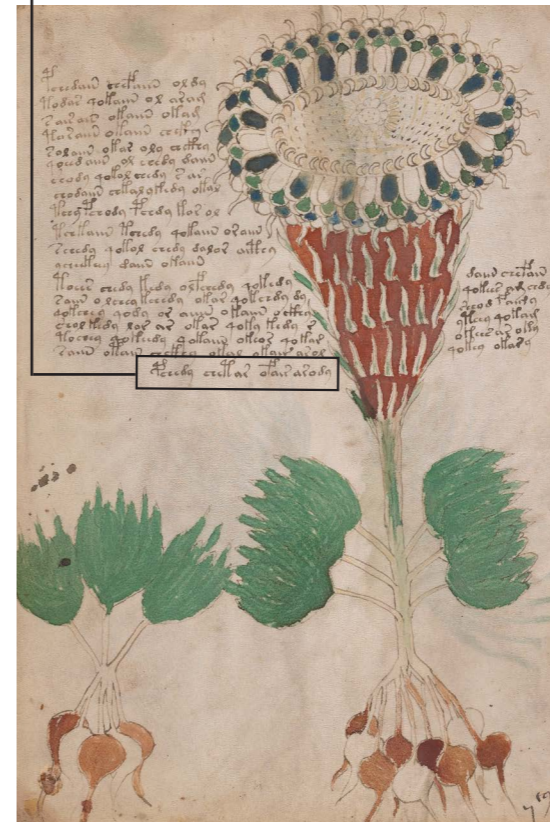
Here “oil-like” could refer to houseleek’s

succulent, viscous substance. “Oil-like” could also refer to quintessence, as the Middle English Dictionary notes that alchemically, oil can signify “a substance extracted from metals or other elements, a quintessence.”

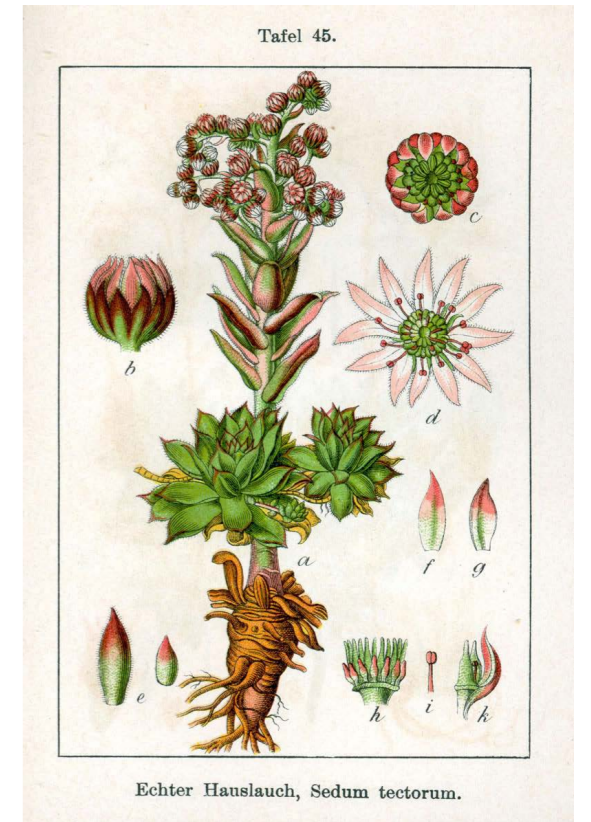
Read this way, the headline appears as a descriptive or functional medical note about the plant. The reading aligns with the large foldout diagram where oil, or quintessence is extracted for use in medicine.



b(oil)i(sdr)(ij) (oil)ik (vo)(rs) af(iv)r (vo)(rs)U(rsd)(ij)  
boil-lighting oil-lik fors an fiver forscorching  
**boil-healing oil-like force on fever being severely scorched**



F40v. A plant that resembles housleek with its red and green leaves along the stem, succulent grey-green, sessile leaves at the base, and round tap root.



Sempervivum tectorum. Johann Georg Sturm and Jacob Sturm, Deutschlands Flora in Abbildungen (1796).

THE FIRST PAGE

Is it possible to trace the same context of medicine, alchemy, and distillation on the first page of the manuscript?

Testing the decoding on the first line, I read:

“Five physicians in the art of circulating alchemy.”

According to Lisa Fagin Davis, there are at least five scribes behind the text in the Voynich Manuscript.\*

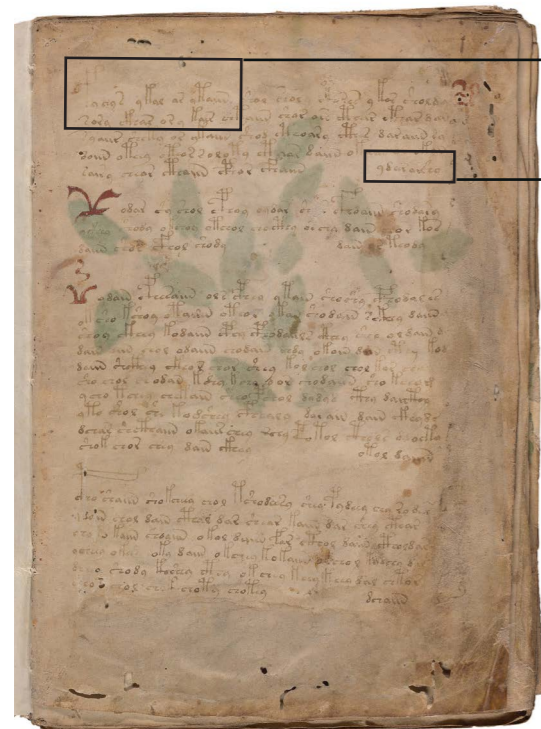
Even though the first line is descriptive in this reading, it feels somewhat abrupt as the opening

of the manuscript, lacking the usual formal or narrative framing. A contextual frame appears in the headline immediately under the paragraph, which I read as:

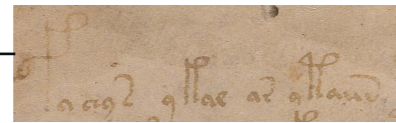
“The red circulating vivifying soul.”

Together, the headline and the first sentence introduce a:

- What:** the red circulating vivifying force pertaining to the soul
- Who:** five physicians
- Which discipline:** alchemy



Folio 1r. The first page in the manuscript.



f(iv) l(ij)(rs) (ij) tez (vi)(rn) a kev(nj).  
 five lēches ī tēch vēren\* a/kymi.  
**five physicians in nature (of) circulating/turning alchemy.**

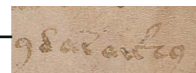
\*This word is unclear, but circulating/turning is chosen as it fits alchemical imagery of circulation of vapors, rotational cosmology (celestial spheres), distillation cycles and transformation processes.

MED:

Vēr: turning motion, change of direction

Vire: MScot. vire, wire to turn, wind about or whirl (sth.), throw.

Vēren: To turn, change course, raise.



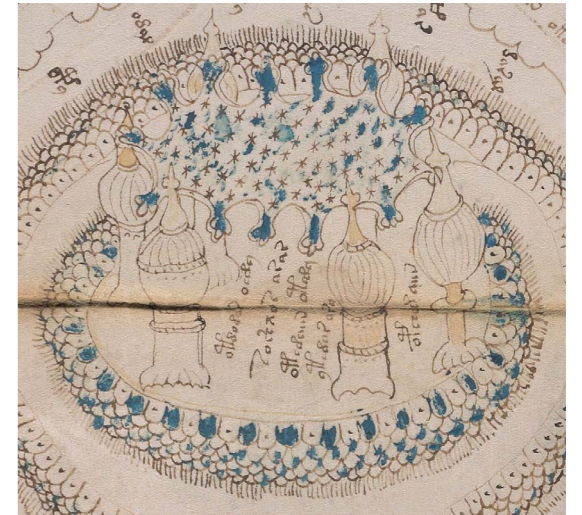
y (rd) (vi)(rn) (vi)(vsl)(ij)  
 (N & NM) 3e red vēren vivesouling/vivesouli\*  
**the red circulating/turning lively pertaining to the soul/?soul**

\* How Many Glyphs and How Many Scribes? Digital Paleography and the Voynich Manuscript, Lisa Fagin Davis, Manuscript Studies, Volume 5, Number 1, Spring 2020, pp. 164-180 (Article)

This reading aligns with the interpreted instructions of the text around aqua vitae:

“Uppermost, with the body and soul, oil-lifting, purify red toxic substance heated, with red circulating, uniting the unctuous essence.”

In all three texts, “ver / veren / vering” makes sense when translated as circulating / circling / turning. Similarly, “soul” appears in the first headline of the manuscript, in the aqua vitae text, and as the first word of the diagram.



THE TEXT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DIAGRAM

“Soul” is also found in the text at the very center of the diagram, placed between the medicine vessels.

In this text I read:

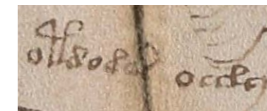
“With emitted first principle, which strengthening shines with the soul  $\pi$ , with the sun’s fixed force, works the highest sphere. Moreover, strengthening projected fire, circling, delivers vivifying projection.”

In this passage, the soul appears to be represented by the sign  $\pi$ . The entire text can be interpreted as a description of how the celestial sphere projects its vivifying force, the first fundamental principle, the sun’s fixed force, which, strengthening, shines with the soul.

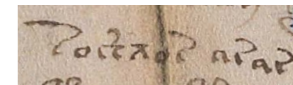
Through this passage, the intermediary circles, that are connected to this first principle in the centra circle, can be understood as representations of the cyclical or circulating influence that the highest heaven, the quintessence, exerts on both the earth and the alchemical process, linking cosmic motion to the microcosmic operations of distillation.

\* MED: Firstmost fors: Fixed force, fundamental force or impulse, first principle.

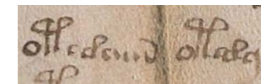
\*\* MED: First heven: Uppermost or highest sphere.



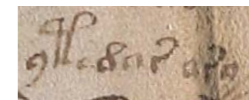
w k(sd) (vi)(rsd) (vo)(r?s) U (vords)(ij)  
 with kest first fors\* hu forcing  
**with cast’s fundamental force\* that strengthening**



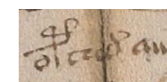
(srjns) w (sul)  $\pi$  (w)(suns) v(rn) (vo)(rs)  
 shīn with sul  $\pi$  with suns firme fors  
**shine with soul  $\pi$  with sun’s fixed force\*\***



(w)k vi(rs)divun ak (vords)(ij)  
 wark first hēven\*\* ac forcing  
**work highest sphere moreover strengthening**



(ij)ki(sd)vr (vi)r(ij)  
 ikest-vir vēreing  
**projected fire turning/circulating**



Up (li)w(rd) (vi)v (m)  
 up livereth vīve-erm  
**delivers active/sophic-arm/projecting (flame)**

THE LAST PATH IN THE DIAGRAM

Even though the diagram is circular and seemingly without an end, the text offers an end point, or an outcome in its last path. The shape of the path is like an S, the alchemical symbol for “spiritus”.

Outside the road I read:

Left:

*reddening restored to its original form*

Right:

*out of the circling path*

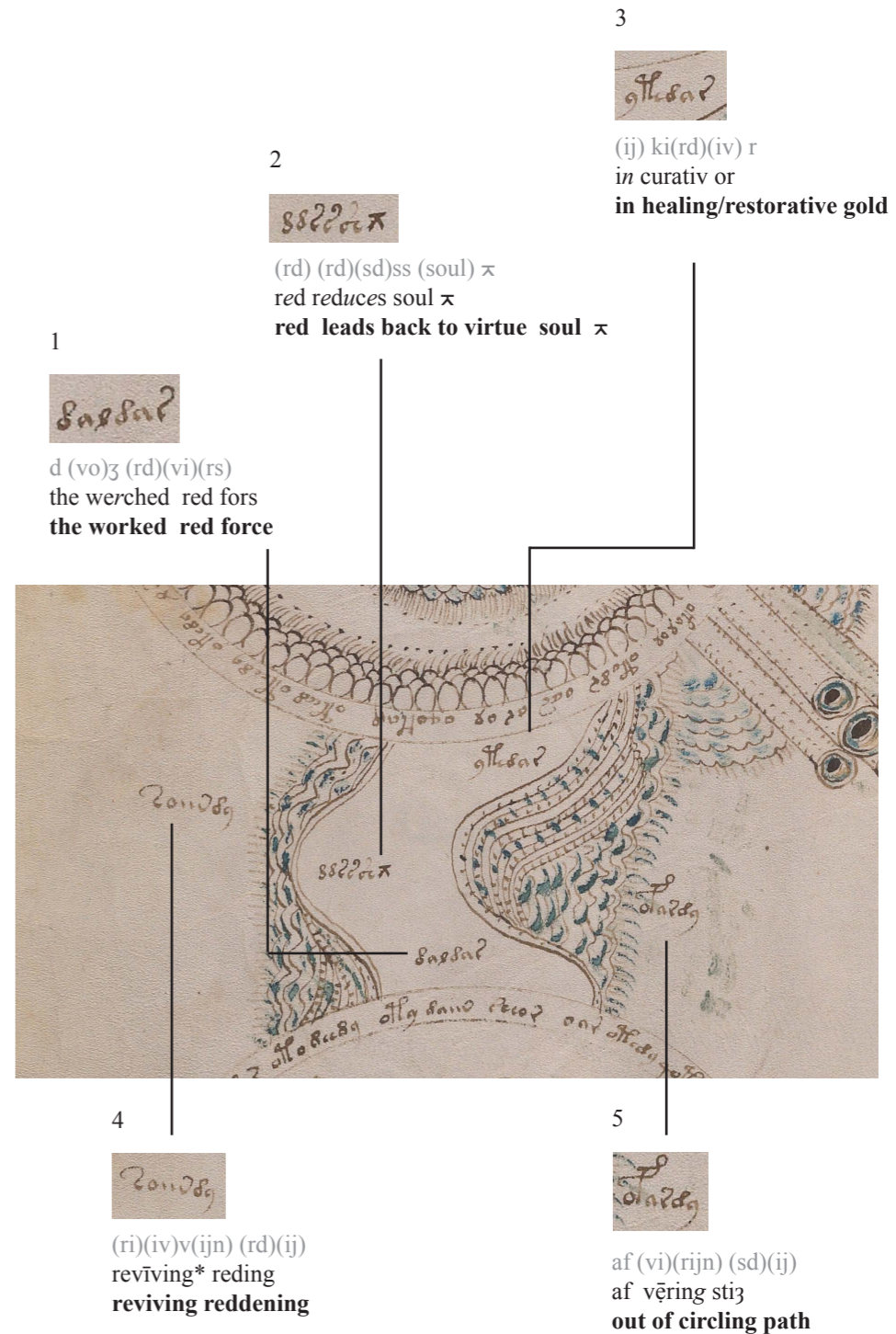
Inside the road I read:

1. “the worked red-force”
2. “red leads soul π back to virtue”
3. “in curative gold”

In path eight (p 66), I read the text

“Curative gold” appears as the final words in the circle, suggesting that it is the end product of the process. This aligns with the text in Path Eight (p. 66), which echoes the medieval alchemical or medicinal concept of potable gold, “a drink with gold.”

