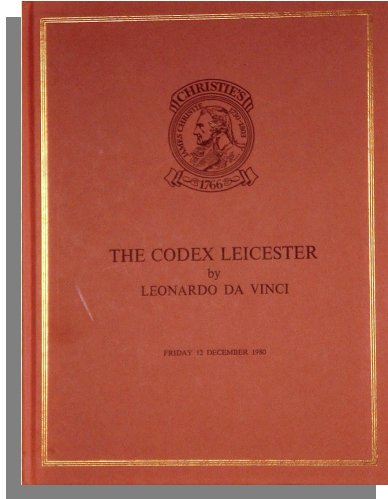


THE CODEx LEICESTER/HAMMER: 1980 CHRISTIE'S LONDON SALE OF THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE BOOK AND THE ONLY AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT BY DA VINCI STILL IN PRIVATE HANDS – INCLUDING OTHER RELATED BOOKS

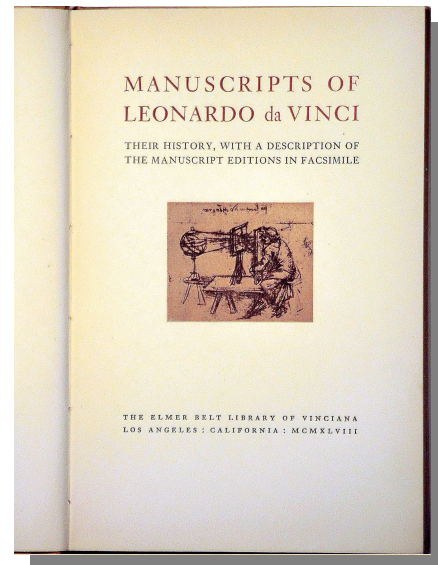


A set of six books relating to Leonardo da Vinci's autograph journal, the Codex Leicester. Twice and currently the world's most valuable book, this manuscript is owned by software titan Bill Gates. The Codex Leicester, sometimes called the Codex Hammer, is a scientific manuscript by famed Italian Renaissance artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci (1452-

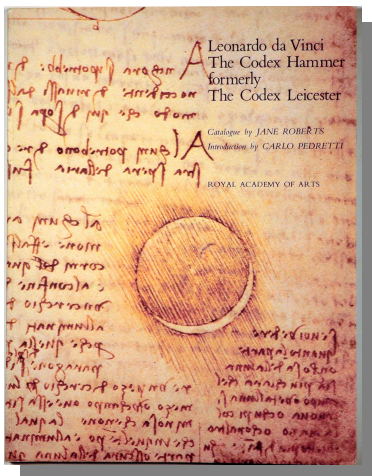
1519). The early sixteenth-century journal, which deals primarily with the science of water, is the only autograph manuscript by da Vinci in private hands. Ireland's Chester Beatty Library, which hosted the codex in the summer of 2007, describes it as follows:

*"The Codex Leicester was composed around 1508-1510 and comprises eighteen loose double sheets of paper in which Leonardo illustrated and wrote down ideas and observations in his distinctive mirror script. Written in Italian, the manuscript is illustrated with over 300 pen and ink drawings, sketches and diagrams."*¹

The codex has been sold twice in the recent decades and has a notable provenance. The manuscript passed from da Vinci to a contemporary and then disappeared from the historical record until ending up in the collection of Roman painter Guisepppe Ghezzi (1634-1721). Ghezzi sold the codex to English nobleman Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester (1697-1759) in 1717 or 1719.

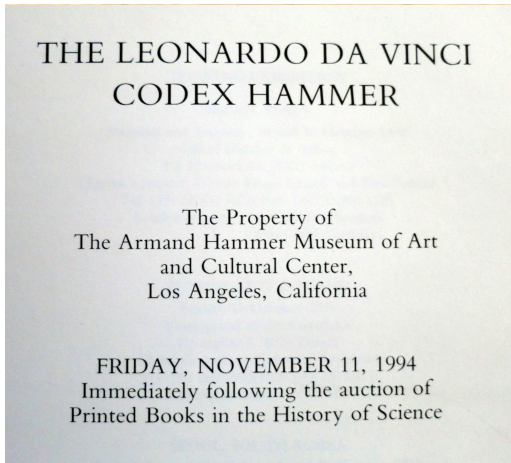


Details of the sale are unknown. The codex remained in the Earl of Leicester's family until 1980, when it was put up for auction at Christie's and purchased by industrialist Armand Hammer (1898-1990). Hammer's 5.12 million-dollar winning bid made the codex the world's most expensive manuscript. In 1994, four years after Hammer's death, his Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in Los Angeles sold the codex, again at Christie's, where it was purchased by Bill Gates. Gates's 30.8 million-dollar bid reconfirmed the codex's place as the crown jewel of rare books. Gates has spoken admiringly of da Vinci's genius and the importance of his manuscripts.



