

CORNELIUS AGRIPPA & HIS MAGIC



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ENRICO CORNELIO AGRIPPA
and His
MAGIC

HENRICUS CORNELIUS AGRIPPA



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ἀχλὺν δ' αὖ τοι ἀπ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἔλον ἢ πρὶν ἐπῆεν,
ὄφρ' εὖ γινώσκῃς ἡμὲν θεὸν ἠδὲ καὶ ἄνδρα.

Iliad, E, 127-28. (*)

*... and I have removed from your eyes the cloud that was
above them, that you may know the gods and mortals well.
Iliad, Book V, vv. 127-128.

CHAPTER I.

The legend of Agrippa

Visitors to the National Exhibition of Fine Arts in Turin in 1880 had the opportunity, if not the good fortune, to observe among paintings exhibited there a painting of a historical genre by the painter Pietro Mi- chis entitled: *Cornelius Agrippa Presages the Defeat of Pavia to Francis I.*

The 'Illustrazione Italiana' of 25 April 1880, which carried a reproduction of this painting, accompanied it with a small article in which it recounted how, a few days before the battle of Pavia, a wanderer was arrested in the French camp on suspicion of espionage. Generals La Trémouille and Lautrec made it their duty to interrogate him in his capacity as soothsayer, but they had bad predictions from him. François I.^o, who had placed his quarters in the palace of Mirabello, informed of the capture and overcoming the ill-will of his generals who did not want him to come into contact with the soothsayer, ordered him to be brought before him; And the latter, who was none other than Cornelius Agrippa, inspecting the lines of the royal hand, and answering without reticence and without fear in the very presence of the two generals, predicted what would happen the next day; namely, that the imminent battle would be a great victory for the enemies and a great ruin for the king. The next day saw the famous battle of Pavia, so disastrous for French arms and policy.

This is what 'Illustrazione Italiana' reports

This is a groundless legend in which subsequent historical events have been mixed up. Agrippa was actually in Pavia at the time of the battle of 18 June 1512 (the exact date of this first battle was found by Prost ⁽¹⁾ in the *Diarium Curiae Romanae* by Paris de Grassis, which is reproduced by Raynaldus in his *Annales Ecclesiastici*, t. XXX, 1512, no. 65-66); but at that time King of France was still Louis XII, and the French army was commanded by La Palisse, who had concentrated his troops in Pavia in May 1512. Agrippa was already there, all intent on making his way to that university.

While the French were preparing to evacuate the city, and had not yet left through one gate, the confederate troops, i.e. the Germans, Swiss and Venetians, entered through the other; Baiardo resisted with his legendary valour at the hottest point of the fray, but the city was stormed and sacked by the Swiss, and the French lost their dominion over Milanese territory as a result. Agrippa was unable to escape and was taken prisoner by the Swiss, but regained his freedom a few days later in Milan.

Three years later, François I., who had assumed the throne of France, sent an army to Italy under the command of the Constable of Bourbon, who had, among others, Marshals La Palisse, Lautrec and Louis de La Trémouille under his orders; and, after the first rapid successes of his vanguard, he personally crossed the Alps. The Battle of Marignano re-established French rule in Milanese, and Pavia was retaken by the French. By his misfortune Agrippa was again in Pavia; he managed to escape this time, but the French sacked his house, and a short time later in Milan the Swiss took everything from him, even his books and manuscripts.

Finally, at the time of the famous battle of Pavia, on 24 February 1525, which definitively decided the French fortunes in Italy, and in which Francis I himself: was taken prisoner, losing everything.

(1) Aug. Prost. - *Henri Corneille Agrippa*, Paris 1882, Vol. II app. XXIV, p. 497.

except honour, Agrippa was instead far away from the theatre of battle, and precisely in Lyon, at the French court, at the queen mother's.

As we can see, the episode could not have happened for any other reason, neither in 1512, nor in 1515, nor in 1525; and must be relegated among the many legends that have arisen around the name and figure of Agrippa.

In popular tradition, in fact, even in Italy, Agrippa is the famous magician, very knowledgeable, and an expert in evoking the dead, averting demons, healing the sick, bewitching and 'binding', and in all kinds of divination and witchcraft. Thus, the Italian populace knows A-Grippa mainly by virtue of a recipe book of secrets and magical practices entitled: *Il libro del Comando ovvero l'arte di evocare gli spiriti*, by Cornelio Agrippa - Firenze, ediz. Salani, 1896, and other similar books printed by other publishers of the genre, always falsely attributing them to the famous Agrippa ⁽²⁾. In this 'magical zibaldone of the mysteries of the rod of command - a book written by me Cornelio Agrippa by virtue of God', there is a little bit of everything: crumbs of tradition, fragments of secret knowledge, naivety, errors and fibs.

Thus, next to the 'magic secret of guessing, with onions, the health of a distant person', and the 'way of knowing, with the song of a cuckoo, the precise year in which you will take a husband or wife, and whether you will have money all year round in your pocket', we also read the following witty story, which, however, should not be attributed to Agrippa:

"*The Great Secret of Adam's Rib*". This is the headline, and here is the caption: "It is said that God, having taken a rib from Adam to make a woman, and having placed it for a moment beside him, a cunning and clever monkey stealthily took the rib away and began to run away; that an angel ran after it and took it by the tail, but the tail remaining in his hand, brought it back instead of the rib; and because of this mistake the woman was formed from the tail of an ape. But this sort of belief is not to be taken as true.

Thank goodness, readers will say, and especially female readers. However, Agrippa not only never wrote anything like this, but was on the contrary a convinced and ardent feminist, and wrote a book on the *Nobility and Superiority of the Feminine Sex*, in which he argues not for the equality of the sexes, but even for the superiority of the female sex. And he proved the sincerity of these sentiments by taking a wife three times.

The sorcerer's fame was formed around him and his name very early on, when A-Grippa was still alive and young. Various and manifold causes contributed to the formation of the legend. In his early twenties, he composed the first two books of his treatise on *Occult Philosophy or Magic*, which, highly praised by the authoritative Abbot Trithemius, aroused lively interest and curiosity, toured half of Europe in manuscript, and was a great success in terms of admiration and esteem. Surrounded from his earliest years by devoted friends, over whom he exerted such a powerful prestige and influence that the ascendancy of cultural and intellectual superiority alone is not enough to explain it, A. grippa was interested in and occupied himself throughout his life with occult sciences, Kabbalah, magic, alchemy, and was a doctor, astrologer and fortune teller. From his correspondence, it is undoubtedly clear, as we shall see later, that he possessed actual knowledge of magic, which he gave evidence of to his disciples. The reputation of a sorcerer was therefore in his face; and he himself certainly contributed to it, and wished to be recognised as a magician, but he understood this word in the sense in which he attributed it.

(2) Here are the titles of these publications:

Agrippa Cornelio - *La famosa pergamena del comando* - Milan 1818.

Agrippa Cornelio - *Il libro del comando ovvero l'arte di evocare gli spiriti* - Athens, Muzzi, 1880,

Agrippa Cornelio - *Il testamento magico di Cornelio Agrippa*. - *Introduction to the Practice of Magic*-- Rome, Perino (Biblioteca Magica), 1891.

Of Agrippa's works and writings we know of no other Italian versions than the following editions of the time:

Arrigo Cornelio Agrippa's *Vanity of the Sciences* translated by M. Lodovico Domenichi in Venice, 1547; other editions in 1549 and 1552.

Arrigo Cornelio Agrippa - *De la nobiltà e precellentia del femminil sesso*, 1549, s. n.

Henrico Cornelio Agrippa. - *De la nobiltà e precellentia del femminile sesso a la Signora Margarita Augusta Principe di Austria, e di Borgogna novamente stampato* - s. d. né l. di st. - un vol. in 8.° di 22 folios n. n. There is a copy in the Bibl. Naz. Vitt. Em. di Roma, bound together on parchment with two related works, one dated 1545, the other 1548.

No less important factor in the formation of the legend, however, is the deliberate exaggeration and slander, and the vicious attacks of his many enemies. Among his defamers, the writers Paolo Giovio, Andrea Thévet, and Father Martini Del Rio of the Society of Jesus excel.

Agrippa was attributed the power to conjure up apparitions. According to a legend collected and reported also by Walter Scott ⁽³⁾, one day, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, a distinguished poet of Henry VIII's court, mourning the death of his beloved consort, the beautiful Geraldine, daughter of Lord Kildare, owed to an evocation by Cornelius Agrippa the consolation of seeing again one he had lost; the magician had caused her to appear to his eye in an enchanted mirror; and Jacques Gohory and Blaise de Vigenère accused him ⁽⁴⁾ of this, saying that it was in order to woo his friends that he boasted to know the practice of the Pythagorean mirror. Agrippa, in fact, speaks of this secret in Chapter 6 of Book I of the *Occult Philosophy*, claiming to know it. In this case, however, legend, accusation, and possible boast undoubtedly had a basis of truth and a consistent starting point. For in a letter, contained in Agrippa's Epistolary (*Ep. VII, 22*), written at the end of December 1532, and addressed to Agrippa by an Italian friend of his, Don Bernardo dei Paltrinerii, butler to Cardinal Lorenzo Gampeggi, legate of the Holy See, (Clemente VII), this friend of his makes an incidental but precise allusion incidental but precise, to a mirror in which Agrippa had shown him a living person in the image formed by a figure that was lifeless (*sicut mihi ostendisti in eodem speculo cognoscere in imagine pictam vivam a parte mortua... (et) ... inducere personam vivam pro veritate rei*) ⁽⁵⁾.

According to Thévet ⁽⁶⁾, when Agrippa was in Italy, he was attached to the person of a Spanish general, Antonio di Leyva, by whom he was greatly esteemed and by whom he was consulted with such profit that those envious of this general's victories attributed all the credit to Agrippa's spells. This is evidently a legend whose genesis is simple enough. But Del Rio ⁽⁷⁾ is not satisfied with this, and adds that through the intercession of Antonio di Leyva, Emperor Charles V took Agrippa into his service, who, having become his councillor thanks to his recommendations, dared to propose to this prince that he procure him immense treasures with his magic secrets; so that Charles V, outraged, expelled him for this reason from the court and from his states.

Another fairy tale told by this Jesuit with the utmost seriousness, and as if he absolutely believed what he was telling, is that Agrippa often paid in hotels on his travels with apparently very good money, but which after a few days one realised was nothing more than

(3) Sir W. Scott - *The lay of the last Minstrel*, Canto VI, stanzas 16-20.

(4) This Jacques Gohory or Gohorry, from Paris, wrote under various pseudonyms, J. G. P., Leo Suavius; and he attacked Agrippa in one of his works: *Th. Paracelsi Philosophiae et Medicinae Compendium cum scholiis in libros IIII ejusdem de Vita Longa* - Auctore Leone Suavio, I. G. P. - Parisiis, 1500) - The attacks of the cabalist Blaise de Vigenère are to be found on pages 16 and 27 of his *Traité des Chiffres*, 1586.

(5) This is *catoptromancy*, or divination by means of mirrors, i.e., that kind of divination that by means of mirrors or equivalent and similar devices, such as that of the water basin in lecanomancy, or that of the 'carafe' used by Cagliostro with his 'pupils' or 'doves', causes the explication of ordinarily inert and unknown psychic faculties and the consequent vision of distant things, the future and the transcendent. It is attributed

Pythagoras and Numa also had knowledge of magic mirrors. It was an ancient opinion that mirrors were made round so that the moon could be better reflected in them. One would write in blood in the mirror what one wanted to make appear and show, and then, standing at the back of the observer and arranging the mirror so that the full moon would appear in it, and making the observer stare intently at the moon, he would see in it the things one wanted to show him. This is the tradition as reported by the erudite Natale Conti (*Natalis Comitis Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri decem* - Coloniae Allob. 1616, Lib. III, ch. 17, p. 253; first edit. Venice, Aldo, 1551), who states that this is where Agrippa's 'artifice' originated. In his treatise *Della Incertezza e vanità delle scienze* (*On the Uncertainty and Vanity of the Sciences*), where Agrippa condemns all kinds of divination, he does not breathe a word about it. Don Bernardo's letter to Agrippa can be found in Agrippa's epistolary on pages 354-356 of Part II.^a of Volume II.^o of the Complete Works, Lyon edition of 1600 (Beringos Fratres). On the subject of magic mirrors there is a very competent article, signed 'Luce', in the August-September 1925 issue of the magazine 'Ignis'.

(6) Andrea Thévet - *Histoire des hommes illustres*, Paris edition, 1671; VI, 223.

(7) Martini Del Rio S. J. - *Disquisitionum Magicarum libri sex*. - Leuven 1599 - Lib. II, Quaest. XII, num. 10.

pieces of horn or rubbish; once, among others, he handed an old woman a corbel that seemed to be full of shields; but, having put it in a cupboard, when he went to take it back, he found nothing but horsehair.

Another fictional anecdote about Agrippa is also recounted, again with a straight face, by this Jesuit (too credulous a writer, according to Prost): When Agrippa was in Leuven, he had a very inquisitive young man with him at his boarding house. One day when Agrippa had to leave the city, he advised his wife not to let anyone into his workroom; but this young man, by dint of begging, managed to get the key and broke into the master's office. The imprudent man cast his eyes over a book of prayers, and read out a few words from it, mispronouncing them aloud. And behold, immediately the door of the cabinet was shaken; and, as the reading continued, the door was shaken again; and as no answer followed this signal, which had not been understood, the door finally opened and a demon appeared, asking who it was that was calling him and what was wanted of him. Paralysed by fear, his voice is choked in his throat, and the demon, irritated, throws himself on top of him and strangles him. At this point the magician returns, and notices that the demons are walking and prancing around his house; he calls them, learns from them what has happened, and orders the guilty demon to enter the inanimate body of the victim, ordering him, before regaining his freedom, to go for a walk around the square most frequented by students, and then to retire. The demon obeyed; the reanimated body advanced onto the public square, but after two or three laps around the square, suddenly abandoned, it fell lifeless to the ground. It was then believed, adds Del Rio gravely, that the young man had died a sudden death, but the signs of strangulation that were soon found on his body set the truth on its way, and there was no longer any doubt about this when Agrippa later made public the heresies that he had hitherto kept hidden in his bosom⁽⁸⁾.

The falsity of all these stories has been shown by Viero, Naudé, Freher and especially Bayle. Agrippa was by no means recommended to the Emperor Charles V by Antonio di Leyva, but by his friends whom he met at the court of Princess Margaret, and Charles V's indignation against Agrippa had a completely different cause and was expressed in a completely different way, as we shall see when discussing the publication of his works. The story of the counterfeit coin refutes itself. If Agrippa had been able to avail himself of such means, he would not have had to struggle with money troubles all his life and would not have gone to prison for debt; and as for the story of the imprudent disciple strangled by the devil (which perhaps suggested to Bulwer Lytton the episode of Glindon and the guardian of the tower)^(*), the reader will understand for himself that it is up to those who assert such spectacular facts to provide some argument a little more convincing than those put forward by Del Rio.

The life Agrippa led in Bonn in 1535 is described to us by his disciple Viero. Buried amidst papers and books, he would sometimes retire to his workbench for a whole week, while keeping himself informed through his extensive correspondence about what was happening even in the most distant countries. At that time, there was no 'yellow press' to tell the young readers true and false news and to provide opinions and sentiments to order, and men of letters were in the habit of writing to inform each other of the most interesting events. Agrippa's *e- pistolario* reveals to us that he had a magnificent and unsophisticated supply of information at his disposal; but the general public, who ignored him, attributed all this information to Agrippa's favourite dog, which, needless to say, although it had the appearance of a real dog, was actually a devil.

Paolo Giovio⁽⁹⁾ deals at length with this dog. It was, says Giovius, a black dog that followed its master everywhere, and wore a collar adorned with nails arranged in such a way as to form necromantic figures. Now, Agrippa, feeling that death was approaching, and advising

(8) Martini Del Rio - *Disquis. Magic.*, II, Quaest. XII, Sect. I.

(*) The reference is to the novel *Zanoni* (1842) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton.

(9) Paolo Giovio - *Elogia virorum litteris illustrium* - Basel, 1577. Chap. XCI.

hastening to repentance, he turned towards this dog, shouting: 'Go away, cursed beast, that you are the cause of my utter perdition. And the black dog took flight towards the Saône, threw himself into it and drowned.

This whole story simply stems Agrippa's great heart for dogs. Viero tells us this, and it also appears from Agrippa's letters. His house was always full dogs, and he had among others one whom he named *Filiolus*) and to whom, when he died, a friend of Agrippa made a beautiful epitaph in Latin; and in Bonn, when Viero was there in 1535, he had one among others (the black dog in question), whose name was *Monsieur*, and of whom he was so fond that he let him stay with him at table and in bed; and while Agrippa and his disciple were at the table, intent on their work, the dog was always between them on a pile of papers. It is not unlikely that this dog had a greater understanding of Agrippa's soul than did Giovio and Del Rio; but even the love of dogs became evidence of dealings with the devil in the sick imagination and malice of Agrippa's enemies.

Another legendary variant on Agrippa's death is recounted by Peter De Lancre ⁽¹⁰⁾: "This wretched Agrippa," writes De Lancre, "was so blinded by the devil that, although he well acquainted with his wickedness and his artifices, he could not avoid them, as he was so well entangled in the meshes this devil, who had persuaded him that if he would let himself be killed, death would have no power over him, and that he would resurrect him and make him immortal; However, it turned out differently, for Agrippa having had his head cut off, trusting in this false hope, the devil mocked him and would not (nor could he) give him back his life in order to give him back the means of deploring his crimes.

Conversely, according to Collins de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal* and Migne's *Dictionnaire des Sciences Occultes* ⁽¹¹⁾, which copies it, in certain backward provinces of France it is still believed that Agrippa is not dead, as it is believed of Nicholas Flamel, and that he is preserved in a canon either by magic arts, or with elixir of long life. This legend can be found in one of Cyrano de Bergerac's *lettres sur les sorciers*, which contains a story entitled: *Un grand sorcier*, in which the author recounts an adventure or vision through which he was able to contemplate face to face the sorcerer Agrippa, whose soul is the one that metempsychically animated the holy Zoroaster, prince of the Bactrians. Disappeared more than a century ago from among men and he is preserved by drinking gold, with a health that no illness has interrupted. From twenty years to twenty years, he takes a hold of the mysterious universal medicine, which rejuvenates him and restores to his body what it has lost in strength ⁽¹²⁾.

The Naudé first and in part ⁽¹³⁾ and then with greater completeness and critical precision the Bayle ⁽¹⁴⁾ have since done justice these legends and slanders. But this does not prevent the facile and especially Catholic writers from continuing to print a lot of lies and errors against Agrippa. The article on Agrippa in Migne's *Dictionnaire* cannot be surpassed for the slander it contains and for its historical and biographical inconsistencies by either Jovius or Thévet. It says, for example, that after the publication of *De Occulta Philosophia*, this philosopher was accused of heresy and magic, and that while awaiting trial Agrippa spent a year in the prisons of Brussels, after which he was forced to leave Metz. Now, one only has to consult the biography of Agrippa in Bayle's *Dictionnaire* (1697, and numerous later editions), which is as- sembly well done, to see that Agrippa left Metz in 1520, ten years before he saw the light of day.

(10) Pierre De Lancre - *Tableau de l'incostance des mauvais anges et demons*, Paris 1607, lib. II, dis. 4.

(11) *Dictionnaire Infernal* par I. Collin de Plancy - 5^e ediz. Bruxelles, 1845, pp. 7-9; *Dictionnaire des Sciences Occultes*, 1846, Vol. 47-48 of Migne's *Première Encyclopedie Théologique*, - Vol. I, p. 33.

(12) *Diction. Infernal* del C. de Plancy. Appen. pp. 509-510. Ed. 1845. *Diction. des Sciences Occultes* by Migne - Vol. I, p. 418. This legend is also reported in the booklet: *Cornelius Agrippa. Il testamento magico*, published by Perino (Rome 1891). Omitting all source information, it is reported in the form of an introduction with this title: *Introduction by a disciple of Cornelius Agrippa* in the 1st Paris edition.

(13) Gabriel Naudé - *Apologie pour tous les grands personnages accusés de Magie* - 1625.

(14) Pierre Bayle - *Dictionnaire historique et critique* - Rotterdam, 1697.

the first book of *Occult Philosophy*. And after having poured out two columns of such historical erudition, the writer of the *Dictionnaire des Sciences Occultes* finds a way, *more usually than not*, to insinuate with superfine Jesuitical art a slander on Agrippa's morals, which were irreproachable even according to Prost, who is certainly not the most tender and indulgent of biographers. Here are his verbatim and very Christian words ⁽¹⁵⁾: "If, therefore, he was obliged to take flight more than once to escape the ill treatment of the populace who accused him of witchcraft, it is perhaps not permitted to believe that either his caustic spirit, *and perhaps his unruly customs*, made him enemies, or that his character as a diplomatic agent often put him in dangerous situations, or that the empirical medicine he practised exposed him to catastrophes; unless we are in fact to believe that this man had actually studied magic in those mysterious universities of which we do not yet know the secretions?" ⁽¹⁶⁾

We could go on and on about other feats attributed to Agrippa by legend. It was claimed, for example, that he read in the moon what was happening on earth at a great distance; it was said that one day he finished a public lecture in Freiburg at ten o'clock in the morning, and that at the same time he immediately began another one in a distant place, in Pont-à-Mouson; but we move on.

In addition to the war and calumnies of the monks and theologians, Agrippa also had the misfortune of being ridiculed by Rabelais, as *Her Trippa* in *Pantagruel* is none other than Henry Cornelius Agrippa. The appearance of the 3rd book of *Pantagruel*, notes Lefranc ¹⁷, is connected with the famous "*question des femmes*", for which there was so much excitement at the time; and it was natural that Rabelais should bring in Agrippa, who had written the book on the "nobility and excellence of the female sex", to dispel Panurgio's doubts as to whether he should take a wife or not. Panurgius, hesitant and fearful, goes off to consult the famous magician Her Trippa, who gives him a horoscope in such terms as to cast full ridicule on the magical arts that Agrippa was engaged in. Rabelais mocks Her Trippa, who predicts future things 'by the art of astrology, geomancy, chiromancy, metopomathy and others of the same flour', and whose 'assez bellaz tre' wife is 'saboulée' by the 'laquais' of the court, while her husband is all intent on conferring with the king about heavenly and divine things. Rabelais here makes a transparent allusion to Agrippa's situation when as physician to the queen mother he lived in Lyon at the French court, and to his third wife, from whom he had to separate, we do not know for what reason.

And see what can happen when you love women and dogs too much.

(15) *Dict. des Sciences Occul.* by Migne, Vol. I, p. 32.

(16) Balzac says in his *Secret de Ruggieri* that Ruggieri (Cosimo) the old man, Catherine de Medici's famous astrologer, was the head of the secret university from which Nostradamus and Agrippa emerged.

(17) Abel Lefranc - *Rabelais et Cornelius Agrippa*, contained in *Mélanges offerts à M. Emile Picot*, Paris, 1913, Vol. II, pp. 477-486 - The 3rd book of *Pantagruel*, where the episode of Her Trippa is found, appeared in 1546.

CHAPTER II.

The Life of Agrippa

A portrait of Agrippa

A chronicler from Metz, Philip of Vigneulles, a contemporary of Agrippa, left us a very picturesque portrait of him: ⁽¹⁸⁾

"About this time," writes Vigneulles in date 1521, "an appointed Master Martin Luther, doctor and heretic, a religious of the order of Augustinian friars, made and composed many great and wonderful writings, printed and circulated throughout Christendom, touching on certain articles of our faith and the holy sacraments, and also on the governors and destinies of the holy Church; in some great clerics and doctors followed him and others did not.

Among those who followed him was a young man from Cologne, *merveilleusement grand clerc* and small in stature, named Master Agrippa, who aroused universal interest, and spoke every language, and had studied science. And this Master Agrippa was in the fifth and nineteenth years on the payroll of the city of Metz, and had a wife who was a native of Pavia, in Lombardy, *la plus mignone et plus diversement acoustrée* (i.e. the prettiest and most strangely dressed) ever seen in this country. And this Master Agrippa was very much acquainted with Master Jehan ⁽¹⁹⁾, curate of Sainte-Croix, who was a great *clerc*, and it was said that he held some of his own opinion. For which the friars preachers of the said city made disputes, and gave many arguments in public and in their churches, seeking to have the said master Agrippa ⁽²⁰⁾. But he took leave of the city and departed on the same day that these disputes were being made".

After a long stay in Italy, Agrippa went to Chambery, and then in January 1518 to Metz, accepting offers to work there as a public official and specifically as a salaried orator and councillor of the city. However, the new environment was not to his liking. During his seven years in Italy, Agrippa had, according to one of his contemporaries (*Ep.* III, 15), become completely Italianised, and he himself, in one of his letters (*Ep.* II, 14), treats France and Germany as barbarian countries in comparison to Italy.

"I urge you," Agrippa wrote to his friend, "after you have seen Germany and Gaul, and all the colluvia of our barbarians, to come and visit me at last in Italy: if you once see it with your own eyes, every other homeland will be vile and turpentine" (1518). In Italy, he had left all kinds of intellectual possibilities, his universities, their passionate audience for letters and the arts, the great movement of spirits of the full Italian renaissance, and a certain freedom of thought in classes, among the great lords, among the people and even among the clergy.

(18) See in Huguenin, *Les Chroniques de la ville de Metz*, p. 73.

(19) He was Joannes Rogerius Brennonius, Agrippa's friend and disciple, also dedicated to Hermetic studies, who was imprisoned in 1525 for his unorthodox opinions.

(20) You mean: trying to entangle him in the meshes of inquisition to save his soul and burn, you understand, his heart. The Inquisitor of the Faith of Metz, the Dominican Nicholas Savini, and the Prior of the Convent of the Friars Preachers, the Dominican Claudio Salini, had to vent not only their theological hatred but also their personal resentment against Agrippa, because Agrippa, as we shall see, had had the truly extraordinary courage to engage in a daring battle against them, and what is worse, to win it, managing to snatch from their hands a poor woman whom, after torturing them, they wanted to burn as a witch.

Germany, on the other hand, was in a state of turmoil at the time of the Reformation, and Agrippa, whose official duties took time away from his favourite studies, had the opportunity to assess the importance and character of this grandiose spiritual movement.

Agrippa's life, from his early twenties commenting on Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* in Dole until the day of his death, was a violent and skilful battle against monks and theologians. Agrippa dared, like Luther and Mélancton, whom he honoured, to rise up against the authority of the supreme pontiff and to revolt against the preponderance of monks in the Church and society; and it is understandable that the Metz chronicler, who judged wholesale, could see in Agrippa a follower of Martin Luther. Agrippa, on the other hand, never broke with the Church and the Prost says that "like Erasmus, he preserved, as far as strict orthodoxy was concerned, a very correct attitude in his acts, but as far as opinions were concerned he allowed himself a great freedom of thought, generally hidden under the mask of an apparent submission" ⁽²¹⁾ But in Agrippa's case, it was certainly not the reasons prudence that dictated his attitude; he relied on the tradition of occult philosophy and the practice of the occult sciences, he related to Hermes and Pythagoras, to the Kabbalists and the Pythagoreans, and he could clearly not join or follow the simple advocates of free examination. A. grippa *knew* that the full meaning of the letter, misunderstood or no longer understood by the Church of Rome, could not be grasped with the simple aid of free examination, just as it could not be grasped by unintelligent faith, but that only the intellect purified by *art*, according to the secret, traditional and ritual rules of magic, could attain the vision and understanding of things, and consequently also of the sacred texts of religions. Indeed, when one has reached a certain degree of

"Direct experimental knowledge", the attitude to be held in the face of the beliefs of the professional world is no longer determined by other beliefs, mentalities or methods of investigation, but by the evaluation these secular beliefs on the basis and escort of one's own spiritual knowledge and the consideration of the goals to be achieved and obstacles to be overcome. Philosophical and religious residues, mental and sentimental, cannot and must not remain.

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The Secret Association

Henry or Arrigo Cornelius Agrippa, in French Henri Corneille Agrippa, was born in Cologne on 14 September 1486. Apparently Corneille is the Frenchised name of Agrippa's family, and his real name is said to be Cornélis; Agrippa was a nickname taken by Agrippa's father and kept by his sons, and is evidently taken from the old name of the city: Colonia Agrippina. Agrippa also had pretensions to nobility, or thought it worthwhile to claim it, and especially towards the end of his life called himself *Henricus Cornelius Agrippa ab Nettesheym*, a title of nobility that also appears on the title page of editions of the time of some of his works. Nettesheym is a small village to the north of Cologne, near Neuss in the province of Dusseldorf; however, it seems very doubtful that this noble nickname actually belonged to him.

