

with unclothed women romping on what seem to be water slides. The style of writing and of drawing seem to place its production in the late 1400s or early 1500s, possibly in central Europe.

The VMS was found in Italy in 1912 by the American rare book dealer Wilfrid Voynich [V, 1921]. A letter found with the manuscript, a faded signature on the first page, and a variety of collateral or circumstantial evidence definitely place the book at the Prague court of Rudolph II, Holy Roman Emperor from 1576 to 1611, and probably place it in the possession of the English mathematician and astrologer, John Dee, who was at Rudolph's court at various times between 1584 and 1588.

Ownership passed through Voynich's heirs to H. P. Krauss, another rare book dealer, who gave it to Yale University, where it is now MS 408 in the Beinecke Rare Book Library.

Since its discovery in modern times the problem of reading this book (or indeed, of making any sense out of it at all) has been a tantalizing puzzle to many scholars. About ten solutions have been offered in print, of varying degrees of implausibility. The claimed authors and topics include: God, Roger Bacon, Anthony Askham, Cathars, Khazars, spiral nebulae, contraceptives, suicide, capsicum, sunflowers and other botanical novelties from the New World. William R. Newbold's 1928 book *The Cipher of Roger Bacon* [N] contains the oldest and most notorious such fallacious solution, which was refuted by J. M. Manly [M]. There is a largely repetitious secondary literature on the VMS, a sampling of which is listed in the bibliography.

There are two serious books. Brumbaugh [Br] offers — with unconvincing evidence — the attractive theory that the book has no meaning, but was concocted as a hoax: a neo-Platonist rarity to sell to a wealthy gull, most likely the Emperor. In contrast, D'Imperio's book [D1] — an encyclopedic survey of everything known or conjectured (up to 1978) about the VMS — offers no solution of its own. Because D'Imperio was able to interview many of Friedman's Voynich collaborators (especially John Tiltman and Prescott Currier), her book is most useful as a guide to the Friedman collection; the preface by John Tiltman makes clear a form of "apostolic succession": D'Imperio succeeds Tiltman, who succeeded Friedman as "unofficial coordinator of the work of some of the people who have been working on the problem."

A privately printed pamphlet seminar proceedings by D'Imperio [D2] contains the best