The next chapter presents a label-by-label reading of my interpretation of the diagram, from the first word, “soul,” to the last word, “curative gold.”



\*MED: *Reviving*: Reviving, recovering, alch. of a metal: to be restored to its original form or condition.

**PART 3**

**INTERPRETING THE TEXT**

## INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT

This chapter presents interpretations of all the labels in the diagram. It is not called a translation, as a deeper study of the context, and of the language or dialect, is required to understand the words fully and translate them accurately.

The following reading represents an ongoing study, a process temporarily paused, to test what emerges when applying the decoding from step two within the context of medicine, alchemy, and distillation.

## SPELLING

The ligatures in the Voynich cipher point toward an economical mode of writing, saving both time and space. This economy may also be present in the spelling, where letters appear to be omitted. As shown in the table below, this type of omission is in accordance with spellings found in other Middle English texts. It also seems to follow certain patterns that is transferred to the interpretation of the Voynich text.

The list to the right shows examples of abbreviations in the late fifteenth-century *Peterborough Lapidary* (p. 1–4), transcribed by Francis Young.\* The omitted letters are written in cursive.

Compared to the Voynich text, there are some notable omitting of letters in The Peterborough Lapidary:

1. The single letter *p* has multiple meanings, like *pat*, *per*; *pis*, *pe*.
2. *N* and *m* is very often omitted, like in *ston*, *kynde*, *seint*, *in*, *man*, *many*, *hem* and *him*.
3. *N* seems to be consequently omitted in front of *g* in the words ending with -ing, like *semeing*,

*plesyng*, *pekyng*, *shewyng*, and *folowyng*.

4. The suffix *-us*, or *-es*, are omitted, like in *plunius*, *rufus* and *cristes*.

5. At the middle or end of words *er* are often omitted, like in *herafter*; *maner*; *ouergirde*, *maners*, *vertu*

6. The ending *e* is often omitted, like in *one*, *habe*, *bene*

7. “With” is spelled in different ways, often as a single “w” or “wi:” *per-with*, *with* and *with*.

8. The short *e* is omitted in words like *precious*, *venym*.






















To the right is a repetition of the deciphering from step two, used in the reading of the diagram labels.

<i>pat</i>	<i>com</i>	<i>temporeth</i>
<i>maner</i>	<i>sum</i>	<i>comfortep</i>
<i>precious</i>	<i>colour</i>	<i>pinges</i>
<i>contreys</i>	<i>weiztes</i>	<i>encresite</i>
<i>founde</i>	<i>precius</i>	<i>strengþe</i>
<i>assaing</i>	<i>ysidre</i>	<i>semeing</i>
<i>hem</i>	<i>founde</i>	<i>kinges</i>
<i>man</i>	<i>vertu</i>	<i>redyng</i>
<i>many</i>	<i>maners</i>	<i>þe</i>
<i>meruailes</i>	<i>ouergirde</i>	<i>þer-with</i>
<i>tresowur</i>	<i>one</i>	<i>with</i>
<i>propose</i>	<i>habe</i>	<i>with</i>
<i>folowyng</i>	<i>þer</i>	<i>kynde</i>
<i>herafter</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>kend</i>
<i>seint</i>	<i>miche</i>	<i>plesyng</i>
<i>him</i>	<i>lapidaries</i>	<i>pekyng</i>
<i>in</i>	<i>pis</i>	<i>shewyng</i>
<i>plunius</i>	<i>scripttur</i>	<i>ston</i>
<i>rufus</i>	<i>bene</i>	<i>helpit</i>
<i>cristes</i>	<i>veynis</i>	<i>graciose</i>
<i>colours</i>	<i>colour</i>	<i>venym</i>

















































\**The Peterborough Lapidary* (encyclopedias of the ‘virtues of stones and minerals’), Cambridge University Library MS Peterborough Cathedral 33

THE DECIPHERING FROM THE SECOND STEP OF DECODING

Singel letters

a	Δ	
b	ff	
c		
d	8	
e	a/c	
f	ff	
g	8 (gh/ch)	
h		
i	c	
j	)	
k	ff	
l	cc	
m	cc	
n	↘ end of words	
o	o	
p	ff	
q	4	
r	2	
s	2	
t	ff	
u	l	
v	u o	
w	∩	

Examples of ligatures

	rd		sd		
		2+8		2+8	
	rdj		sdj		
		2+8+j		2+8+j	
	rn		sn		
		2+∩		2+∩	
	rndj		<sup>(sh)</sup> srijn		
		2+∩+8+j		2+∩+∩+∩	
	<sup>(sh)</sup> sr		swl		
		2+2		2+∩+cc	
	oil		ul		
		∩+∩+cc		∩+cc	
	kl		tl		
		ff+cc		ff+cc	
	pl		bl		
		ff+cc		ff+cc	
	ijn		sla		
		∩+∩+∩		2+∩+∩	
	vl		vo		
		∩+∩		∩+∩	
	va		wa		
		∩+∩		∩+∩	
	ij		iu		
		∩+∩		∩+∩	

METHOD

The interpretation of the text is presented as follows:



1. Transliteration: (ij) (oil) kuvs
2. Middle English\*: ï oil cuves
3. English: **in oil vats**

1. In the transliteration, ligatures (combined letters) are written in parentheses.

2. The transliteration is then compared to words in the Middle English Dictionary.

3. The modern English translations are listed in the Middle English Dictionary.

*Letters in cursive represent omitted letters.*

**Interpretations are written in bold blue. They are rendered as close as possible to the original wording.**

The Middle English interpretation is written in regular blue.

\* MED: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>

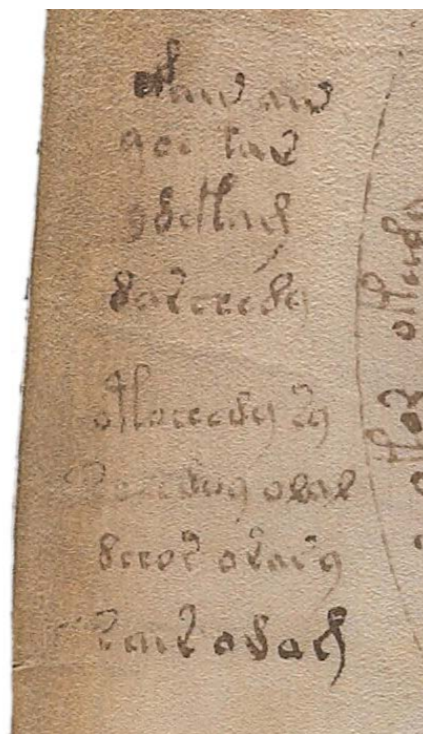
AT THE MARGIN - A DESCRIPTION OF THE DIAGRAM

**vivifying fume (mercury)  
in vessels of oil (quintessence)  
in a restoring circulation  
red-forcing oily reddening**

**one can oil-lifting shining  
purify with virtuing work-vault's  
red oil-rinsing with kindling projection in  
shine's formative principle with retained redness**

v̄ivifiung feum  
ĩ oil cuves  
ĩ reductive rounding  
red-forcing oili reding

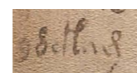
wo can oil-lifting shining  
sie with vertuing werch-vauts  
red oil-washing with arm-furing ĩ  
shine-fourme with retentif reding



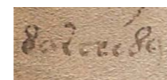
(vi)f(iv)u(inj) (vi)un  
vivifiung \*feum//veyn//win//vein  
**life-giving \*vapor//substance//wine//  
channel**



(ij) (oil) kuvs  
ĩ oil\*\* cuves  
**in oil\*\* vats**



y (rd)U(zt)(iv) (rundij)  
ĩ reductive\*\*\* (Latin) rounding  
**in bringing something back to its ori-  
gin/restoring/reductiv circling/circle**

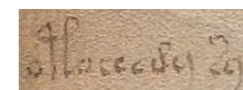


(rd)(vo)(rsij) (oil)i (rd)(ij)  
red-forcing oily reding  
**red-strengthening oily reddening**

\* *Veyn* is used about substances like “sal petre (p. 147), magnes, salgenne, aspalum, mummia (p. 149), quick siluer, sulphur, chalke, sal amonyake, alum glasse es ustum, i. rede poudre y-made of copre, flos eris, i. flour of bras, petrolium (p. 150), bole, thylmolea, cleye sclattes, siluere, golde cathymy (p. 151), and so on: Halversen, Marguerite A. *The consideration of quintessence : an edition of a Middle English translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de consideratione de quintae essentiae omnium rerum with introduction, notes and commentary*. Thesis, 1998. Transcription of Rupescissa, *The Consideration of Quintessence*, Book I.

\**Feum*: “White feum” has historically been used as a cover name, a decknamen, for mercury: *The Experimental Fire. Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Jennifer M. Rampling. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London, 2020., p. 34.

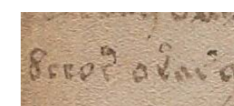
\*\*MED: *Oil*: Alch. A substance extracted from metals or other elements, a quintessence



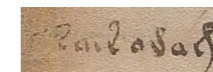
(wa) ka (oil)i(rsd)(ij) (srijn)(ij)  
wo can oil-lizthing/luching shining  
**one does oil-lighting/lifting shining**



(sij) w ?(vi)(rd)U(ij) w3(vo)3  
sie with vertuing werch-auts (also: voghts)  
**purify/flow/drip with virtueing work-vaults**



(rd) (oil)(wa)(rsij) w (arn) v(urij) (ij)  
red oil-washing with arm-furing ĩ  
**red oil rinsing with arm-kindeling in**



(srjn) (vo)u(rne) w (rnd) (iv) (rdj)  
shine-fourme with retentif redding  
**shine formative principle\*\*\*\*\* with retaining reddening**

\*\*\**Reductiv*: Loan from Latin *reductio*: A leading back, bringing back, restoring.

MED: *Reducten*: Lead back to a first source or principle, reduce, return.

\*\*\*\*MED: *Vertū*:

Physical strength, power; force, energy; also, vigor. The quickening power of a flower or root; also fig.; the life-sustaining force within a plant; the vegetative power of nature; also, the fruit of a plant. A particular mental faculty or power of the soul necessary for thought, imagination, etc. Medicinal potency. A supernatural influence; the power to affect life on earth;—used of celestial bodies. An inherent quality of a substance which gives it power; also fig.; an intrinsic property of one of the four elements. Divine power, divine might; also in synecdoche, a supernatural or divine power. A state of grace. Nobility of character, manliness, valor.

\*\*\*\*\* MED: *Fourme*: Form, fomative principle, hat which causes a thing to be what it is/ the essence of the thing (as contrasted with the matter of which it is composed)

PATH ONE - THE FIRST LABEL



**purify the soul in round circuit**

saul rōund skīren



s(ou)(ul) (round) (sr)i(rin)  
soul rōund skīren  
**soul in a circular course/fully purify**

\* MED: *Soul*, also *sowel*, (N or chiefly N) *saul*, *sauil*: Soul  
\*\*MED: *Round*, adv.: 1a) In a circular course (c) with a rotary movement; ?in a circular or winding motion. 3 c) from beginning to end. 4 a) Vigorously, fiercely; also, fully. (b) quickly, promptly, at once

**The first label - the start**

In Europe, the convention is to read from the upper left corner. When the foldout map is approached in this way, the starting point of the diagram appears as a short label that has almost vanished.

The label is placed above the sun, where the path enters the map. As this marks the beginning of a route connecting the eight circles, the label may indicate the initiating action or movement of the soul within the work.



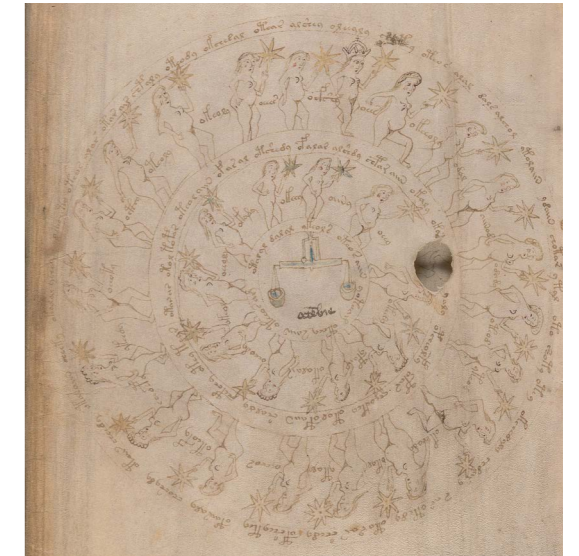
A sun in  
Brunschwig's  
*Liber de arte  
distillandi de  
compositis*,  
Strasbourg,  
1512.

The Voynich sun is not a happy sun. Rupescissa wrote that the sun "is of so greet sufferynge and of so maruaillos sadnesse that fire may not waste hym (destroy it) by noo wytte ne reason (by any wit or reason)."\*

\* Page 135, Halversen, Marguerite A. *The consideration of quintessence : an edition of a Middle English translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de consideratione de quintae essentiae omnium rerum with introduction, notes and commentary*. Thesis, 1998. Transcription of Rupescissa, The Consideration of Quintessence, Book I.