According to Agrippa himself, he learned the first notions of astro-logy from his father. He studied in the public schools of Cologne and attained the rank of *maître-ès-arts*, which attested to a certain knowledge of the seven liberal arts. He later had occasion to speak very ill of these schools and his first masters, but in any case he is not known to have had any other avenue to build up his initial knowledge. With this preparation, he left at the age of about twenty for the University of Paris, where he was able to lay the foundations of his great erudition in every field, his expertise and his legendary prestige in magic and the occult sciences. We find him in his early twenties intent working on alchemy together with the

(21) Aug. Prost - *H. C. Agrippa*, Vol. I, p. 207.

to a considerable number of young students from various countries, among whom was an Italian, a certain Landolfo, a close friend of Agrippa's, with whom, in imitation of what was customary in ancient times, he had founded a secret society, of which he was the head, for the culture of the art. Over them Agrippa exercised a great ascendancy; his superiority was unquestioned, and the association endeavoured with the greatest devotion to favour its leader in all that he did and proposed.

Agrippa's life was as agitated and conflicted as ever. His adventurous affairs began in 1508, when he and his friend Landolfo left for Spain to serve the King of Aragon against rebels against his authority. From the vicissitudes he encountered while carrying out military service, Agrippa later drew reason to claim that he had earned the title of knight, knight aurata, a title whose legitimacy was contested by Prost. Having at best escaped various and serious dangers, he went from Barcelona (August 1508) to Valencia, where he embarked for the Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Naples; but he turned back almost immediately, again by sea, touching at Livorno, and landed in Provence, arriving in Avignon at the end of 1508.

In Avignon he learns that his Landolf is in Lyons, and writes to him (*Ep.* I, 8): "After these terrible trials, all that remains is to seek out our friends, to renew the sacraments of our conspiracy and to restore the integrity of our association; I have already solemnly affiliated the venerable companion of my long pilgrimage, Anthony Xanto. He is faithful and taciturn, and eager to be one of us; I have rehearsed and instructed him.

The association was therefore always alive, and we see that the affiliation to it had a solemn ceremonial character. This letter is dated 20 December 1508; in the following February Landolf writes (*Ep.* I, 11) to Agrippa, recommending an initiate: 'He is,' says Landolf, 'a German like yourself; he is a native of Nuremberg, but lives in Lyons. Curious investigator of the arcana of nature, and a free man, completely independent of the rest' (22), he wants, on the reputation that you already have, to add splendour your abyss too... Throw him therefore to prove it in space; and borne on the wings of Mercury fly from the regions of Austro to those Aquilon, take also the sceptre of Jupiter; and if this neophyte wishes to swear our statutes, associate him with our brotherhood".

With his seemingly imaginative phrasing, my friend Landolfo alludes circumspectly to the tests that the brotherhood practised prior to affiliation. The expression: *free man*, in this sense and applied to the layman knocking at the door of the temple, belongs to traditional Masonic terminology, and this trial of space is ceremonially reminiscent of the trial of the air, practised two centuries later in Masonic initiation, and the passage from the regions of Austro to those of Aquilone recalls the symbolic journeys that the layman must make under the guidance of the "experienced brother". Here, however, unlike in the Masonic ceremony, there are conspicuous hermetic elements; everything is done with the wings of Hermes, the father of philosophers according to the hermetic tradition, the guide of souls in the classical beyond and in the initiatory mysteries, Hermes thrice great, to whom was attributed the paternity of various writings that, having come to light a few decades ago, ran in numerous editions through the hands of scholars and especially of alchemists or hermeticists.

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Agrippa comments on De Verbo Mirifico in Dole.

Following this letter, Agrippa travelled to Lyon, where it is probable that he affiliated with the Germanic; he then went on to Autun, and ended up reuniting with his friends in Dole, which was then the capital of the county of Burgundy and the seat of a university. He leaves his friends to work for his benefit in Dole, and goes to

(22) *Nullis irretitus vinculis*, says the text. If we are not mistaken, the cautious Landolphus intends to assure Agrippa that his gathers spiritual, mental and perhaps material independence from the association's supposed enemies, i.e. monks, theologians etc. The letter is dated 4 February 1509. (*Ep.* I, 11).

Châlons-sur-Saône, and then back to Dole. The association continues to work; his friends write to him inviting him to visit an important personage in Chalons: 'If this noble personage, however, in his impatience, comes to see you in Dole, remember that you know everything, that you can do everything; but do nothing, promise nothing except after many prayers, and do not let yourself be won except after many favours. If you find yourself destitute, hide it carefully' (*Ep.* I) 20). The work of recruitment was apparently well organised; friends were not idle; and the contingent interests of the brotherhood were also taken into account.

The Franche-Comté together with Burgundy and the Low Countries was administered at that time by Princess Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V, then very young and under guardianship. Margaret of Austria was a cultured woman, a man of letters; and Agrippa, in order to win her favour, wrote and dedicated to her the *Treatise on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Feminine Sex*, which we have already mentioned. The arguments that Agrippa uses in support of his thesis are quite curious: he proves by means of the Kabbalah that woman has been given the most excellent name of man: Adam means earth, and Eve life; another reason for her perfection is that she was created last; another reason is that her body floats in water better than man's. Women are, says Agrippa, the most perfect sex. Women are, says Agrippa, more chaste and more eloquent, for there is hardly an example of a mute woman. Poets are won over by women 'in her ciencie et fabule, and dialecticians in her contentative garrulity'. 'What abbachista making a false account to deceive a female, can ingure her?'. "The philosophers, mathematicians and astrologers in his divinations and precognitions are many times inferior to the rustic females, and many times an old woman wins the doctor".

However, this treatise was not printed until 1529 in Antwerp, together with Agrippa's other minor writings. Reprinted in 1532, it was also translated into French, Italian, etc., and had great diffusion. Please refer to the bibliography for more information on this.

One result of the devoted and zealous work of Agrippa's friends, and the reputation of great knowledge and military valour that he already enjoyed when he was only 23 years old, was the invitation extended to him by the vice-chancellor of the University of Dole to read and explain Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* at that university. Only the first edition (1494) of this important work by Reuchlin existed at the time, the second edition being from 1514. In it, Reuchlin, following in the footsteps of Pico della Mirandola and the Pythagorean philosophy (as he called it) that he had found restored in Florence on his journey Italy, mixed Kabbalah with a neo-Platonic and Christianity. Agrippa solved the task entrusted to him with honour and success. But the mistrust, hostility, and wars provoked by *De Verbo Mirifico* against its author, could not help but cause trouble even for its explainer and apologist. Thus began the struggle between Agrippa and the priests, a bloody struggle, which ended on Agrippa's side on the day of his death, and on the part of the priests lasts, as we have seen, to this day.

It was a Franciscan friar, Jean Catilinet, from a monastery near Dole, who initiated the attack, travelling to Ghent in Lent 1510, and accusing Agrippa in his sermons of having dared to introduce the forbidden and condemned doctrine of the Kabbalah into schools, of submitting the texts of the sacred scriptures to the Talmud, and of pronouncing against him the accusation that was truly formidable in those times: Agrippa is nothing other than a Judaizing heretic.

The blow was severe, and it is probably for this reason that Agrippa, bold and bellicose, but at the same time cautious, suddenly left England, from where he wrote his first polemical essay in response to Catilinet: *Henrici Cornelii Agrippae expositulatio super expositione sua in libro De Verbo Mirifico cum Joanne Catilineti fratrum Franciscanorum per Burgundiam provinciali ministro, sacrae theologiae doctori*; which was also first published in 1529, and again in 1532. It is a short, but vigorous writing, all sparkling with irony. Agrippa rebukes the Frenchman for his behaviour so inconsistent with the precepts of the Gospel, and his ignorance in matters of Kabbalah and Hebrew science; and he shrewdly calls into question the university and the parliament of Dole, which had listened to him and applauded him, and to whom, he says, Catilinet's attacks and insults are therefore due; and he adds: And he adds: "Even if it were true that a twenty-three year old adolescent had made some imprudent proposition and deserved to be reprimanded, this had to be done elsewhere and

more pious and Christian way that you have not tried, you who, being Gray's convent, had occasion to come to Dole; why did you not come to see me, why did you not speak to me face to face, and go and stir up ill-will against me 200 miles away? Catilinet's attack harmed Agrippa, and among other things prevented him from presenting his treatise on the nobility and pre-eminence of the female sex to Princess Margaret.

During his stay in Dole, Agrippa worked on the *De Occulta Philosophia*, completing the first two books in an almost complete draft, of which he sent a manuscript copy to Abbot Trithemius, exchanging a correspondence with him that will be discussed below.

Little is known about what Agrippa did in 1510 and 1511; all we know is that during 1510 was already back in Cologne to support some theses in theology. Then in 1511 he went back to Italy, where he remained for seven years without interruption.

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The stay in Italy

Italy was at that time the scene of military and political struggles complicated by religious ones. Agrippa travelled to Lombardy in the service of Emperor Maximilian, who was then at war with the Venetians and the French king Louis XII for the domination of Milanese territory. The king of France had summoned a council in Pisa for 1 September 1511 to judge Pope Julius II^o, a council that actually opened only two months later, under the presidency of the Cardinal of Sainte-Croix. Julius II responded by excommunicating the cardinal and his adherents and summoning a council in the Lateran for 1 April 1512, then excommunicating the king of France and interdicting the kingdom of France. At the heart of the Council of Pisa was the Spanish Cardinal Carvajal, Cardinal of Sainte-Croix, and Agrippa was called upon by him to appear as theologian at this Council, which sought to reform the Church 'in its head as well as in its members' and especially to put Pope Julius II. in a state of excommunication. The first three sessions were held in Pisa, the fourth in Milan in early January 1512, and Agrippa may have also taken part in this session. In the spring of 1512, we find him in Pavia, mainly occupied with his favourite studies. In a letter (*Ep.* I, 31) to a certain Chrysostom, a friend of his, accompanying the dispatch of a book on Kabbalah dated 30 April 1512, he makes great recommendations for secrecy and high praise for this divine science, the most sublime of which human enquiry can be aware. On 18 June 1512, as we have already narrated, he was caught up in the events of the war in Pavia, and was taken prisoner by the Swiss. Freed in Milan, in August of the same year we find him again in Pavia, which he left in November to go to Casale to the Marquis of Monferrato, Guglielmo VII.

Four years of continuous residence in Italy followed, the events of which are difficult to follow due to a lack of documents. Agrippa must also have had occasion to render service to the pope at some time, because there is a letter from Leo X, complete with health and apostolic blessing, signed by Cardinal Bembo, to Agrippa, thanking him for the proof of devotion given to the Apostolic See (*Ep.* I, 38).

In the autumn of 1513 he is in Borgo Lavezzaro where he had been before: in March 1514 in Milan, and by 1514 or in the winter of 1515 he makes a trip to Rome. In the winter of 1515 he goes as far as Brindisi; and in the summer of the same year we find him again in Pavia.

He became a salaried professor at that university; he had a furnished house and servants for himself and his family; for in Pavia he had taken a wife and already had a son. From the chair of the university, he explains to the public the *Pimander*, the hermetic writing attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, which had been found in Macedonia by an Italian monk, Leonardo di Pistoia, and of which Marsilio Ficino had made a Latin version, dedicated to Cosimo dei Medici.

While the Greek text was not printed until 1554, the Latin version had already had some twenty editions by 1510; among others, an edition had appeared in Paris in 1505, with the addition of commentaries by Lefèvre d'Étaples (*Faber Stapulensis*), who endeavoured to reconcile the doctrines of Hermeticism contained in *Pimander* with Christianity. Agrippa's lectures followed the same line and excited the curiosity and interest of that cultured and intelligent audience. According to Agrippa, the *Pimander* contains the deepest mysteries of the most ancient theology, with secrets of both philosophies, about God, the spirit, demons and the soul, religion its mysteries, secret prayers, divine union and regeneration. Of this course of his, the first lecture has come down to us in the editions of his works (ed. of Lyons, 1600, Tom. II, part II^a, pp. 401-411).

After *Pimander* Agrippa commented, we do not know whether in Pavia or Turin, on Plato's *Convito*, in a speech to young, *candid auditores*, probably students. In his commentary, he follows the Socratic conception of love: Love, he says, by the consensus of all philosophers and theologians, is the desire that leads us to beauty, but above all to hidden beauty (*occultum formosum*), of which visible beauty is but a symbol; he exalts therefore, in keeping with his own rather than with Socrates' sentiment, love for women, but not sensual love, foreshadowing a divine sentiment that elevates and ennobles. This oration can be found in the edition of the works (ed. Lyon, 1600, Tom. II, part II^a, pp. 389-401).

The events of the war also put an end to this stay in Pavia, as we have already mentioned. He had to take refuge in Milan, where the Swiss took everything away from him, including his books and bookshelves. He thus lost some commentaries on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans (*Ep. II*, 14).

He returned to Pavia shortly afterwards to reunite with his wife and son; and in the following year and spring of 1517, he was in Casale Monferrato, where he devoted himself to his favourite subjects of study and e-experience and where he wrote and dedicated two small books to the Marquis of Monferrato: *Dialogus de domine qui Dei imago est* and *De triplice ratione cognoscendi Deum*.

Agrippa sends these two writings to a friend, a certain Augustine, a most learned Augustine, says Agrippa, (*Ep. I*, 49) so that he may read them, consider them and correct them. The latter replies, congratulating himself on the best and wisest of mortals, on the diligent explorer of secret things, who in the midst of his misfortunes has been able to free his spirit so as to bring it to a contemplation that has enabled him to study himself, mortals and God himself in such an admirable way (*Ep. I*, 50).

The three ways to know God that Agrippa expounds are: contemplation of the divine works; the warnings of the prophets who know the book of the Law; the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Apostles in the Gospels. But with regard to the book of the Law, Agrippa adds (*De Tripl. Ratione...*, Chap. IV) that in addition to the written law, which he calls the literal law, given by the Lord to Moses, Moses also received the oral interpretation of it, which is in some sense its spiritual law; it was transmitted to seventy wise men, not in writing, nor for them to write it down, but by word of mouth, and so that each of them might in perpetual order reveal it to his successors. Because of this character of its transmission it is called the science of eloquence, which the Jews call Kabbalah. With the help of the Kabbalah, one can derive knowledge of divine things and humanity from the law of Moses. Quotations from the Hermetic books abound in this writing, which also reproduces passages from *Asclepius*.

Agrippa's thinking is now definitively fixed on this important subject; and we will see later on how he adhered to the *De triplice ratione cognoscendi Deum*, carrying whole sentences of it by weight, in the writing of the third, last and most important book of the *Occult Philosophy*. The affirmation of the existence of the esoteric tradition, of the "oral" (kabbalah) transmission of spiritual law, is made explicitly and categorically by our author.

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Agrippa in Metz. - The Woippy Witch Affair

The year 1517 was the last of Agrippa's stay in Italy. In February he was in Turin and in May in Chambery; and on 16 January 1518 he left for Metz, accepting the offers of employment made to him by that city. The city of Metz was governed by a patriciate, which employed Agrippa from February 1518 as the city's salaried orator and councillor. We have already had occasion to see how Agrippa took a keen interest in the reform movement by which Metz was also agitated and how the duties of the office and the low civilisation of the environment compared to Italian cities made him regret his stay in Italy. However, even in Metz, he had friends who were also passionate about magic and the secret sciences: the master Claude Chansonneti (*Claudius Cantiuncula*), who performed a similar task in the city, the religious celebrity Glaude Dieudonné, and Jean Rogier, known as Brennonius. In addition to his friends, however, he also found fierce enemies in Metz: Nicholas Savini, a Dominican, inquisitor of the faith, Claudio Salini, a Dominican, prior of the convent of the Friars Preachers, the Franciscan Dominic Dauphin, Nicholas Orici, of the Friars Minor, the archpriest Regnault (Reginaldus), and John Leonard, an official of the episcopal curia.

These enmities were a consequence not only of Agrippa's questionable sympathies with the Reformation, but also and above all of his courageous attitude in the face of the horrors committed by the Inquisition. We allude to the famous affair of the witch of Woippy in which Agrippa's wrongdoing was that he was right and succeeded in defeating his opponents.

It was a matter of snatching from the hands of the inquisitor of the faith of the city of Metz a poor woman from the village of Woippy unjustly accused of heresy and evil-doing; it was a matter of disputing a supposed witch by fire. Agrippa himself speaks of this affair in chapter 96.^o of the book *De Incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* entitled 'Of the art of inquisitors', and in a letter written to his friend Cantiuncula. He disputed the battle on the legal ground by raising exceptions against the inquisitor and his exorbitant proceedings.

"At the beginning of the affair," writes Agrippa (*Ep.* II, 40) to Cantiuncula, 'a vile mob of countenances conspiring against her invaded her house in the middle of the night. These wretches, drunk on wine and orgy, seized the unfortunate woman and on their own authority, without any right, and without a judge's licence, threw her into prison. Nevertheless, the cathedral chapter, lord of the place, has her taken to Metz, and delivers her into the hands of its ordinary judge, the bishop's court official. A time limit is given to the peasants within which they either declare themselves accusers or simply make the complaint. These rascals have the audacity to come forward as accusers and are then imprisoned; but thanks to the inquisitor who sat as an assessor with the official, they are granted an extension of two days'. At this point, Agrippa narrates his intervention in the matter. He takes the poor woman's defence; and the infamy begins. The official Jean Leonard, unbeknownst to the defender, delivers the wretch into the hands of her accusers for a few florins. "Four of these wretches had already been sent back as known villains; the other four seized the victim, mistreated her, insulted her and beat her". Agrippa intervenes by opposing them, but to no avail; and while the wretch groans in the harshest captivity, the others freely indulge in the orgy. Eventually, the official in charge of instructing the matter arrives in Woippy. Then a memorandum or rather a libel full of impostures is produced; and against every principle of law the trial is conducted at the same time by way of accusation and inquisition. Agrippa protests, refusing to appear *in loco suspecto*. Meanwhile, unconcerned by so much lawlessness and barbarity, the inquisitors eliminate the husband of the alleged witch, preventing him from intervening to avoid any plea of appeal on his part.

It is then that, on the advice of the inquisitor, of this large monk who, under his thick rind, reveals a crueler spirit than that of the executioner (*consulto egregio illo dilatato et impinguato paterculo inquisitore, lictore ipso crudeliore*), and in accordance with the inept conclusions of the booklet he is said to have produced, as well as inconsistent arguments of the accuser, the official subjects the wretch to the atrocious ordeal of torture. From this horrible spectacle he and his acolytes are put to flight, but they do so by leaving the victim in the hands of his enemies and the instruments of the inquisition. The poor woman continues to be tormented without the judge being present, and then she is thrown back into prison where without any humanity she is left to suffer hunger and thirst.

"Yet what reason does this merciless inquisitor give for martyring the wretch in this way? What proof does he give that this woman is really a witch? He says that her mother was burnt as a witch; and I tell him to his face that the facts of others have no value against an accused. Well, do you want to know what argument he then goes fishing in the arsenal of his peripatetic theology? He pretends that witches are in the habit of consecrating the fruit of their wombs to the devil; and that, on the other hand, as they ordinarily give themselves to the devil, he is in all nature the father of their children and hereditarily transmits his malice to them.

"By your perverse doctrine," says Agrippa (*Ep. II, 39*) to the inquisitor, "you misconceive the virtue of baptism and its sacramental form; for if the son remains with the devil even when the priest has said: 'Come out unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit, what value has the sacrament? And who proves to you that the devil can beget? You, inquisitor of the faith, with all your arguments, are but a heretic'. For Agrippa, the best defence consisted in the most audacious and violent offensiveness, but the inquisitor so boldly attacked replied by retaliating against the accusation: "What do you speak of heresia? You yourself are a heretic, and I could prove it to you'.

The threat was serious enough to terrify even the most stout-hearted; but Agrippa knew that with ferocious beasts one must show that one is not afraid. He continues undaunted, turning to the viceroy of Metz and contesting the jurisdiction of the inquisitor (*Ep. II, 38*): 'It is not for him to recognise the crime of witchcraft; and as for that of heresy, presumption is not enough to give him the cause'. And he emerged victorious from this debate of competencies; the lords of the Chapter decided to have the poor peasant girl taken back to Metz. In the meantime, the official died suddenly, and on his deathbed, yielding to the cry of conscience, he dictated a declaration to a notary in which he acknowledged and proclaimed the innocence of the unfortunate woman. The inquisitor, on the other hand, remains unmoved and does not let go of the prey; on the pretext that the death of the official had halted the proceedings, he has the pretence of taking everything to himself in order to subject the victim to new torments and finally set her on fire. "For, says Agrippa, these instruments of the inquisition do not believe that they have fulfilled their task until they have burnt those who are exposed to their persecution. Faced with the new claim and threat, Agrippa returned tirelessly and courageously to the defence; he sent the new officer, appointed to replace the deceased, a new request (*Ep. II, 39*), asserting the previous judge's statement and remorse; and the chapter finally proved Agrippa right, rejecting the inquisitor's claims. The populace, says Agrippa, shamed him by finger-pointing and whistling at him. Agrippa therefore emerged victorious from this battle; but if the alleged witch escaped the stake, her defender brought upon himself the personal resentment of the inquisitor and all his colleagues; and when, due to other matters with the theologians, he had to leave the city Metz, the fierce inquisitor was able to make up for his enforced fasting and give free rein to his charitable feelings, doing to others what he certainly would not have wished to be done to himself. Indeed, his friend Brennonius wrote to Agrippa that the master of heretics (they referred to him among themselves with this pun), Nicholas Savini, had tortured, as suspected of witchcraft, a poor, almost decrepit old woman, who, unable to resist the torment, had confessed what they had wanted her to say (*Ep. II, 49*).

Agrippa continued his courageous campaign against the horrors of the inquisition for the rest of his life: "These bloodthirsty vultures," wrote Agrippa some ten years later ⁽²³⁾, "in addition to the privileges of the inquisition office granted to them, still interfere, against reason and canon, in the jurisdictions of the ordinarii... and cruelly and most cruelly they persecute peasant women, who, being accused and denounced of witchcraft and witchcraft, are often subjected by them to cruel and terrible torments without any other reasonable evidence; until, having been forced to make confessions, which they had never thought of, they have only the power to condemn: And truly they are then held as inquisitors, when they do not remain from their office, until the wretched woman is burned, or has gilded her hands to the inquisitor, that he may have mercy on her, so that he may absolve her, as sufficiently purged in the torments: For the inquisitor is often able to change the corporal punishment into money, and to apply it to his office of the inquisition, so that he derives great profit from it: there are also many of those unfortunates who are obliged to pay tribute to him every year, lest they be dragged and inquisitioned again. In addition when the goods of heretics come under taxation, the inquisitor also takes a small share: and finally, every accusation or denunciation or suspicion of heresy, however slight, or of evil, and the mere summons of the inquisitor brings infamy with it: the integrity of which cannot be provided for unless money is given to the inquisitor; and this too is something. With this caution, I remember that when I was in Italy, many inquisitors in the Duchy of Milan harassed many of the most honest and noble matrons there were, and secretly extracted a great deal of money from those frightened little girls. In the end, having discovered the deception, they were badly punished by the nobles; and they barely escaped the stump and the fire".

We have quoted this passage from Agrippa's work, not only to document his in-dependence and generosity in the face of the iniquitous proceedings of the Inquisition, but also because it did not seem inappropriate, nor out of place or time, to refresh the lazy memory of the many Italians who delude themselves into thinking they are working on behalf of their country by favouring the 'Vatican she-wolf', which, like all wolves, may lose its fur but not its vice. Agrippa and his disciple Viero were among the very first to generously and recklessly rise up against the bloodthirsty and sadistic madness that for centuries and centuries, dreaming everywhere of demons, evils and witchcraft, availed itself of torture and burning as the most suitable means to defend and spread the religion of love preached by the meek Jesus. And he knew full well what he was exposing himself to with his reckless attitude. The monkish hatred, indeed, soon took its revenge in the affair of St Anne's monogamy, of which we shall speak briefly here.

The Parisian philosopher Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples (*Faber Stapulensis*), who was very much in favour of the Reformation, had at that time begun a work of exegesis and historical criticism of the sacred texts that aroused great interest in the scholarly world, strong discussions in the troubled field of religious studies, and bitter hostility within the Church. One of the questions addressed by Lefevre d'Etaples was that of the three Marys. It was a question of whether or not the Virgin Mary had had two sisters with same name as Mary, as certain legends that were widespread and accredited at the time. The general belief at the beginning of the 15thth century was in fact that St Anne had been the mother of these three Marys, and that she had had these three daughters by three different and successive husbands, whose names were also given: Joachim, Cléophas and Salome. Against this accredited legend in the Church, Lefèvre d'Etaples rose up, reconstituting the original legend in its entirety, namely that St Anne had only one daughter and that this was the Virgin Mary ⁽²⁴⁾. The orthodox theologians condemned Lefèvre d'Etaples for this opinion and waged bitter warfare against him. Agrippa had the misguided idea of intervening in the dispute, siding, it is understood, against the orthodox theologians and on the side of the Parisian philosopher; and he took the field with his usual ardour. But he immediately found in Metz equally ardent contradictors at the head of which was Claudio Salini, prior of the Dome- nicans and doctor of theology at the University of Paris. These monks and theologians resorted *more*

(23) Arrigo Cornelio Agrippa - *Della vanità delle scienze*, translated by M. Lodovico Domenichi in Venice, 1547, ch. XCVI, p. 181.

(24) Faber Stapulensis - *De una ex tribus Maria* - Paris, 1519.

used all means to fight Agrippa, setting the people of Metz against him in their sermons in church and in their disputes and concourses even in the square. Unable to withstand so many attacks on his own, denounced as a heretic who deserved to be burnt at the stake, tired and disgusted, fearful of any calumny, and expecting every iniquity from his enemies and every excess from the drunkenness of the people mounted against him, Agrippa, who knew how to refrain from unnecessary temerity, ended up leaving the city of Metz and going to his own Cologne. This was in February 1520.

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Agrippa a doctor in Switzerland

Agrippa did not stay long in Cologne. In the spring of 1521 he was again, but only passing through, in Metz, where he had the misfortune of losing his Italian wife, and went to Geneva, where he had a friend in Eustachio Chapuys, a canon, an official of the bishop of Geneva, Giovanna di Savoia, and later councillor to the Duke of Savoy, and then councillor to Charles V (1527) and his legate to the King of England, Henry VIII.

It appears from Agrippa's letters that his wife's death was a very serious loss for him; however, it did not prevent him from soon marrying a second time in September 1521 in Geneva.

Of course, with the constant changing of places and activities, Agrippa's interests did not benefit much, and it is understandable how he also had to deal with his unhealthy condition from time to time. Once he was married again, he tried to settle down (as they say in the current Italian bad habit), getting himself employed as a doctor to the Duke of Savoy; and having failed in this aspiration, he turned elsewhere and was called as a salaried doctor by the city of Freiburg in Switzerland, where he arrived at the end of 1522 or the beginning of 1523.

Agrippa, in all likelihood, did not possess the academic qualifications legally required for the practice of medicine, and his biographer noting the fact comments on it and judges it unfavourably: "The natural daring," he writes ⁽²⁵⁾, 'thanks to which Agrippa knew how to dare everything, a certain good fortune in having everything accepted, the mobility of character that led him to pass incessantly from one situation to another; this is what probably explains the change of position that he attempted (*i.e. to become physician to the Duke of Savoy*) by dedicating himself to the practice of medicine without having studied this difficult art in any particular way until then'. Prost sees in this fact a remarkable testimony to the *souplesse* and fecundity of his spirit and simultaneously to the recklessness that is one of Agrippa's salient character traits, as well as proof of the lack of fixity of his ideas.

But, leaving aside this reproach of ethical origin, to which Agrippa could have responded by denying his adherence to a morality that recommends fixed ideas, what needs to be examined is whether or not Agrippa's confidence in his medical knowledge was justified; a question that can be resolved not on basis of the existence and value of the academic titles he possessed, but on the basis of the ability he demonstrated during the seven years he practised the profession of doctor. The question, thus posed, is certainly resolved in Agrippa's favour; and, since it does not appear that he did and never had the time to make regular medical studies (and the same applies to legal studies), another question arises: Where and how did Agrippa acquire his encyclopaedic knowledge?

We have seen that the chronicler of Metz, his contemporary, called Agrippa *merveilleusement grand clerc*, and added that he had studied every science and spoke every language. Another frank testimony is provided by a letter from a friend to Agrippa (*Ep.* III, 15, Basel, April 1522): 'On the way a good man began to speak to me about you: he painted me such a

(25) Aug. Prost. - *H. C. Agrippa*, Vol. II, p. 29.

most erudite in everything, a doctor by profession, encyclopaedic and almost omniscient in science, most skilful in disputation, capable of dismantling the pride of the sophists with a trifle. I asked him again about his name. "Agrippa" he replied: "He is a native of Cologne, of Italian upbringing, of curial experience, in other words, a man of the court, urban, civilised".

