

4 Structure of the MS

4.1 General

The Voynich MS is a book or codex which is composed of parchment leaves or folios, combined into gatherings or quires³. A 'standard' quire in the MS consists of a stack of four sheets or bifolios, which is folded in the middle to form 8 folios. Each quire is sewn onto a set of three thongs, at the combined fold. A standard Voynich MS bifolio is roughly 32 cm wide and 23 cm high, meaning that a folio is roughly 23 by 16 cm.

All folios in the MS have writing and/or illustrations on both sides, and the individual sides of each folio will be referred to here as pages. Thus, a standard quire has 4 bifolios, 8 folios or 16 pages.

The quires in the Voynich MS have been numbered 1 to 20 (with 16 and 18 missing). Like many other medieval codices, several quires in the Voynich MS do not consist of the standard 8 folios. What is more unusual, though, is that several bifolios are wider than the standard size. These have additional folds and consequently more than the normal four pages. They are referred to as foldouts. These foldouts have different dimensions, with widths of the corresponding bifolios ranging from three to five pages (instead of two). In addition, there is one (approximately) 45 by 45 cm bifolio which has an additional horizontal fold.

Every folio in the MS has a folio number written on it, with the numbering running from 1 to 116, though 14 folios are missing. The corresponding folio numbers are skipped.

4.2 Page naming (numbering)

The notation used to identify a page in the Voynich MS is the character f (for folio) followed by the folio number, followed by r (for recto - the front) or v (for verso - the reverse). Thus, the first quire starts with pages: f1r, f1v, f2r, f2v, f3r, etc, and ends with f7v, f8r, f8v. The four pages: f1r, f1v, f8r and f8v together form one bifolio.

For the foldout folios, the following additional rule is applied. When any foldout is completely folded out, to the right of the binding gutter one sees the recto side of this folio. To the left is the verso side of the previous folio. If the folio nr. is n , the recto 'pages' of the foldout are numbered left to right (i.e. away from the binding): $f_{nr}1$, $f_{nr}2$, etc. On the verso side (with the binding to the right) the 'pages' are numbered right to left (again away from the binding): $f_{nv}1$, $f_{nv}2$, ...

This is illustrated below for the single bifolio in Quire 11, where the red mark represents the binding. To its left we see the standard folio f71 and to its right the multiple foldout folio f72:

³ This text is from <http://www.voyrich.nu/descr.html>