Porphyrius and Plotinus discussing the purification of the soul by means of theurgy; gods, souls and zodiac signs. Maître François, between 1475 and 1480.



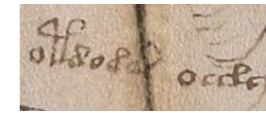
The Voynich Manuscript f72v1, a diagram with a zodiac sign.

THE TEXT BETWEEN THE MEDICINE JARS IN THE CENTRE CIRCLE

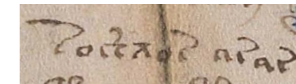


with emitted fundamental force which strengthening  
shines with the soul  $\pi$  with sun's fixed force  
works the highest sphere moreover strengthening  
projected fire circling  
delivers vivifying projection

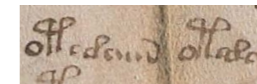
with kest first fors hu forcing  
shins with soul  $\pi$  with suns firme fors  
work first hēven ac forcing  
ikest-vīr vēring  
up livereth vīve-erm



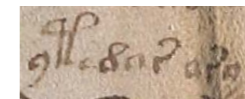
w k(sd) (vi)(rsd) (vo)(r?s) U (vodrs)(ij)  
with kest(s first fors\* hu forcing  
with cast's/casted/emitted/shed/concocted first force  
who strengthening



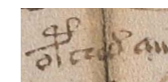
(srjns) w (sul)  $\pi$  (w)(suns) v(m) (vo)(rs)  
shīn with sul  $\pi$  with suns firme fors  
shine with soul  $\pi$  with sun's fixed force/first principle\*\*



(wa)k vi(rs)ivun ak (vorsd)(ij)  
wake//work first hēven\*\* ac forcing  
awoken//work highest sphere moreover strengthening



(ij)ki(sd)vr (vi)r(ij)  
ikissed// ikest-vīr vēren  
ignited/touched//projected fire turning



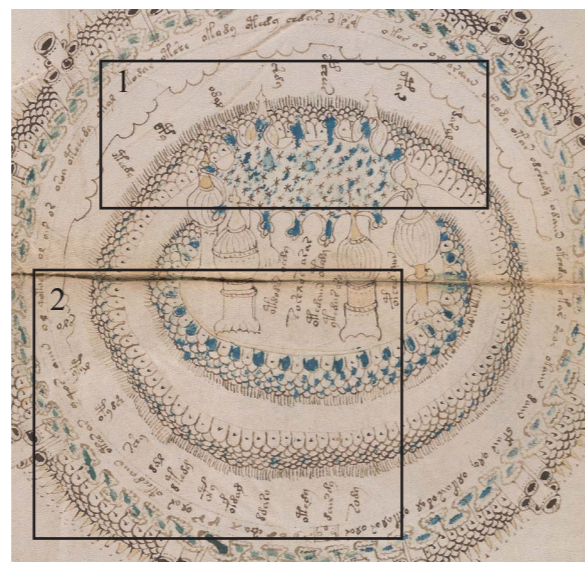
Up (li)w(rd) (vi)v (m)  
up livereth vīve-erm  
delivers active/sophic-arm/projecting (flame)

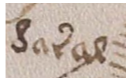
\* MED: *Firstmost fors*: Fixed force, fundamental force or impulse, first principle.  
\*\* MED: *First heven*: Uppermost or highest sphere.

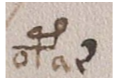
THE TEXT AROUND THE MEDICINE JARS

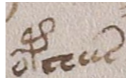
This text is placed inside the central celestial sphere which is feeding four of the surrounding circles.


- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1 <b>transforming work<br/>circling upward<br/>around oil (quintessence)-vessels<br/>celestial</b></p> <p><b>worldly<br/>around (it)<br/>work improving (or: remedy)</b></p>   | <p>redūcing werch<br/>up vēring<br/>umb oil-lumes<br/>celestīn</p> <p>worldishe<br/>umbī<br/>werk mending</p>  |
| <p>2 <b>and here is<br/>exuded work<br/>one improving the oiling<br/>or ensouling</b></p> <p><b>red source<br/>the quintessence<br/>uppermost wine (quintessence)<br/>with soul-virtue<br/>restored with receptivity</b></p> <p><b>shedding<br/>red forming unifying<br/>resurrection</b></p> | <p>and her is<br/>iwepe werch<br/>wo prōving the oiling<br/>or souling</p> <p>red source<br/>the quint-essence<br/>upperest vin<br/>with furth-vertū<br/>redūced with reiciving</p> <p>acasting<br/>red fourming using<br/>resurrecciōun</p> |



1.  
  
 (rd)(iu)(rsinj) (vi)3  
 reducing werch  
**leading back to virtue/changing/  
transforming work**

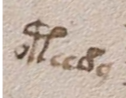
  
 Up (vi)(rinj)  
 up vēring  
**upward turning/circling**


  
 Ub (oilu)ms  
 umb oil-lumes  
**around/about vessels**

  
 (sele)(sd) (ij)  
 celestīn//soul-luching  
**celesital//soul-lifting**

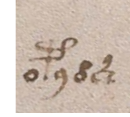
  
 w(rd)e3  
 worldishe  
**worldly**

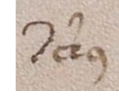
  
 Ub(ij)  
 umbī  
**around/roundabout**


  
 wkmd(ij)  
 werk-mending//mendinge  
**work-improving/curing/  
regulating/remedy**

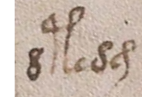
2  
  
 a 3 s  
 and he//her is  
**and it//here is**

  
 (ijv)p (vo)3  
 iwepe werch  
**exuded work**

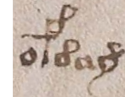
  
 (vo)(pr)(ovij) d(oilij)  
 wo prōving the oiling  
**one proving oiling**

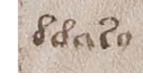
  
 r (sol)ing  
 or souling  
**or souling**

  
 (rd) (srd)3  
 red source  
**red source/origin\***

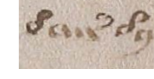
  
 d (ku)(imd)(esdj)  
 the quint-essence  
**the quintessence**

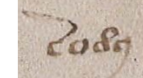
  
 U(prst) (vij)  
 upperest vie/vin  
**uppermost/supreme/  
highest manner of liv-  
ing/?life//wine**

  
 (vi) (furth) (vi)(rdj)  
 with furth-vertū  
**with life/soul virtue**

  
 (rd)(sd) (vi) (res)(ivj)  
 reduced with reiciving  
**reduced/transformed/restored  
with recieving/?receptivity**

  
 ak i (rs)(vij)  
 acasting  
**shedding**






  
 (rd) (vo)(rnij) (usdij)  
 red fourming using  
**red forming/creating/gif-  
ing life to unifying**

  
 (rs)U(rsrd)(ijn)  
 resurrecciōun/  
**resurrection fig. a rebirth,  
spiritual revival//fig. rising  
again**

\*MED: Source: The upward flight of a bird; also fig.; (b) ~ of the sonne, the rising of the sun

THE FIRST CORNER CIRCLE - THE CIRCLE THAT THE PATH ENTERS

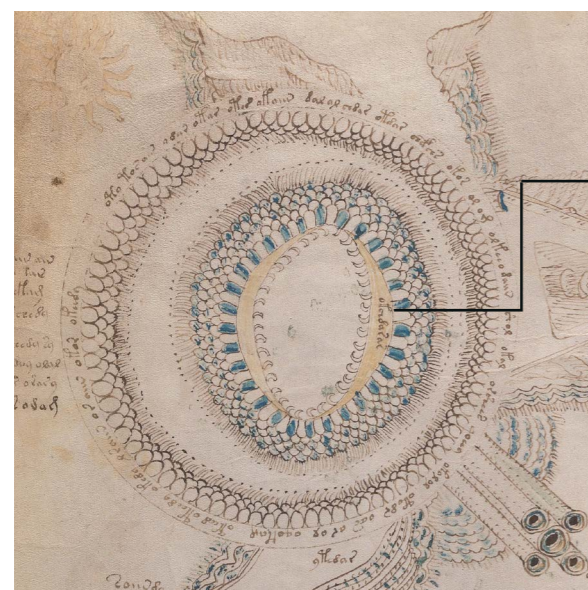


-  Mercury
-  Argentum
-  Aurum
-  Ovum= egg, ?athanor
-  The sun

PATH TWO - DEEP PITS AND ORPIMENT

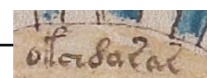


The picture shows Strip-Mining Sulfur (Orpiment) at Pozzuoli. Anton Eisenhoit (German, 1553/4–1603). Engraving in Michele Mercati, Metallotheca Vaticana (Rome, 1717), pl. after p. 78



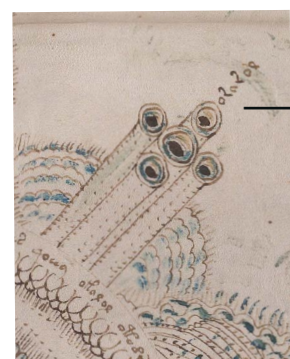
circling (or fire) of the unworked force

untoiled-fors-vēr (fīr)



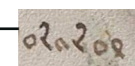
Ut(oil)d(vo) (sr) (vi)r  
 untōled (of toilen)-fors vēr/fīr (also vir, ver)\*  
**unprocessed/unmixed/unpulled (alch. raw/un-prepared/natural?) force/virtue circling//fire\***

\* MED: *Fīr* (alos *vir, ver*): Alch. (a) Any of various kinds of heat or degrees of heat used as an agent in an operation; (b) such heat identified as to the operation in which it is used

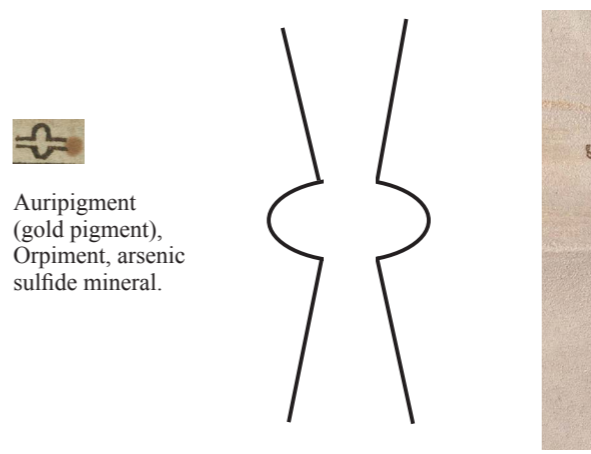



warm the work by fire

warm-firen werch



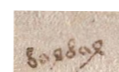
(wa)(rn)v(rn) w3  
 warm-firen werch  
**warm-fire work**



 Auripigment (gold pigment), Orpiment, arsenic sulfide mineral.

retentive red work

retentīf red werch

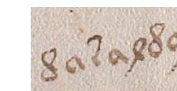


(rnd)(iv)3 (rd)(vi)3  
 retentīf (error: rentiv) red werch  
**retentive/the capacity to retain nourishment / holding fast, not letting escape red work**



the colour gold in hiding

the heu or ē hīding



d (iu) r e 3(rd)(ij)  
 the heu or ē hīding  
**the color gold in hiding**

THE FIRST INTERMEDIARY CIRCLE ATTACHED TO THE CENTRE CIRCLE




Ely Cathedral lantern tower, built between 1322 and 1342. Photo: Peter Trimming, CC BY-SA 2.0

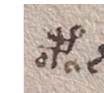


with attaching  
red x distillate before  
forceful path of calcination  
uppermost distillate shines  
of mercury  
hereafter shines it  
rinsed in  
redness volatile  
improving within  
from the centre

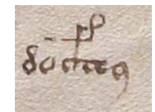
with taching  
red x eue er  
ust-förcī wei  
up eue shīn  
of win  
uver shīn he  
out-washed ī  
ruddon fliing  
rectifying ī  
ute

 Mercury

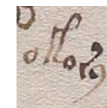
 Dissolvere (1) x 13



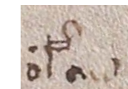
Up (iu) (srijn)  
up heu//eue shīn\*  
**up(ermost heu//spirit  
shine/radiate/circulate**



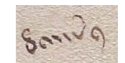
(rd)U (fli)(ij)  
ruddon fliing  
**redness (alch.) volatile//  
flying**



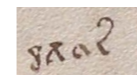
w ta(rs)(ij)  
with taching (of: tachen)  
**with attaching/placing/fix-  
ing/implanting**



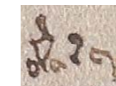
uf (vi)un  
of win//feum  
**of /from wine//feum (mercury)**



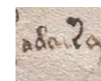
(rd)(iv)u(inj) (ij)  
red-yevung//rectifying ī  
**red-giving//improving  
within**



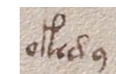
(rd) x (iu) r  
red x heu//eue er  
**red x heu//spirit before**



(vo)(thvrdj)e (srijn) (ij)  
föρθ-wārd shīneth hē  
**forward/hereafter shines it**



U(sd) vu(rsij) (vij)  
ust-förcī wei  
**calcined forcing/full of force  
path**



(ou)tv(rst) (ij)  
out-washed ī  
**rinsed in**



Uta  
ute  
**outwards (from the  
centre)/outside**

PATH THREE - CALCINATION



Calcination

THE SECOND CORNER CIRCLE - CIRCULATION



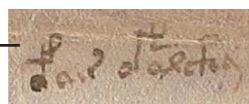
Aes distillatum			Vitriolum
Cinnabaris			Destillare
Sulphur stillatum			Retort
Vitriolum album			Dissolvere
Vitrum, glass			Mercury



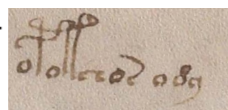
out from ivory's emptying-channels  
around laboring decoloration

off ivören outing-sheteles

umb a tulous undeie



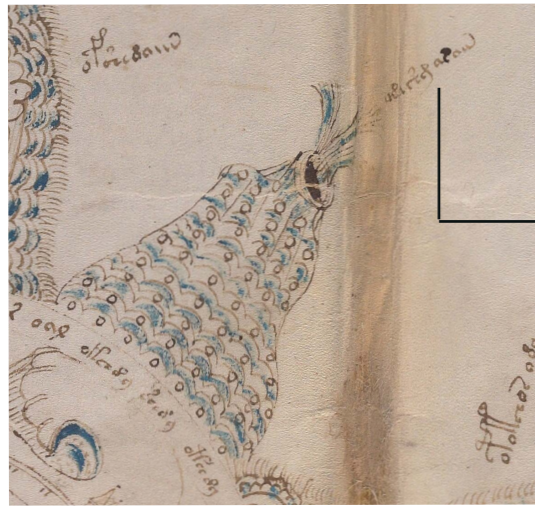
oF (iv)(m) Ut(iu)3tl(ij)  
off ivören outing-chetel//chastel//sheteles  
off ivory's emptying/expelling-kettle//castle//channels



Ub at(ul)(ou)s u d(ij)  
umb a toilus (see toil, N tule) undeie  
around/concerning a churning/working/mixing un-dyeing

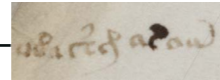


VITRIOL AND DIGESTION



glasslike soul-lifting spiral-form

vitreous soul-luching vis-fourme



(vi)(dr)(iu) (swlij)(dsj) (vi)s (vo)u(rn)  
 vitreous soul-luching\*\*//vitriol-solūciōun  
 vis\*\*-fourme/worm  
**glasslike soul-lifting // vitriol-solution spiral\*\* (Latin, vis: force)-form//worm/snake**

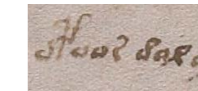
\* MED: *Luchen*: cp. MnE dial. lutch to lift  
 \*\*MED: *Vis*: Spiral stair.