Indeed, from his earliest youth, he was so versed in magic and the secret sciences that he was admired not only by his contemporaries, but also by the grave and knowledgeable Abbot Trithemius, he is called as expert in theology to the Conclio of Pisa and as a man of law to a public office in the city of Metz, where he shows his competence in legal matters by engaging and winning on this ground a knife fight with the inquisitor of the faith, he is a critic and polemicist in matters of hagiography, and now he becomes a doctor with the utmost tranquillity. Finally, after a long period of professional practice in which he was able to prove not only his ability but also his self-denial and courage, we will see him make another transformation and become the official historian of Emperor Charles V. Now, even if it is true that in Agrippa's time there was not that specialisation of studies for which today there is an astonishing competence in a narrow field of knowledge thanks to an ignorance and unconsciousness of everything else, it is also the case, it seems to us, one must also ask oneself whether such an encyclopaedic knowledge can only be explained by the hard work of an autodidact endowed with a multifaceted intelligence, or is it not perhaps the fruit, let us not say of Ruggieri's secret university, but of that magic art or occult philosophy in which Prost sees nothing but superstition and charlatanism? Even Prost, on the other hand, despite his incompetence in the secret sciences, sees alchemy as the source of Agrippa's medical knowledge.

Agrippa medicine publicly in Freiburg in 1523 on the basis of a special commission from the city authorities; and it is to be assumed that, before employing a doctor on their salaries and entrusting him with the health and skin of the citizens, these authorities took the trouble to obtain, as we say today, the appropriate references. In Freiburg, too, we find around Agrippa a small group of friends, all dedicated to the study of the secret sciences, who gathered in his house to study theoretically and practically. His profession as a doctor dependent on the city's administration naturally provided Agrippa with obligations and constraints that had to get in the way of his work in the field of his favourite studies; and this is perhaps the reason why he soon resigned from his post, although he continued to stay in Freiburg for seven years, which he left in February 1524 to arrive in Lyon in the first months of the same year.

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Agrippa at the Court of France

At the time of Agrippa, France was engaged in wars for dominance in Italy and for this reason it often happened that the seat of government of France was in Lyon, without comparison closer than Paris to the theatre of war and competition. Great was the influence of Italian culture and customs in Lyon. There was no shortage of Italians even among the alchemists, astrologers and mages who flocked to Lyon. At the beginning of the 16th century, at the time of Louis XII, for example, there was a mysterious Italian scientist in Lyon, called John, who claimed to be able to convert metals and make gold; always grave and mysterious in his manner, his wisdom amazed the most knowledgeable; he had given King Louis a sword adorned with a magic mirror and was in the habit distributing the money he received from the king to the poor. In this city, more suited to his genius, Agrippa stayed for four continuous years, a long period in his restless life, but it was not a happy stay.

In August 1524, we find him at the court of France in Lyon as counsellor and physician to the king attached to Queen Mother Louise of Savoy. He is there the time of the passage through Lyons of the French troops on their way to Italy under the command of François I.; and, as we have already had occasion to report, he is also there at the time of the battle of Pavia in François I. is defeated and remains a prisoner of the imperialists. The affairs of state then consequently passed into the hands of the queen mother, and Agrippa appeared content with his state August 1525, when the queen mother left Lyons without taking Agrippa with her. From then on he could no longer get his salaries paid, and his life became very difficult due to financial straits. Yet it is precisely at this time that we find undeniable proof of his goodness and generosity in an episode of his life.

In June 1526 he wrote from Lyons (*Ep. IV*, -20), to his friend Brennonius in Metz to send him the *Steganography* of Trithemius and some notebooks containing notes on a geomancy quite different from the vernacular which, if not lost, he had left in his hands years before. A certain Gianpaolo, known as the Flemish, a young man of twenty-five, who had already met Agrippa in Italy, and who was to go to Lyons, was in Metz at the time. Brennonius approved of the opportunity and gave the Flemish the task of bringing the requested books to Agrippa. But the Fleming, when he is halfway there, stops and writes to Agrippa (*Ep. IV*, 28), telling him of his commission, and that, having been robbed, he had to stop because he had no money; he therefore asks Agrippa to send him two golden "crowns", promising, as soon as he receives them, to bring him Geomancy and *his Steganography*, which he has with him. It was a full-throated lackey, which struck poor Agrippa at a most inopportune moment. He must have been well aware that he was dealing with a scoundrel, but he found the money he had asked for and sent it to the blackmailer, whom he called *adulescens eruditissime* (*Ep. IV*, 32): and, once he had the books, he not only held no grudge, but, having learned that the Fleming was in trouble, came very humanely to his aid.

In the midst of the troubles Agrippa still worked hard. By absorbing himself in his work, he perhaps found a little peace. It was then that he wrote the treatise *De Incertitudine et Vanitate Scientiarum* (*Ep. IV*, 44) as well as some writings of lesser importance: *On the Sacrament of Marriage*, of which there is an edition without date or place of printing, with a Latin text and French translation by Agrippa himself, an edition that is perhaps from 1526 and thus Agrippa's first work to be printed; a writing on *pyromachy*, which has not come down to us; and a critique of the theology of the pagans (*Dehortatio gentilis theologiae*), published in 1529 together with the work on the *female sex*, and other writings, including *The Sacrament of Marriage*.

We will speak further on *De Incertitudine et Vanitate*. Let us note, for the moment, that in this work Agrippa shows himself to be clearly opposed to astrology; and the sincerity of his attitude is confirmed by what he writes in letters of that period. Nevertheless, one had to make a living, and, as he was consulted for his astrological skills, Agrippa sometimes lent himself to gold.

Now, the queen mother had also requested a horoscope for King Francis I from Agrippa on her way from Lyon; but Agrippa, who wanted to be employed and regarded as the king's councillor and the queen's physician, which was his position, and not as a court astrologer, refused to accommodate the queen. In some letters to his friends at that time, he complained about this claim of the queen and accused her of wanting to abuse astrology, and of indulging in foolish hopes in what is nothing but vanity and superstition; the queen learned of these letters and of Agrippa's gossip about her, and for not wanting to bow to her whim, Agrippa was definitely removed from the ranks of the court pensions in October 1526. Giving the news to his friend John Capellane (*Ep. IV*, 52, Lyons, October 1526) he comes out in expressions very much at odds with the panegyric on the *fair sex*: 'I remembered what is written in the holy scriptures: not trust princes; I read in the philosophers: Women are not to be trusted; and , at school (*sub ferula*) I learnt from Virgil: *Varium et mutabile semper foemina*. And I doubly foolishly, di- mensive of human and divine warnings, have trusted him who is at the same time Prince and woman'.

The queen also another reason for her hostility towards Agrippa. She knew, in fact, that although he refused to give her his horoscope for the king, he had at that very time made a prophecy in which he predicted a brilliant victory for the Duke of Bourbon, who had long since left the French and joined the imperialists, and who was then under the walls of Rome; a prediction which came true, for Rome did in fact fall into the power of the imperialists, although the Duke of Bourbon paid for his brilliant victory by losing his life in the fury of the assault.

It seems that Agrippa was also secretly on terms with the Duke Bourbon and that he was prepared to accept the solicitations of the Duke of Bourbon and to serve the enemies of the French court; so that Agrippa's prophecy to the Duke of Bourbon was probably not the result of an astrological calculation, but rather of his own political calculation; By instigating the Bourbon to attack and take Rome with his Lutheran troops, Agrippa was perhaps pursuing his own policy; he spiteful towards the French court, with which relations were no longer what they used to be, and he earned the Bourbon's trust and friendship in the event, not difficult to foresee, on the basis of the precise information that Agrippa had, that the prophecy should come true. The death of the Bourbon, not foreseen by Agrippa, upset all calculations and was a serious blow to him.

With the possibility of being called by the Bourbon having disappeared, his relations with the French court having broken down, and his salary as councillor and court physician having been withdrawn, Agrippa found himself real trouble. But some saint must have protected him, for in a letter (*Ep.* V, 3) of February 1527 he wrote that he had seen an angel of God coming, who had brought him out of the mouth of hell, and had made him see the light of the sun, and had filled him with every good thing. He was, it seems, a wealthy Genoese merchant, a certain Agostino Fornari, who had a bank and business in Lyons, Antwerp, etc., and who, like many Italian merchants and bankers of those times, knew how to divide his time and attention between business, studies and the highest speculations.

Agrippa understood that the air in France was no longer so hygienic. Except that it was not easy to leave France. First he had to obtain a full discharge from the king and queen, then he needed safe-conducts to cross the frontier, both those of the king and those of Princess Marguerite of Austria, who was the governor of the countries where he intended to go; and this without counting the not inconsiderable financial difficulties. He turned to his friends in Antwerp to overcome these last difficulties; and after many delays and stumbling blocks, probably caused by the state of war then reigning on the frontier, the long-awaited money arrived at its destination. Fornari was unfortunately far away from Antwerp, and it was another Italian friend of Agrippa's, Father Aurelio di Acquapendente, who endeavoured to find them. At the beginning of December 1527, Agrippa was therefore able to leave Lyon and arrive in Paris on 20 December. Here it took him months and months to overcome all the bureaucratic difficulties, so that he could not arrive in Antwerp until July 1528.

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Agrippa physician in Antwerp

In Antwerp, Agrippa promised to meet some of his best friends: the Genoese merchant Agostino Fornari, who, according to Agrippa himself, had only been brought to his aid by his love of science and letters; his father Aurelio d'Acquapendente, whom Agrippa did not yet know personally, but with whom he had established a close relationship and friendship through a very important correspondence, which we will discuss later; and a third personage, whose name is unknown to us, but who certainly had a high social position and good financial situation, and who was also already in correspondence with Agrippa, who calls him a respectable and learned man. Father Aurelius was in Antwerp; he knew Fornari, and it may have been Fornari who put him in correspondence with Agrippa when the latter was still in Lyons.

Agrippa wanted very much to meet Father Aurelius personally, the friend who was still unknown but very close to him and very dear to him spiritually, the friend who had brought him back from the plague in France; but when he arrived in Antwerp, Father Aurelius was not there, he was probably travelling, and until end of August the desired meeting could not take place. Fornari was also absent and did not return until the end of August, to leave on his own business and return again in 1529.

Agrippa, perhaps not wanting to waste time, perhaps considering the dangers of war, left his wife and children in the care of one of his relatives, Guillaume Furbity, on his way from Paris. His family therefore did not join him until later. In early November 1528, they all gathered in Antwerp. There, Agrippa had taken up practice of medicine; he had also tried, but to no avail, to become physician to Princess Margaret of Austria under whose regency the Netherlands was situated with the seat of government in Malines (*Mechlinia*). Princess Margaret was the one to whom Agrippa had dedicated his treatise on the preeminence of the female sex some twenty years earlier.

Agrippa's reputation as a doctor did not take long to establish itself and spread; he was also called upon from neighbouring cities, from Leuven and Malines. But the practice of medicine did not absorb him to the point that he forgot the secret sciences. In June 1529 he was in Malines with a sick person; and from there he wrote (*Ep. V, 75*) to his family, giving them the instructions needed to carry out a real alchemy operation, which he had had to leave in the middle of the day in order to go to the bedside of the Malines client. The latter replied (*Ep. V, 76*) by informing him of the stages of the operation; they had brought Cynthia and Cillenius (copper and mercury) together in a very transparent bed, so this was the case. A plague had broken out in Antwerp in the meantime; and in August 1529 Agrippa, who was away from the city for his professional duties, was suddenly forced to return in great haste because he received news that his second wife had fallen ill with the plague. The plague spared no one in Agrippa's family; he alone remained immune. His wife was taken from him by the epidemic; some of his family lost their lives; and Agrippa then found refuge in the house of his friend Fornari.

The epidemic was wreaking havoc in the city, and Agrippa, while mourning the loss of his wife, tirelessly and courageously devoted himself to the care of those afflicted by the disease. His conduct at this juncture is all the more praiseworthy because the city's physicians, those endowed with loyal and academic titles, behaved quite differently.

"Most of the physicians of Antwerp, recounts Orsier ⁽²⁶⁾, "had left hastily when the scourge appeared. Agrippa remained, and so did a certain Jean Thibault, who like Agrippa practised medicine without being a doctor. Agrippa is on his feet night and day, doing his best, standing up to the scourge, snatching from it and dispatching as many victims as he can with noble obstinacy. On the basis of ancient recipes of Galen and other famous archaeologists, he has composed a sovereign remedy, which he applies in all cases where he judges the occasion propitious. When the scourge finally ceased, the doctors who had fled returned, and to cover their shameful defection, they hastened to attack Prof. Jean Thibault for unlawful practice of medicine. The matter was brought before the council of Malines; and Agrippa, called by Thibault as a witness in his defence, pronounced one of his usual tirades against the deserters of their professional duty, defending and extolling the work of Thibault who had remained at his post amidst the dangers of the terrible disease. Thibault has fought on my side, says Agrippa; and to the great anger of the doctors of An- versa the accused wins the case'.

The memoir he presented on this occasion to the Council of Malines has come down to us. In it, he violently attacked the *invidium medicorum genus porcorum*, which is always ready to lend itself to immunities (*sibi stercola invidere*) for the slightest hope of profit (*alterum alteri matulam aut concham stercorariam praecipere, magnis contentionibus digladiati, sordidi lucelli gratia*). He then took it with the medicine in vogue, with logistical or sophistic medicine,

(26) Joseph Orsier - *Un aventurier célèbre du XVI siècle, Cornélis Agrippa* - 'Revue des Idées', 15 Sept. 1910, p. 186.

denying its value. The best teaching comes from experience, Agrippa said. "That is why old ladies often succeed where wise doctors have failed, that is why Master Jean Thibault has cured many a sick person whom the doctors of Antwerp had abandoned as desperate. Hence a deep wound to their self-love, hence the envy, the proceedings they brought against him. Doctors vanquished by an ignorant man!

"It makes one wonder why these illustrious and learned doctors did not take up the cause when the epidemic was raging in the city. Then one could see the men who served the public good. These doctors were seen fleeing and abandoning the people, regardless of the oaths they had taken at the hands of the magistrates, and the obligations they had undertaken to receive the state's salary. In the meantime, Jean Thibault and a few others were courageously working to save the city. And now these scholastic doctors, these sesquipedal doctors, would like to entangle you with their sophistry, disputing our health and our lives by dint of horny syllogisms. Well then, let them have the glory of taming, let them have the titles and the honours, the first places and the fat emoluments. But at the bed of the sick, where it is no longer a question of spitting, but where it is necessary to alleviate evil and heal it, let it be left to those who bring proven and effective remedies, who know how to act even when they have withdrawn, *when ipsi jam aegrum, ut aiunt, prognosticis reliquerunt*' (Ep. VI, 7; Antwerp, 1530).

It is easy to see that this language and this victory were not meant to win Agrippa the sympathy and support of the city's doctors. Envy of his achievements and reputation, and resentment at these violent attacks and his defeat must have aroused the general hostility of the medical profession against Agrippa; and he must have realised that it was no longer possible to continue practising medicine, which he had been looking after for seven years. On the other, having become a widower with the thought and responsibility children, he hesitated somewhat as to which way to go.

His reputation was such that he received enquiries and offers employment from various quarters: Enri VIII, King of England, who was engaged in the great matter of his divorce, made him offers; the chancellor of the empire did likewise if he went to the sovereign court; Fornari conveyed to him the urgent solicitation of an Italian marquis whom he had already met once before and who called on him again; and Princess Margaret offered him a convenient, though less lucrative position than the others. Agrippa wished to live independently rather than return to the service of the powerful; but in the interests of his children and to better look after the publication of his works, he ended up accepting Princess Margaret's offer and remained in the Netherlands.

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Agrippa the emperor's historian

The post Agrippa was given at the court of the regent of the Netherlands was that of councillor, archivist and historian to the emperor: *Caesareae majestatis a consiliis, archivis indicarius et historiographus*.

At the beginning of 1530 he took possession of his new office and went to Malines, ending his fixed residence in Antwerp. Malines was in fact the seat of the court, the parliament and the government council; in short, it was the capital of the Netherlands. The functions of the emperor's historiographer were poorly paid, but they were at least honourable, writes Agrippa, perhaps thinking back to the Queen of France who wanted to make him the court astrologer; and as he had plenty of time left, Agrippa resumed his favourite studies and attended to publication of his works. Having established his residence in Malines he took his wife back for the third time and had a home again.

As early as 1529, he had started to print his writings, also directly taking care of the sale. He first published all the minor treatises. A small volume had been published in Antwerp in 1529 containing: the *Treatise on the Preeminence and Nobility of the Feminine Sex*, his *Apology against Catilinet's attacks* on his exposition of *De Verbo Mirifico*, the *Declamation on the Sacrament of Marriage*, the *Book on the Threefold Way of Knowing God*, the *Critique of Pagan Theology*, the *Treatise on Original Sin*, and the *Regimen or Antidote against Pestilence*.

After this and simultaneously with the printing of the treatise on the *Uncertainty and Vanity of the Sciences* and that on *Occult Philosophy or Magic*, other minor writings appeared: In 1530, the *Storia dell'incoronazione di Carlo V (History of the Coronation of Charles V)* appeared, in , in his capacity as the emperor's official historiographer, Agrippa speaks about the coronation that took place in Bologna in February 1530.

In 1531, a *Funeral Oration for Princess Margherita* and *Commentaries on Ramon Llull's Ars Brevis* were published. Other minor writings appeared after these, in 1533: an *Apologia*, and a *Querela* against the accusations made by the theologians of the University of Louvain against the Treaty of the *Vanity of Sciences*; the following year Agrippa published his polemical writing on the subject of *St Anne's Monogamy*, and finally in 1535 he published some *Discourses*, the *epigrams in verse* and the *plea* he had addressed to the Senate of Cologne in order to be able to continue printing the *Occult Philosophy* prevented from him by the Inquisition.

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Publication of De Incertitudine

Before embarking on the publication of his two main works, Agrippa thought about guaranteeing his copyright for a certain period of time by requesting and obtaining an 'imperial privilege' from Charles V. This imperial privilege, written in French and issued to Agrippa on 12 January 1530 new style ⁽²⁷⁾, was valid for four of Agrippa's works: *De Occulta Philosophia*, *De Incertitudine et Vanitate Scientiarum atque artium Declamatio*, *In Artem Raimundi Lullii commentaria et Tabula abbreviata* and the *Quaedam Orationes et Epistolae*. This imperial diploma guarantees the author of the writings listed therein the privilege of their printing for six years.

The useful effect of this privilege should therefore have been to safeguard Agrippa's author's rights, but he did not hesitate, in good faith or not, to use it also as a shield the attacks of the theologians and as a weapon to overcome the obstacles placed in his way by ecclesiastical censorship; And Prost wonders (II, 282) if Agrippa was not induced to procure this imperial privilege not so much from a consideration his moral and material interests as a writer as from an anticipation of the difficulties he was likely to encounter following the publication of his greatest treatises (*De Incertitudine* and *De Occulta Philosophia*), taking into account their content and the persistent malice of monks, theologians and all fearful souls towards him. This imperial privilege appears in the original French at the head of the first editions of the two works mentioned above, with the date 12 January 1529.

Agrippa began by printing *De Incertitudine*. It is a voluminous work written during the difficult period in Lyons, when he was at odds with the French court, distressed by lack of money and exacerbated by bad treatment. The bitterness of the soul was perhaps transfused in the acerbity of the writing, which certainly not fall short of Agrippa's other polemical writings. It is true

(27) That is, in January 1529, old style. In England, Scotland, Ireland, France, at the time of Agrippa, the year began on the 25th of March; then, with the Gregorian reform (1582) the 'new style' was introduced, and little by little the custom of setting the New Year's Eve on the first day of January became generalised. In Tuscany, the ancient custom of starting the year with the spring equinox, i.e. with the first *true*, was maintained until 1761. Agrippa calls the two systems: Roman-style calculation and French-style calculation (old style) . Cf. *Ep. V*, 26 and *V*, 68.

that it is a '*Declamatio invectiva*', as Agrippa calls it, a '*Paradox*', as the title has been translated in some French editions; but it is a declamation that spares no-one, it is a doleful and sarcastic charge against all sciences, a fierce diatribe against all that was essential in the society of his time, and especially against the Church, i.e. against the clergy, mainly the regular clergy, and the monks, Agrippa's black beasts.

In Chapter LXII, he deals with the '*sects of the monks*', showing how they house, like an asylum for all the wicked, those whose consciences are pricked by their crimes, those who can only escape the just vengeance of the law, those who have squandered their patrimony, the slackers, those compelled by the avarice of wicked parents or guardians. All these people are caught in a bundle by pretended sanctity, cassock and profitable begging. This *magnum sea*, in which Leviathan and Behemoth, among other fish, swim, is full of stoic monkeys, plastered beggars, hooded monsters, barbarians, fumigators, versipellus, multi-coloured, palliated, chlamydates, breeches, hoofed, barefoot, black, white, bigoted...

Agrippa thus goes on for a long time in his thorough attack, accusing the monks of every kind of rigging and hypocrisy: "Secured from all the dangers of the world," says Domenichi, "and from civil harassment, they eat idle and rascally bread in exchange for that which is acquired with hard work, sleeping comfortably and without thought; and they believe that this is evangelical poverty, living in idleness and rascality from the hard work of others" (28). Agrippa was cursed with the monk's hood, and, after searching in vain in the sacred scriptures for the origin of the cowl, he started a similar search in the paintings and frescoes that decorated the loggias of the monks, whereupon the devil with the cowl appeared before him, tempting Jesus in the desert. Therefore, wrote Agrippa, "the first inventor of the cockscomb was the devil, from whom I think that the other monks and friars under different colours borrowed it, or, by chance, took it because it was left to them as if by hereditary right" (29).

The chapter dedicated to the '*sects of the monks*' is followed by chapter LXIII dedicated to the *Art of Merit*. And this is not a combination. Agrippa himself does not shy away from explaining the reasons why it was appropriate to place meretricians immediately after monks: "publicly seeing that where there have been magnificent churches and colleges of priests and monks, for the most part there are dishonest places to be found; and there are also many houses of nuns, nuns and lace-maids, as well as courtyards deprived of public females, which we know that monks and religious (so as not to bring their chastity into disrepute) have sometimes kept themselves in monasteries under a monk's habit and men's clothes: It seemed to me, that it was not out of order to add hereafter the reasoning of the art of whores" (30).

In the following chapter, entitled: *De arte lenonia*, in a passage that does not appear in the mutilated editions, he reproaches the priests for preferring to keep concubines with infamy, rather than wives of honoured reputation, *forte quia ex concubinis proventus illis amplior* (perhaps because the income from concubines is larger). In this regard, Agrippa goes on, 'we read that a certain vescovo during a banquet boasted of having under his jurisdiction eleven thousand priests living in concubinage, from which he made a handsome sum of gold every year'.

As one can see, Agrippa had quite a long tongue. Moreover, he is not the only one in the host of hermeticists, magicians and initiates to make use of colourful and biting language. Even without invoking Dante's disdainful invectives, did Paracelsus, Fludd, Khunrath employ the half-truths and euphemisms of modern virtuosos hypocrisy? At that time had not yet come

(28) Arrigo Cornelio Agrippa's *Vanity of the Sciences*, translated for M. Lodovico Domenichi in Venice, 1547, p. 96.

(29) This passage is missing from most editions after 1539, from which all or part of the passages that were condemned by the theologians have disappeared. These passages, for those who wish to know them, are listed and reported in the *Bibliothèque Curieuse historique et critique ou catalogue raisonné de livres difficiles à trouver*, par David Clement - Göttingen, 1750 - Vol. I, pp. 81-95-; they belong to chapters XXV, LVII, LX, LXII, LXIV, XCVI, XCVII, XCIX, C, CI.

(30) *Della Vanità delle Scienze* - translated by Domenichi - Venice, 1547, pp. 97-98.

It is fashionable to fashion the figure of the initiate who takes upon himself the *Weltschmerz*, and is consumed with love for his neighbour, who finds universal truth everywhere, even in the absurd, who is chastened and gospel-like in speech and is drenched with milk and honey from head to toe; all in his own filthy self-interest, so as not to make himself 'bad Karma', not to go into the *Avitchi*, and to 'advance on the path'.

Of course, Agrippa knew very well what reaction would be unleashed when the book appeared; he even dared to predict it in the preface, and he boasted of this prediction to a friend: 'I expect the fiercest attacks,' he said in the preface, 'deaf machinations and insults. Grammarians, poets, mathematicians, astrologers, soothsayers, philosophers, all will employ their weapons against me. The almighty pontiffs will damn me to eternal fire, the haughty legist will accuse me of lese majesty..., the theologian will condemn me for heresy, and will want to force me to worship his idols... These are the dangers I dare to face; but I have the word of God to protect me...'. This verb or voice of God is to be understood in a very precise way, which Agrippa specifies in Book III, 36 and I, 74 of the *Occult Philosophy*, as we shall see. His predictions were not belied by the facts.

The book aroused great interest and had a large and rapid circulation. The first edition of *De Incertitudine* came out in Antwerp in 1530, and was followed within a few months by three more editions, one printed in Cologne in January 1531, one in Paris in February 1531; and a third edition in January 1531, without place of printing or publisher's name, is probably from Antwerp.

As soon as the Paris edition came out, the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne examined it and condemned it to the fire (2 March 1531, new style). After the Paris edition, the University of Louvain took the field, which compiled a list of criticised propositions. Alongside these direct and open attacks there were, of course, the covert and underhand attacks, perhaps even more serious and dangerous than the others. There were those who took the trouble to draw Emperor Charles V's attention to the matter and to provoke his indignation by showing him what a scandalous use Agrippa had made of the imperial privilege granted to him, which had in a way become the shield and passport impiety and heresy; and the monks took from the side of religion the princess Margaret, who was, says Agrippa, a *religious mulie- briter*, and, "if she did not die more than in time," writes he, "it was over for me, guilty of the greatest of all crimes, that of having slandered the monkish majesty and the sacred hood. Agrippa, in truth, had stirred up a hornet's nest.

To the not inconsiderable burden of this struggle, financial troubles were added. Agrippa had never managed to get his salary imperial historiographer; the possibility of collecting arrears now became even more uncertain. Without money, burdened with debts, he ended up in August 1531 by being thrown into prison at the request of one of his creditors, Alex Falco, in defiance of a fifteen-day reprieve granted to him by the president of the Malines Privy Council. From prison, he sent this president a 'vehement protest', as we would say nowadays, warning him that his concession had not been observed and that he had been imprisoned anyway; then in a plea and protest to his judges and a letter to the emperor. He insists above all on the payment of his salary, and asks that at least, until this is paid to him, he be considered released from his oath, so that he may render service to whomever he pleases, perhaps to the enemies of the state, he adds (*Ep.* VI, 22, 25). Agrippa's temperament does not waver; even from prison he threatens and makes irony: 'What, then, is the use of the privileges and exemptions granted by the emperor to his officers? Are they then nothing but lies and meaningless words, *nugae et ampullae*? I have been in Caesar's service for seven years, and my family starves, my debts are always mounting, and my creditors persecute me. That is the price of my services!' (*Ep.* VI, 25). Agrippa, let's be fair, had reasons to spare, even without thinking of the 'idle et furfantoso pa- ne of the monks'.

All his protests, however, only succeeded in securing his release, not in winning the emperor's rank, nor in obtaining payment of his wages. So, in order to escape his creditors, Agrippa left the Netherlands and took refuge in his native Cologne, under the protection of Archbishop Herman de Wiede, prince- elector of the Holy Roman Empire and legate of the Holy See, with whom he had been on excellent terms since January 1531. Arriving in Cologne, he tried to get paid what he was owed, but the imperial treasurers refused under the pretext that this not the residence of

Agrippa. He points out that as the emperor's historiographer he can stay anywhere in his states to work for him, but that to search for information and assemble volumes he must first of all live in a different way than a sponge attached to a rock (*Ep. VII* 21). Excellent reasons, but they had no hold on the souls of those bureaucrats; and by the end of 1532, Agrippa had failed to get a penny. These things happen, even today, with all the trumpeted progress; but today, as then, they require much philosophy from those who are the victims.

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Agrippa fighting with the theologians of Louvain

In the midst of these difficulties, Agrippa had to attend to the printing of *De Occulta Philosophia* and at the same time fight against his accusers on his own behalf. We have said that the Faculty of Theology at the University of Louvain had incriminated certain passages in *De Incertitudine*. These incriminated propositions passed from hand to hand, and were even placed before the eyes of the emperor; Agrippa, however, who was after all more involved than the others, could not be notified of them until 15 December 1531, accompanied by an injunction from the Privy Council to publicly recant the opinions contained therein.

