

consuming. My experience suggests that after transcribing about ten pages the would-be VMS reader loses interest in the task, starts worrying about his eyesight and stops work, leaving more than two hundred pages untranscribed.

It was with great pleasure, then, that I discovered in the William F. Friedman Collection[†] of the George C. Marshall Foundation a transcription made half a century ago of almost all of the Voynich manuscript. This transcription, item 1609 in the Friedman Collection, is a printout of an IBM card “edition” of the VMS. It is the product of what M. E. D’Imperio [D1] calls the “First Voynich Manuscript Study Group” of 1944-46 (here abbreviated FSG), which was an unofficial after-hours club of U. S. Army cryptanalysts at the end of World War II. As far as I know, it is the only complete transcription of the whole VMS into conventional symbols, yet its existence has not been mentioned in print until now; D’Imperio [D1] seems unaware of its existence. It may well be the first example of a machine readable edition of a text prepared for scholarly purposes.

This paper describes item 1609 and places it in the context of the activities of the 1944-46 study group and in the context of Mr. and Mrs. Friedman’s longstanding interest in the Voynich manuscript, as revealed in the holdings of the Friedman Collection.

The present paper should be regarded as a contribution to the historiography — but not to the solution — of the Voynich manuscript. In a later paper I hope to present a statistical analysis of the VMS text itself, based on Friedman’s transcription.

The Voynich Manuscript

The following facts about the VMS are repeated in almost everything written on the subject. The VMS is a book of about 104 vellum leaves, sized about 16 cm by 23 cm (6 by 9 inches), written in an unknown (but apparently alphabetical) script. It is profusely illustrated with plant drawings, zodiacal diagrams, what have been called “cosmological” diagrams, and diagrams

[†]No general survey of the contents of this collection has been published. The items mentioned in this paper account for perhaps three quarters of the Voynich material in the collection; at a later time I hope to publish a systematic survey of the Voynich holdings.