Brunschwig: "After that you should have glass vessels for digestion and circulation, called circulatorium, their forms are of many kinds, the first is as follows."

around waves bringing matter to its primary state

umbe wavis redōucing



Ub (wau)(vi)s (rd)(ov)(ch) ij  
 umbe waves redōucing  
**around waves reducing/dissolving/bringing back matter to a prior state**



vitriol - put into work/digest - opening

vitriol - forwirsch - opening



(vo)r (vi)ʒ  
 forwirschen\*  
**destruct/?work through//?digest**  
 \* Dutch *verwerken*: to process/digest.



(vi)to(roul)  
 vitoroul (error fro vitriol)  
**vitriol**



up(oninj)  
 opening  
**opening**

Vitrum



Vitriolum atramentum  
 Iron Sulphate



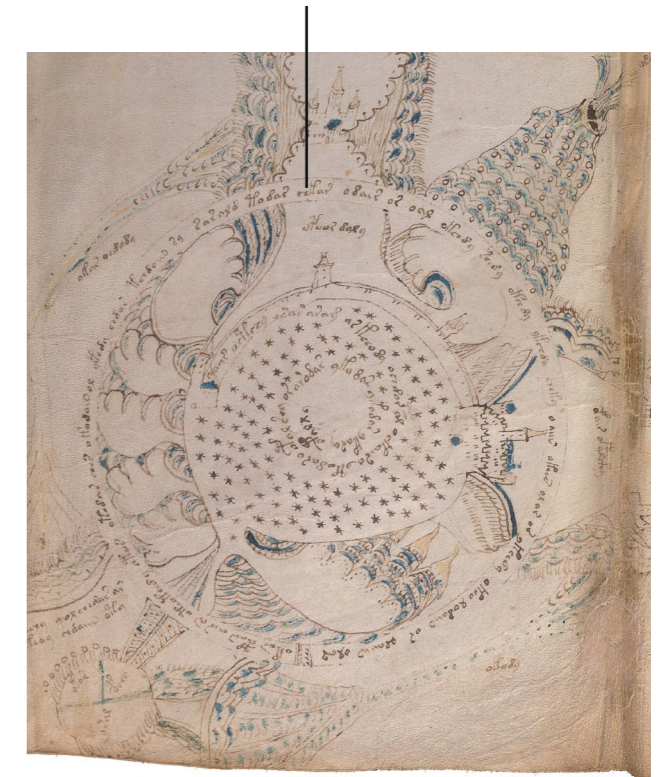
Vitriolum album  
 Zink sulphate



Waves and/or curling smoke around the water bath.



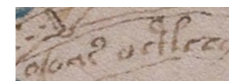
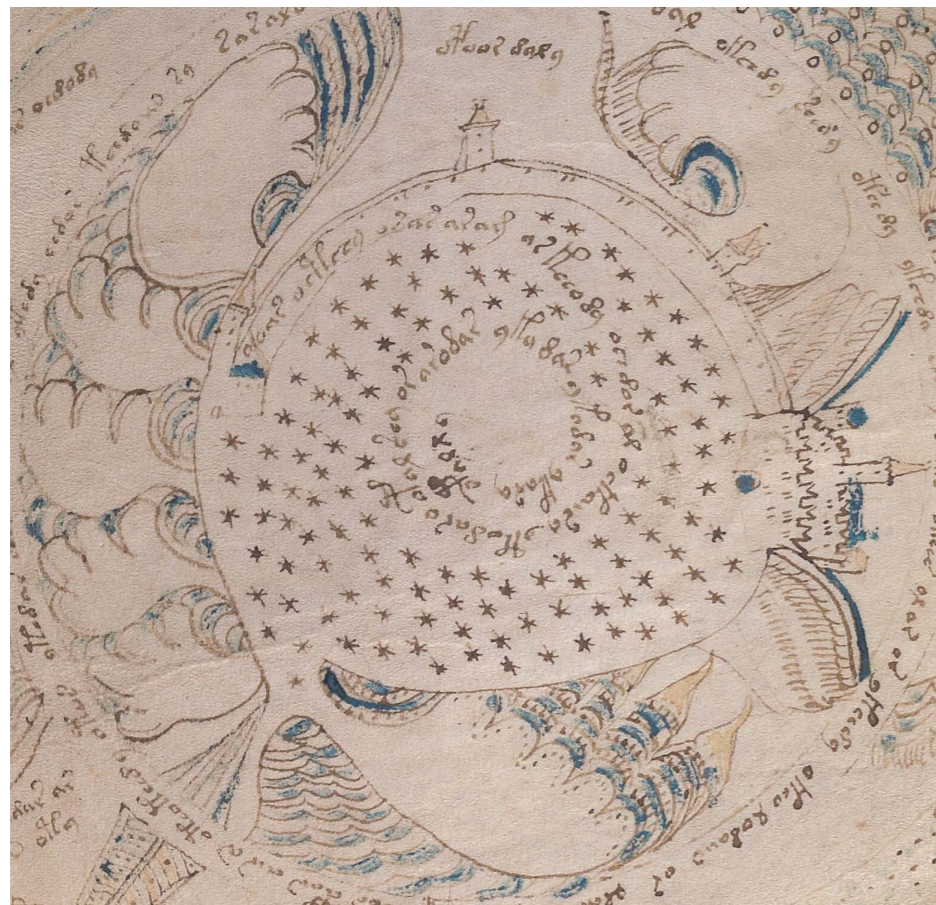
A vessel with a narrow neck standing in a water bath. *Alchemiae Gebri Arabis Philosophi Solertissimi : Libri, cum Reliquis, ut Uersa Pagella Indicabit'*, 1545, Geber (13th cent)..



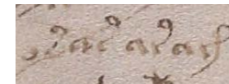
THE SPIRALING TEXT AMONG STARS AND WAVES

waves with curling, on silvery ivory virtue.  
 Force to moves through an oil-stirred work,  
 which into the ivory eye, move the circling fire  
 around the work of the soul`s path, warm fiery vitriol,  
 glasslike reducer, outside the circling. White-forming  
 performs a physical operation on  $\pi$  within

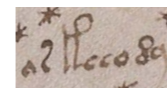
waves with curling on silveri ivori vertue  
 fors to mouwe through a oil-storen werch  
 who into ivoris eie igadder and  
 umb werchs souli vei warm firi vitriol virteous reducer  
 without the verre outwards vering whit-fourming  
 up-werch  $\pi$  in



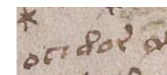
(va)(uu)(is) (vi) (ku)(l)(ij)  
 waweis with curling  
 ?wave`s with curling



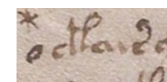
o (sij)(lv)r(ij) (ivrij) (iu) (wu)(rdj)  
 on silveri ivori vertue  
 of/one silvery ivori vertu



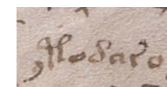
(vo)(rs) t(mou)w d(oj)  
 fors to mouwe throug  
 force to move through



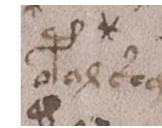
?a (wul) (sd)(ou)(rn) (vi)3  
 ?a whel (also, wheel, wel)  
 storen werch  
 ?a wheel/circular process  
 moved/stiren work



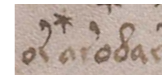
U it(iv)u(rijs) (vij)  
 hou into ivori`s vei  
 who into ivory`s path



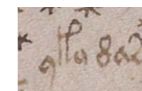
ika d vir a  
 iga the vir//ver (triangle: fire)  
 move/fare the fire//circling fire



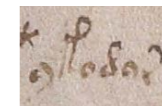
Ub(vi)3 (souli)(vij)  
 umb werchs souli vei  
 around works partaining to the soul path



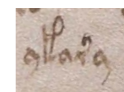
w(urn) (vi)(rij) (vi)(dr)(ov)r  
 warm//worn vering/firi vitriol  
 warm circling/firy vitriol



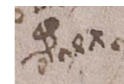
(vij)tiu (rd)(iu)(u)r  
 vitre/vitreus reducer  
 glass vessel//glasslike reducer



ujt(va)(rds)(vi)(rijn)  
 ou3twārdes vēring  
 towards the outside/external turning

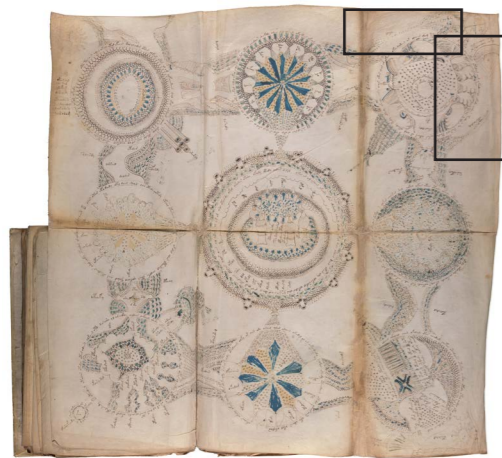


(vij)t(vo)(urn)(ij)  
 whīt-fourming  
 white-forming



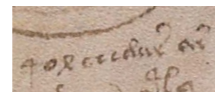
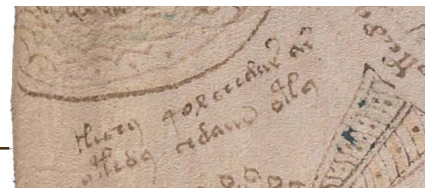
Up(va)3  $\pi$  (ij)  
 up-werch  $\pi$  i  
 work/form/stir/perform a physical opera-  
 tion on  $\pi$  inside

TEXT BY THE EXTERNAL PATHS LEADING TO VITRIOL

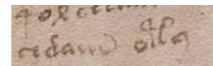


**mixing of casting (injected matter)** which oil (quintessence) in stirring forming light-vivifying operation

toiling of casting which oil in stiring forming liste-viven werking



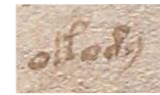
tul(ij) tuling (of toilen, also tule, N) **pull/efforting/cook. to mix (ingredients); stir (a mixture)** qU3 (oil) i (sd)iu(rinj) (vo)(rnij) qwich oil in stiring (stiren also steure) fōrmen **which oil in stirring/combining a substance with another by stirring/moving/agitation or motion of waves/churning of the sea forming**



(ou) ki(sd)(ij) of/kesting (of: casten, also kesten) **of casting/throwing/injected matter** (li)(rsd)(vi)vn/(vo)uun wk (ij) light (also, liste)-vīvaunte werking **light-living operation/work**

external path

ōutwārd vei

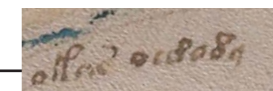


Ut(va)(rd)(ij) ōutwārd vei external path



**vitriol's fire not immersed**

vitriol's fire withoute



(vi)tiu(rs) (triangle) (vd)(ou)d(ij) vitriol's fire (alch. triangle) withoute **vitriol's fire not immersed in (water)/outside an enclosed area**