The storm was gathering over his head, but to his good fortune, besides the protection of the Archbishop of Cologne, there was also that of two cardinals, Cardinal La Mark, Bishop of Liège, and especially that of Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggi, legate of the Holy See. Protected and encouraged by Cardinal Campeggi, Agrippa turned to his favourite weapon, the pen, and wrote his *Apologia* against the accusations and incriminations levelled against him by the theologians of the Faculty of Louvain. It is in the house of Cardinal Campeggi himself and under the eyes of his secretary Don Luca Bonfio and his butler Don Bernardo dei Paltrinerii, both friends of Agrippa, that he writes this *Apologia*, and it is to the Cardinal himself that he dedicates it.

The doctors of Louvain had raised formal accusations of impiety against certain propositions that were, according to them, offensive to pious ears. These were the invective against the customs of the clergy, the reckless assertions of Agrippa who called Luther an invictus heretic (*invictus haeretici*), the propositions about the uselessness of external ceremonies, the worship of images, the purely human character of prophets and evangelists, and the inanity of doctrinal interpretations of the word of God, which according to Agrippa no one had the right to take away or add to. Finally, they condemned the famous proposition, which is the key, says Prost, to the whole work; namely, that there is nothing more contrary to the religion of Christ than science⁽³¹⁾, as well as, one understands, the idea of attributing the invention of the hood to the devil; and they condemned by declaring the book outrageous and defamatory.

(31) It should be noted that Agrippa liked to give the two words *religion* and *Christ* a special, esoteric sense. In this sense, and with reference to the "*great work*", carried out "*according to ritual*", the basis of a certain "*secret and religious art*", which Agrippa speaks of in his works and letters, and which we will deal with later, it is technically correct, as far as we know, that all rational science and speculation can be of no help, and can even be a hindrance. After all Agrippa's position had been taken before him by the Cardinal of Cusa whom he cites, and was in no way at variance, indeed, with the attitude of Platonists and Neo-Platonists, nor with the attitude of Jesus himself. The superiority of this religion, of this hermetic technique, of this royal art over science and human philosophies and sentiments is a matter of fact, an experimental ascertainment in the eyes of the competent. The bad thing is that this religion has nothing to do with any belief; and the opposition of believers against the sciences and philosophies, intended to safeguard fideistic positions cherished by sentiment, prejudice or intellectual inertia, cannot be equated with the esoteric and traditional evaluation of the sciences, philosophies and beliefs. And this is precisely the assessment on which Agrippa based both *De Incertitudine* and *De Occulta Philosophia*.

Agrippa defended, further developing the main points of his thesis with great erudition. Having been told forty-three incriminating paragraphs, he replied point by point, dividing his *Apology* into forty-three chapters. His treatise, says Agrippa, is nothing but a declamation; in it he not make assertions, he only questions theses. If he said that science and art are the sure cause of man's perdition and that knowing nothing is a great good fortune, this is an old maxim of the Greeks, and Saint Augustine also said that ignorance leads to God more easily than science; and the Cardinal of Cusa said that it is not perfect science to believe one knows what one does not know; but to be certain and assured by proofs and demonstrations that one cannot know, this is what one can call fortunate ignorance. Regarding the criticism that he had called Luther an invincible heretic, Agrippa replied that it was an unpleasant but true fact that Luther had not been vanquished, and added: "Instead of condemning him, go and fight him; but, I tell you as a friend, try to find better arguments than those you are using against me. If you can only use flames and pyres against him and his, take care that they do not answer you with iron and fire. The sack of Rome had taken place only a few years before and Agrippa reminded the theologians of it. After all, Agrippa ended by saying, 'if I deserve to be burnt in this world and the next, it is perhaps for having spoken ill of the holy hood. I hear the whole crowd of tonac bearers shouting: He blasphemed! crucify him! crucify him! I dared to say that the hood is an invention of the devil; but it is an innocent joke, I wanted to make fun of the cucullomachia, of the serious and eternal disputes on this subject'.

The joke, however, had not been as innocent as Agrippa made it out to be; and he himself was perfectly aware of this. Indeed, writing to a friend about this *Apologia* of his, he said: 'I made it in moderation, but not without a certain salt, to which I added a little vinegar and mustard, taking care to forget the oil. I want to publish it as soon as I can, at the risk of bringing up another tragedy. Of course, there are some people who will certainly enjoy it'. The first to enjoy it was evidently Agrippa himself, and we seem to see him smiling, pleased and satisfied, when a few well-placed blows came out of his brain and his pen; and this ironic and reckless, belligerent and happily confident spirit of his makes him extremely likeable to us.

After the *Apologia*, Agrippa also wrote a *Querela* on the same subject and in the same style; apologia and querela that were printed together, overcoming various difficulties, in 1533 in Cologne.

In the summer of 1533 he made a quick trip to Brabant, but in September he was in Frankfurt, and in November 1532 he settled definitively in Bonn, under the protection of the Archbishop of Cologne. What was close to his heart and required all his attention and energy was the publication of his treatise *Della Filosofia Occulta ossia della Magia*, of which only the first book had been published in 1531. But of this treatise and the vicissitudes he encountered in order to and in publishing it, we shall say more separately later. They were, as is easy to imagine, connected to his struggle with theologians and monks.

In November 1532, Agrippa wrote a letter to Erasmus, announcing his quarrel with the doctors of Louvain and asking his opinion on *De Incertitudine*. Erasmus replies almost on the spot, but makes no mention of the book; as for the dispute with the doctors Louvain, he expresses himself in measured words, giving Agrippa some wise advice: 'Try to get rid of yourself as soon as possible; few people have had to praise themselves for dealing these hornets. As for the long-awaited opinion on Agrippa's work, Erasmus waits until 21 April 1533 to unburden himself, and he does so very cautiously, without mincing his words. And he insists on repeating his admonition to Agrippa: "I will repeat what I have already told you: get rid of this complaint as soon as possible; remember Louis Berguin (Lo-dovicus *Barguinus*)⁽³³⁾, a man, it is true, of very questionable morals, but who has been lost only by his reckless attacks on monks and theologians. What have I not done to restrain him! With such people, I told him, even St Paul himself would be wrong. He preferred to follow his blind

(32) Agrippa, referring in this way to the *De Docta Ignorantia* of the cardinal of Cusa, placed a shelter of a certain solidity and security between himself and his avowals.

(33) He was burnt as a heretic in the Place de Grève in Paris on 22 April 1529.

feeling, to listening to my advice. You know what has happened; do not do the same. Finally, if you cannot avoid the fight, at least stay on the side of strength. Do not put yourself in their hands; and above all do not mix me in this matter' (*Ep.* VII, 40).

From this correspondence between Agrippa and Erasmus, between these two great fighters, the difference in temperaments and political conduct becomes clear. Erasmus, who what he was talking about, saw Agrippa as having embarked on a very risky undertaking and was sincerely sorry about it; but above all he did not want to be compromised by his recklessness. Agrippa, on the other hand, was led to act differently, not only by his aggressive temperament and his dislike for the bearers of honour, but also by considerations of tactics and psychology, in which we cannot disagree with him, and probably also by his awareness of his own value and social function. He wrote in this sense to his old friend Cantiuncula (*Ep.* VII, 35): 'I have always in my life been in dispute with monks; today more than ever. On all sides they have set their minds against me; to give in would be to incoherent them. One must have the courage to be able to resist them face to face and to know how to make oneself feared. I am therefore determined to fight relentlessly against this swarm of sophists and hoods. I will paint them as they really are, I will show them in their true colours to the people whom they deceive, I will show what kind of men they are deceived by. And he went on, accusing the monks who attack him of ingratitude! They indeed, said Agrippa with a hard face, should have been grateful to him, because he had composed his treatise on the *Vanity of the Sciences* largely for their use and convenience, to provide them with arguments to assert against the vices of all kinds which they had a mission to combat! (*Ep.* VII, 35).

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Agrippa and the Reformation.

All this fighting not prevent Agrippa continuing to pursue the secret sciences with unchanged fervour and interest. At the beginning of 1532, Cardinal Campegi had left the Netherlands, followed by Agrippa's friends Don Bernardo dei Paltrinerii and Don Luca Bonfio, to go to Regensburg, to the Diet. The correspondence between Agrippa and these friends shows that they had the same deep interest in the secret sciences as Agrippa, especially Don Bernardo. This suggests that Cardinal Campegi was also interested in them and, as a result, felt sympathy and admiration for Agrippa and was induced to protect him. Through his friends, Agrippa procured the necessary material for his studies. "I am counting on you," he wrote to Don Bernardo, "to procure for me the works of Galatinus and the Kabbalah of Samuel (³⁴)", in which he knew some rare doctrine was contained (*Ep.* VII, 2). He ended the letter by writing in figures that Don Bernardo could not interpret. "Send me the key again, and see to it that I too may make use of it, in case I have anything secret to convey to you, which we do not wish to fall into foreign hands" (*Ep.* VII, 8; Regensburg, 8 March 1532). Agrippa replies to the two friends with great delay, in November, announcing that the *De Occulta Philosophia* is under print and will appear around Christmas (*Ep.* VII, 14). Don Bernardo replied from Bologna (28 Dec. 1532) where he was in the cardinal's retinue, giving Agrippa ample information about a work of his on Kabbalistic hermeneutics, comparing the results obtained by applying this method to the results obtained by Agrippa with magic mirrors, when he showed him the transformation of a dead figure into a living one. At the same time, he sends him the Hebrew alphabet, known as the alphabet of Ezra, and the book of Galatin, not the book of Samuel, because it would not be much use, he tells him that he has seen Father Francesco Giorgio Vene-

(34)Pietro (F.) da Galatina (Pietro Colonna), an Apulian, still living at the time of Agrippa, was the author of a book against the Jews, taken from Martinez's *Pugio Fidei*; 15 manuscript volumes of Galatino exist in the Vatican. The Sa- muele alluded to here was also the author of a book against the Jews.

to, the author of *De Harmonia Mundi*, and extols the Jewish works of the most reverend Aegidius (*Ep.* VII, 22).

Despite, therefore, Agrippa's purported retraction in the then published *De Incertitudine*, we see him continue to take a keen interest in the secret sciences. His correspondence shows that still dealt not only with Kabbalah, but also, and above all, with alchemy (hermeticism), astrology, geomancy, magic, and even experimented with physiology. He treasured the works of Pico della Mirandola and Reuchlin, whom he had known from his early youth ⁽³⁵⁾.

Prost realised the contrast between this persistent interest of Agrippa in the secret sciences and the retraction contained in *De Incertitudine*. Another problem to be explained, for Prost, is how and why Agrippa, having become opposed to the secret sciences, and having renounced them in *De Incertitudine*, published the treatise of *Occult Philosophy* after this work. Prost gets away with saying that Agrippa wanted to publish *De Occulta Philosophia* for reasons of pecuniary interest, and that, if he continued to deal with the secret sciences, he did so for fun and intellectual exercise, and "perhaps rather out of what today would be called charlatanism" (Aug. Prost, II, 357).

The complete incomprehension and incompetence of initiatic matters thus leads Agrippa's best biographer to brand him a charlatan. He does not realise that this charlatan, this adventurer, as Orsier calls him, fought a fierce and arduous battle all his life to support his ideas and affirm his occult philosophy; he does not realise that his audacity sent shivers down Erasmus's spine; he does not realise that Agrippa was playing a terrible game, which, for his part, meant his own skin, a stake that charlatans are careful not to jeopardise.

Moreover, Prost himself is forced to acknowledge that the alleged charlatan enjoyed a reputation for universal wisdom. He knew eight languages, he knew theology, law, medicine, philosophy, he had an astounding historical erudition, not to mention his culture as a specialist Kabbalah, Hermeticism and all the magical and secret sciences. He enjoyed the esteem of men of the calibre of Erasmus, Melanchton and Lefèvre d'Etaples, he received proofs of admiration and esteem, even from distant countries; scholars visited him and sent those who travelled to him for instruction; and his books aroused admiration and a stir everywhere. What a curious figure of a charlatan!

We do not think we are mistaken when we say that Agrippa was motivated by motives other than financial interests, and that he did his utmost to publish his treatise on the *Philosophia Occulta*, despite all the obstacles put in his way by the Inquisition and the dangers that this struggle brought with it. The great religious turmoil of the period also raged in Cologne, where Agrippa supported the fight for the publication of his book. The city was divided between Catholics and Luther supporters, and the fanaticism of these followers of the religion of charity and love tinged the religious competition with blood.

In 1529, two scholars, Peter Flosted and Adolphus Clarebach, had been imprisoned for publicly proclaiming certain errors, and after a long trial they had been burned. "One can therefore understand what authority the voice of the inquisitor should have in such circumstances," writes Prost (II, 383), declaring that Agrippa's books were suspected of heresy, and opposing, as we shall see, the printing of *De Occulta Philosophia* for this reason. Yet Agrippa, putting into practice the intention he had expressed to his friend Cantiuncula, in order to defend himself against this terrible accusation, had the temerity

(35) Pico della Mirandola and more especially Reuchlin in his *De Verbo Mirifico* had tried to harmonise Kabbalah and Christianity. Reuchlin, followed by Agrippa, based his theory above all on the discovery that *shin*, the symbol of fire, and therefore of the Holy Spirit, placed in the centre of the four letters of the *tetragrammaton*, the Jewish sacred name, transformed it into the sacred name of the new revelation, the name of Jesus. It is a genuine error of Hebrew orthography that was excusable in Reuchlin and Agrippa, given the lack of knowledge of Hebrew in those times. But it has been perpetuated with the characteristic pertinacity of errors, thanks to Kircher and Agrippa, Khunrath and Saint-Martin, Guaita and Papus. And today, there are Enlightenment, Gnostic, Martinist orders that claim to represent the Western, Kabbalistic-Christian initiatory tradition, and which therefore consider it appropriate to base all their knowledge on this egregious error of the *shin* in the tetragrammaton. Sentimental residue jokes. See Savino Savini's learned article on this subject in the April-May 1925 issue of "Ignis".

to write one of his usual violent diatribes addressed to the magistrates of the city of Cologne, in which he, accused of heresy, emphasised the impotence of the efforts of the doctors of Louvain against Luther, who, according to him, was invincible and triumphant. "This was not," Prost acknowledges, "a work of defence, but an act of defiance. Agrippa could not deceive himself about his true character, but he could not resist the urge to strike at those who had struck him. He should have lost himself a thousand times over in such a situation, and no less protection was needed from the almighty Archbishop-Elector to draw him out of this danger, while at the same time making him overcome all the difficulties with which he struggled to publish his treatise. The archbishop of Cologne then ended up embracing Lutheranism; Agrippa, on the other hand, maintained a very reserved demeanour with respect to Lutheranism, "no doubt dictated by prudence, says Prost, because he did not have the firmness of character that defies persecution".

That one can explain Agrippa's attitude towards Lutheranism in this way seems inconceivable to us. Is it possible that Agrippa behaved like the prudent Erasmus? According to Bayle ⁽³⁶⁾ Agrippa and Erasmus, having shown obvious sympathies for Luther and Melancthon, then stood aside and refused to openly associate themselves with the Reformation, which did not implement and satisfy all their desires. Prost does not doubt that this restraint was dictated by prudence and gives the good reason given above. We think, on the contrary, that Agrippa's behaviour was inspired by initiatory considerations, and that therefore, although he shared the Protestants' attitude against the excesses, abuses and errors of the Church, he had no reason to adhere to a movement of an essentially critical and profane nature, which throws overboard much of the traditional, dogmatic and liturgical content, jealously preserved and formally transmitted by the Catholic Church. For Agrippa, it could not be a matter of resorting to free examination, to the light of reason, to interpret the letter of scripture and to reject what appeared irrational, but rather of grafting onto the dead trunk of formal tradition the life-giving power of 'oral' tradition, the light of actual spiritual experience, the fruit of the secret and religious art, of occult ritual, of the hermetic and magical operation, perpetuated in the West, in the secret of occult orders, expressed in the language of chivalric allegory, gaiety, and alchemy, a tradition to which, in the last few decades, the re-establishment of contact with the East and the discoveries of the humanists had been joined by the flotilla of neo-Pythagorean and neo-Platonic, hermetic and cabalistic traditions. For Calvin, both Erasmus and Agrippa were two freethinkers affected by the same blindness ³⁷. We do not know to what extent Agrippa's initiatory and inner experience extended, but we are convinced that of the three, in terms of spiritual knowledge and understanding of religions, Agrippa was certainly the least blinded.

Agrippa's position was therefore above the divisions between the Church of Rome and the Lutherans. With a truly 'catholic' understanding, in the etymological and not in the sectarian sense of the word, he could well, writing to Melancthon, instruct him to greet Luther, 'the great unconquered heretic, who, as Paul says in Acts, serves God according to the sect, which they call heresy' (Ep. VII, 13; Frankfurt, Sept. 1532).

Agrippa looked at and recognised the spiritual greatness of that character, the inner and immortal reality of the noble and great soul, completely independent of the truth or falsity of the ideas held, of his intellectual standing and education and of changes in ideas and beliefs; he recognised what Luther was worth spiritually and paid homage to him, leaving the assessment what he thought and held in second place. It is understandable that when one is spiritually blind and locks orthodoxy into a concept, a profession of faith, and even worse, into the unintelligent and mechanical recitation of a formulary and creed, one is also incapable of recognising the superiority of this synthetic and tolerant attitude, which aims at the heart and not at the brain, and which approximates, if not identifies itself with, the divine attitude, for which the miserable human distinctions are not only a matter of faith, but also of belief.

(36) *Dictionnaire*, ed. 1740, vol. I, 106, note N.

(37) Calvin - *Traité des scandales* (1550); 1566 edition, p. 1182 in the *Recueil des opuscules de Calvin* published by Th. de Bèze.

disappear in the grandiose understanding of the whole. So we, too, from this effectively catholic and initiatic point view, say that we are not at all surprised, and find no contradiction, to see that Agrippa, writing to Erasmus (*Ep.* VI, 36; Brussels, January 1521), warns him that as far as religion is concerned his sentiments are those of the Catholic Church. Agrippa took these words in their true meaning, and would have been pleased if the nominally Catholic Church had also been effectively so. One may perhaps also think that he conceived the possibility of a spiritual vivification of the Church, of a restoration of spiritual values and of the actual priestly hierarchy on the basis other knowledge and other means than those of the Counter-Reformation, the Council of Trent and the Jesuits. Agrippa's sympathies for heresy and reform were not, therefore, irreconcilable with his initiatory catholicity; and some of his expressions of adherence to the Catholic and Christian Church are to be explained by giving the terms the meaning attributed to them by Agrippa, who could express his thoughts with this system, and at the same time create documents to defend himself in easily foreseeable cases.

During his stay in Bonn, in addition to printing the *Occult Philosophy* and the *Apo-logy* against the accusations of the theologians of Louvain, which we have already mentioned, he also thought about printing a second edition of his *Commentaries on Ramon Llull's Ars Brevis*. These writings were brought together in a volume bearing the date 1533. In the following year he published his old writing on the affair of *St Anne's Monogamy*, and in 1535 we have his preface to the pamphlets published in Nuremberg, by Godeschalchus Moncordius, his friend, writings which were censured by the theologians (or theologastri, as Agrippa calls them) of Cologne.

This was the time when Giovanni Viero, then a teenager, was with Agrippa, Agrippa's disciple and later defender of his memory. Master and disciple spent hours and hours at a desk, busying themselves with old books on Kabbalah and magic, while at their feet, on top of a pile of papers, Agrippa's favourite dog, the intelligent and faithful dog in which the bigots' imagination saw the incarnation of a demon, kept quiet watch.

One day, Viero was able to get his hands on Trithemius' *Steganography* without Agrippa's knowledge. He secretly read this book full of strange figures, where the names of demons are given, and after reading it, copied it without his master's knowledge. A skilful physician and good writer, Viero continued Agrippa's bold and resolute fight against the odious witchcraft trials, so frequent in the 16th century, and was the worthy heir, Prost acknowledges, to Agrippa's wisdom and humanity in these matters. In his works, Viero showed with great doctrine and skill the insubstantiality and frenzy of the common belief in witches, and the vanity, infamy and injustice of inquisitorial proceedings, torture and burning at the stake; and the merit of having freed (*pro tempore*) Christianity from these horrors must be acknowledged in great part to the work of Viero, a worthy continuator of Agrippa's daring.

In 1535, Viero was still in Bonn with his master. And it is Viero who provides us with some scarce information on the last months of Agrippa's life. In 1535, Agrippa went to Lyon, where King François I. had him imprisoned for writing against the queen mother, says Viero. But thanks to the intervention and prayers of his friends, he was soon set free. Lefranc thinks, however, that the real reason for Agrippa's imprisonment in Lyons is to be found in the condemnation inflicted on *De Vanitate* by the Sorbonne theologians on 2 March 1535. On that date, in fact, the Sorbonne declared that this book was infected with Lutheranism because of its attacks on the culture of images, the temples, festivals and ceremonies of the Church, and its blasphemies against the sacred canon, and condemned it to be publicly burned. And just as Rabelais fled from Lyons when the Sorbonne's theology faculty brought its censure on Gargantua, so Lefranc⁽³⁸⁾ is inclined to explain Agrippa's journey to Grenoble in the same way. In this city in 1535,

(38) Abel Lefranc - *Rabelais et Cornelius Agrippa* - in *Mélanges offerts à M. E. Picot* - 1913, vol. II, p. 477.

Agrippa ended his short, noble and troubled human existence. According to the learned Guy Allard ⁽³⁹⁾, he died in the lodgings of François de Vachon, president of the parliament of the Dauphiné, in Grenoble in 1535; according to Chorier ⁽⁴⁰⁾ According to Chorier ((40)), Agrippa, after having been a guest of Vachon, died instead in the house of the councillor at the Ferrand parliament.

His corpse was interred in the church of the Friars Preachers in Grenoble, but Christian fanaticism did not leave his bones in peace either. The burials of this church were in fact violated when it was destroyed during and as a result of the religious wars of the 16th century; and in this destruction and violation, Agrippa's bones went missing.

(39) Guy Allard - *Bibliothèque du Dauphiné* (1680).

(40) Chorier Nicolas - *La jurisprudence du celebre conseiller et juriconsulte Guy Pape* - Lyon 1672.

CHAPTER III.

The key to Magic

Agrippa and Trithemius

In order to understand the treatise on *Occult Philosophy*, it is necessary, according to the last chapter Book III and the letters of the author himself, to possess the key (*Ep.* III, 56; V, 14). But those who have hitherto dealt with this classic treatise on Magic have done so almost without exception, not only without seeking the key, but without any special preparation or technical competence, although they have not hesitated to express their more or less unfavourable and severe judgement, whether they look at its contents in the light of their philosophical and religious beliefs, or pronounce their judgement with the authority of modern thought and scientific knowledge.

On the other hand, we are of the opinion that before condemning an author and his works, it might be advisable to make sure that one has understood him well; and, since in this case we know that we are dealing with a book which, according to the author himself (Book I, chap. I), is obscure and difficult, with a mysterious book, to which Agrippa had reserved the key for himself and his friends, the task is certainly easy. In order to help the reader, we will gather here, mainly from the writings of the author, some elements that are and seem to us suitable to allow or facilitate the best possible understanding of the essential part of the work, illustrating also as an example some salient passages.

The three books of the *Occult Philosophy* were not published at the same time, because Agrippa was prevented from doing so by the vicissitudes of his stormy and eventful life and, above all, by the difficulties he encountered from monks and theologians. The first book saw the light in isolation in 1531, and the other two, together with the first, in 1533, two years before the author's death.

Henry Cornelius Agrippa, preparing for the publication in print of his treatise on *Occult Philosophy*, of which numerous manuscript copies had long been circulating in Europe, wrote on January 1532 (new style) from Malines (*Mechlinia*), seat of the government of the provinces of the Netherlands belonging to the empire, to Herman de Wiede, archbishop of Cologne, prince-elector of the Holy Roman Empire and legate of Rome, a dedicatory epistle, which appears at the head of the 1531 and later editions.

In this letter, Agrippa recounts that from his early youth he began to write the books of the *Philosophia Occulta, or Occult Philosophy, or Magic*, and then forgot about them for many years, and finally resumed and completed them. It is," he wrote, "a new work, but one of the most ancient and abstruse doctrine; a work of my curious youth, but a doctrine of antiquity that no one, I dare say, has so far attempted to restore...; but it is the work not so much of my youth as of my present age, because I have corrected the many errors of my youthful work, and I have made copious additions and introduced many new chapters".

By 1509, in fact, when he was only twenty-three years old, Agrippa had almost completely composed the first two books of *De Occulta Philosophia*, while the third book remained in a draft state for about twenty years. And since early 1510, Agrippa had sent a hand-written copy of the work to the famous Abbot Trithemius, a Benedictine, author of important and highly regarded works on magic, polygraphy, and steganography, former Abbot of Spanheim, and at that time Abbot of Wurzburg (*Herbipolis*), whom he had already met personally the Wurtzburg Abbey, where he had been entertained.

ning with him about alchemy, magic, kabbalah and other subjects belonging to the domain of the occult sciences.

At the same time as the manuscript, Agrippa sent Trithemius a letter in , recalling the conversations he had had with him in Wurtzburg, "about chemistry, magic, kabbalah and all the other things hidden in the occult", he recalled how they had then wondered "why magic, so highly esteemed by the ancient philosophers, had become suspicious and hated by the Church Fathers in the early days of religion, and was soon rejected by the theologians, condemned by the Church Fathers, and condemned by the Church Fathers, venerated in antiquity the sages and poets, had in the early days of religion become suspect and hated by the Fathers of the Church, and had soon been rejected by the theologians, condemned by the sacred canons, and proscribed by the laws". On reflection," Agrippa continues, "it seemed to me that the only cause all this was the depravity of the times and of men, thanks to which pseudo-philosophers, magicians unworthy of the name, were able to introduce execrable superstitions and baleful rites, to the contempt of God ⁽⁴¹⁾ and to the perdition of mankind, they heaped up their infamous sacrileges against the orthodox religion, and finally published this quantity of books that we see circulating everywhere and which must be condemned, and to which the very respectable name of magic is unworthily given. In endeavouring in this way to secure some credence for their fantasies, they have turned this sacred name of magic into an object of hatred for decent people and a source of grave accusations against the wise; So that no one now dares, by his doctrine and his works, to confess himself a magician, except perhaps those country wenches, who would have us believe that it is in their power, as Apuleius says, to make the heavens descend, earth rise, the springs solidify, the mountains split, and to do all the kinds of wonders of which Homer, Virgil, and Lucan speak.

"I was astonished and indignant at the same time to see how until today no one has been found to avenge the crime of impiety of the sublime and holy doctrines, and to present them in their entirety and purity; for all those whom I have seen announce their intention to do so, such as Ruggiero Bacone, Roberto Anglico, Pietro d'Abano, Alberto Teutonico, Arnaldo di Villanova, Anselmo di Parma, Piscatrix di Spagna (*), Cecco d'Ascoli ⁽⁴²⁾ and many others who are less well known, instead

(41) We have used lower case instead of uppercase to write *god*, because this was Agrippa's 'bizarre' habit, and, in reporting this passage, we have respected his spelling.

(*) This is not actually an author, contrary to Reghini's reference in footnote 42, but the *Picatrix*, a work in Latin translated from Arabic in 11th century Spain (original title: *Gāyat-al-hakīm*, i.e. *the end of the essay*) and written by Abū-Maslama Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn 'Abd al-da'im al-Majrīṭī, a native of Cordoba who died in 1007-8 AD. According to Latin manuscripts, the work was translated *de arabico into hispanicum* in 1256 during the reign of Alfonso X of Castile, known as *el Sabio*. The Latin *Picatrix* had enormous circulation throughout Renaissance but was never printed; it had a large manuscript circulation during the 15th and 16th centuries. The book contains lists magical images as well as practical advice on magic, expressed within the philosophical framework of Hermeticism. After an introduction containing philosophical ideas that follow those also expressed in other treatises belonging to the Hermetic tradition, such as *Pimander* and *Asclepius*, the author of the *Picatrix* goes on to examine in the first two books the art of creating talismans from a series of images, a detailed list of which he proposes. In the third book, the author discusses the correspondence of stones, animals and plants with the various planets, signs of the zodiac and parts of the human body. The book also contains formulas for invoking the spirits of the various planets. The fourth book also deals with similar topics and ends with a series of prayers addressed to the planets. But see the writing proposed in the *Appendix*.

(42) Cecco d'Ascoli's name has been omitted in later editions of *De Occulta Philosophia*, but appears in the original editions, and in the edition of the *Epistolario*.

However well known the authors he cites seem to Agrippa, it won't hurt to provide some information on the subject.

Roger Bacon (*Doctor Admirabilis*, 1214-1292), philosopher, physician, alchemist, mathematician, astronomer, was the first to rebel against Aristotle in order to adhere to the experimental method; he knew composition of cannon powder, the theory and practice of lenses. His experiments in physics were attributed to the work of the devil; he was accused of magic and imprisoned for ten years. His works were condemned as containing 'dangerous and suspicious novelties'. In them, he accurately predicted navigation without oars, fast cars and flying machines (*De Secretis O-peribus*, Hamburg, 1618, pp. 37-38). On his deathbed, his last words were: 'I regret having worked so hard to destroy ignorance'. Robert Anglicus is most probably that Robert, bishop of Lincoln in the 13th century, whom some demonologists had placed among the magicians, because, according to the English poet Jean Gouvier, he had smithed a bronze talking head to serve as an oracle.

