

# The Codex Gigas: The Mysterious "Devil's Bible"



The **Codex Gigas**, also known as the "Devil's Bible," is one of the most fascinating and mysterious manuscripts of the medieval era. This colossal book, measuring about 92 cm (36 inches) in height, 50 cm (20 inches) in width, and weighing 75 kg (165 pounds), has captivated historians and enthusiasts for centuries. But why has this manuscript, written in the early 13th century, earned such a sinister nickname? In this article, we'll explore the history, structure, and legends surrounding the Codex Gigas.

## [Origin and History of the Codex Gigas](#)

The Codex Gigas was created in a **Benedictine monastery** in **Podlažice**, in what is now the Czech Republic, around 1229. It is believed to be the work of a single monk, although his identity remains unknown. According to historical records, the Codex was moved to the **Broumov** monastery after its completion, and it disappeared for several centuries before resurfacing in Sweden.

During the **Thirty Years' War** (1618-1648), Swedish forces invaded Prague in 1648 and seized the Codex Gigas as war booty. It was then transported to Sweden, where it still resides in the **National Library of Sweden** in Stockholm.

## Structure of the Codex Gigas

The Codex Gigas is remarkable in many ways. It consists of **310 vellum leaves** (about 620 pages), made from the skins of approximately 160 calves. It includes a variety of religious and historical texts, such as:

1. **The Old and New Testaments:** The Bible is nearly fully transcribed in Latin.
2. **Historical texts:** Chronicles of Bohemia and lists of abbots from the Podlažice monastery are included.
3. **Medical texts:** The manuscript contains medical writings based on ancient knowledge, offering advice on medicinal plants and health practices.
4. **Exorcisms and invocations:** There are also rituals and prayers meant to ward off evil and instructions on how to heal those possessed by demons.

One of the most striking features of the Codex Gigas is a **full-page illustration of a demon**, taking up an entire double-page spread opposite a depiction of Heaven. This image is believed to be the reason for the Codex's nickname, "The Devil's Bible."

## The Legend of the Damned Monk

The nickname "Devil's Bible" stems from a dark legend about its creation. According to the tale, a Benedictine monk had committed a grave sin and was sentenced to be walled up alive as punishment. To escape this fate, he promised to create, in a single night, the largest manuscript ever made, containing all the knowledge of the world. However, realizing at midnight that he could not complete the task alone, he allegedly made a pact with **Satan**, selling his soul in exchange for the Devil's help. In gratitude, he supposedly included the large illustration of the demon.

While this story is purely mythical, it has fueled the manuscript's mysterious reputation.

## The Unique Content and Its Significance

Despite its ominous nickname, the Codex Gigas is primarily a compilation of knowledge from the time. The mix of religious, medical, and historical texts suggests an attempt to create an encyclopedic work, though the exact reason for its creation remains uncertain.

### **Biblical Text**

The core of the manuscript is, of course, the Bible, with the Old and New Testaments transcribed in full. However, unlike traditional Bibles, the Codex Gigas includes some **apocryphal texts** and other writings, setting it apart from conventional religious manuscripts.

### **Medical Writings**

The Codex also contains medical treatises, drawing on the works of ancient physicians and philosophers like **Hippocrates** and **Galen**. It includes remedies for physical ailments and instructions for common medieval therapeutic practices, such as bloodletting and the use of medicinal herbs.

## Prayers and Invocations

The sections on exorcisms and magical rituals are perhaps the most intriguing. They reflect the medieval belief in demonic possession and spiritual healing, showing that illnesses and mental disorders were often attributed to supernatural forces.

## The Mystery of Its Creation

One of the most astonishing aspects of the Codex Gigas is that it appears to have been written by a single person. Paleographic experts who have studied the handwriting agree that it is remarkably consistent from beginning to end, indicating that one scribe wrote the entire text. Considering the size and complexity of the work, some estimates suggest it would have taken between 20 and 30 years to complete.

This only deepens the mystery surrounding its origins, as very few monks would have possessed the skill and patience to undertake such an enormous task. The conditions under which this monk worked and lived remain a subject of speculation.

## The Devil's Illustration

The image of the demon, standing nearly 50 cm (20 inches) tall, is undoubtedly the most famous aspect of the Codex Gigas. The Devil is depicted with horns, sharp claws, and a menacing expression, painted in green and red to symbolize decay and evil. This depiction has inspired centuries of legends about the book's infernal nature.

On the opposite page is a representation of **Heaven**, creating a stark visual contrast between good and evil. Some believe this juxtaposition illustrates a spiritual struggle within the manuscript, though the exact purpose of this arrangement remains a mystery.

## Sources

- [fr.wikipedia.org](https://fr.wikipedia.org)

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