PATH FOUR - MARRIAGE / UNION



**rinsing (and) cleansing**

rīncen puliching

**work moisty oiliness**

werk moīstī unctūōusiti

**living ensouled red marriage**

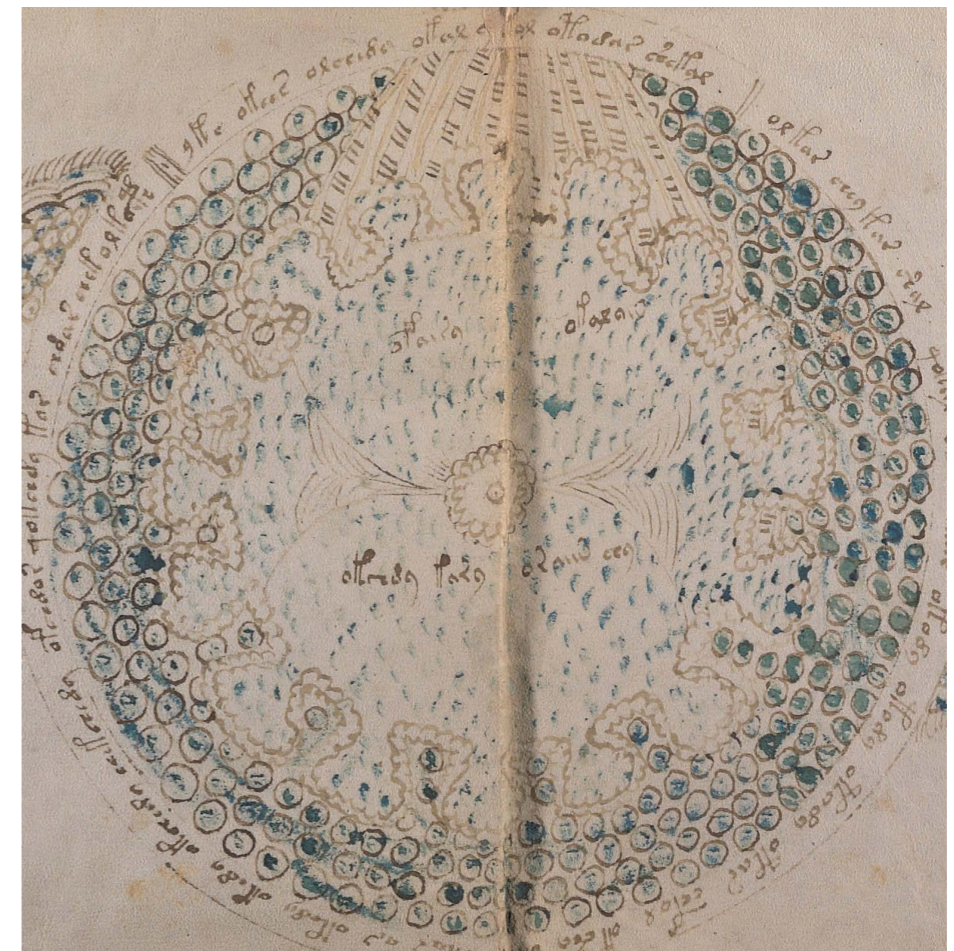
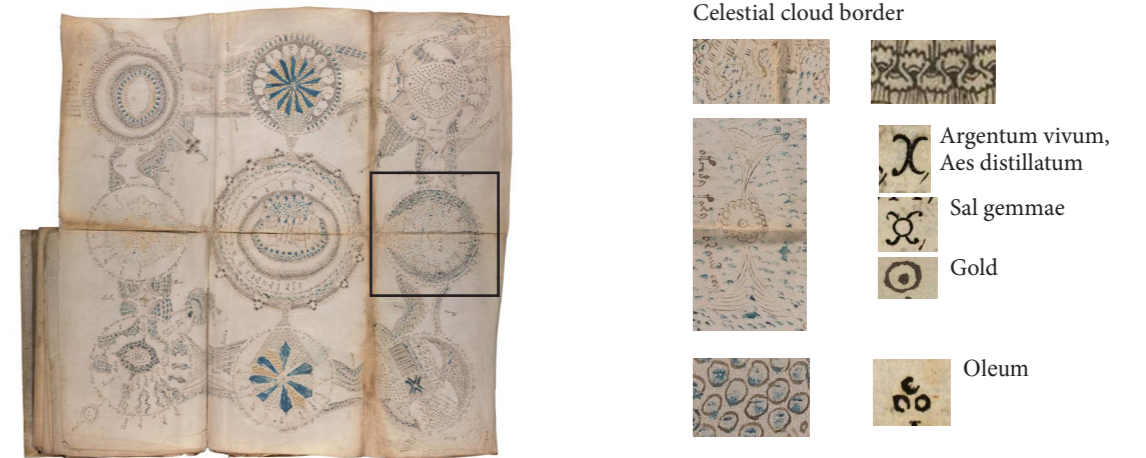
vīf soulī red-viving

re(nrs)m(pul)(sd)(ij)  
rīncen\* puliching  
**\*Rincing (a container) by swirling and emptying (and) polishing/cleansing**

(vi)f (swl)i (rd)(vi)v(nj)  
vīf soulī red-wiving//  
wine/vevyn//vivifien  
**quick/lively/sophic of the soul red marriage// dye/toxic substance/living soul in red vivify**

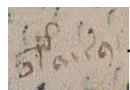
(ve?)k m(osd)(ij) uk(vo) 3 (sd)(ij)  
werk moīstī unctūōusiti  
**work moisty oiliness**

SECOND INTERMEDIARY CIRCLE



**a (triangle: fire) heating**                      **rinsed oil**  
**fat-oil to heating a projecting arm uniting oil(ing)**

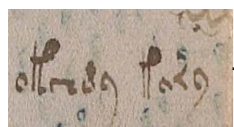
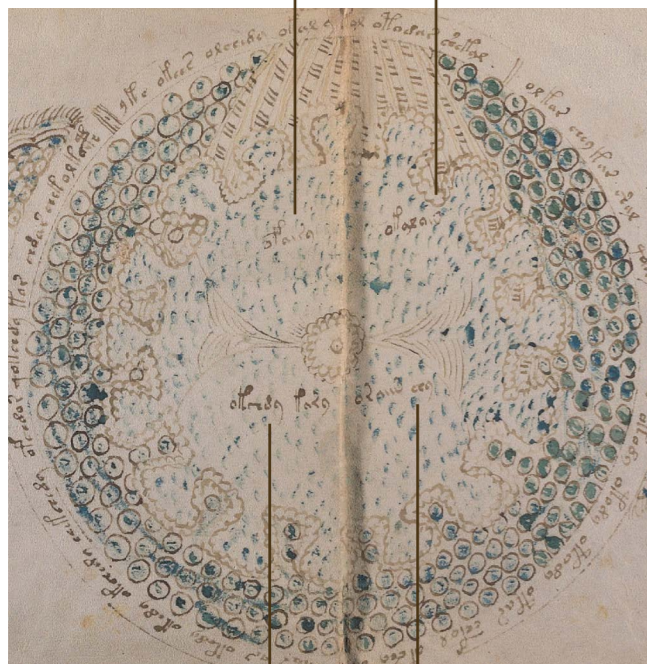
a (triangle: fire) fevering                      out-washt oilum  
 vat-oil residue to firing    a arme unitingo oiling



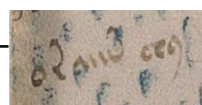
a (triangle) F (iv)r(ij)  
 a (triangle: fire) fevering  
**a (triangle: fire) heating**



Ut (vo)3 (iu)u(ln)  
 out-wash//ōutwerken ?oilum//  
**rinsed//bring/result in oil/oils**



(va) t(ui)l (rsd)(uj) t (vi)r(ij)  
 vat-oil residue to firing  
**fat-oil to firing/ alch. heating;**

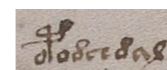


a (rn) (vi)v(inj) (oi)l(ij)  
 a arme wīvng//?vīvifīng oiling//olige  
**an arm/projection marrying/joining/vivi-  
 fying application of oil/oil**



**around heat-inherent red work**

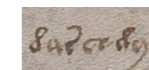
umb vertūāl red verk



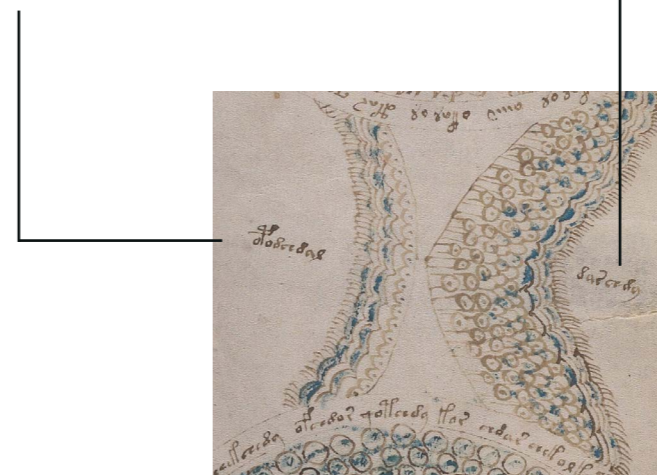
ub (vi)(rdv)(ul) (rd) v3  
 umb vertūāl red vertu/verk  
**shed/around alch. the heat inherent in the  
 physical composition of a substance (as  
 opposed to heat from the outside) capable  
 of transforming any alchemical material  
 red-colouring**

**red-circling's oil achieving/sprouting**

red -vērs oil chēving








(rd) (vi)(rs) (oil) (dsr)(uwj)  
 red vērs oil chēving  
**red circling's oil achieving/occurring/sprouting**



Toleum, canvas

THE THIRD CORNER CIRCLE



-  Aqua fortis
-  Salpetre
-  Mensis, (error for Menstruum)  
Rock salt
-  Albumen
-  The sun



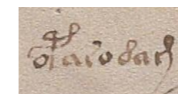
TEXT BY THE SECOND SUN

around turning one rectifying circulation

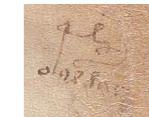
umb vēren *with* rectiv (of: rectifie) rounding

enwrap work's vapour....

wap werch(s steu...)



ub (vi)(rn) w (rd)(iv) (rndj) ?  
 umb vēren *with* rectiv (of: rectifie) rounding  
 around turning/circling one refining/alch. to  
 purify (a substance) by distillation rounding/  
 circulation

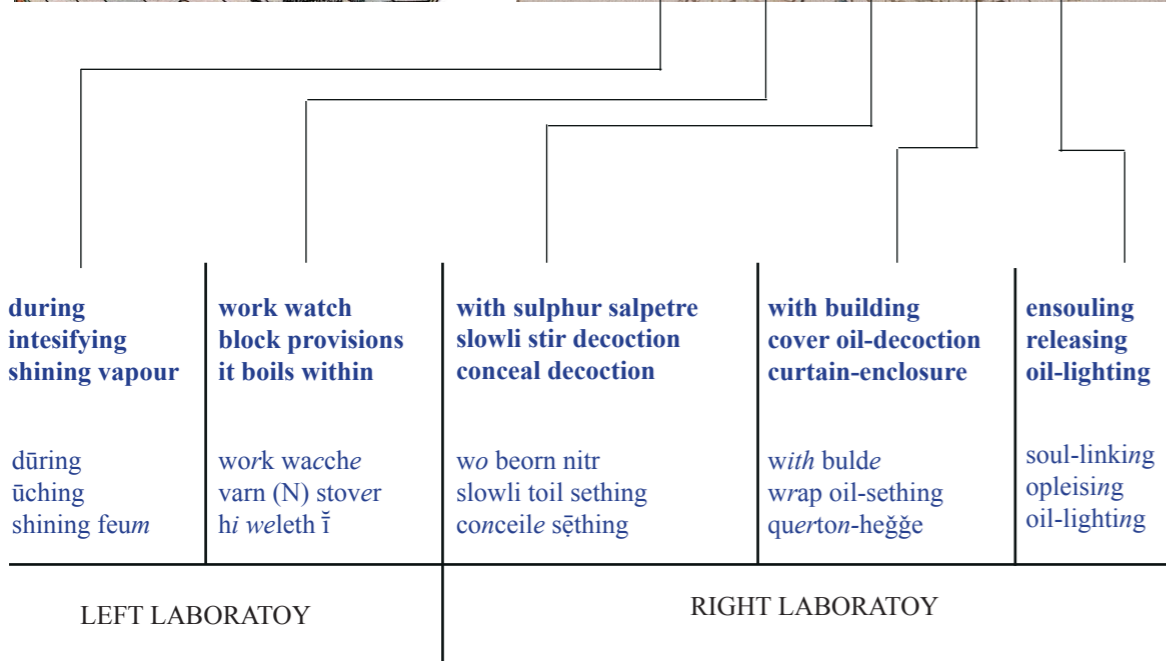


(wap) (va)ʒ (sd)(iu) ?  
 wap werch(s steu... ?  
 enwrap/cover work('s bath/vapour/cal-  
 dron....



THE LABORATORY WITH CURTAINS TO PROTECT FROM DANGEROUS VAPOURS

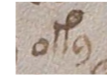
*Alchemist's Laboratory*, Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae*, 1595. The fireplace is under a rectangular construction with ventilation. As in the Voynich illustration this construction has green curtains.



LEFT LABORATOY



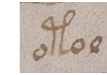
d (iu)(rijn)  
dūring  
during



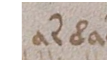
Ut(ij)  
uchching//ūching of: ēken)  
moving/rising//increasing



(srinij) (vi)(iu)  
shining feum  
shining vapour



wk (wa)3  
work wacche  
work watch

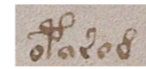


(vo)(m) (sd)(ov)r  
(N) varn stöver  
block/deny access to/guard provisions



3 (wl)d e  
hī welletth ĩ  
it boils/seethes/bubbles/rise/flow in

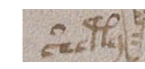
RIGHT LABORATOY



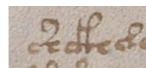
w b(eu)(rnij)a(dr)  
with burn nītre  
with sulphur saltpetre



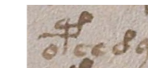
w b(oil)d  
with bulde  
with building



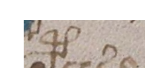
(soul)ek(ij)  
soul-ēking  
soul-adding/increasing/adding



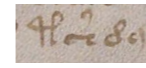
(slowli) (toil) (sd)(ij)  
slowli toil sething  
slowli pull/mix/stir decoction



(wa)p (oil) (sd)(ij)  
wrap oil-sething  
enwrap/clothe/cover oil-decoction



obls (ij)  
upleis ye  
releas/uplift the



k (osijl) (sd) ij  
conceile sēthing  
conceal/cover up decoc-tion//seething



qUtU 3  
querton-hegġe  
curtain-enclosure

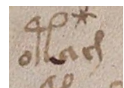


(oil)i(ij)t(ij)  
oil-lighting//lightening  
oil-burning/illumination/  
softening/resulting//clarifying/  
revealing/illumination/un-loading

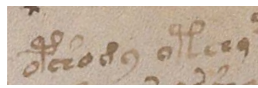
ABOVE THE TWO LABORATORIES

**aqua forte** release red in aqua-oiling  
**and around turn oily boiling** and moistening that achieve one specific gold-souling

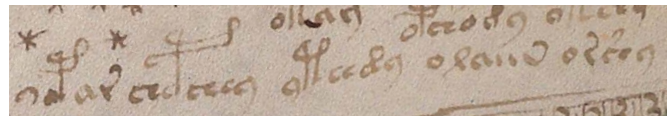
*aque forte* absolv red in aqua-oiling  
 a umb veren oili boiling iec moisting hu chiven wo or-souling