Peter of Abano (Padua), or *Petrus de Apono*, who died in his 60s in 1312, a physician and philosopher, author of several works on alchemy and astrology including the *Heptameron*, published in Paris in 1474 (and later published together with the fourth book of *Occult Philosophy* attributed to Agrippa), was denounced as a magician to the Inquisition and accused of a-

of magic, which they claimed to make us familiar with, have given us nothing but valourless extravagances or unworthy superstitions'.

"Thus yielding to my indignation and the righteous feeling of my admiration, as a curious and intrepid explorer of the mysteries of nature, I believed it would be a praiseworthy work to re-establish the ancient magic, the doctrine of the sages, after having purged it of the errors of impiety and established it on a solid foundation.

This thought," says Agrippa, "has been troubling me for a long time, but I had never dared to give myself over to it, when our conversations in Wurtzburg on these subjects, your illumined advice and exhortations inflamed my courage and decided me to set to work. I have relied on the opinion of philosophers of recognised sincerity to dispel the darkness accumulated by a false science, which pretended to derive everything from rehearsed books. I have therefore recently composed three books in which all magic is concentrated, under the less discredited title of occult philosophy. I send them to you, begging you to review and correct them, in case they contain anything that may be contrary to truth and religion. Approve nothing that is not true, but likewise conceal nothing from me that may my purpose, so that, approved by you, my work may be worthy of being given to the public and face the judgement of posterity. Forgive my rash undertaking' (*Ep.* I, 23; also found in the beginning of the ancient editions of the work).

By placing himself under protection of Trithemius, Agrippa acted with the modesty of a young man in his twenties who recognised the authority of the famous Benedictine, but also with a shrewdness of which this is but his first example, and which he carefully used during twenty-five years to ensure the fate of his fundamental work. The approval of the abbot of Spanheim was in fact a not inconsiderable endorsement and passport in the case, which Agrippa certainly foresaw and expected, that theologians and inquisitors should accuse the book and author of heresy and witchcraft.

From what we have reported, it is clear that then, as now, there was a horde of illiterates who wrote magic and discredited its name; and then, as now, the true followers of the science of magic felt a deep repugnance at being lumped together with the ignorant, the *detraqués*, the deluded and the charlatans. The purpose of the little more than 20-year-old writer was therefore very bold and audacious: to restore ancient magic, the doctrine of the sages, by building it on a solid foundation.

To this letter from Agrippa, Trite-mio replied on 8 April 1510 with a letter (*Ep.* I, 24) full of praise, which can be found published at the beginning of the older editions of the work (1531, 1533, 1550). Trite-mio declares himself to be greatly admired for Agrippa's uncouth erudition, which, although so joyful, is not so much a matter of

learned the seven liberal arts with the help of seven spirits that he kept locked a vial. He escaped being burnt at the stake because he died during the trial; the Inquisition ordered his corpse to be exhumed and burnt, and because a friend secretly managed to steal his body from Pietro di Abano, his portrait was burnt. Albertus Teutonicus, author of a work on alchemy, translated almost immediately into Greek, and contained in the last volume of the works of Albertus Magnus (*Opera*, Lyon, 1651, vol. XXI), is to be identified with Albertus Magnus, of whom it was said that he had made a talking bronze head, and Agrippa himself mentions it in *De Vanitate*. Arnaldo di Villanova, who died in 1319, a very famous alchemist, was also accused of trading with the devil, and persecuted by the archbishop of Tarragona. Anselm of Parma is probably the Anselm of Parma who is praised as a great philosopher by Bartolomeo Della Rocca (*Cocles*) in his book *Chiromanzia e Fisionomia* (Bologna 1504) and blamed by Viero, as well as by Del Rio and other demonologists. Naudé speaks of him in chapter XIII of his *Apologie* (ed. 1653, p. 372) and reports that Anselm of Parma was considered to be a sorcerer and enchanter, because the demonologists reproached him for taking from his name that of those who heal sores with words, i.e. the *emsalmites*. Naudé points out that to support this thesis it is necessary to ignore Latin, since one would then have to call the *psalms* the *Empsalms* and those who use them *Empsalmator* or *em-psalmist*. See what reasons would suffice to be accused of magic. Piscatrix or Picatrix, an Arab physician of the 13th century, had a great reputation especially in astrology, and Alfonso X.^o, king of Castile, had his works translated into Spanish. Agrippa was accused of having copied extensively from Piscatrix. Cecco d'Ascoli, i.e. Francesco Stabili from Ascoli, poet and astrologer, author of *Acerva* and a book on astrology, was burnt as a heretic in Florence in 1327 by the Inquisition. Some of his writings on astrology and astronomy have recently been rediscovered and were published in 1905 by the Collegio della Querce in Florence. One of his works on occult sciences was found and published in Venice in 1550.

vane penetrates secrets and arcana hidden even to many learned men; he says he approves of the work, and finally admonishes him to observe the precept of communicating vulgar things to the vulgar, but the highest and most arcane things only to the most secret and highest friends. "Give the hay to the oxen and the ginger only to the parrot; take care not to expose yourself as others have been exposed to the kicks of oxen'. Agrippa has admirably adhered to the first precept, and the reader should always bear it in mind when reading the *Occult Philosophy*; but as for the second part, we know he made of these exhortations to prudence, which his friends felt it opportune to make to him in order to moderate his aggressive and reckless temperament. If he didn't end up like Cecco d'Ascoli, he couldn't help but take what Trithemius called the oxen's kicks.

Another friend of Agrippa also gave him similar sage advice in 1514. On learning that Agrippa had decorated the wall of his house with a fine portrait of Hermes, this friend wrote to Agrippa (*Ep.* I, 42), warning him and telling him to take care that this inconstant and deceitful God, dangerous when irritated, did not lead him philosophising over hot coals. And he was alluding, it is clear, to other coals than those of the philosophical furnace of transmutation. In other words: my dear young and daring Agrippa: watch your pen, and remember that the flame of Christian love and charity burns so violently in the hearts and mouths of our so-called neighbours that it takes only a little to set itself on the fires of holy and Christian inquisition.

This early and juvenile edition of the *Philosophie Occulta* ran manuscript through Italy, France and Germany, arousing great interest and admiration everywhere, and creating in Agrippa the reputation of a magician and sage. One of Agrippa's correspondents wrote to him in 1523 (*Ep.* III, 55) that he "had visited the University of Pavia and found there the living memory of Agrippa and his profound knowledge of the mysteries of nature; that he had seen there the treatise of natural magic, the source of all knowledge" ⁽⁴³⁾.

To this letter Agrippa replied by sending him (*Ep.* III, 56) the index of his books of the *Occult Philosophy*, a work composed in his youth, and much increased, since then, but to which there is still more to be added. And he added: "The key to the whole affair I reserve to myself and to friends, of , do not doubt, you are one (*clavem totius negotii mihi, amicisque quorum te unum ne dubites, reservo*). It would be a crime and sacrilege to publish this matter to the conscience of all. For it is not transmitted (*traditur*) by writings, but to the spirit by means of the spirit is infused (*sed spiritui per spiritum infunditur*)'.

Prost translates: *the key to the book*; but here it is not just the key to the book, but likewise the key to the occult philosophy itself, or magic, the subject of the book; the key to the *whole shop*.

This is a very important letter, which is amply and perfectly confirmed by two other very important letters by Agrippa himself, written four years later (1527), and addressed to one of his many Italian friends, Father Aurelio da Acquapendente, an Augustinian, master in theology, resident in Antwerp, and who became Agrippa's friend and disciple as a result of this correspondence.

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Agrippa's two letters to Fr. Aurelio d'Acquapendente

The importance of these two letters was recognised by Bayle, who partly reproduced them in his *Dictionnaire*, as well as by Agrippa's biographer, Auguste Prost, who gave them in his op-ed.

(43) We have researched this manuscript, but it does not appear in the Pavia University Library's catalogue of manuscripts.

s a somewhat incorrect version. They are contained in Agrippa's epistolary, namely *Ep.* V, 14; and V, 19. But Agrippa himself attached great importance to them, because they also appear at the end of the first edition of *De Occulta Philosophia* (1533) on pages 317-349. Agrippa, , had already published them earlier. In 1532, one of Agrippa's lesser works, *De nobilitate et praeccellentia foeminei sexus*, was reprinted in Cologne, along with six other works by Agrippa and thirteen letters, the first two of which are precisely those addressed to P. Aurelius. This edition does not mention the name of Fr. Aurelius and only says that they are addressed to a certain religious friend (*ad quendam religiosum ami- cum*). We do not know if these letters are also found in the 1529 edition of *De nobilitate*.

The Prost makes no mention of this fact, which seems significant to us because it shows how Agrippa himself attached such importance to these two letters that he thought it appropriate to precede their publication to that of *De Occulta Philosophia*. The correspondence was provoked by an admiring letter written to Agrippa by his father Aurelius, and this is how Agrippa replied to the unknown admirer. We translate directly from the Latin text since the version given in French by Prost is, as is easy to verify, not sufficiently faithful and suffers too much from this biographer's inability to grasp the hidden and important meaning cautiously expressed by the original:

From your letter dated the 2nd of this month (September 1527)," writes Agrippa, "I was able to recognise, Reverend Father, the candour of your soul. I also recognised the erudition of your spirit, which is truly encyclopaedic and curiously inquisitive about the things that are still hidden in the tenebres. I rejoice that I have won the friendship of a man like you with whom I can sometimes open my mind and my wits a little; and now, this letter bears witness to it, I receive you my very good friends. But what guides do you follow, you who dare enter the untraversable backward palace of Daedalus, proceed among the sentinels of the dreadful Minos, and entrust yourself to the Fates? What are thy masters, O thou who turnest towards immense things, and darest to compel to stability that which wanders, to make trustworthy that is perfidious, and most constant, like Adrastia herself, the most fleeting of all gods? ⁽⁴⁴⁾ Take care not to be deceived by those who were themselves deceived. For here you could not use any great reading of books, which give no sound other than that of pure enigmas. Oh, how many books one reads about the irresistible power of magic, about the prodigies of astrology, about the marvellous metamorphoses of alchemy, and about that blessed philosopher's stone, which, like Midas, changes the vilest metals into gold and silver; all of which appear vain, false, and untrue if they are taken literally, and which are not therefore handed down and written by the most serious philosophers, by holy men, whose teachings no one would dare to call false. Who would dare to believe that they wrote lies? But the meaning of this is quite different from that of the letter ⁽⁴⁵⁾ ⁽⁴⁵⁾ It is veiled by various mysteries that no teacher has ever clearly explained, and I do not know if anyone, without the help of an experienced and trustworthy teacher, or without the illumination of a divine deity, which is given only to the very few, could grasp this sense with the sole help of reading books. Hence the vain efforts of the many who endeavour to pursue these most secret arcana of nature by applying the mind to the bare sequel of lesson of texts. For with minds unshaken by the auspices, having strayed from the true intellect to fall into false imaginations, ensnared in the deceptions and artifices of the external spirits, they have become the dangerous servants of those by whom it is given be ruled.

(44) This passage was skipped over by Prost, who evidently understood nothing in this hermetic phraseology. "To make fixed that which is volatile" is a phrase that has belonged to hermetic terminology and symbolism since the legendary emerald table, and the most fleeting of all gods is Hermes, the messenger of Jupiter, the guide of souls, to whom corresponds in alchemy the mobile mercury, the living silver, the "fugitive silver", which it is necessary to fix in order to obtain the mercury of the philosophers. It is also the higher, divine consciousness, which emerges in the human one, and which must be fixed by amalgamating it with the human one. In this way, the human, transient and "fugitive" consciousness is grafted into the initiatory, stable and permanent one. The alchemical symbolism used here corresponds perfectly, as we shall see when discussing human transience and initiatic stability, to the fundamental allegory etymologically inherent in the traditional technical terminology as well as in the ceremonial terminology of the classical mysteries. Adrastia is Nemesis, the law of retribution, Agrippa himself says in *De Occ. Philos.* (lib. III, ch. XLI, towards the beginning).

(45) Such clear and explicit statements should give pause for thought to those scientists who feel entitled to mock the "dreams of the alchemists". The previous note partly indicates what this is about.

you, and, ignoring themselves, they go away behind the vestiges of their flocks, seeking outside themselves what they possess within. And this is what I now want you to know, because in ourselves is the operator of all wonderful results and phenomena (*effects*), who is able to discern and accomplish whatever the marvellous mathematicians, the prodigious magicians, the alchemists, the envious persecutors of nature, the evil necromancers worse than demons dare to promise; and this without any crime, without any offence against God, and without any insult to religion. This doer of wondrous things, I say, is in us:

Nos habitat non Tartara, sed nec sidera coeli

Spiritus in nobis qui viget illa facit.

This is what it would be good to discuss at length, but with four eyes (*coram*). For these things are not entrusted to letters, nor are they written with the pen, but are infused from spirit to spirit, with a few sacrosanct words, if I happen to come to you. As for the books you ask me about, I had some, but no longer have them. Under the title of *Occult Philosophy* a work from my youth is given as mine, the first two parts of which are very incomplete, and the third is missing altogether, or only contains a small epitome of what I wrote. But with the Lord's help I shall one day give birth to whole work in its entirety and correctness; the key to the work, however ⁽⁴⁶⁾ is reserved only for my very dear friends. Do not doubt that you are not among them. Vale; Lyon 23 September 1527' (*Ep.* V, 14).

In all of this, Prost, may Hermes Trismegistus forgive him, saw nothing but charlatanism, shrewd and far-sighted politics, intended for the utilitarian purpose of winning a friendship and exploiting it when necessary. But Father Aurelius of Acquapendente must have understood Agrippa's side much better, because he replied with an enthusiastic letter, asking to be admitted to a full initiation: "It will be the same for me as entering heaven" (*Ep.* 17, 16) ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Agrippa promptly replied with a second letter no less important and interesting than the first, which we quote here, translated from the original:

"Venerable father, in your excellent (very human) letters I have glimpsed your soul as in a mirror, and I embrace it wholeheartedly, and I want you to be persuaded that you are dear to me what can be shown in a letter, and that you are deeply in my heart: and that I am so made that I write this *ex abundantia cordis*, and that I am used to never abandoning those who entrust themselves to my friendship at any juncture. Therefore I would come to you at once to fulfil your vows, which are also mine. If we were given to speak to each other viva voce, I know that our friendship would be indissoluble and would last forever. As far as the philosophy you desire is concerned, I want you to know that to know the same God who is the worker of all things, and to pass into him with the inner image of the likeness (that is to say, with a certain contact or essential bond), by which you are transformed and become God himself, in the way that God said to Moses, saying, Behold, I have made you God of Pharaoh; I want you to know that this is the true, the supreme occult philosophy of admirable works. The key it is the intellect ⁽⁴⁸⁾, for the higher the things we have understanding of, the higher are the powers (*virtutes*) with which we invest ourselves, the greater our works, and the greater the ease and efficacy with which we do them. For our intellect, included in the corruptible flesh, if it has not overcome the way of the flesh, if it has not assimilated itself to its own nature and been able to unite itself to those virtues (for indeed they do not unite themselves except to that which is similar to them), and to those occult things of god and secrets of nature which are to be investigated, is quite ineffective.

(46) The word *work* can be understood in two senses: the book of occult philosophy, Agrippa's work, and the work to be performed, the 'great work' of Hermeticism. The amphibology is expressly intended by Agrippa himself, as is evident from other passages, which we will examine, and is clear from the comparison with the expression *clavem totius negotii* used in *Ep.* III, 56, which we have discussed.

(47) It is in fact the *coelum philosophorum* of Hermeticism, the 'kingdom of heaven' of Jesus. Fr Aurelius awaited the keys to it, not from the pope, but from Agrippa.

(48) It is that true intellect of which Agrippa spoke just above. It is the acting intellect, the νοῦς ποιητικός, the *intellectual lumen*, the intellect that, acting above and through the occult elemental forces and investing itself with the side virtues, performs the admirable works.

ce; *atque hoc opus, hic labor est, superas evadere ad auras* ⁽⁴⁹⁾), indeed, can he who has lost himself in ashes and mortal dust find god himself? How can he learn spiritual things, immersed as he is in flesh and blood? Will man see the Lord, and live? What fruit will the grain of wheat bear, if he does not first become dead? ⁽⁵⁰⁾ For it is necessary to die, to die, I say, to the flesh, and to all senses, and to the whole animal man, if one wishes to enter into these pen- trals of the secrets. Not that the body should depart (*separetur*) from the soul, but that the soul should leave (*relin- quat*) the body ⁽⁵¹⁾, of which death Paul wrote to the Colossians: you are dead, and your life is born with CHRIST. And elsewhere he says more clearly of himself: I know that man was raptured to the third heaven, in the body or out of the body, I know not, God knows, and the rest that follows. It is necessary to die, I say, of this precious death in conspect of the Lord, which happens to very few, and peradventure not always: for *pauci quos aequus amavit Iuppiter, aut ardens evexit ad aethera virtus, diis geniti potuere* ⁽⁵²⁾. First of all, those who are not born of flesh and blood, but are born of God; immediately afterwards those who are made worthy of this (*dignified*) by a benefit of nature, and by a genetliac gift from heaven; the others strive to attain it by merit and art, of which I will give you a more certain account ⁽⁵³⁾. Of this I must warn you, do not deceive yourself about me, and do not think that I, having once experienced these divine things, would expound them to you, or that I would arrogate such a thing to myself, or hope to be able to grant it to myself, I who as a knight consecrated by human blood (shed in combat), lived almost always in the courts, bound by the bond of flesh to a dearest wife, and exposed to all the vicissitudes of unstable fortune, bound by the flesh, the world and domestic cares, I have not attained such sublime gifts of the immortal gods; but I want you to take me as a sentinel, standing always before the entrance, showing others the way in. Besides, my love for you will not be lacking in the least; I do not see what you owe to my benefits, because I have not yet brought any to you; except that, as soon as the opportunity arises, I am ready to bring you everything. And now he is well and happy. Lyons, 19 November 1527" (*Ep.* V, 19).

After reporting this letter, Prost follows it up with the following appreciation: "This long letter is certainly interesting. It provides, like the previous one, a curious testimony to the mystical spiritualism with which Agrippa was imbued. A mixture of doctrines borrowed at the same time from Christianity and pagan antiquity, strange beliefs that seem to come in a direct line from the Alexandrian Gnostics. One cannot fail to recognise the extreme abi- lity with which Agrippa is able, with insinuations in this letter as well as in the previous one, to arouse the interest and increase the curiosity of those he wishes to gain. We see him also, it is good to observe, although he gives himself and his science a high idea, carefully procuring, with the help of the

(49) These words are taken from Virgil's *Aeneid* (VI, 128). The same applies to those that follow a little further on. Here then, carefully stated, is what the work consists of. Agrippa shows, and it could not be otherwise, that he has perfectly understood the anagogy of the sixth canto of the Roman initiate's Pythagorean and imperial poem.

(50) This symbolism of the grain of wheat is by no means a monopoly of the Gospel as the *lectores unius libri* believe. It was used in the Isiac and Eleusinian mysteries, and was one of the familiar and characteristic symbols of Hermeticism and also, let it be said with forbearance, of Freemasonry.

(51) Agrippa tries to make it clear that the Christian phraseology he is using is not to be taken in a devo- He is struggling with the difficulties of verbal expression; and indeed it is difficult to make the difference between the two detachments understood by those whose supernormal experience, or almost all of it, is nothing but sleep, wakefulness, artificial intoxication and death. Let us at least grasp this, that the thing must occur not as a result and repercussion of the events of the body, but by inner virtue and initiative.

(52) Words taken from the *Aeneid* (VI, 130); *ardent virtue*, the power of 'philosophical fire', spiritual ardour and 'astra- le' accomplish the 'work'.

(53) The expression: *with art*, is part of the technical terminology of Hermetic and Masonic symbolism. It is the *art regia* or *pastoral art* of Maximus of Tyre, the *royal art* of the alchemists, the *royal art* of Freemasonry, i.e. the art and science together transmutation and spiritual 'edification'. The first of the three categories mentioned above is that of those who 'not born of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of woman, but who have god for a father'. (*De Occ. Phil.*, lib. III, 36). The second is, perhaps, those who have accomplished the 'univocal generation' (*De Occ. Phil.*, III, 36), who have begotten the spirit. These, says Agrippa, are 'the most occult secrets of nature, which must. not be further revealed to the public' (*De Occ. Phil.*, III, 36).

reserves full of apparent modesty, an easy retreat for the day when he was put in a position to realise the hopes he has the audacity to encourage with these speeches.

To disregard Agrippa's thinking and bona fides so completely is not, we believe, easy. Prost is so sure that the three categories of initiates and masters mentioned by Agrippa are a simplification of his charlatan imagination, which is drawn to explain every word and action from that point of view.

The fact is, however, that Agrippa, from the time he was little more than twenty years old, enjoyed an extraordinary charm and prestige among his friends that cannot be explained by the recognition of simple cultural and intellectual superiority; and the fact is that, from his voluminous epistolary and what else is known about him, it does not appear that any of his friends and disciples, tired or disillusioned, turned against him over the years or in any case conceived a less elevated esteem for him. In particular, Father Aurelius became and remained a close, faithful and devoted friend to him. Now, if a charlatan is one who deceives, deludes and harms, a charlatan 'of extreme skill' must also have a few victims, and Agrippa's enemies and the victim in question would have well cried out against him, without the need to go inventing unsubstantial stories like that of the corbel filled with horse dung. A charlatan of whom no one realises he has been the victim, whose victims no one knows, and who ruins his position at court by insisting not to do the king of France's horoscope, belongs to a species of charlatans that is not so common. It is worth mentioning.

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The Key to Magic

For our part, we include among the authentic charlatans all those, devoid of even the most elementary sacred experience, nevertheless claim to teach sacred things, even claim the monopoly of the priesthood (in the etymological sense, not the professional sense of the word), when they can barely whisper formulas. Against this genius of pseudo-priests, Agrippa had to fight throughout his life; and even in the event that he were to be included and consider himself to belong to the first two initiatory categories that he distinguishes, it is not very difficult to explain the modesty of his attitude; for, for understandable reasons of prudence, he had to refrain from making claims which, from the point of view of the religious beliefs of his contemporaries, and especially of the monks and theologians with whom he was dealing, could have brought him great trouble if, by any chance, the letter had ended up in hands other than those of the intended recipient.

Moreover, by printing these letters together with the complete edition of *De Occulta Philosophia* and even earlier, Agrippa himself provides us with evidence that he intended anything other than the petty solicitation of Father Aurelius.

Indeed, these letters provide valuable insights into the key to occult philosophy, the key to magic.

In 1524, Agrippa wrote that he kept the key to the whole affair (*negotium*) for himself and his friends, because it would be a crime and sacrilege to put this affair (*hunc*) within everyone's reach. Besides, Agrippa added, it is not transmitted in writing, but is infused into the spirit by the spirit, and the same thing, using the same expression, the same technical terms, he repeated in 1527 in his letter to Father Aurelius. It seems to us that Agrippa saw to the timely publication of these letters precisely so that in them his friends might find some indication of the key to magic, and thus to the full understanding of his book.

In what, then, does this key consist? Agrippa says in Chapter III of Book III of the *Occult Philosophy* that "in the dignification man consists the key all magical works, the co-

arcane, necessary and secret knowledge to operate in this art'. According to Brucker, it is uncertain what Agrippa meant by this key: 'Agrippa himself says somewhat obscurely that a certain inner illumination and a descent of the supreme light into the soul is necessary to understand it...; nevertheless it is certain that he did not require anything other than the Platonic illumination or key, which is quite clear from his letter to Father Aurelius: I want you to know... From which it is clear that he meant that key which is postulated by the followers of those Platonists, whose writings he read that have come down to us. And since this is nothing more than some sweet dream of the imagination alone, Naudé's conjecture that Agrippa boasts of this key for mere ostentation, to win the admiration of his friends and lure them into his country' ⁽⁵⁴⁾, a conjecture that after Brucker also Prost made his own, is not far from plausible.

We do not say that Brucker is wrong in approximating Agrippa's 'key' to that of the Neo-Platonists. But this approximation, acknowledged by Agrippa himself, does not prove that everything in his case was reduced to a mere theoretical and philosophical speculation, and that Agrippa drew the idea of the "key" in question from this source; for it is natural that if Agrippa had knowledge of the thing, he must, on realising that the ancient pagan writers had knowledge and spoke of the same thing, have brought out the approximation and relied on the authority of the ancients. Naturally such an obvious assumption cannot be made when with the unconsciousness and presumption of a *Herr Professor* one judges, like the Brucker, that it is nothing more than some suave dream of the imagination alone.

Anyone who does not adhere to such arbitrary exclusivism, however, must recognise, purely logically, that Brucker's and Prost's assertion is devoid of any serious foundation.

Whoever has personal experience of that "work" to be performed according to the "rite" and "art", which we have repeatedly mentioned, whoever has personal experience of the inner phenomenology provoked by this technique, instead of posing the question of the derivation of ideas, naturally asks another and more interesting question: Did Agrippa have experimental knowledge of this "art", or did he only have a clear intellectual understanding of it? And again: Did Agrippa have the ability to convey the "now" tradition, the Kabbalah as he called it, by means of "a few but *sacred words*", in a loud voice? Was there burning within him the sacred fire of Zoroaster and Hermes, and was he able, as flame to flame, to kindle and rouse that fire?

We are perfectly aware that to answer such questions it is necessary to possess other competence than mere philosophical and philosophical erudition; and it is precisely because we are by no means lacking in this competence that we dare to propose a solution to the problem. By temperament, we would not be inclined to adopt pontifical attitudes, and in our indifference to the appreciations of the profane world we would like to maintain the traditional reserve of the "sons of the art"; but, on the other hand, in keeping silent, we are sorry to leave the field open to the arbitrary denials of the sceptics, the poisonous defamations of the Christians, and the unconscious ramblings of the pseudo-initiates: and, since the occasion calls for it and it is now time to rehabilitate Henry Cornelius Agrippa from the stigma of charlatan and adventurer, we would like to finally oppose prosopopoeia and presumption with our modest but expert and considered judgement.

To the best of our knowledge, therefore, we can and must ensure that this whole affair is not reduced to the sweet dreams of the intellectual imagination alone. The existence of the secret and religious art, of the occult ritual that gives key occult philosophy or magic, is a vital and historical reality. We affirm this from direct and long-standing experience. There is an "oral" tradition of occult wisdom that cannot be conveyed in words (profanely perceived and understood); and there is still, in the West, a serious tradition, apart from the carnivalesque hullabaloo of parodies and pretensions of so-called contemporary occultism. Having said this, we can add that it is already clear from Agrippa's writings and letters that his knowledge of sacred things was no mere cultural knowledge, and that in the actual hierarchy, both magical and spiritual, for the knowledge he possessed, for action he performed in life, he occupies his rightful place. He could not-

(54) Jacobi Bruckeri - *Historia critica philosophica* - Leipzig 1743, tome IV, p. 407.

He therefore lacks, four centuries later, our recognition and solidarity. And it is only right that we should declare how, even judging from inspection of the writings alone, it appears manifestly impossible that he could have always expressed himself so exactly and with such precise references without possessing any knowledge other than indirect and cultural knowledge. Therefore, when he states that the transmission of the "key" necessarily takes place by infusion from spirit into spirit, and consequently writes to Father Aurelius that it is necessary for them to be together, A-Grippa does not speak in quackery, nor does he simply echo a tradition that he follows as a philosopher, but behaves as the very nature of the thing requires; when he states that it is necessary for master and disciple to be together (and not in the *astral plane*!) in order for the infusion of spirit into spirit to take place, it gives one to see how he knows that the master acts by presence, and that it happens as if by *induction*, or by *catalytic action*, by *attunement* and assimilation.

That it cannot be otherwise will be apparent to anyone who cares to take things unprejudiced and seriously. How, indeed, could it be possible, using human language woven into and relating to human experience, to communicate to human beings what their experience entails? Is it possible to explain to a born blind person what light is to the sighted? All the electro-magnetic theories of this world, even well understood mathematically, can never reveal to a blind man the mystery of light, and give him the experimental sensation that only the sense of sight can give.

Words make sense insofar as there is a common experience in both the speaker and the listener to which they refer; they lose their meaning when the speaker cannot appeal to an experience in the listener analogous to his own. Of course, even inner phenomenology can, at least in part, be expressed in words, necessarily using the analogy between the abstract and the concrete, i.e. using allegorical language; but all allegories, which are clear to those who have 'lit the fire in the athanor', can only arouse vaguely undefined embryonic concepts in those who do not have key to experience. No verb can therefore replace the personal experience of sacred things, of the divine word or 'voice of god' perceived inwardly. In this priestly do- minus, unveiling is necessarily equivalent to revealing, alluding to deluding.