“I feel very lucky that I own a notebook. In fact, I remember going home one night and telling my wife Melinda that I was going to buy a notebook; she didn’t think that was a very big deal. I said, no, this is a pretty special notebook, this is the Codex Leicester, one of the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. And I personally have always been amazed by him because he personally worked out science on his own, and he understood things that no other scientist of that time did. And his work is amazing. He would work by drawing things and writing down his ideas. So he built these notebooks about how light worked, how water

worked, how weapons would work. Of course he designed all sorts of flying machines, like helicopters, way before you could actually build something like that. So every one of these notebooks are amazing documents – they’re kind of his rough-draft notes of texts that he eventually wanted to put together.”²



Both Hammer and Gates have lent the manuscript for exhibition at institutions throughout the world. Several catalogues and facsimiles have been produced. Three are included here.

- Christie’s London. *The Codex Leicester by Leonardo da Vinci*. December 12, 1980. Hardcover, 175 pages, illustrated. In this sale, the codex was sold by “The Trustees of the Holkham Estate”, descendants of the Earl of Leicester, and purchased by Armand Hammer. The catalogue includes an introductory essay, appendices, a color facsimile of the manuscript, and a brief description of each page’s content.
- Christie’s London. *The Codex Leicester by Leonardo da Vinci*. December 12, 1980. Softbound, 32 pages, illustrated. A condensed version of the catalogue listed above, containing the same articles and appendices but lacking the photographs and descriptions of each page.
- Christie’s New York. *Codex Hammer*. November 11, 1994. Hardcover, 203 pages, illustrated. The auction catalogue for the sale in which the Armand Hammer Museum of Art sold the manuscript and Bill Gates purchased it. The catalogue includes an introductory essay, a description of the manuscript, and a complete color facsimile of the codex with commentary about each page. The content of this catalogue is similar to that of the 1980 Christie’s catalogue, but the size of the 1994 catalogue is greatly expanded.
- Steinitz, Kate Trauman *et al.* *Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci: Their History, with a Description of the Manuscript Editions in Facsimile*. Los Angeles: The Elmer Belt Library of Vinciana, 1948. Hardcover, 70 pages, illustrated. Produced by the Elmer Belt Library of Vinciana, a collection of Leonardo da Vinci-related material at UCLA, this book includes an essay on da Vinci’s scientific journals

- and an annotated bibliography, of the library's extensive holdings of facsimiles of the journals, including the Codex Leicester. Ex-libris Pierpont Morgan Library.
- Roberts, Jane. *Leonardo da Vinci: The Codex Hammer formerly The Codex Leicester*. Los Angeles: The Armand Hammer Foundation, 1981. Softbound, 126 pages, illustrated. The book includes a complete, black-and-white facsimile of the codex along with an introductory essay and a description of each page's content. This catalogue accompanied an exhibition of the codex at the Royal Academy of Arts in London the year after Hammer purchased it.
 - Roberts, Jane. *Leonardo da Vinci Himmel, jord, hav i Codex Hammer*. Los Angeles: The Armand Hammer Foundation, 1982. Softbound, 47 pages, illustrated. In Swedish. The Swedish version of the book above, published for the codex's 1982 visit to the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. The textual content of the two books is the same, but the Swedish version lacks a complete facsimile of the codex, which accounts for the difference in page count.

\$225.00

NOTES:

1. <http://www.cbl.ie/Exhibitions/Past-Exhibitions/Leonardo--the-Codex-Leicester.aspx>
2. Bill Gates interview at Windows Vista UK Launch., British Library. January 31, 2007. <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/news/exec/billg/speeches/2007/01-30uklaunch.aspx>