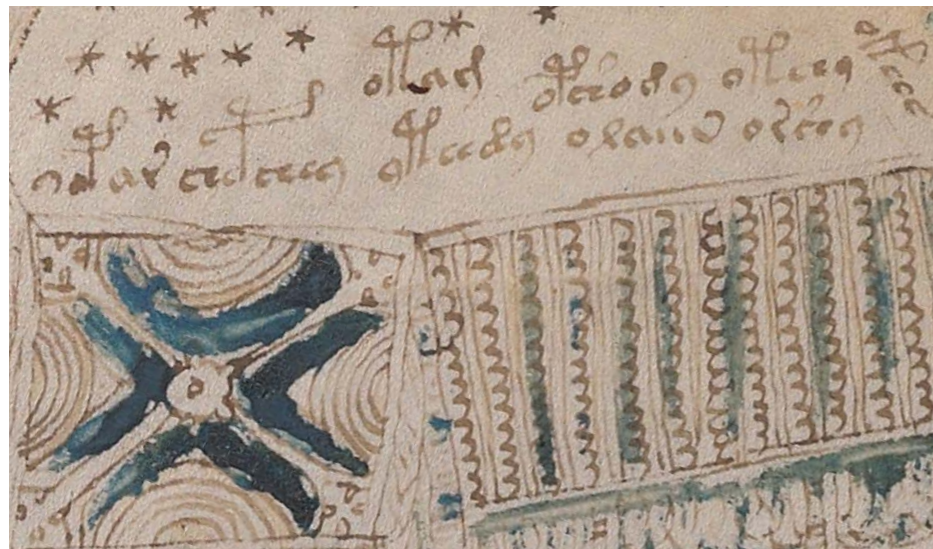
aku(vo)(rdj)  
*aqua forte*  
**aqua forte**



ab(sol)w (rd) (ij) ak(oil)(ij)  
 absolv red jn aqua-oiling  
**release/?dissolve red in aqua-oiling**



a ub (vi)(ren) (oil)ib(oil)(inj) (ij)k m(oisd)(ij) U 3(iv)un w r (soul)(ij)  
 a umb veren oili boiling iec moisting hu chiven wo or-souling  
**and around turn oily boiling** and moistening that achieve one specific gold-souling



TWO TEXTS TO THE RIGHT OF THE LABORATORIES

**1 Block scent before toxic substance of oily-life works.**  
**With the oiling released into quintessence,**  
**block heated equipment containing strong litharge.**

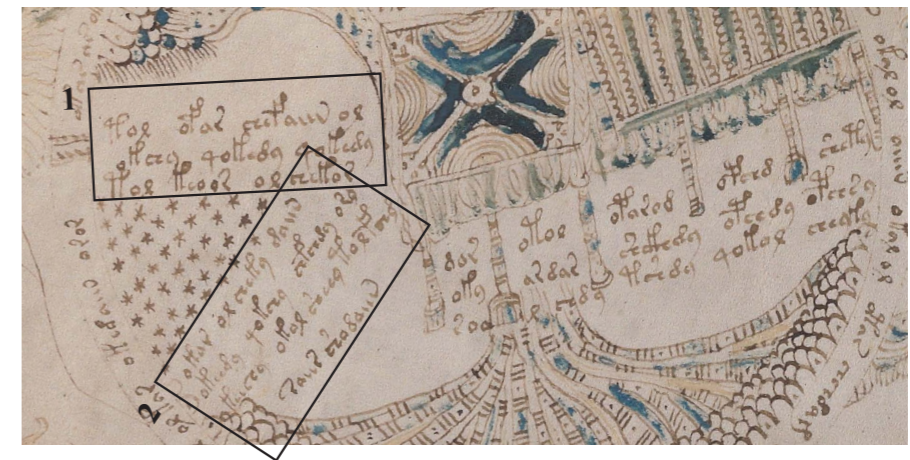
clōth waf vorv oil-lif-viven werch  
 with the oiling quited jn quint-essence  
 clogh teu warm with hiz litarġe

**2 With turning, fear the making of resistant wine.**  
**Undiluted in craftily oil-life-lifting a destructive force will rise.**  
**When working with strong ensouling, conceal completely**

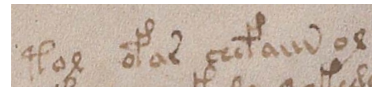
**Recovering ensouling of the toxic substance**

with turning ughe lēting restīf vin  
 untrepid jn queintlī oil-lif-luching vo rung/ring  
 jn toiling with tough souling clogh fulliche

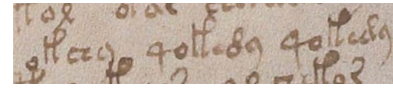
reversing soul of the vevyn



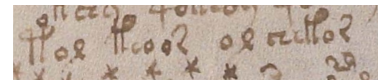
1



k U 3 (wa)V (vo)(rn) lif(vi)vn w(3)  
clogh waf vorn oil-lif-vevyn//viven werch  
**cloth/block scent/odor before/in front of oily-life-toxic substanc//uniting work**

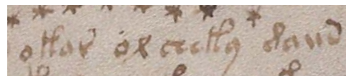


w t (oil) ij qU(t)ud(uj) q(ou)te(sd)(ij)  
with the oiling quited jn quint-essence  
**with the oiling released into quintessence**

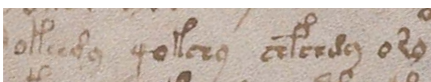


k U 3 tiU (wa)(rn) w 3 lit a (rs)  
clogh teu warm wo hiz litarge  
**clothe/block equipment warm with purified litharge**

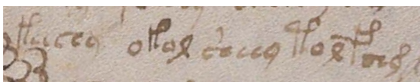
2



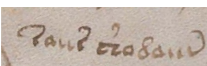
w tiu(rnij) U3 lit(ij) (rsd)(iv) v(in)  
with turning ughe lēting restif vin  
**with turning fear letting/making resistant wine**



Ut(em)(rd) (ij) q(ou)tl(ij) (oilf)(lu)(ds)ij (vo) r(uj)  
untrepred jn queintli oil-lif-luching vo rung//ring  
**undiluted in wisely/craftily oil-life-lifting injury/desructive force rise//encircle**



(ij) tUil(ij) w t(ou)3 (soul)n(ij) k U 3 f(ol)(dsj)  
jn toiling with tough souling clogh fulliche  
**in mixing/stiring with strong/viscous/difficult ensouling clothe/cover/  
conceal fully/completely**



rev(rsij) (soulij)a d (vi)vn  
reversing souling of the vin//vevyn  
**reversing ensouling of the wine//toxic substance**

ABOVE THE ATTACHMENT GLASS FOR DISTILLING AQUA FORTIS



protection before work

war vorn werch

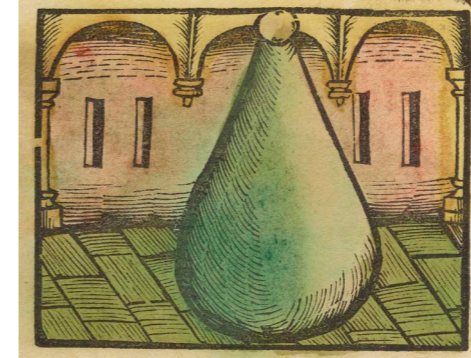


(wa)(r) (vo)(rn) v(rdj)

war vorn werch

protection before work

Sarnach soln haben fürsatz gleser / so  
man distillieren wil Aqua fort / Sarn zu  
entpfaße die spiritus vn geist bald n ach  
dem mundloch sich weiteren / off das sich  
die spiritus bald von einander thünd / ge-  
nant Receptaclen / in tütscherzungen für  
setz gleser / darumb das darin entpfangē  
würdt das gedistilliert / des figur also ist.



Brunschwig: "After this you should have  
attachments glasses / when one wishes  
to distill aqua fortis / In them the spirits  
and vapors are to be received / soon  
after they expand from the mouth of the  
vessel, so that the spirits may quickly  
separate from one another / these are  
called receptacles / in the German  
tongue Fürsatzgläser / because in them  
is received that which is distilled /their  
shape is as follows."

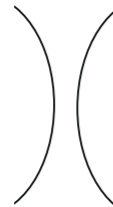
PATH SIX - DANGEROUS CIRCLING AND CAREFUL DIGESTION



Argentum vivum (mercury)  
Realgar

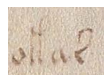
**dangerous circling**

wat vēr

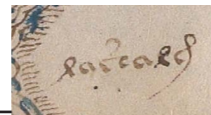


**careful digestion**

choislī dīgēsting



(wa)t (vi)r  
wat (N, of wōth) vēr  
dangerous turning

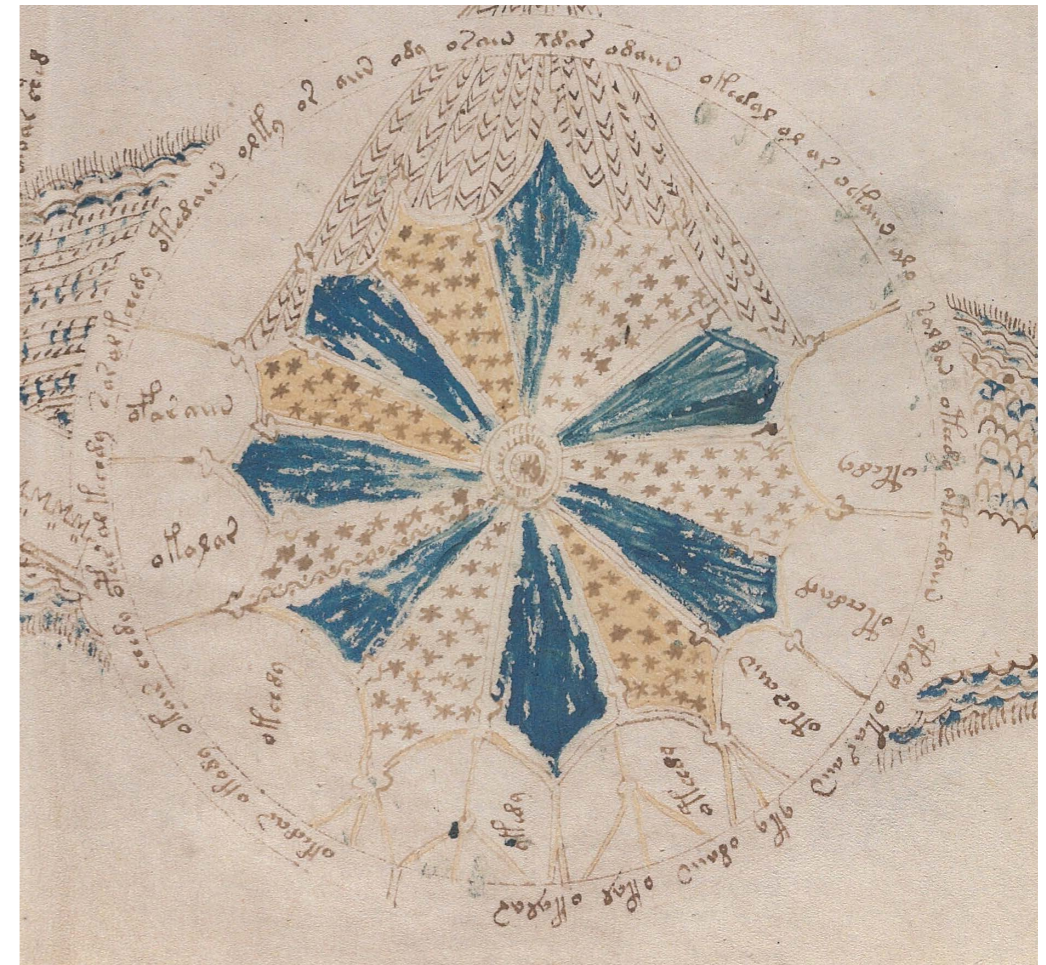


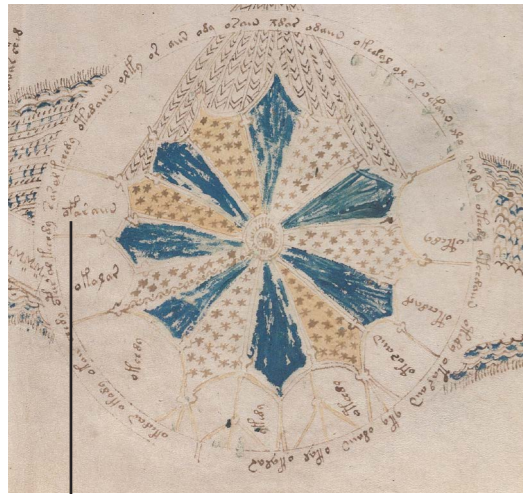
ziu(suli) (iu)3(sdj)  
choislī dīgēsting//  
aptly digesting (trans-  
forming (usually by  
means of heat), vaporize  
(moisture), age (wine),  
etc.; transforming (the  
alchemists' 'stone')

THE THIRD INTERMEDIARY CIRCLE



4xSal commune





from the vivifying shine of the toxic substance  
with the work's circling  
with the oil reddening  
yet uniting  
from kindling  
works ones toxic substance  
with cold virtue  
hiding itself

of viv-shine vevyn  
with the werchs ver  
with the oil-reding  
yet usting  
of kīnding  
wark wons vevyn  
with cōld vertū  
unkīthing

offeand

UF (vi) (srijn) (vi)vn  
of viv-shīn vevyn  
**out of/from vivifying shine  
toxic substance**

offeag

(uj)t u(sd)(ij)  
yet usting  
**yet uniting/marrying**

offeasg

wk(ol)d (vi)(rdj)  
with with cōld\* vertū  
**with cold\* virtue**

\* rest, condensation, stabilization,  
or gentle absorption.

offeag

(vi) t (vi)3(vi)r  
with the werchs ver  
**with the works turning/circling**

offeag

(ou) knd(ij)  
of kīnding  
**of kindeling**

offeag

U kid (ij)  
unkīthing  
**hiding itself/ ?latent**

offeag

w t (oil) (rd)(ij)  
with the oil-reding  
**with the oil-reddening**

offeand

(wa)k ws (vi)vn  
wark wons vevyn  
**work ones toxic substance**



proceed the work to ensouled red

work rech vor souli red

offeag

wk (rds) (vo)r (souli)(rd)  
werk rech vor souli red  
**work reach/proceeds for ensouled red**

around bloomed wine

umb blumed win

offeag

Ub(lumd)(vi)un  
umb bloumed win  
**around bloomed wine**



offeag





Road 7 enters a circle  
that has a flowere in the  
centre.