From this observation follows the important consequence that initiatory knowledge, being necessarily ineffable to the layman, necessarily has an esoteric character. And, in fact, this has always been the case, inevitably, in all places and at all times. Now this esoteric character is in direct contrast to the modern Western conception of what science *should* be. The modern mentality assumes, in fact, that all science can and must be expressible and communicable verbally, that the results of scientific investigation and experience can and must always be shown by laboratory means or demonstrated rationally. This de-mocratic and rationalist demand can be satisfied, and *sicut insofar* as, when the field and methods of scientific experimental investigation are limited to what falls within the domain of human reason and the human senses; But if this arbitrary limitation finds some excuse in historical events of European civilisation, which is not the case here, it does not and cannot have any justification in a purely scientific and philosophical sense, precisely because it is not necessarily the case that one must renounce obtaining an order of experience and knowledge for the sole reason that they cannot be transmitted in the same way as others.

This renunciation of the contemporary Western scientific mentality is all the more regrettable because there are those who take advantage of it by making exaggerated and absurd feudal claims, asserting that the territory abandoned or unoccupied by science belongs by right and necessarily to faith, and claiming that there is a field reserved for religion and forbidden to science. The Christian Church has until fairly recently claimed to oppose its beliefs to scientific theories and experimental results, and Protestant fanaticism is still today battling in America against the theory of evolution, opposing it, not on scientific grounds, but on the basis of the letter of the Holy Scriptures. But just as in the field of physics the church has had to yield in the face of science, so too in the field of metaphysics the church will have to yield in the face of wisdom. According to Schopenhauer (*Ueber den Willen in der Natur*) 'the inhuman zeal that the Church has always put into persecuting magic ... comes in par-

by a dark presentiment that magic cannot put the original force (*Urkraft*) back in its true place (A Schopenhauer - *Memoirs on the Occult Sciences* - Turin 1925, p. 47).

Just as it is superfluous in the physical laboratory to hang sacred icons on the walls, and just as beliefs and feelings are completely disregarded in the physical experimental investigation, so languor and devotion, beliefs and theories are, to say the least, useless in the hyperphysical or metaphysical laboratory. We have no reason to accept this division of the universe into two domains, one of which is the domain of science, and the other of religion, and we believe that no limits can be imposed on science; On the contrary, we say that if faith alone suffices *ad firmandum cor sincerum, fides alone does not suffice* to enter the kingdom of heaven, and that it is even convenient, even for the unscrupulousness that befits the scientific experimenter, to do without this ballast; the less entanglements one drags along, the better one ascends. For these reasons, we do not agree with the 'great rejection' of the Western scientific mentality, and in the face of the usurpers of an inconclusive and absurd monopoly, we, the very modest followers and continuers of the Western tradition, maintain the same attitude as Roger Bacon and Dante Alighieri, Agrippa and Bruno, Campanella and Cagliostro, and we challenge the competence and effectiveness of a formal tradition that is not based on experience. We know that the posing of questions and concepts is not equivalent to knowledge and does not lead to knowledge, even if those questions and concepts are not wrong; and we know that ruminating beliefs and babbling formulas is even less effective. At best, a creed can only be a *symbol*, meaning this word in its etymological sense as well as in the sense it has taken on; but initiatory knowledge is not attained by theorising and unleashing the imagination; it is not attained by resignation, humility, faith, hope, charity, languor and a stiff neck ⁽⁵⁵⁾.

Only with cool, willful, steady, bold action, technically conducted according to 'ritual', can the 'great work' be accomplished. In the liturgies of mysteries and religions, there are ceremonies and sacraments that have a similar magical character; and we could say, without departing from reality, that it is precisely in our case a sacrament or ceremony. But we prefer not to use these words because of the deformation their meaning has undergone; for there is a gulf between the value of a sacrament and ceremony performed and understood in a magical, esoteric, effective and traditional way, and their profane, vacuous, nominal and modern value.

The transmission and possession of sacred texts, even if understood according to the "orthodoxy of the doctrine", is not sufficient to ensure and constitute the transmission of "initiatory wisdom", and does not in itself constitute the "initiatory tradition". On the other hand, a tradition of initiatory wisdom can exist and be perpetuated, even without sacred texts, theologies and philosophical and profane developments. And, let it be said *en passant*, the assessment of the spiritual greatness of peoples and

(55) This discourse is also addressed to all those "occult" schools in the West that feel the need to maintain the Christian bias, making Jesus not only an initiate, but the greatest of initiates, the exceptional being, who occupies a privileged position, that of the last comer and therefore the greatest of founders of religions. The principle of sufficient reason is sufficient to show the error of this sentimentalist conception, due simply to the inertia force of affective residues and cerebral encrustations. But even if we accept the thesis, even if we admit that Jesus is all that is said by some, we must realise that it would be an illusion to believe that in order to attain initiatory knowledge it is necessary or sufficient, or at any rate convenient and opportune, to lean on veneration, on love, and that more, for this to be privileged. Thought, feeling, devotion are ingredients foreign to the great work; and therefore it is even useless to go and see, to that effect, whether certain ideas are right or not and certain feelings are justified or not. With such ingredients, religions are made, but the great work is not accomplished, for which the fetishes worshipped by civilised peoples and held in such veneration by certain "occult" schools are as useful as the totems of Australia. *And what else is there for you to do to idolaters but to worship one and you worship a hundred?* Now we know that politically and socially peoples need totems and fetishes; but we would prefer it if such fetishes were not of exotic origin; and in any case it would be necessary for the ecclesiastical hierarchy not to be completely detached from the actual spiritual hierarchy. But, leaving aside these arguments; here we only want to try to make it clear that ideas, beliefs, feelings, languor, etc., are all stuff that belongs to the profane and not the initiatic realm.

of their wisdom and tradition, if he does not take this fact into account, he runs the risk of being greatly mistaken⁽⁵⁶⁾.

The doctrinal, cultural part of the tradition is merely the side dish. The essential is rational, and is achieved, not by thinking, but by mastering and transcending thought, not by works, but by the 'work'.

Agrippa explicitly deals with this "work", this "religious art", not only in the 3rd chapter of the third book of the *Occult Philosophy*, but also in other passages of his writings that we will quote or mention. This contemplation, performed according to the norms of ritual, as the technical and conventional expression of Hermeticism puts it, brings illumination to the intellect; and in this sense it can also be said, with Agrippa, that the intellect is the key to this supreme occult philosophy. All magic, as Agrippa understands it, presupposes this conquest, because, he says, it is in us that the operator of all the admirable effects of magic resides, effects that Agrippa discusses in his book.

(56) For this and other reasons, we contest the systematic and widespread devaluation of Romanity and paganism in general. A large volume could be made of the disproportionate sentences that have been said in this regard. In the *Histoire de la Philosophie Moderne* par Harald Höffding (Paris 1908, 2^e ediz., t. I, p. 9-10), for example, we find this summary judgement: 'The greatest merit of the Middle Ages was the deepening of the inner world of psychical life. Pagan antiquity limited itself to a harmonious relationship of spirit and body and was only interested in the inner life in its relation to the outer life in nature and state'. Is it therefore to be believed that Pythagoras, Socrates, Empedocles, Plotinus, etc. did not belong to pagan antiquity, or are they to be regarded as *quantités négligeables*?

In 'occult' literature, then, there is, among others, a book, *The Legend of the Symbols* by Marco Saunier, a book that has also been widely circulated in its Italian version, despite the fact that it is devoid of any initiatory or cultural value. In this book, the denigration of Romanity touches the fantastic.

Saunier, after saying that Rome was founded by a college of Etruscan initiates, and that this is proved by the name of Rome, which means "New Ram", thus proving ignorant of the fact that the city of the albulic waters and *lapis niger* had an occult name, adds that "the initiates were soon driven out, and the Roman people wanted to govern themselves, following their coarse appetites and the impulses of their native brutality". And he continues (p. 176 of the Italian version, 1912 edition): 'The city of the seven sacred hills ... had become the infamous lair of a bunch of brutes who wanted to impose their power on the world. Rome's cult was war, its dream the millstone. There was nothing great and noble in the Roman. The heart did not exist. In him, strength alone spoke and intelligence resided in the muscles of his fist. Being busy beating himself, he used slaves to think'.

After which Saunier expounds a little hundred corbels fantasies, affirming among other things that Apollonius of Tyana fought against Roman Caesarism, while it is historically certain that the opposite is true, and ends by saying that since destroying the Force with "Force alone is a chimera...", to renew the World, it was therefore necessary to find a means to seduce Force and Intelligence together, to prepare their alliance, and to stop their duel. And it was Jesus who found it in sentimentality.

The merits of Jesus are thus clearly established, by this writer in Celtic and Christian hatred against Rome is combined with a jaunty imagination, ridiculous presumption and uncommon ignorance. We leave it to readers to decide, after this, whether it is appropriate, from a purely Italian point of view, to exalt the Christian religion, because, as some have said, it is that of our fathers, at the expense of the Roman religion, which was that of our grandfathers. We do not want to examine what kind of believers are those who claim to believe in a religion simply because it is that of their fathers; but, abstaining from politics, and sticking to a purely historical point of view, we must say that it does not seem to us that the Julian race has lesser powers towards Italy and the empire than the Davidic race; it seems to us, on the contrary, that what the Roman did, the Asiatic did not do. That foreigners and Christians feel the need to systematically denigrate Romanity is understandable and perhaps even symptomatic, but from an initiatory point of view such denigration has no reason to be. And so, in us, the sense of Roman-ness merges with the aristocratic and initiatory in making us fiercely opposed to certain alliances, acquiescences and deviations. Perhaps the time is approaching when it will be possible to set things right a little, and we hope that we will be allowed to unearth some signs of Roman esotericism once in a while. As for the permanence of a 'Roman tradition', it must be admitted that if a pagan Roman initiatory tradition has been able to perpetuate itself, it can only have done so in the most absolute mystery. It is therefore not the case to interject affirmations and negations. We will therefore limit ourselves to inviting the reader to read and ponder what Humphry Davy says in his *Consolations in travel, or the last days of a philosopher* about a "stranger" he met at the Colosseum when he came to Italy in 1818 (see also: Hoefer F. - *Histoire de la Chimie* - 2.^a edit., 1869; t. II, p. 577).

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A passage from the Liber de Triplici Ratione Cognoscendi Deum

Agrippa speaks of this religious operation sporadically and in passing in *De Occulta Philosophia*, especially in the first chapters of Book III. More extensively and without scattering his thoughts on the subject, he then speaks of it in another piece of writing published as early as 1529 and again in 1532 along with his letters to his father Aurelius, before the printing of the second and third books of *De Occulta Philosophia*. We also place this important passage before the reader's eyes. Enrico Cornelio Agrippa's *Liber de Triplici Ratione Cognoscendi Deum*, preceded by a dedication dated 1516 to Guglielmo Paleologo, Marquis of Monferrato, is one of the minor writings contained in the 1529 and 1532 editions of *De Nobilitate et Praecellentia Foeminei Sexus*, which we have already mentioned. We therefore translate part of Chapter V (cf. fol. E, 7 - G, 8 of the 1532 Cologne edition, and t. II, p. 489 of the two-volume edition of the *Works*, printed in Lyon without date by the Bering brothers):

"Every study and love of wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit through our Lord Jesus Christ; true wisdom is the very knowledge of God, the illustration of the mind, the correction of the will, the appetite of right reason, a certain law of life which sanctifies the soul of man, and disposes the way to God, showing what is to be done and what is to be omitted; which wisdom, we call by another term Theology⁽⁵⁷⁾. This wisdom, and true knowledge of God, indeed true and proper essential contact of God, better than cognition, is transmitted in the Gospel by divine inspiration. For neither without the Gospel is there true knowledge of God himself, nor is the Gospel truly understood without divine grace⁽⁵⁸⁾. For it is manifest that the things which have been co-municated by God cannot be understood except by God, as the prophet (Psalm 35) says: In your light we see the light, which light is called by Mercury Trismegistus (Pim. 1) the mind of the divine essence, the same light that comes from God. Our intellect, therefore, if it is not enlightened by the divine mind, is not immune from error, and in vain does it toil after divine things. So Paul (2 Cor. 3): We are not by ourselves sufficient to think anything, but our sufficiency is from God, whom St. Dionysius (*De Divinis Nominibus*) prescribes to invoke and pray to, at the beginning of all things, and especially therefore it is to be done in Theology. The same truth also Christ said: Ask and it will be given to you (Mat. 7, Luc. 2), knock and it will be opened to you, ask and you will find, that is, ask in faith, firmly believing. For believing, as Hermes says (Pim. 9), is the same as understanding. Finally, asking with hope, with firm and undoubting expectation, praising and adoring Jesus Christ, from whom descends such divine knowledge into our soul, that we may be enlightened by the light of his spirit. Knocking therefore with the operation of charity, with watchfulness and fasting, and ardent desire in all our life with the imitation of Jesus Christ in that way that John says: "He who says he abides in Christ must, as he proceeded, also proceed; to which Paul gives the name of faith, which works by delight. Hence in vain proceed those, whoever they may be, who pursue divine things by disputing and litigating, and, armed with contrivances, sophisms and polished dialectics, think they can open the doors of the sacred letters⁽⁵⁹⁾. Those who di-

(57) It is therefore by Agrippa's own express declaration that he gave the word Theology a special, superior and quite different meaning from the vernacular meaning. In *De Occulta Philosophia*, theology is identified with ceremonial magic. The same goes for the expressions: religion, true religion, as opposed to superstition, etc.

(58) It follows logically that the vast majority of Christians cannot be said to have a true understanding of the Gospel.

(59) That is to say, in order to truly understand the Gospel (and likewise any sacred text), it is vain to have recourse to ideas, reasoning in them or accepting them by faith, and one must have recourse to that certain religious art and perform, according to the norms of the rite, the work. And indeed it is not an illusion, for oneself and for others, to believe and call oneself a priest, even though one has no experience of the "kingdom of heaven", of "regeneration by fire", and in general of those pearls which, according to Jesus, are not gate to swine?

they always go in search of great things, and instead find nothing, because they neglect themselves (as Paul says), and learning continually, they never come to the science of truth. Therefore Paul himself commanded the Corinthians to obey and persevere firmly in the faith, and to take care not to be deceived by dialectic and philosophy, which are fallacious and inane findings of men, based on the elements of this corruptible world; the knowledge of which proceeds entirely from the senses, from which reason draws all its knowledge, by discoursing, composing, distinguishing and collecting from experience the universal propositions. God and Jesus Christ is indeed above the world, and the creator of the world above all natures, qualities, figures, orders, actions, and above (as St. Dionysius says) all negation and affirmation, above even those supermundane angels and wings of the winds, who the creator ascended above the Cherubim, and set the cloud as his veil, who is king of kings, lord of lords, both of those who are and those who are not, he made the heavens inclinate, descended as the rain does upon the wool, assumed human nature in himself, and in it is made among men miraculous and admirable in all his works for his supernatural and divine power. Dialectics and philosophy therefore cannot rise to his true knowledge, prevented by reason, which is the enemy of holy faith. Hence, Gregory of Nazianzus says in the second book of Theology: What will you suspect of the divine if you completely believe in the speculations of logic? And to what will the power or subtlety of reason lead you, you who boast of immense things? Only faith, then, which is more powerful than all knowledge, can apprehend the things that are beyond the world, not by inane commentary, but by the full brilliance of the divine revelation that descends from the first light. For it (as Paul says) can understand the beginning of the world⁽⁶⁰⁾.

"Through faith we understand how the word of God has adapted the ages; and it ascends above the limits and spaces of constituted nature, and sweeps over that very wide field, into the very height of nature. In this faith Paul says that he took up the apostleship and preached God. And writing to the Corinthians, he says: My preaching is not in human persuasions, but in the display of the spirit and truth of the faith of Jesus Christ. For faith alone is the instrument and the means by which we can know God, and, as the Platonists say, by which alone do we gain access to God and receive divine protection and virtue. But let us see which soul, when and in what way can freely make use of this instrument? ⁽⁶¹⁾. Certainly none, if not that which, with all the intention of reason ascending into the mind, into its head, into the supreme portion of it, all is converted into it, since we know that, even when for the love of things lower and sensible, it is converted into phantasies, the human mind is in every way an image of the supreme face, which is within us as a writing of light, which mind, migrating from the source of truth, alone grasps and embraces truth; but the whirlwinds of phantoms, not in itself, but in us, obscure, destroy, dissipate, disperse, and prevent the soul from entering that narrow gate of truth. Therefore, included in our corruptible flesh, submerged in too much commerce with it, if it has not overcome the way of the flesh, and if it has not first restored its nature, and freed itself as a pure mind, almost equal to an angel, in vain does it labour in divine things. But, what is this soul, if not that which commands the imagination to be silent in its uncertain hopes and longings for the supernal name, and which, having firmly embraced the true faith, in no case relies on the usual discourses of natural reason, and which, with ardent affection adhering to God, lives in the mind alone, a liberated angel who has taken up God with all its breast? Hence that saying of Jeremiah (Jer. 9): He that glorieth, of this shall glory that knoweth me. And Zoroastro, most ancient philosopher: The soul of man, he says, in a certain way contracts God within itself, then, retaining nothing mortal, it becomes wholly inebriated with the divine sips. And then, too, such a soul often exults in the harmony of the world, when, that is, returning after contemplation to occupations (uf-

(60) That is, he can understand how it is possible that, at some point in time, the universe began, thanks to creation. Those who believe in creation *ex nihilo* assume that this first and extraordinary event took place in time, which, of course, pre-existed creation, with its linear character, conceived by men as unique and absolute.

(61) Faith, of course the 'holy faith', must be an instrument of the soul, and it must not be the soul's assertion of faith, especially of the vulgar kind. Moreover, this faith can only serve those souls that fulfil certain non-ordinary conditions.

ficii) corporal, let the fruits of faith be produced in these, the food of righteousness ⁽⁶²⁾. Therefore John says (I John, 2, 3) that in this way the soul is born again of god, if a certain light of the supreme god, dimming the body like a sunbeam and drawing it up, and converting it into a nature of fire, flows through the angelic minds to our nature, daily instilling the soul immersed in the flesh so that, denuded of all carnality, it lays aside all animal and rational powers and actions, and living in the mind alone, resplendent with hope, directed by faith, fraught with love, all conversant in god and god-king, fertilised in god, it becomes the daughter of god and is born again as new ⁽⁶³⁾ Emanuel. And such a soul as often as, having resigned its actions, it returns to itself, then, no longer numbed by any impetus of earthly things, but freed from them by the Father of lights, it ascends to the sublime summit of divine cognition, where it is filled with prophetic oracles, and is often also elected as an instrument of god to perform miracles, so that even discourses about public events in the world itself do not become irate, according to what Jacob admonishes us (Jac. 3), saying: Elijah was a man like unto us and passible, and praying he prayed that it rain not upon the earth, and for three years and six months it rained not; and again he prayed, and heaven gave rain, and the earth ⁽⁶⁴⁾ gave its fruit. Oh great miracle is man, especially the Christian, who, being constituted in the world, knows the things that are above the world, and the author of the world himself, and yet sees and understands in himself the lower things; not only the things that are and that were, but also those that are not and that are to come. Certainly a great miracle is the Christian man (i.e. as Christ as Agrippa understands him), who, constituted in the world, dominates over the world and performs works similar to those of the creator of the world himself, vulgarly known as miracles, all of which have their radiance and basis in faith in Jesus Christ. Only through faith in Jesus Christ does man become something identical (*idem aliquid*) with God, and enjoys the same power, according to what Christ promised: *Amen dico vobis*, whoever believes in me shall do the works that I do, and greater still (John 14), for I go to the Father, and whoever prays to my Father in my name, I will do it, and whoever prays to me I will do it, that the Father may glory in the son. And elsewhere he says: If you had faith as much as a grain of mustard seed, and said to this mountain: throw yourself overboard, it would come to pass ⁽⁶⁵⁾. Therefore I say to you, whatever you ask, believe because you will receive it...".

Throughout this passage, as indeed almost everywhere in all of Agrippa's writings, it is remarkable how he continually moves from the sacred scriptures and the Church fathers to the philosophical and magical texts of pagan antiquity, to Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster and the like, all people, it seems, followers of the

'true faith'. Basically, Agrippa's position is the classical and traditional position of every initiate, who necessarily, effectively and clearly realises the inherent limitations of reason, which is consequently incapable of solving the mysteries of life, and recognises the insufficiency of ordinary faith to understand or penetrate them, as well as that aberrant and morbid faith that takes pleasure in the incomprehensibility of the mysteries of faith and revels in absurdity (see Tertullian). Hence Agrippa is perfectly consistent in his charge against the uncertainty and vanity of the sciences, including all those that have magic as their subject, studying it solely on the basis of logic and erudition, as well as in his vehement attacks on superstition; and he is perfectly justified in resorting to 'true theology', to ceremonial magic, to 'that religious art', in order to

(62) All this language is not to be taken in the sentimental and devotional sense of the profane inebriated by creed. In fact, this sticky sentimentality does not get anything out of it, and only causes invincible nausea in those who have remained healthy amidst the spread of the 'Asian disease'. Humility and humiliation cannot lead to asceticism and spiritual elevation. One has to be a Christian not to see the incongruity of fact, visible even in the incongruity of terms.

(63) Entire sentences of this passage are to be found at the beginning of Chapter VI of Lib. III of *De Occulta Philosophia*. Note the detail of the daily instigation (*quotidie*) referring to the operation of the soul's detachment from the senses and carnal life.

(64) Cf. *De Occulta Philosophia*, lib. III, ch. LXIV, in fine.

(65) After twenty centuries of the partial spread of the nominally Catholic religion, the chronicles have yet to record the first example of this feat of mountains thrown into the sea by force of faith. From which it follows, if one does not want to question the veracity and competence Jesus, that there are not many have as much *true* faith as a mustard seed.

where, animated by true faith and working according to the rite, it is possible to achieve that same regeneration which in Chapter I of Book III of *Occult Philosophy* is attributed to Bacchus and Christ. Therein lies, let us repeat, the key to the whole matter, the *key to the supreme and most occult philosophy*.

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Some passages from De Occulta Philosophia related to the great work.

As is to be expected, in *De Occulta Philosophia* Agrippa deals with this mysterious religious operation. However, as he declares in the last chapter of Book III, if he has conveyed this art in such a way that it cannot remain hidden from prudent and intelligent men, he has also ensured that the entrance is not free for the wicked and unbelieving unworthy to participate in the arcana of these secrets. He has written the work for the children of learning and wisdom, who, in searching the book, can find the author's understanding, which he has purposely dispersed by placing it in various places, to find the doctrine reserved for them, as well as the arcana veiled beneath many enigmas, which can only be discovered by a profound intelligence, when it has been acquired. He says that he has hidden the truth of this science under the ambiguity of the enigmas, and has dispersed it in various parts of the work; but he has not hidden it from the sages, he has only conveyed it in a style that requires that the fool should understand nothing of it, and that it should easily reach the intellect of the wise.

We have noted Agrippa's systematic use of an amphibological style and we have already cleared up more than one ambiguous enigma; but what we have said and reported so far cannot naturally communicate that knowledge, which, as Agrippa says, is not communicated through writings, but only by presence, through a traditional art and ritual, promoted by the 'catalytic' action of the master. Nor is it easy, by writing, to do more. But in any case, in order to allow the reader an intellectual understanding of the treatise of *Occult Philosophy* as profound as possible, we will highlight and comment on a few salient passages concerning the mysterious oration with the greatest possible clarity, in the conviction that only those who must, can and *will* hear and understand will hear and understand. With regard to the complete initiation, for the avoidance of misunderstandings and responsibility, it is enough for us to warn the reader that today, as in Agrippa's time, the world is full of false doctors, of blind men who lead the blind, of pseudo-initiates who are not even capable of recognising in the inner sincerity of their conscience their profound ignorance, their radical illiteracy: Beware of being deceived by those who were and are in turn deceived ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

The most important passages are, of course, to be found in the third book, which deals specifically with ceremonial magic or theology, and which was written long after the other two books were written in their infancy; but even in the first two books, there is no shortage of important passages on this subject.

Chapter V of the first book provides us with an initial example: it is entitled: *Of the admirable natures of earth and fire*. To understand it, one must first abstract from the usual modern and western meaning of these words, then recall the ancient and broad sense of the famous four elements of antiquity, and finally remember that, by virtue of precisely this broad and generic sense and the law analogy, the words earth and fire lend themselves to designating in particular the soul of the universe.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Societies with initiatory pretensions or aspects are often also or only an instrument or emanation of bodies with a political or politico-religious character. We shall confine ourselves to pointing out 'Martinism', founded by Papus in 1887 with the main and declared aim of opposing the Pythagorean tradition, and whose leaders, the 'unknown superiors', use the same initials used by the RR. PP. of the Society of Jesus; certainly to better show which are the incognito superiors. This may also help explain why these people followed the same policy as the Society of Jesus during the last war. The reader is asked to believe that we know what we are saying.

man and his earthly body, in their antithesis and mutual reaction. Agrippa takes his point of departure, for a change, from Hermes, relies on the Pythagoreans, insists on the broad and spiritual meaning of 'our fire', thus designated using a characteristically hermetic terminology, and finally emphasises that the basis and foundation of all elements is the earth. The reader need do no more than refer to 'our earth', to our body, what Agrippa says generically about the earth, and he will immediately understand where he is going with it. It, he says, receives celestial influences, contains the seed of all things, and when fertilised gives life and produces plants, worms, animals. In it (and, consequently, also and above all in our bodies) lie the greatest secrets, and they can be discovered if we purify it by means of the artifice of fire (i.e. by lighting the "philosophical fire" by means of the hermetic art, according to the traditional and verbally incommunicable rite, and by investing and purifying the bodily organism with the flame of this "our fire"), and if we reduce it to its simplicity by means of a suitable lotion. It is, says Agrippa in a technical term of Hermeticism, the *first matter* of our creation and restoration and the very root of our preservation. *Os-sia*: it is by working on this first matter that it is possible to restore, regenerate man, taking him away from his transient nature and giving him the possibility of stable survival or co-scient preservation.

Of particular importance are the first chapters of the third book.

Chapter one begins by saying: "It is time to move on to higher things and to that portion magic that teaches us to know and experience the laws of religions, and in what way we must through divine religion (note the intended contrast between divine religion and religions) reach the truth, and in what way we must ritually ennoble (*excolere rite*) the soul and mind by means of which alone we can understand the truth".

Here, then, is the work of ennobling to be performed according to ritual. The adverb *rite* also traditionally conventionally used throughout literature. Marsilio Ficino made use of it in his version of the Hermetic books well known to Agrippa; for instance in his Latin translation of the *Egyptian Mysteries* attributed to Jamblico. There, in the penultimate and last chapters, speaking of the "santimonia", Ficino translates as follows: "Among the Egyptians, the aim of sacred and religious elevation is this, that the divine good they think of as nothing more than the divine intellect itself, and the human good nothing more than union with its lord, in the way that the prophet Bytis explained in the mercurial books. In fact, this part is not left out among the Egyptians, as you would suspect, but that which pertains in some way to sanctimony is transmitted to us *rite*'. The Greek text says: ἀλλὰ θεοπρεπῶς παρεδόθη i.e.: but delivered in a divine manner; and it seems to us that Ficino realised, at least intellectually, the jeratically technical character of this transmission by adopting the adverb *rite*.

Returning to Agrippa, he says a little further on that sacred religion (and therefore not that which cannot be called sacred) purifies the mind and makes it divine "We must therefore first of all purify ourselves and commend ourselves to divine piety and religion, and then, having dulled our senses, with a quiet mind, praising and adoring, wait for that divine Ambrosian nectar ⁽⁶⁷⁾, the nectar I say that the pro-feta Zechariah calls wine that makes virgins sprout, that supercelestial Bacchus, the supreme of all Gods, and antistite of priests, the author of regeneration, whom the ancient poets sang twice-born, from whom so many divine streams emanate in our hearts".

(67) This stillness or mental silence that corresponds to the Pythagorean σιγή and the Eleusinian σωπτή, and which is indispensable, necessarily includes the elimination of concepts and beliefs. Even if they are correct, they are of no use; on the contrary, they clutter and undermine, and must be silenced. Let alone in the ordinary case! It takes a lot more bemoaning the rosary, worshipping idols and pining for the fetishes of one's faith and imagination! As for nectar (the drink of the gods) and ambrosia (the food of the gods), we will limit ourselves to observing that these two words are etymologically equivalent to immortality; wine is an ancient symbol of the Bacchic and Dionysian mysteries, and the intoxication it gives is the symbol of the higher states of consciousness attainable through initiation into the mysteries; wine is also an alchemical symbol (Ramon Llull), since the spirit, alcohol, is obtained from wine by rectifying and distilling it.