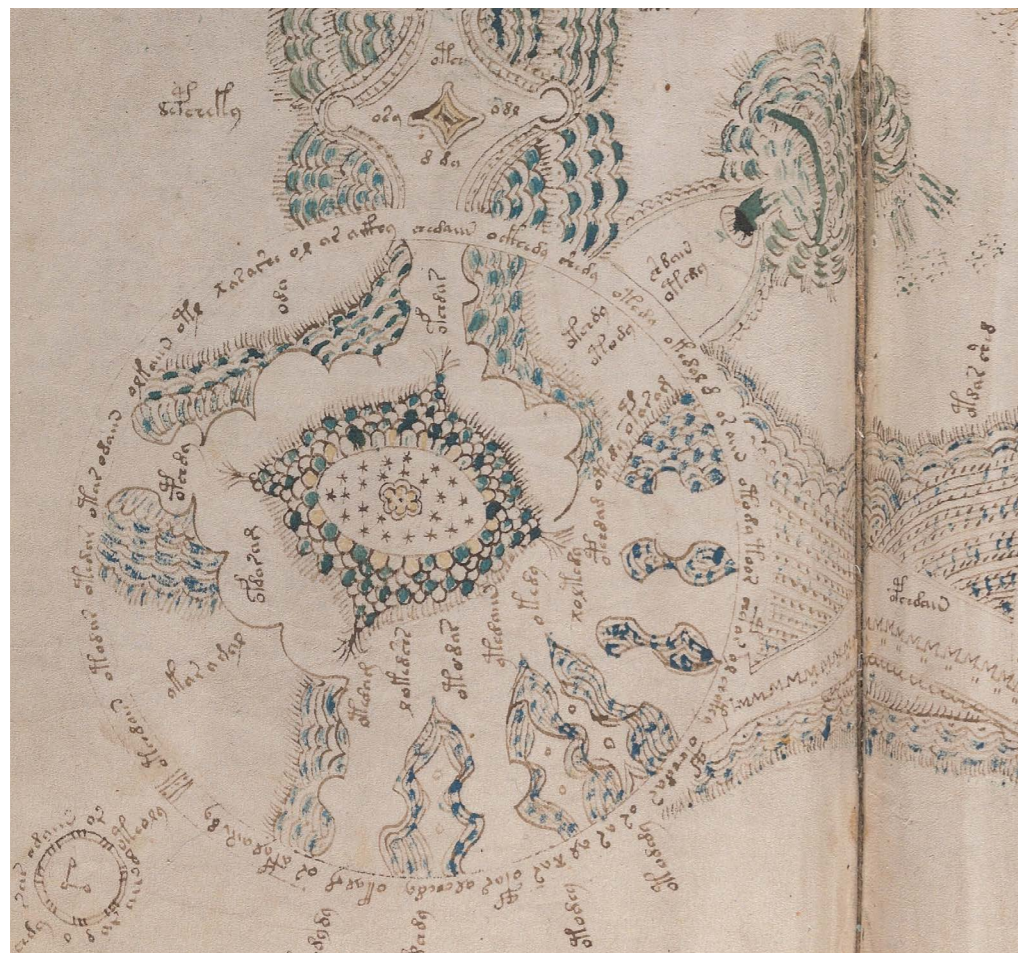


offeag Coagulation(1)  
Alembicus (2)

THE FOURTH CORNER CIRCLE - AQUA VITAE



-  Aqua vitae
-  Cucurbitum  
Alumen  
Antimony vitrum
-  Mercury
-  7 x Marriage



UNDER THE VESSEL

warm reducing  
not affected by natural  
processes of decay

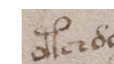
uncōlde redoucing  
uncorrupte

INSIDE THE VESSEL

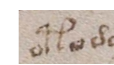
ensouled red marrying  
strong quintessence

soweli red wiving  
quintessence vurthie

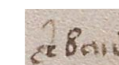
\* MED: *Rēd*, also *rede*,  
*redde*:  
1a. Red  
1g. Alch. Of alchemical  
substances or operations:  
having the color of the final  
elixir or stone, effecting  
transmutation to gold; red;  
also, as noun: the red form  
of the philosopher's stone



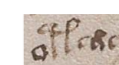
uk(ol) (rid)(ouj)  
uncōlde redoucing  
**vigorous/fervent reducing**



(u)k(ou) (rud)(ij)  
uncorrupte  
**eternally unchangeable/  
pure/ not affected by natu-  
ral processes of decay, not  
decomposed**



(swli) (rd)(vi)(vinj)  
soweli red\* viving//wiving  
**ensouled red\* vivifying//  
marrying**



(vi)(kumts) (wu)(rd)(uij)  
with quintessence worthī  
**work/operation effective//  
strong/potent**

**purified heu**

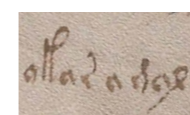
washed *hiu*



(wa)(rsd) iu  
washed *heu*  
**washed/alch. to purify (a substance)  
in the process of creating the philos-  
ophers' stone heu/color**

**a cinnabar hue red-work**

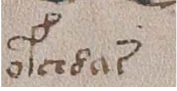
a *teafur heu* red-deuing



?at(ivr) (iu) (rd)(iu)(3)  
?a *teafur heu* redouce  
**?a cinnabar hue reduce/restore**

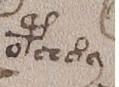


**with fulfilled circling**  
*with filled vē*




w f(ul) (rd) (vi)r  
*with ful red vē*  
**with complete red turning/  
 circling**

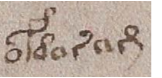
**uppermost oil-lifting**  
*up oil-luching*



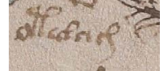
Up (oil)(rsd)(ij)  
*up oil-luching//up-luching*  
**uppermost oil-lifting//elevating**



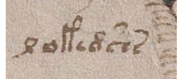
**one fixed distilled water or ready (red) distilled water**  
*o fast eue er eue rēdī*



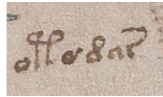
o V(sd)(iu)r (iu)(rdj)  
*o fast eue er eue rēdī*  
**one solid/fixed/dense distilled water or distilled water  
 ready/red**



wk i(ds)(iv) (rdj)  
*werk achiven rēding*  
**work finish/achieve/accomplish  
 reddening**



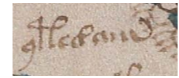
(3) wti(sd) ( soul)s  
 hechen/high witest\*\*  
 souls  
**raise/high most puri-  
 fied souls/spirits**



(wu)k (ou)(?) (rds) (vi)r  
*werk of rised vīr*  
**work of rised/awakened/  
 activated fire**

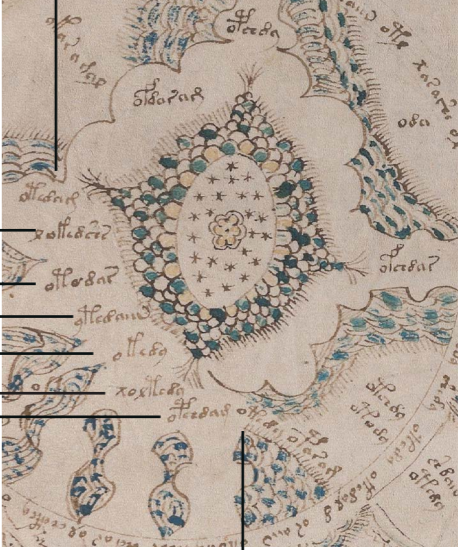
**the highest most purified souls (spirits)**  
*high witest souls*

**work of activated fire**  
*werk of rised vīr*



**strengthened toxic substance**  
*enčrēsed veyn*

eki(rsd) (vi)vn  
 enčrēsed (N) wien/ (error)  
 veyn  
**intensified/repeated wine/  
 dye/toxic substance**

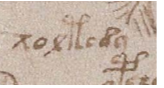


**with the improving**  
*with the iching*

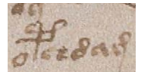
w t i(dsr)(ij)  
*with the iching*  
**with the increas-  
 ing/amplifying/  
 improving**

⌘ of high worthy  
 ⌘ of heigh-worthī

**with bound virtue**  
*with bōnd vertu*

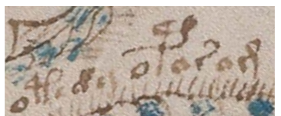


⌘ (ou) (3)kw(rd)(ij)  
 ⌘ of heigh-worthī  
 ⌘ of high-worthy



w bnd (vi)(rdj)  
*with bōnd vertu*  
**who/how bound virtue**

**with casting around for virtue**  
*with casting umb vor vertu*



w ki st ij Ub (vo)r (vi)(rdj)  
*with casting (see casten , also kest) umb vor vertu*  
**with turning/forming about/around for/to bring  
 about virtue**

Summary of the text in side the symbols of marriage in corner circle four:

**with fulfilled circling  
uppermost oil-lifting  
one fixed distilled water or ready  
(red) distilled water**

**work achieve reddening  
the highest most purified souls (spir-  
its)  
work of activated fire  
strengthened toxic substance  
with the improving  
⌘ of high worthy  
with bound virtue  
with casting around for virtue**

*with filled vē  
up oil-luching  
o fast eue er eue rēdī*

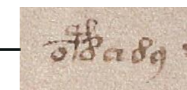
*werk achiven rēding  
high witest souls  
werk of rised vir  
encrēsed vevyn  
with the iching  
⌘ of heigh-worthī  
with bōnd vertu  
with casting umb vor vertu*

OUTSIDE CORNER CIRCLE FOUR

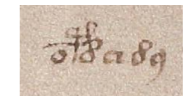


**continued reddening  
intensified oil ready  
the oil actively working  
work of restoring**

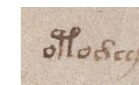
*onforthing reding  
upped oil reding  
unctuōs chiving  
werk of restitūing*



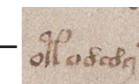
*of i(rd)(ij) (rd)(ij)  
onforthing rēdī  
**advancing/continuing reddening***



*Upd (oil)/(iu) (rd)(ij)  
upped oil rēdī  
**raised/intensified/manifested oil ready/reddening***



*U(mk)(vo) (rsd)uij  
unctuōs chiving  
**unctuous/oily acheiving/activating/maturing***



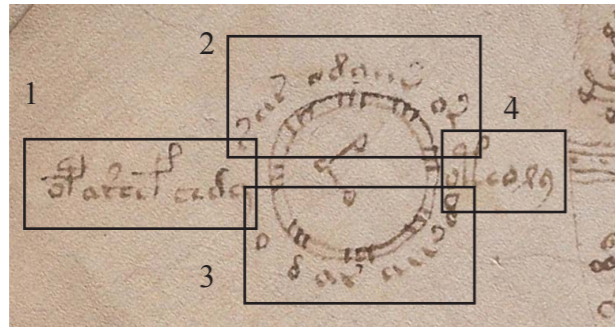
*wk (ou) (rsd)id(ij)  
werk of restitūing  
**work of restoring***

clarify with red toxic substance heating

skīren with red vevyn warm

uppermost with body and soul oil-lifting

up with soul-lif\* oil-luching\*\*

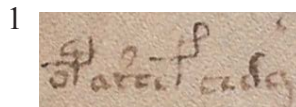


unctuosity (oily essence)

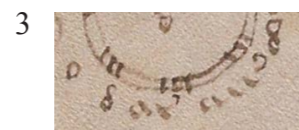
unctuōsitē

one red circling unifying the

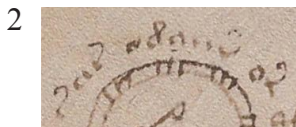
wo red vēring\*\* wiving the



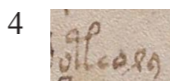
Up e (sul)if (lu)(rsd)(ij)  
up ē soul-lif\* luching\*\*  
up/out from/upward/up onto/at the summit in soul-life/body and soul lifting//springing



(wo) rd (vi)v(ijn) (vo)u(rn) d  
with red vēring\*\*\* wiving the  
with red turning/circulating marrying the



(sr)iu(rn) e (rd) (iv)un (wa)(rnij)  
skīren ē red (N) wien//vevyn warming  
purify in red wine//dye/toxic substance heating



UkiU3(ij)  
unctuōsitē  
oily substance/oiliness/viscosity

\* *Lif*: The body, the bodily members as a whole. *Lif and soule*: body and soul, as adv.: wholly, altogether. *Soule and lif*, all of oneself; as adv.: wholly

\*\* *Luchen*: cp. MnE dial. lutch to lift.

\*\*\* cp. MScot. vire, wire to turn, wind about or whirl (sth.), throw.