Agrippa gives himself the air of being carried away by literary enthusiasm when he calls Bacchus the supreme of the gods; but he knows the value of what he is saying when he speaks of Bacchus twice-born, the Dionysian initiatory palingenesis.

What more is needed? Here is catharsis and palingenesis; fundamental modalities of the operation, its essential results, and the explicit reference to the Eleusinian mysteries. In our opinion, too, Agrippa went beyond the limits of prudence and discretion that Abbot Trithemius and his friends never tired of recommending to him.

And in fact it is only chapter two that is devoted by Agrippa to expounding the necessity of secrecy and mystery. It follows that he makes more use of this rule in chapter three than in chapter one, and one must remember this.

Chapter III deals with the "key to all magical operations"; and we find here that same expression of "key" used by Agrippa in writing to his father Aurelius and his other amico. The chapter is entitled: *What dignification is required to become a true magician and worker of miracles*; and it says: "In the beginning of the first book of this work we spoke about what a magician should be; we will now tell the arcane, necessary and secret thing (mind you, it is not quackery), for anyone who wishes to work in this art, which is the beginning, the complement and the key of all magical operations; and it is precisely the dignification of man to such a sublime virtue and power".

We will not translate and quote the chapter. Let us only note that in this chapter Agrippa uses the phrase he had already used in writing to Father Aurelius, when he says that the intellect is the only operator of things that are miraculous; he explicitly insists on two things that are above all necessary for those who aspire to the lofty heights of magic: one, in what way to leave the carnal affections, the fallen sense and the material passions (i.e. to the catharsis of the mysteries), and the other, in what way and by what means to ascend to the pure intellect itself, united with the *virtues* of the gods, without which, he says, it is never possible in any way (other than humility, more or less mystical love, devotion and yearning!) to ascend to the scrutiny of holy things and to the power of admirable operations. In this, Agrippa continues, consists all the dignification that is provided by nature, merit and a certain religious art (*ars quaedam religio- sa*)⁽⁶⁸⁾ The natural dignity is constituted by the complexion of the organism; the meritorious dignity is obtained through doctrines and works, a Christian concept and expression, which Agrippa, however, takes care to explain, saying that one must first become erudite and expert in the three faculties of the elementary (physical), celestial (metaphysical) and intellectual (theological) world, as he said at the beginning of the book, and as it is set out respectively in the three books of *De Occulta Philosophia*; the works, then, consist in removing impediments, bringing the soul deeply and intimately closer to contemplation and turning it in upon itself. "Within ourselves, indeed, is inherent the faculty of learning and mastering all things. But we are prevented from making use of it by the passions of the generation that surround us, and by false imaginations and immoderate appetites; when these expelled, divine knowledge and power immediately arise...".

Here, then, according to Agrippa himself, is the key to all magical operations; here is what one must do to become a magician, in the true, genuine, and ancient sense of the word. Without this preliminary operation, all the practices of magic become pure superstition or

(68) The text in the original edition (lib. III, ch. III, p. CCXIII) of 1533, as well as the Lyon edition of 1560, reads: *an quaedam religiosa, naturalis dignitas: ipsa*. It seems to us that the punctuation should be modified thus: *ars quaedam religiosa. Naturalis dignitas ipsa...* And since we are on the subject of errors in the same first edition, we will point out that in the "scale of the quaternary" (II, 7) the Lead is placed in the fourth column instead of the third. Likewise in the "scale of the denarius" (lib. II, c. XII), the name of Raziel should appear in the second column, since Jophiel, which is substituted for it, should instead appear together with Zaphkiel in the third column, as is evident from the context of c. X of Book III. As for this Raziel Agrippa says (cf. *De Occ. Philos.*, III, 10, 24, 47), that it means the vision of God, that it is the particular intelligence of Jod, the second name of God, and is the one that was prefixed to Adam. Agrippa evidently drew on the 'Book of Raziel', a collection of secret Kabbalistic writings that did not see the light of day until 1701 in Amsterdam in Hebrew, which makes Raziel the angel of magic and Adam's instructor after his exit from the earthly Paradise. Agrippa was accused of taking the contents of the fourth book of Occult Philosophy (which was wrongly attributed to him) from this book of Raziel. The accusation made *en passant* by Jacques Gohorry (*Th. Paracelsi Philosophiae et Medicinae Compendium cum scholiis in libros III ejusdem de Vita longa. Auctore Leone Suavio I. G. P.*; Parisiis 1566, p. 322), was rebutted by the Dutch physician John Viero (J. Wieri - *Liber Apologeticus* - Adv. Leonis Suavii calumnias, 8).

witchcraft. Agrippa has no illusions about the value of what he expounds in the three books of the *Philosophie Occulta*; he subordinates all magic to this operation, which is the key to it; but it is not true that he has recanted and in *De Incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* he has repudiated his treatise of the *Philosophie Occulta*. If the language is apparently different, the position is essentially the same.

In *De Incertitudine*, Agrippa divides magic into natural magic and ceremonial magic, and the latter into goetia and theurgy. Goetheia puts unclean spirits and familiar demons in communication; and he condemns it but does not deny it. Of theurgy he says that in the eyes of some it does nothing unlawful, because it is exercised in the name of god and angels to compel and reduce evil demons. Great purity is its main means of action, but it includes various kinds of superstitions that are all the more dangerous because they take on a more divine character in the eyes of the vulgar. Of the chymists he says that more than one useful discovery is owed to them and adds: I do not want to say more. He then takes issue with scholastic theology, which also distinguishes from true theology, which is nothing more than the tradition of those who have known the word of God (of course objective knowledge, not nominal). In conclusion and in essence, there is no contradiction to what Agrippa says in *The Occult Philosophy*, and Agrippa's purported retraction at the end of the 1533 edition of *De Occ. Ph.*, seen in its true light is nothing more than one of Agrippa's usual devices to succeed in what had been his ardent aspiration for twenty years: to secure the publication and fortunes of the *Occult Philosophy*. Indeed, it consists of the reproduction some passages from *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, some against venomous magic, necromancy, divination, others having the simple character of definition and exposition, published under the captious and conspicuous title of: *H. C. Agrippae censura sive retractatio de Magia ex sua declamatione de Vanitate...* With this cheap offer, Agrippa appeased or intrigued his enemies, and ensured the life of the treatise on *Occult Philosophy*.

We have insisted on this subject of the key to occult philosophy, both because it is necessary to understand what it is all about in order to see the whole work in its true light, and because the subject was more worthwhile than it might seem, and because it was time to highlight the true position and value of Agrippa, who was generally misunderstood and regarded as a slavish follower and believer in the prejudices of his time, or as an adventurer or charlatan. It is true that his reputation, on the other hand, is great and traditional in so-called occult circles, but we know them all too well, and we know perfectly well that the clarifications we have given and all the elements comparison and judgement we have collected and reproduced are anything but superfluous for most of these people.

CHAPTER IV.

The vicissitudes of publishing *De Occulta Philosophia*

Agrippa's alleged retraction

Agrippa's relations with Herman de Wiede, archbishop of Cologne, prince-elect of the Holy Roman Empire as well as legate of Rome, date back to January 1531. In fact, not content with Trithemius's letter of commendation and imperial privilege, and perhaps spurred on by the first clamour and excitement raised by the publication of *De Incertitudine*, he thought of adding another valid protection to those already in his possession to safeguard *De Occulta Philosophia*, of which he was about to publish the first book, and wrote from Malines in January 1531 (i.e. 1532 new style) a letter to the Archbishop of Cologne, dedicating to him the treatise *De Occulta Philosophia*, the publication of which he was beginning. 'Appearing under your auspices,' Agrippa wrote in finishing the dedication, 'my work will certainly be safe from envy, and thus I will have assured the durability of a work, which will not be without utility'.

The printing of the *Occult Philosophy* had begun towards the end of 1530 at the same time at the publisher Jean Grapheus in Antwerp and at Christian Wéchel in Paris, both of whom published only the first book in 1531. In the title, it was stated that the other two books, of which the indication was given, would be published as soon as the author's occupations permitted.

The text was preceded by a preface to the reader written by Agrippa himself, which we quote here omitting the less interesting parts: 'I do not doubt that the title of our book *De Occulta Philosophia sive de Magia* should excite the curiosity of the readers, among whom will be found some ill-disposed, torpid and even malignant ones, who through their presumptuous ignorance will take the name of magic in its worst sense; and as soon as they catch a glimpse of the title, they will cry out that we teach forbidden arts, that they contain seeds of heresy, that they offend pious ears and scandalise decent people, and that I am an evil, superstitious, demonic being, a magician. To these readers I can answer that for men of letters the word magician does not sound evil, superstitious and demonic, but wise, priestly and prophetic; that the sibyls did magic, and therefore could make such open prophecies of Christ... But you who are going to read with a fair mind, if you use as much prudence of discernment as bees do in choosing honey, you can read peacefully. If you find something you do not like, leave it alone and do not make use of it, for I do not intend to convince but only to narrate. But do not reject the other words ⁽⁶⁹⁾Even those who read medical books come across antidotes and medicines along with poisons. Magic teaches many vain things and curious prodigies to show off; leave them as vain things, but do not ignore their causes. For these things in truth can be done without offence to God and insult to religion, for the benefit of men, to avert misfortunes, to destroy evil, to cure diseases, to exterminate ghosts, to preserve life, honour and good fortune; and who does not esteem these things not only useful but necessary? Therefore I say to you that rather than affirming, I have written narrating. We have much followed the sayings of the Platonists and other pagan philosophers where the subject matter suggested it. Therefore if there is any

(69) This preamble is quite identical to the usual warning that is almost always found at the top of Hermetic books, and which recommends choosing well; for it is already known that there is no rose without thorns; and the rose of the rose crosses certainly does not make an exception to the rule. Similar warnings are found in the last chapter of the work.

something erroneous, and said too freely, forgive our adolescence, for I composed this work when I was less than an adolescent; so that I can excuse myself by saying: when I was a boy I spoke like a boy and knew as much as a boy; when I became a man I got rid of the boyishness; and in our book: *Della Incertezza e Vanità delle Scienze (Of the Uncertainty and Vanity of Science)* I have retracted most of these books.

But you will perhaps object to me: you wrote as a young man, you recanted as an old man; and why then did you print them? And I answer that I began to write these books when I was just a young man, and that I planned to publish them once they were corrected and enriched; and for this reason I sent them to the abbot Giovanni Tritemio, a man who is an expert in arcane things, to have them corrected. It then happened that, having interrupted the work, before I had put the final touches to it, corrupted copies were going around in Italy, France and Germany in this truncated and unpolished form. Not only that, but some I do not know if more impudent than impudent wanted to put this shapeless book under the presses. Only to avoid this trouble, I decided to publish it myself, thinking that it would have been far less dangerous to have this slightly corrected book published by my own hand than if incorrect and truncated fragments had been spread by others. Besides, it is not a crime if I do not let this fruit of my youth die. On the other hand, we have added a few chapters and inserted several new things, which the reader can easily distinguish by the diversity of the sentence. I did not want to redo the entire work, but to correct it a little and bring a little light into it.

Brucker, dealing with this retraction and the one in *De Vanitate*, is not at all persuaded. "Whether this was his earnest and true mind and opinion," writes the Brucker ⁽⁷⁰⁾, "or whether it was only prompted as it were to ward off envy, we have no way of telling, because the series of E-guns ceases after the edition of *De Occulta Philosophia*, which we think is the only source from which it is possible to judge his true opinion. But from what his disciple and friend Viero and others report, it appears that towards the end of his life he was considered a magician by the vulgar crowd, from whose judgement of the vulgar crowd it cannot be inferred that he cultivated this philosophy until the end of his life; therefore we say nothing definite about this.

Prost, on the other hand, takes this preface and retraction of Agrippa literally, as if he himself had not had the opportunity to observe and reproach Agrippa for his nonchalance and insincerity with regard to his academic titles, his military exploits, etc., and as if, following Agrippa's life step by step, he had not had to observe the inexplicable contradiction between the attitude assumed in *De Incertitudine* and his repugnance and disbelief. And as if, by following Agrippa's life step by step, he had not had to note the inexplicable contradiction between the attitude he assumed in *De Incertitudine*, his repugnance and disbelief in astrology and other magical and divinatory arts on the one hand, and on the other, his persistent and vital interest in magic, and his tenacious intention to publish the work he had composed as a boy, which he evidently cared for more than any other. We think that this purported retraction by Agrippa must be understood with much *granu salis*. It should be noted that a few lines above, he himself invites the reader to choose honey from flowers with the prudence and discernment of bees. The publicity and the fate of the treatise on *Occult Philosophy* were too dear to Agrippa's heart, and we will find further evidence to show how he attached great value to his work and not the meagre value it displays here. It is precisely because he attached importance to his work and its publication, perhaps considering it to be his life's work, that Agrippa, accustomed to colouring the truth according to convenience of his intentions, Agrippa always so shrewd and resourceful, was certainly well able to conceive and implement a pseudo-devaluation and re-treatment of his own work as a matter of policy. For who could have thought of his insincerity in despising his own work? What better way, in short, to use a quaint Florentine expression, to beat a lullaby?

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(70) Brucker Jacob - *Historia Philosophica critica*. - Vol. IV, p. 4, 409.

The fight with the Cologne Inquisition.

In November 1532, after a pause, the complete manuscript of the work was finally in the hands of the printer; and Agrippa wrote to his friend Don Bernardo (*Ep.* VII, 15) that his book *De Occ. Ph.*, augmented corrected and cleaned up, was under the presses. In another letter, written at the same time (*Ep.* VII, 14) from Bonn to another friend, Don Luca, Cardinal Campeggi's secretary, Agrippa wrote: 'The *Occult Philosophy* is under press in Cologne, and will be published around Christmas'. It was in fact under printing by the bookseller Hetorpius and the printer Jean Soter.

But on 1 January 1533, Hetorpio wrote to Agrippa that he had to put everything on hold: 'The Inquisitor,' he wrote (*Ep.* VII, 24), 'has referred the treatise of *Occult Philosophy* to the Senate of Cologne as suspected heresy, concluding that its continued publication is forbidden. The printer Soter had to, by order of the Senate, hand over to the inquisitor what had already been drawn up, to be examined more closely, before it was decided whether the book could appear. You know what the monks' dispositions are in your regard, and those of the preaching monks in particular⁽⁷¹⁾. It would therefore be useful if we could get to an understanding because it would be to the detriment of both your honour and my money. The Senate has not yet pronounced the interdiction, and Soter continues, indeed hastens the execution; it should therefore be arranged. Send me first the original diploma of the privi- lege given by the emperor'.

Eight days later, the printer Soter also wrote to Agrippa to inform him that, in addition to the Senate, the officialdom had been set in motion, and that it had forbidden him to continue printing the book had been examined by it, under penalty of severe measures. Soter deferred to Agrippa's prudence, and asked him to obtain from the Prince's chancellery that the ban be lifted. In the meantime, he was obliged to arrest himself.

Agrippa thus found himself grappling with his old enemies, the same friars with whom he had fought in his youthful stay in Cologne. He did not flinch; he counter-attacked imminently with his usual vigour. He wrote, one after the other, three letters to his friend and protector, the archbishop of Cologne (*Ep.* VII, 27, 28, 30), and addressed a long and violent protest to the magistrates of the city (*Ep.* VII, 26). Agrippa, in his defences, always went on the counter-attack. Let us give an idea, by summarising the protest, of the fertility and skill of argument with which he defended himself and his book against the attacks of the theologians of Cologne.

"Illustrious Senators, I learn that the Rev. Father Conrad d'Ulma, of the Order of Preachers, Inquisitor of the Faith, has asked you to interdict as dangerous and infected with heresy my book of *Occult Philosophy or Magic*, currently in print in your city. This work, which has been carefully examined by scholars and prelates specially commissioned by the Emperor, has received their approval, as well as that of the Privy Council, and under the guarantee of the imperial privilege has been able to be printed, and sold publicly in Antwerp and then in Paris (the first li- bro). After this, a miserable monk, infatuated with his title of inquisitor, dares to attack the sceptre of Caesar, like a vile insect attacks the body of the eagle; and, pretending to submit my work to censure today he addresses himself to you, to you whose duty it is to defend the acts of the Imperial Majesty, and to assure the citizens of the protection that comes with it. Nonetheless, you have compelled the printer of this book, John Soter, to hand over to this monk the notebooks that have already been pulled. I appeal to the feeling of every honest man. Is it admissible that, having previously been judged by the censors and the council of Caesar, and armed with the privilege consecrated by his authority, I should now have to submit to the scrutiny of a host of ignoramuses, accusers and judges at the same time? It would be Minerva brought before swine.

"Do not let yourselves be astounded by a false interpretation of this word magic, which is only frightening to the vulgar, and on which these sycophantic hypocrites are basing their accusations of blasphemy and heresy. My book contains nothing but things that have nothing to do with the Christian faith and the holy scriptures; and it is only, as you know, in opposition to

(71) The inquisitor was Conradus Colynus of Ulm, of the Order of Preachers.

If it should be otherwise, then condemn everything that is not faith and the gospel; condemn Aristotle, Averroes, whom these people always have on their hands in their schools; condemn their Thomas and Albert; condemn all their doctors in feud with the precepts of pagan philosophy. What offends the delicacy of my contradictors are the suspicious names of magic and cabal. This is enough for these ignorant asses to condemn what they do not know. Thus it happened that one day, having entered the house of John Rink, one of the illustrious magistrates of this town, and having found there the polygraph of Trithemius, the learned abbot of Spanheim, they began to cry out scandal and heresy; manifest proof of their crass ignorance and wickedness.

"Now that your university is populated by such slobs, marvel at seeing the arts and sciences exiled from our Cologne and all the students, once so numerous, now dispersed, to the great detriment of the city, whose glory is fading day by day. It is good to tell you, it is good to point out to you this conspiracy of theologians in general and of these preachers in particular to drive sacred sciences and good literature out of your city and out of the whole of Germany. You must be reminded of the war which they waged and in which they wore themselves out against Capnius ⁽⁷²⁾, and the fortunately sterile attacks against Erasmus; Lastly, the unworthy persecution directed against the illustrious and learned Hermann, Count of Newenar, and also against the learned doctor Peter of Ravenna, the celebrated jurist whom they expelled from your university, as well as John Aesticampano, this man irreproachable in morals and doctrine, whom they forced not only to come down from his chair but also to leave your city. Truly, seeing these swine rage against me, there would be reason to consider myself a learned doctor.

"And then, what are these impudent teachers capable of doing? When Martin Luther, the formidable adversary of all these theosophists, stood up recently, before whom both the famous school of Paris and the Roman Consistory itself hesitated, they were seen to hastily formulate a few articles without construct or logical consistency, and boldly pronounce a sentence of heresy. What effect did they achieve in this manner? They have raised laughter and scorn, which they could not escape like our magistrates; and they have ensured the progress of that Lutheran evil which they pretended to arrest. Then they gave up the battle, with the exception of one, Jacques Hochstrat, this preacher, who was called the master of heretics (*Magister hereticorum*; it was the title of the inquisitor of the faith; Agrippa makes a transparent pun on it), and well deserved the title, because in his writings against the heretic Luther he himself was the most dangerous heretic, as is easy to prove. This is what I shall do in an inscribed book: Of the Crimes and Heresy of the Friars Preachers, where I shall show how these friars put poison into the sacraments, counterfeit miracles, assassinate princes and kings, lure people and spread error. As for the successor of this Hochstrat, Master Conrad, our present inquisitor, they say that he so well declaimed against Luther in Ulm, his hometown, that he made this illustrious city and the whole district completely Lutheran. Would he not do better, in truth, if he went around begging for eggs and cheese for his community instead of stirring up trouble, slandering honest people, and daring to put his hand on Caesar's authority?"

"Thanks to these braggarts, your people are famous throughout Germany for their coarseness. And I still remember the filthy beasts who presided over their schools when I attended them in my youth. I would like to refresh your memory in this respect by reminding you of that rector Bommelchen, who, despite his very advanced age, gave the youth the most pernicious example with his speeches and vile constu- tutions; better still, Master Cornelius of Breda, curate of Saint Martin-le-petit, who did not blush to take the part of a jester at the table of our bourgeoisie and whose shameful excesses had to be severely repressed by Landgrave Hermann, then archbishop of Cologne. Yet, of all people, he was the champion of every feat

(72) It is the Greekised name of John Reuchlin, or Rauchlin (little smoke), the Kabbalist whose *De Verbo Mirifico* Agrippa had publicly explained in Dôle in 1509, resulting in his being shaken off by the persecutions of the church people (Catilinet). Agrippa had already spoken of these same things and people in *De Incertitudine*, in chap. XCVI of the unmutilated editions (pre-1539).

theology. If we pass from masters to pupils, what can we say of that John Rayn, promoted to master of arts by your gymnasiarchs, and, in this capacity, ordained priest, and then invested with a canonry in the Church of the Apostles, who never knew how to say more than the first mass, and who could not even read his canonical hours; so much so that his brethren had to send him back to the school of the children?"

This is only the beginning of Agrippa's long indictment; he rails against his persecutors for quite a while, attacking left and right, and ends by saying: "Once again I affirm to you that my book contains nothing that touches Christian theology, and that can form the basis of an accusation of heresy. Let your theosophists therefore leave alone that which does not concern them and which they are unable to understand. And you, illustrious Senators, cleanse your university of this mob of sophists, put good letters back in honour" (*Ep.* VII, 26, Bonn, II Jan. 1533).

But the Cologne senate did not respond; the archbishop, although well disposed towards Agrippa, could not, despite his authority, overcome the obstacles put in his way by the inquisition, and things, to Agrippa's great displeasure, dragged on. Truly, the precautions he had taken and the support he had secured were not superfluous! He was on tenterhooks; he was afraid that, for example, the manuscript would be taken away from him on some pretext or other, and he was afraid that the bookseller would let himself be taken away. "Above all, wrote Agrippa to the bookseller Hetorpio, do not trust anyone; do not let them take away the copy of my book under any pretext. Say rather that you have returned it to me. For I have only that, and I could lose the fruit of my long and difficult labour in this way. If I had it here, I would easily have three or four scribes make a transcription of it in a few days, which I could deliver to these theologians; so that they might lose their wits about it in the usual way; but it is not so. Take care also of my privilege, and do not leave it in their hands, because even if it were to be spoiled, it would still be good to justify that the book has been approved" (*Ep.* VII, 31).

And the bookseller Hetorpio answered him (*Ep.* VII, 32) by reassuring him. He had shown the emperor the original privy- gio together with the book published in Paris; but I withdrew it at once and left nothing but the copy printed in Antwerp with these people. I could not learn anything from those are in the archbishop's council; just see to it that you get this prince to lift the ban that has been signalled to Soter, and we will go ahead anyway in spite of the the- logos".

Time passed by without any constructiveness and four months later things were still where they were before.

Eventually, the city magistrates sent their objections. Agrippa considered them petty, writing to the archbishop: 'You have seen that with all their efforts to make my philosophy suspect they have refuted nothing. They make a thousand efforts to torture the sense of certain passages, confusing particularly distinct arguments. Basically, they rely on mere presumptions, based on what they have read in the first book, the only one they have in their hands, a book that is surely irredeemable because the theologians the University of Paris so scrupulous allowed it to be printed and sold in their university. Why prohibit a book composed on the basis of older authors that be easily left in the hands of everyone?' (*Ep.* VII, 34 - 6 May 1533).

Agrippa insisted; among other things, he wrote to him that all these delays made him miss the Frankfurt fair, which was imminent and where he counted on selling his book well.

As God willed, in mid-1533 he was able to overcome the obstacles and resume printing. And in 1533, in the month of July, the first complete edition of the *Occult Philosophy*, which had cost Agrippa so much effort, hard work and bitter struggle, finally appeared.

The first edition of *De Occulta Philosophia* is a folio volume of six unnumbered pages, and 362 pages numbered in Roman numerals; it bears neither place of printing nor publisher's name, and bears at the end the date July 1533. It is a beautiful edition, and though without the publisher's name it is certainly the edition printed by Hetorpio, and edited by Agrippa himself. Here is the full title: *Henrici Cornelii Agrippae ab Nettesheym a consiliis et archivis indicarii sacrae Caesarariae maiestatis de Occulta Philosophia libri tres. Nihil est opertum quod non reveletur et ocoultum quod non sciatur. Matthaei X. Cum gratia et privilegio Caesarariae maiestatis ad triennum.*

Several editions exist of this 1533 edition. Prost distinguishes two of them ⁽⁷³⁾ They both have, he says, the same format, the same number of pages, and end with the same wording: *finis anno MDXXXIII Julio*. However, in one of the two, which is probably the second, some errors have been corrected; it has much finer printing, the initials are of a better style, and the portrait of Agrippa that appears in the frontispiece under the title has been removed, replacing it with a florin. Furthermore, while there is a printing error on the last page of the first printing run: *per vani- tates magicas, exorcismos, incantationes, amatones, agogima...*, it does not appear in the second printing run, which correctly carries *amatoria* and not *amatones*. This error is also reproduced in the beautiful 1550 edition.

However, in addition to these two print-runs of which Prost has seen specimens preserved in Parisian libraries, there are at least two others of the same year, publisher and format. One print run, which is very beautiful and probably not at all similar to correct print run mentioned by Prost, however, unlike this one, bears a portrait of Agrippa on the frontispiece. A copy of this printing run is held by the Casanatense library in Rome (shelf mark: II, X, 43) and another magnificent copy is held by the Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele in Rome (shelf mark: 69, 2, D, 6), which also has a copy of the first printing run (shelf mark: 14, 34, Q. 12). The first run is undated, the third has the errata at the end of the preface. The composition is different in the two runs, although they have the same format and number of pages, and at first glance the difference escapes notice. The initial letters in the beginning of the various chapters and the diagrams are much more beautiful in the edition provided with the errata. This edition must have been composed, not from the manuscript, but from the previous edition, because in it all the printing errors of the first edition have been reproduced, and in addition to these there are a few others. Agrippa, on the other hand, composed the errata in time to correct the word *amatones* into *amatoria* on the last page of the text, as is correctly found in this printing run.

The National Library in Florence possesses a copy (signature: 1, L, 2, 165) of a fourth printing run, which also has an errata and a portrait of Agrippa on the frontispiece. However, unlike the previous printing run, in this one the errata only starts on page 169, and the errors on the preceding pages have been corrected in the text. This run is the most correct and is evidently the last of all those we have seen. Thus, while the two copies of the National Library in Rome on page IV, line 16 and 19 have *obscuritatem* written on them, corrected to *obtusitatem* in the errata, the copy of the National Library in Florence has *obtusitatem* in the text itself. In all these print-runs the numbering of the pages is done in Roman numerals, and is extraordinarily incorrect; one can see that the printer had little practice with this system of writing the numbers ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

Here are the contents of this edition of 1533, the only complete edition, which appeared during the author's lifetime: 1.°) the imperial privilege in the French text; 2.°) Agrippa's preface to the reader; and at the end of it, in later editions, the errata; 3.°) Agrippa's letter to Tritemio; 4.

(73) Aug. Prost - *H. C. Agrippa*; t. II, pp. 513 and 532.

(74) Agrippa, residing in Bonn during the printing of his treatise in Cologne, was probably unable to attend to the revision of the proofs as carefully as would have been necessary. Thus, in addition to the errors indicated in the errata of the last printing in 1533, there are others that Agrippa himself missed. We have already mentioned that in the quaternary scale the lead is made to correspond to the fixed stars instead of to the planet Saturn, and that in the denarius scale is written in the second column *Jophiel* instead of *Raziel*, while *Jophiel* should be written in the third column next to *Za-phkiel*. Other errors that have occurred to us are the following: In book II, ch. 6, it is written *Hémarmene* instead of *Eínarmene*, and in ch. 37 of the same book *Peter of Ebony* instead of Peter of Abano. In the table or magic square of Mars (II, 22) the first box of the fifth line bears the word *הב* instead of *הא*, and in the magic square of the moon the eighth box of the first line contains the number instead of 45. These errors, despite their grossness, were repeated in later editions and translations with the tenacity peculiar to error; and the pile, along the way, grew richer and richer. Thus in Chap. 43 of Lib. III because of an imperfect character instead of reading *alit corpus in torpore* it was read *alit corpus in corpore* and thus translated absolutely in vain, as in the French edition of 1910 which contains in addition an error in the magic square of the sun, one in that of Venus and three in that of Mercury. One error is contained in Lib. I, chap. 74 concerning the mother letters and the simple letters of the Hebrew alphabet; four in the table of the 72 holy names of God, etc.

by Trithemius to Agrippa (8 April 1510); 5.^o) the dedication to Herman de Wiede, *ex Mechlinia* - January 1531; 6.^o) the index; 7.^o) Book I; pp. 1-97; 8.^o) letter to Hermann de Wiede, p. 98; 9.^o) Book II, pp. 99-208; 10.^o) another letter to Hermann de Wiede, pp. 209-10; 11.^o) Book III, pp. 211-347; 12.^o) letter to Fr. Aurelio d'Acquapendente; pp. 347-8 (Sept. 24, 1527); 13.^o) another letter to Fr. Aurelio d'Acquapendente, pp. 348-9 (Lyon, Nov. 19, 1527); 14.^o) letter from Agrippa to a certain friend of his in *Aula Regis*, s.d.; pp. 349-52; 15.^o) Agrippa's retraction with the title: *Henrici Cornelii Agrippae censura sive retractatio De Magia ex sua declamatione De Vanitate Scientiarum et Excellentia Verbi Dei*, divided into short passages from *De Vanitate* and concerning: a) *De magia in genere*, b) *De magia naturali*, c) *De magia mathematica*, d) *De magia venefica*, e) *De goetia et necromantia*, f) *De theurgia*, g) *De cabala*, h) *De praestigiis*; pp. 352-62.