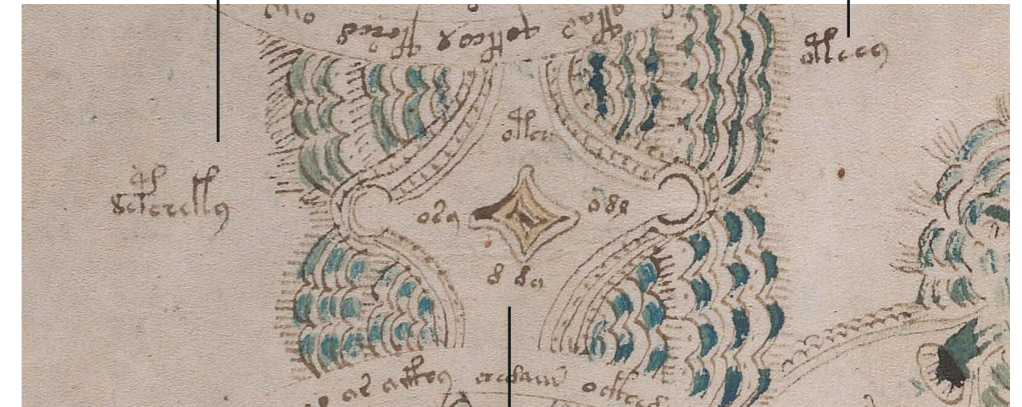


deep oil-coloring

oiling

dēp oil-līting

unctioning



with gold

with gol

exuding

wōsing

with medical potion

viv drich



red dew

red deu

Spirit of wine



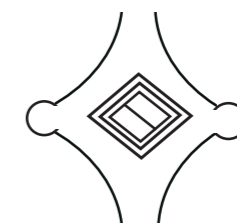
Antimony spagyrica



Vitrum antimony



Aurichalcum gold copper alloy



Blood stone

Crystallus Cupurum, Venus

Argentum

Aurum

\*\*MED: wōse:  
 1. example: Al ase  
 þe oyle op arist  
 ine þe lompe alle  
 þe oþre woses,  
 also merci alle þe  
 oþre uirtues.  
 2. verb: Evapo-  
 rate, exude, emit,  
 flow.



ws(ij)  
 wōsing  
**evaporating/  
 exuding/evapo-  
 ration**



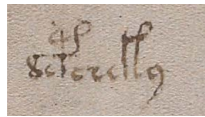
w g(ol)  
 with gol  
**with gold**



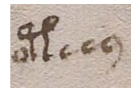
(vi) (dr)ʒ  
 vive drich  
**active/vivifying drink/medical potion**



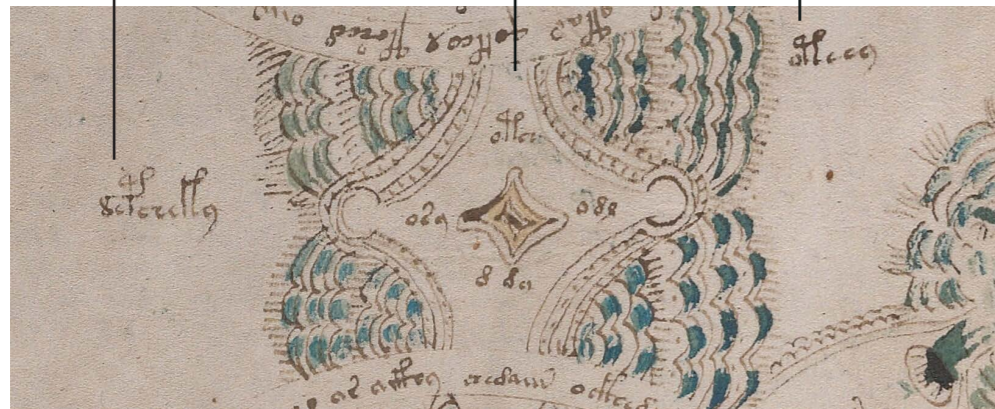
(rd) diu  
 red deu  
**red dew**



dip(oil)ut(ij)  
 dēp/dippen oil-luting//līting  
**deep/secret//immerse oil-(con)seal-  
 ing//colouring**



uk(ion)(ij)  
 unctioning  
**oiling/anointing**



THE FOURTH INTERMEDIARY CIRCLE - PURIFICATION AND SUBLIMATION

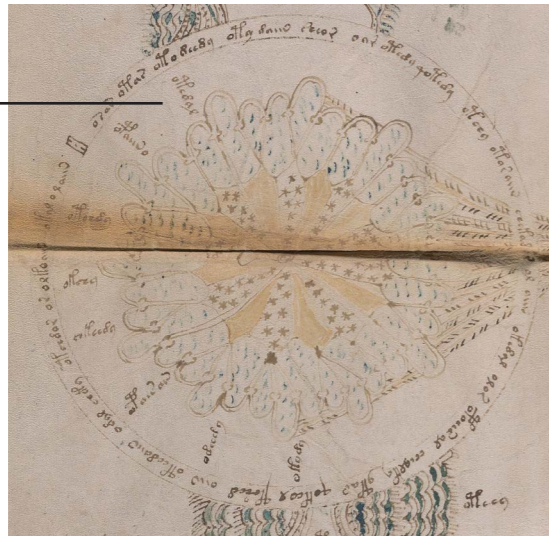


Fan vaulting, Gloucester Ca-  
 thedral, by Philip Halling, CC  
 BY-SA 2.0.

- Sublimation
- Purification
- 2 x Purifi-  
catio
- 3xGold
- 3xSilver
- 3xCopper

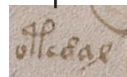


TEXT INSIDE THE LAST INTERMEDIARY CIRCLE - STOP AND SEAL THE WORK

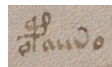


**uncast work  
around united (three in) one  
work oil-lifting  
completely  
seal moistening  
around fleeing wine  
who reduces within  
one tincture**

uncast werch  
umb wiven wo  
work oil-luching  
fōrthlī  
lute moisting  
umb fūsing wien  
hu reduceth i  
one tincturing



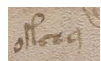
Uki(sd) (vi)<sub>3</sub>  
uncast werch  
uncast work



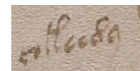
Ub (vi)v(un) (wa)  
umb wiven wo  
around married united (three in) one



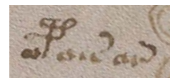
(wa)k (oil)(sd)(ij)  
wark oil-luching  
work oil-lifting



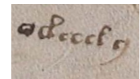
(vo)(rt)l(ij)  
fōrthlī//?fastli  
fully(completely//strongly)



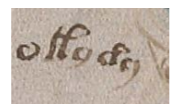
(lu)tm(sd)(ij)  
lute moistening  
seal moistening



Ub (vo)u(sinj) (vi)un  
umb fūsing wien  
around fleeing wine

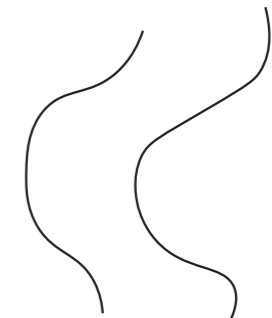


U(rd)uo(sd) (ij)  
hu reduceth i  
who reduces within



w t(ioj)(rsd)(ij)  
wo tincturing  
one tincture

PATH NINE - THE WORK'S RED FORCE AS CURATIVE GOLD



Spiritus

**in curative gold**

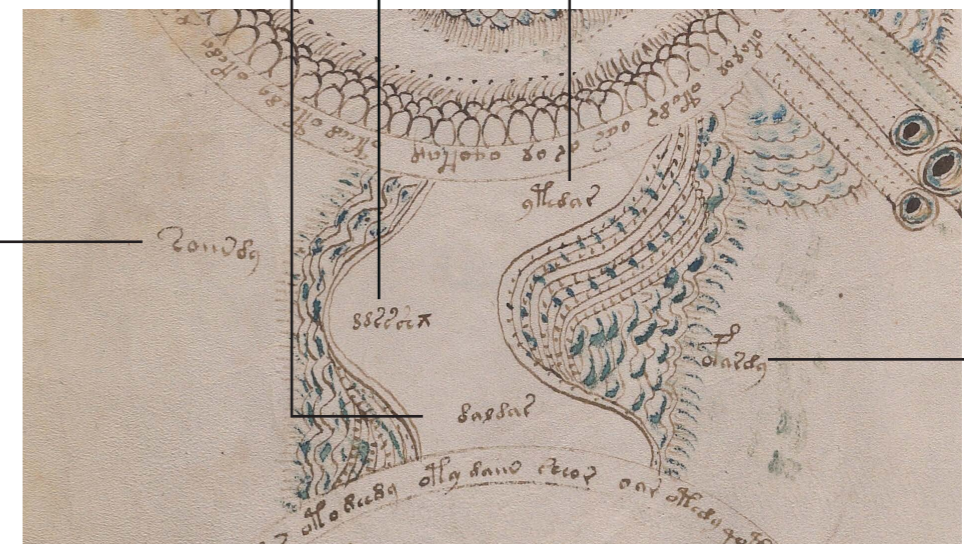
in curativ or

**red leads soul x back to virtue**

red reduces soul x

**the work's red force**

the werchs red fors

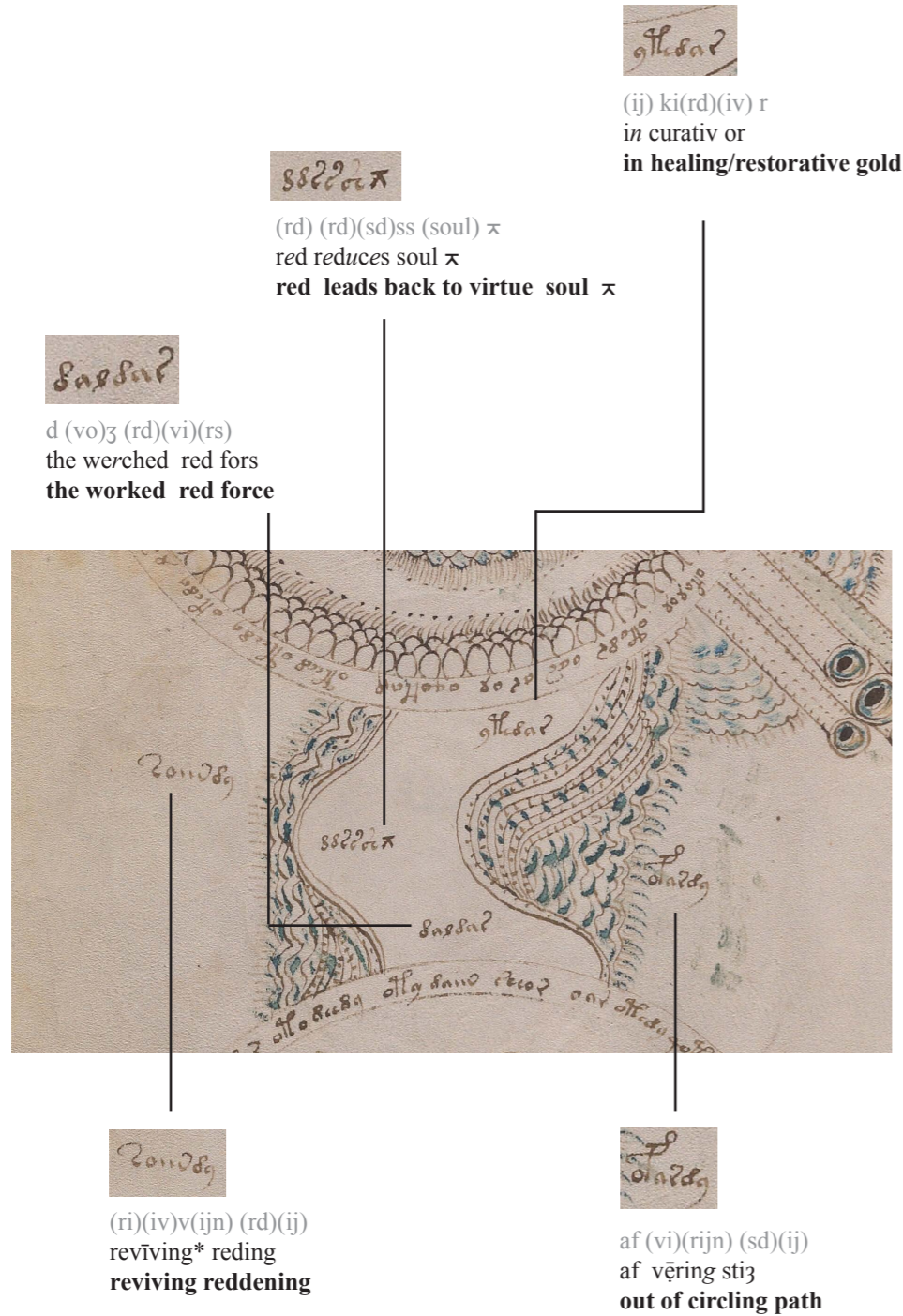


**reviving reddening**

reviving reding

**out of circling path**

af vēring stiz



\*MED: *Reviving*: Reviving, recovering, alch. of a metal: to be restored to its original form or condition.

THE TEXT FOLLOWING THE OUTLINES OF THE CIRCLES

Each of the nine circles in the diagram is accompanied by a text that follows its outline. These nine texts have not yet been interpreted.



## AFTERWORD

This work began in a place of loss. When words became difficult, I turned to unthinking, to materials, and to the vegetal world. Through *Humming*, I found a way of working without language, by arranging, carving, and responding directly to matter. In this space, meaning was not something I needed to define.

I was drawn to the Voynich Manuscript because of its free and lively drawings of plants. I could relate to them, because the plants represented a wordless existence for me. They are beings that our lives are totally intertwined with.

The text surrounding the plants was intriguing because it was unreadable. I could relate to it as a kind of humming. There is a paradox in this. The attempt to embrace a wordless existence led me, unexpectedly, into an intense focus on words.

The encounter with the Voynich Manuscript extended my way of working. Its images and its unreadable text mirrored my own situation. I could not read it, yet I could relate to it on a personal level.

From this position, the work moved between making and reading. The sculptures began to take on forms that echoed the manuscript. At the same time, the manuscript became something I could enter through drawing, copying, and careful observation. To draw was to observe. And through seeing, patterns began to appear.

The attempt to decode the text grew out of this process. First through plants, then through the larger diagram. The work shifted from identifying individual elements to sensing a system. Letters became shapes. Shapes became combinations. Words began to form, though often uncertainly. Meaning did not arrive all at once, but in fragments, tested, adjusted, and revisited.

The images turned out to be just as resistant to decoding as the alphabet. The large foldout became central. It suggested not a map, but

a diagram, a structure describing movement through stages. When read alongside traditions of alchemy, distillation, medicine, and medieval cosmology, the elements of the diagram began to resonate. The path, the vessels, the celestial imagery, and the recurring substances all pointed toward processes of transformation, both material and symbolic.

At the same time, this reading remains provisional. There are still uncertainties.

What is clear, is a method. Working without fixed meaning, staying with uncertainty, and moving between hand and eye, between words and images, between reading and making. Understanding develops slowly, through repetition and attention.

In this sense, the work opens a layer in addition to the attempt to solve the Voynich mystery. It moves toward engaging with the manuscript, as something to enter, work through, and respond to, and through which personal change may take place.

To remain in the space, between not knowing and beginning to understand, is not a limitation, but a condition for the work itself.

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Siv Bugge Vatne

\*

2026