This is the history of the publication of *De Occulta Philosophia* and in particular of the main edition, the first and only complete edition to appear during the author's lifetime. We have seen fit to linger a while over the intricate matter of the printing runs of the Cologne edition of 1533, in order to rectify and complete the information hitherto known. We have found new and undoubted proof of the love with which Agrippa edited his first edition of *De Occulta Philosophia*, an ardour and interest that would be quite curious if we were to believe the preface and the re-treatment and believe that he was forced and unwilling to publish the work.

The dedication from Malines in January 1531 has led many to believe that a 1531 edition existed; but this is a gross mistake. The other editions are all later and are as follows:

In 1541, without printer's name and indication of place of printing; in 1550 in Lyon by the brothers Goffredo and Marcello Béring, a beautiful edition printed in crisp cursive type; in 1565 in Basel; in 1567 in Paris; an undated edition published in Lyon; and finally the Lyon edition of 1713.

The Treatise on *Occult Philosophy* is then found in the various editions of Agrippa's complete works. Of these, there are a few that are either antiquated or of suspect date. Here in any case is a list of the editions of Agrippa's complete works in Latin:

An edition with the false date of 1510; a Lyon edition of the Béring brothers, in two volumes, with the false date of 1531; another edition also from Lyon with the suspicious date of 1535; a beautiful edition, in italics, published without a date by the Béring brothers of Lyon, also containing the fourth book of *Occult Philosophy*. Prost assigns a later date of 1565 to this last edition, but as we shall see when discussing the fourth book, it is probably a few years earlier. Then come two editions, again edited by the Béring Brothers of Lyon, with the suspicious dates of 1580 and 1600. The undated edition, in italics, of the Béring brothers is the prototype that served for the other editions.

The treatise *De Occulta Philosophia* was translated into English, and there is an English edition from 1651; a French version appeared in La Haye in 1727; and a modernisation of it in Paris in 1911. In Italian, it now appears for the first time after four centuries.

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The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy

As we have mentioned, the beautiful italicised, undated edition of A. grippa's complete works, published in Lyon by the Béring brothers, also contains a fourth book of *Occult Philosophy*. This edition is earlier than the two dated 1580 and 1600, because it does not contain certain additions that are found in these. It is in italics like the beautiful edition of *Occult Philosophy* of 1550, and is the first edition of the complete works in which this fourth book attributed to A-

grippe. The first editions of the self-printed treatise of *Occult Philosophy* in which the fourth book of the *Occult Philosophy* can be found in addition to the first three are those of 1566 and 1567.

Prost, in determining the approximate date of the undated Lyon edition of the complete works in italics, which also contains the fourth book, and whose characters are similar to those of the 1550 edition of the *Filosofia Occulta*, which does not contain the fourth book, argues that this date cannot be earlier than 1565, because, according to Prost, this fourth book was first published in 1565, when it appeared, together with Pietro d'Abano's *Eptameron*, without publisher's name or place of printing. Prost should have reflected that by assigning a date at least thirty years after Agrippa's death to the appearance of the fourth book, he was contradicting the statement of Giovanni Viero; who in his *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (Lib. II, *De Magis*, V., 2), dealing with "this fourth and impious book of Occult Philosophy", which he asserts was not written by Agrippa, says it "has now come to light". Now the first edition of Viero's work dates from 1564, but he composed it in 1562; so it is evident that there must have been an edition of this fourth book before 1562. And in fact there is one from 1559, which is in all probability the first, and precisely the one Viero alludes to. It is entitled: *Henrici Cornelii Agrippae Liber Quartus de Occulta Philosophia, seu de Cerimonjis Magicis, cui accesserunt Elementa Magica Petri de Abano Philosophi - Marpurgi, anno Domini 1559*; and is also mentioned in Caillet's *Manuel Bibliographique*. A copy can be found in the Vittorio Emanuele National Library in Rome, bound together with 1550 edition of the *Philosophie Occulta* (shelfmark 14 - 7 - B. 18).

The author of this fourth book, whoever he may have been, remembering and referring to the famous expression of the "key" to the Occult Philosophy, which he may have seen in the letters to Father Aurelio d'Acquapendente published since 1532, and referring explicitly to Chap. III of Book III, almost at the beginning of this book of his, says: "In the three previous books, things were given theoretically rather than practically; figuratively and almost in enigma. This book we have done as a complement and key (cf. Lib. III, chap. III) to the three books of the *Occ. Ph.* and of all magical operations; and therefore I recommend that you keep it protected in silence in the sacred recesses of your religious pet, and hidden with constant taciturnity". And in fact this fourth book is nothing but a manual of practical ceremonial magic.

However, Giovanni Viero, who was Agrippa's disciple and family member at eighteen, categorically disputes that this book belongs to Agrippa.

But since it is a secret key, left only to the very best of friends, one could assume that Viero, at least because of his very young age, was kept the dark as to the existence this fourth book; and thus Viero's testimony would lose its value. In such a case, there remains only the comparative analysis of the three genuine books with this spurious one, performed as much on the doctrinal content as on the writer's style, that can give us any answer to the question. Now from all that we have reported and observed concerning the key to occult philosophy, it is clear that according to Agrippa's thought, which we share, the key to the three books and the key to magic itself consists, not in a manual of practical ceremonial magic, but in a certain special religious operation based on a religious art, transmitted not in writing, but beforehand and performed according to a traditional rite, the effect of which is to dignify the mind, making it divine and capable of performing all those prodigies, falsely believed to be miracles, and put forward by Agrippa in his fundamental work. This consideration seems to us to provide a very strong objection to the attribution of the fourth book of the *Occult Philosophy* to Agrippa.

Brucker also notes that this fourth and spurious book of the *Occult Philosophy* contains some assumptions diametrically repugnant to the magical system proposed by Agrippa, for instance when he says that the *anima mundi* is the supreme intelligence, whereas Agrippa places the *anima mundi* between the intelligences and the sublunar world. As for style, the difference is enormous. Agrippa's Latin is that of a

humanist, scholar of good letters, is in short the Latin of a writer; whereas this book is written in a barbaric language, devoid of any literary merit ⁽⁷⁵⁾.

So everything agrees that the Book of *Magical Ceremonies* is spurious.

The author of this work, following the ancient hermeticist custom of attributing writings to other older and more famous writers, Hermes, Pythagoras, Geber, Aristotle, etc., must have thought it best, not least to avoid possible harassment by the Inquisition, to attribute the authorship of his work to Agappa, whose fame as a magician was flying all over Europe and who had long since died, even without the help of the holy Inquisition.

Of course, being spurious does not mean that it is not worth dealing with, nor does it mean that it is devoid of any value as a ritual of practical magic. But examining this question and studying magic rituals from the point of view of fidelity to tradition and experimental efficacy would take us too far, and we refrain from doing so despite the interest of the subject.

(75) Jacobi Bruckeri - *Historia critica philosophica* - Leipzig, 1743, tom. IV, p. 407.

CHAPTER V

The Content of the Treatise on *Occult Philosophy*

What is Magic

As Agrippa even states in the title of his work and explains in the preface and letters, the term 'occult philosophy' is merely a euphemism used in place of the term 'magic', a term that was already too discredited in Agrippa's time. In our times, the discredit is perhaps even greater, and the majority of so-called educated people are unknowingly joining the Christian mentality when, based solely on preconceived notions, they believe themselves entitled to declare, in the name of science, progress, civilisation, etc., that magic is nothing more than an outdated medieval superstition. Therefore, even today, it is necessary to explain well the meaning that Agrippa gave, and that we give, to the word magic.

The meaning attributed to this word by Henry Cornelius Agrippa is markedly different from the meaning currently attributed to it; but, like it or not to the doctors of chattering, who insurgently speak out in the name of science against those who are not ignorant of science and have spent years in the laboratory, it seems to us more sensible to accept and follow, in defining the meaning of the word magic, the competent authority of a classic than the incompetent arbitrariness of the vulgar.

"The Egyptians," says Agrippa (*De Occ. Ph.* - Lib. I, ch. 27), "called nature *maga*, i.e. a magical force, because it attracts the like by means of the like, and the convenient by means of the convenient". In Agrippa's time, the Egyptian language was not known and we cannot say where Agrippa got this etymology from; it is wrong because in the ancient Egyptian language, as far as we know, there is no word *maga* or similar that has even approximately this meaning; but this detail is irrelevant; What is of interest, however, is to observe how Agrippa, even from this false etymology, felt entitled to traditional his conception of magic as a science of nature, as an art based on the knowledge of natural likes and dislikes, affinities and repulsions. "Magic," writes Agrippa (*De Occ. Ph.* I, 2), "is the true science, the highest and most perfect philosophy, in a word the perfection and fulfilment of all natural sciences, because all regular philosophy is divided into *physics, mathematics and theology... for there can be no perfect work of magic, or even of true magic, which does not encompass all three of these faculties*"; and "whoever wishes to work in magic must know and know the property of his own soul, its virtue, measure, order and degree in the power of the universe itself" (*De Occ. Ph.* I, 57); and when, for example, the magician makes invocations by means of speech, he does no more than operate by means of the very forces of nature, "for the various parts of the world naturally attract each other and react reciprocally on each other, and the magician, by invoking by means of speech works by means of the apt forces of nature, leading certain things by the love of one to the other, or attracting them because of the succession of one thing with the other, or repelling them because of the antipathy of one thing with the other, following the contrariety, and difference of things and the multitude of virtues" (*De Occ. Ph.* II, 60).

Agrippa states that such operations do not differ substantially from other much more common operations that no one is surprised by, and compares their effect to the magical and enthralling action of music and eloquence, and to the persuasive force of the exhortations of loved ones; but 'the vulgar does not admire this kind of fascination and binding, just as he does not detest them, because they are

common, and instead admires other purely physical ones because he is ignorant of them, and because he is not accustomed to them. For this they deceive themselves who esteem them above nature, or against nature, whereas they come from nature and are made according to nature" (*De Occ. Ph.* II, 60).

It is the integral science of nature, and the miracles that the magician performs are not, like those attributed to saints and founders of certain religions, a violation of the laws of nature, but exactly the opposite: they are the result of the explication of the forces of nature, they are miracles in the etymological sense of the word, that is, simply things worthy of being aimed at, no more prodigious than any other phenomenon. Magic is science, indeed it is the science, both theoretical and practical, of physical and metaphysical, human and superhuman nature, observed and known both externally and internally. The expression substituted for it, "occult philosophy", is not as happy, especially giving the word philosophy its current technical meaning, even further removed from the primitive Pythagorean meaning than it was four centuries ago. In any case, 'occult philosophy' would be the "esoteric" wisdom, the Kabbalah or tradition (taking these two words in their sense of "transmission"), infused by the spirit into the spirit, in a manner therefore not perceptible to men, by an occult and secret ritual.

The theory and practice, doctrine and work, dogma and ritual of this integral science, or occult philosophy, of nature, is divided by Agrippa into three parts, corresponding to a three-part world-view: and the treatise *De Occulta Philosophia* is similarly divided into three books. The three parts into which the world is divided are: the *elemental world*, made up of the four elements, which includes all terrestrial objects and bodies; the *celestial or sidereal world*, i.e. the world of planets and fixed stars, which governs the former; the *intellectual world*, which in turn governs the celestial world and thus also the terrestrial world. Each lower world is dominated and governed by its superior world and receives its influences, so that the creator and sovereign worker communicates his power to the elemental or terrestrial world through the heavens and the stars. One consideration of the utmost importance must be made in this respect, which Agrippa kept silent about: the elements and planets are to be understood as symbols of corresponding occult forces; and in the exact understanding of this lies the "secret key" which Agrippa uses in his writings and letters and which we have dealt with at length ⁽⁷⁶⁾ The knowledge that refers to these three parts of the world correspondingly comes to form three groups, which are: *natural magic* or *physics*, as Agrippa also calls it, which has for its object the forces of physical nature, which studies properties, constitution and appearance of organic and inorganic bodies; what effect of heat is; where the tides, the rainbow, the thunderbolt, comets, gold and iron mines come from, and what the hidden power is that makes the earth tremble; where the different kinds of men and beasts and the virtues of herbs come from. In short, this part of magic has for its object what today forms the subject and object of physics, chemistry and the natural sciences; and the main difference lies, moreover, in its name. The results achieved by modern science in these fields may seem to many to justify a sovereign contempt for the natural magic of the Middle Ages; But, while not wishing to devalue the wisdom of such an appreciation, we must say that this criterion does not seem to us to be the most suitable for understanding the actions and conceptions of the ancient magicians and hermeticists, of the advocates and pioneers of the experimental method, of the rebels against scholasticism and Aristotle, of Roger Bacon, Paracelsus, Agrippa, Cardano, Porta, to whose courageous initiative and action all the good deeds of later scientific achievements can be traced back in definition. It is too easy to make fun of Porta or Agrippa when they relate the legendary recipe for calming an enraged bull, which assures us that it is sufficient to tie the bull to a tree by the tail, or when they retell the story of the *Echineis* or remora fish, so called because it acts as a remora for ships. This is best done by paying attention to their personal observations and reflections, often full of acumen and common sense. In Agrippa, for example, we already find (*De Occ. Ph.* I, 6) precise mention of the phenomenon of the

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Compare, carefully, with second letter to Fr. Aurelius, with our footnote 48, and with what we said towards the end of the last paragraph of Chapter III.

camera obscura, the invention of which is usually attributed to Della Porta; Agrippa demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of certain psychic phenomena that is by no means inferior to the modern theories of suggestion and autosuggestion; and his medical knowledge has been favourably appreciated by Folet, who is a physician, and who, in dealing with the composition of the 'love yarns', says that Agrippa was a distant but direct forerunner of Brown-Sequard. Which, evidently, honours... the Brown-Sequard.

Celestial magic or mathematics, as Agrippa also called it, makes nature itself known in its three dimensions, the movement and orbit of the planets, eclipses and the causes of the seasons. On it depends, one understands, astrology. *Ceremonial magic or theology* teaches us about God, angels, intelligences, demons (a word taken in its primitive, Platonic and Neo-Platonic meaning, and not the Christian one), the soul, thought, religion, sacraments, ceremonies, temples, festivals and mysteries. It deals with faith, miracles, the virtue of words and figures, operations and mysterious characters.

Celestial magic is therefore partly identified with today's mathematical and astronomical sciences. And so the field of study and investigation that is usually recognised today for magic is somewhat narrower than that so wide-ranging of ancient medieval magic. Except that the modern scientific mentality, which is the direct descendant of the observational and experimental mentality of the magicians of yesteryear, relegates ceremonial magic to the ranks of outdated superstitions, among the follies that it is even useless and shameful to deal with, because Science (*with many capital S's*) has now shown its vanity. The Church, for its part, makes ceremonial magic, as Agrippa defines it, the object of cultic practices and a matter of religion, not of science; and, in so doing, it meets with no opposition from the very people who are scandalised when magic declares that it is a matter of science.

We cannot gloss over this very important issue here: the position of magic or esoteric science vis-à-vis science and the profane mentality and religions, especially Christianity. It is too fundamental to be passed over in silence; and we will say a few words here, while referring the reader to our articles in the journals "Athanòr" and "Ignis".

(77) for further developments.

When the phenomena of the terrestrial and celestial world are observed, or experiences are made in this field, the phenomenon or experience must be observed and measured from the outside. The scientist, even if he is an operator, remains with his consciousness outside the experience, and his intervention in it is limited to that of his ordinary senses aided by auxiliary instruments and means. Basically, the scientist remains a mere spectator of the world that is outwardly placed and felt, and makes his science consist in recording and measuring phenomena and in the rational construction of theories to express and explain them. This character of experience and the habitual nature of this attitude have led to the conviction that one cannot and must not proceed in any other way if one wishes to remain on terrain of scientific investigation, which in practice leads to the exclusion of all those experiments in which the experimenter is not reduced, wholly or almost wholly, to the role of mere spectator from the outside, but becomes a participant and at the same time an actor and a spectator. This is particularly the case with ceremonial magic, or theology, and especially with that occult rite, that religious operation, that sacred art, which we have had to deal with so often. In this case, the entire organism the experimenting magician or scientist becomes the field action and experimentation; and the magician is both actor and observer, subject and object of the experience. True religion, experimental theology or ceremonial magic therefore has a clearly experimental, positive character, comparable to that the other two magics, namely "physics" and "mathematics". It is all in knowing how to maintain it by bringing to investigation, experiment, observation and work, that same impersonality, inemotivity, absence of sentimentality

(77) See also our article in the August-September 1924 issue of 'Vita Italiana'. The magazine 'Athanòr' appeared in 1924, 'Ignis' in 1925, both under our editorship.

and devotion, independence of beliefs and schools, which scientists worthy of the name bring to their laboratory experiments. So, far from being a mere medieval superstition superseded by science, magic remains, as Agrippa conceived it, the integral, complete science, which applies the experimental method by extending it to every field, and which obtains positive results in every domain, without limitation of any kind; whereas modern science, which renounces investigating certain fields, so as not to abandon its narrow materialistic criteria and its position as a spectator of the outside world, is but a part of integral science or magic.

Magic, in its three subdivisions of physics, mathematics and theology, thus appeals essentially to experience and is therefore naturally in opposition to modern Western-type religions, which do not confine themselves to the exercise of worship, but claim to intervene in questions of science, appealing to faith and the authority of a revelation, and blissfully deluding themselves that it is possible to deliver the truth in sacred texts and enclose it in formulas, creeds and similar verbal expressions, whose orthodox interpretation, i.e. their own, can be communicated by the brain.

In particular, the clash between the monopolistic pretensions of religion and the Christian Church on the one hand, and the aspiration to free investigation and the use of the experimental method and scientific demonstrations on the other, was bound to happen, as in fact it did and is still happening in the West; And it is easy to see that for various reasons it had to take place first and foremost in the field of physical magic and mathematical magic, because in this case the experimental results, because of their tangibility and ease of communication, are very difficult to oppose, and because, on the other hand, the forced abandonment of its positions had to be less sensitive to religion in this field, and less desperate defence had to be made against the audacity and determination of the assailants. In connection with this fact, it has happened that, as science has developed more and more in the field of physical and mathematical magic, the mental habit has taken root of considering the field of experience as necessarily external to the experimenter's consciousness (although in a certain sense this can never be the case); And while science has increasingly accentuated its profane character, religion, taking advantage of the gratuitous and more polite renunciation, has strengthened in the mentality of the vulgar and also in that of the educated the conception and conviction that it, i.e. the church and the clergy, belongs by right and in fact to it the theoretical and practical treatment of every spiritual and theological subject; So that it is thought today that spiritual subjects and phenomena are legitimately a matter of faith, a matter of religion, and not a matter of science and experimentation.

Such a division and position is, in our opinion, and according to Agrippa, arbitrary and unacceptable. Magic, i.e. science, embraces the three worlds of the universe, and also includes theology, the 'true religion', quite different, says Agrippa, from superstition. The true, holy, divine religion, unlike religions, is therefore nothing other than a science, a sacred science, and those who know it actually have the right to call themselves *priests*, the others belonging to the category of pseudo-priests, of the 'blind leading the blind', called by Dante usurpers and preachers of jokes. This occult philosophy, this secret science, is not transmitted in a body of doctrine, in a system of beliefs and concepts, by means of literature, but is necessarily transmitted occultly, infused from spirit to spirit, by means of a traditional rite; and this is essentially the 'oral' tradition; this is the true and etymological meaning of the word *traditio* as well as of the word *cabala*.

The possibility of a science of the spirit, just as rigorous, cold, experimental and positive as the science of matter and energy, is not even glimpsed by the modern secular western scientific mentality, deaf to all inner perception, and the possibility that the tradition 'oral' of which Agrippa speaks has been perpetuated and even today remains, albeit still necessarily concealed, consequently becomes an absurdity. Yet the intrinsic weakness of western civilisation, its feverish restlessness and the tragic sense of an unbearable emptiness that hangs over it, depend precisely on the complete and universal ignorance of the mere notion of a sacred possibility. Not only does the great mass ignore sacred science; it does not even suspect that

such a science might exist, he does not suspect that above the surface of the earth, or beneath it, there might exist a school of the spirit, a metaphysical laboratory, a truly sacred sanctuary, an *ecclesia* of magicians and initiates where they could turn to experiment and learn and perfect themselves. This is quite different from those churches that impose dogmas on the thirsty for knowledge based on beliefs, viciously securing faith through the authority of revelation and this authority through faith, and assure the thirsty for perfection that the path to asceticism is the path of humility, and recommend, as specifics, renunciation, prayer, fear of God, resignation, languor and waiting for grace to descend from heaven in the form of a small basket.

It would be necessary for one of two things to happen: either science, breaking the restrictions it has imposed on itself, would be able to rise to the inner domain life with experimental methods; or the Christian Church would cease to become rigid and isolate itself in purely fidei-stical, sentimental and cultural positions, and would allow the life-blood of experience and spiritual wisdom to be injected into the parched trunk of formal tradition, reconstituting within it an effective spiritual hierarchy, expert in sacred things. It would be necessary not to indulge in gaudy ceremonies and not to presume to satiate those hungry for 'angel bread' with the swill that passes the convent. This is still theoretically possible; for our part, without undue hope or impatience, we await the opportunity. After all, this is more of interest to the Church than to us, because we may well take another route to Rome. In the meantime, the desertion of secular science and the monopolistic pretensions of the church are countered by the imperturbable attitude of sacred science, of magic, which does not allow itself to be restricted in the field and methods of its own experiments, investigations and knowledge. And we, leaving it to those who find pleasure in it to feed on illusions about the artificial and artificial religious awakening, which, with the Jesuits reigning supreme, is firing off firecrackers in our country, stick to the 'true religion', to the truly universal or Roman Catholic religion, to the 'oral' tradition, to the actual hierarchy that still exists. If this position of ours may seem crazy to the profane eye of those who confuse serious science with illiteracy, sentimentality and charlatanism, which is rampant in the so-called occult field, we can refrain from marvelling and even regretting it, but certainly not, because of the laughter in the mouths of others, change our attitude and convince ourselves that we do not know what we know ⁽⁷⁸⁾.

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The theory of correspondences and the magical virtue of words and signs.

In Agrippa's conception, the division of the universe into three worlds does not detract from its connection and unity, since there is a universal concatenation of all things and relations of affinity or repulsion that bind them to one another and make them react to one another. Both nature and man, both macrocosm and microcosm, are images of God; and the microcosm is related to the macrocosm by virtue of analogical influences and correspondences. Maja, based on this universal correspondence and connection, is also the art of leading man to his "dignification" and perfection; and this is achieved, as we know, by means of occult art (the *ar-*

(78) The present condition of our country in relation to the political situation in Europe and the world would be very favourable to those who would and would know how to use it to lay the foundations of the new universal civilisation from Rome. But the statesman who would undertake this truly Roman enterprise should first of all realise that imperialism of this kind cannot be put at the service of a nominal universalism, which because of its congenital and incurable in-tolerance is not acceptable to the rest of western civilisation and even less so to eastern civilisations. Not tinsel but gold is accepted by all; one must therefore be inspired by the Roman spirits, our own, of Caesar and Dante, and not by the foreign and anti-Roman spirits of Jesus and Saint Ignatius. More we would say, and proudly, if we were not forced, today, to adhere to more measured language than that which, at least formally, Agrippa might have used four centuries ago.

tion of tradition) that constitutes the essence of true religion. Dignification and initiation, says Agrippa (Lib. III, 47), give man the self-knowledge, the immortality, the power, to sanctify and to perform all admirable things, all those operations of magic which he discusses at length in his treatise.

"There is such a bond and such a continuity in nature that every higher virtue, spreading its rays with a congruous and continuous sequence over all the lower things, flows to the lower ones; and the lower ones, through their individual superiors, reach the higher ones. For the inferior things mutually permeate the superior things, so that the influences which come from their head and first cause, go down to the inferior things as through a taut string, of which, touching one end, it immediately trembles all over, so that this touching resonates to the other end, and by moving a lower thing the superior one, to which it responds, also moves, like the strings in a well-tuned guitar" (I, 27).

"Just as in the human body," says Agrippa (I, 60), "one member is set in motion by receiving motion from another, and in an instrument a string set in motion gives motion to another, so when one some part of the world in motion the other parts are also set in motion by receiving the motion transmitted; consequently, knowledge of the gradient of the things that follow is the foundation of every marvellous operation and is necessarily required in order to put into effect the power of attracting the celestial virtues" (I, 60). "In this way, everything can be reduced, from the lower things to the stars, from the stars to their intelligences, and from there anything can be reduced to its archetype in a suitable way; from the series of which all magic and every occult philosophy proceeds" (I, 37).

Had Agrippa lived in our times, he would have been able, in addition to the phenomenon of the harmonic vibration of the chords that give the upper octaves of the fundamental sound emitted by the directly moving string, to give numerous other examples of tuning phenomena, such as the explosive wave, which can lead to formidable explosions. Induction and catalytic phenomena would also have supported his theory. His magic rests on the recognition of a fundamental physical phenomenon, in which numerical relationships and the concepts of Pythagorean philosophy immediately come into play. This observation offers mankind the natural means to correspond with the universe, to reach anywhere and to produce admirable effects everywhere: the word, the verb, and especially singing, is the means at its immediate disposal. The magical character of music and the other arts, in which rhythm, proportion and harmony give expression to the profound laws of proportion and the virtues of numbers, is based on this law of analogy, correspondence and universal sympathy; and Agrippa says (II, 28) that "on this foundation the wise ancients, knowing the different harmonic dispositions of bodies and men, according to the variety of complexions, have not in vain made use of songs and music". *Spells, enchantments*, are done precisely through *chants; evocations and invocations* through the voice. Virgil's *carmen* and Ovid's other carmings, one can see what the magical virtues of the ancient *carmina* were, and one can understand why the poet was also the vate and the magician, and why the French word *charme* is derived from the Latin word *carmen*.

The ancient Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, for magical reasons, attached great importance to the knowledge and exact pronunciation of the 'true' names of the deities, and those of things and men; and it was for this reason that, for example, the Romans kept the true name of Rome hidden. In Egyptian eschatology, it was necessary for the deceased to know the true pronunciation of the sacred names of the deities of the Amenti in order to be able to proceed through the various regions of the underworld, of hell, and finally to reach the fields of Yalu; and the class of Egyptian priests that can be identified with the initiates were the *maa kheru*, the 'just of voice', i.e. those possessed the knowledge of the true and occult names and their exact intonation and pronunciation. For the same reason, it is likely that the Eleusinian mysteries were held under the jurisdiction of the 'eumol- pids', the descendants of Eumolpus, the 'good singer', who, according to tradition, introduced these mysteries to Attica; and the function and importance of *mantrams* in Indo-Dyan magic need hardly be mentioned.

The mere sound vibration, the mere utterance of the word is not sufficient in magic, however, because the verb, the λόγος, not only signifies the word but also expresses the 'logical' capacity of thought. "For," says Agrippa (I, 69), "the verb is twofold, that is, internal and uttered". The extrinsecular and vocal verb is the manifestation of the intrinsic verb, but "all our voice, word, and speech (III, 36), if it is not formed by the voice of god, is mingled in the air and dispersed; but the breath and the verb of god persist with the sense and life that accompany them. Consequently, all our speeches, all our words, all the breaths of our mouths, and all our voices have no virtue in magic, except in so far as they are formed by the divine voice'. It follows that it is perfectly useless to insist on pronouncing with the most cavernous voice of this and that world the magic formulas of the *grires*, if at the same time one does not know how to pronounce the sacred names internally; and therefore the first thing one must do, before embarking on this kind of ceremonial magic operation, is to make these divine and occult sounds vibrate within oneself, "because the first thing in which nature exercises magic is the voice god. But this," Agrippa adds (I, 74), "is too deep a speculation to be dealt with in this book".

In fact and the meantime, it is evidently impossible to express in word or writing in what co-know what these inner sounds and vibrations consist of; and their communication can only be achieved by magic, making possible (through 'ritual') the manifestation within our organism of these spiritual sounds. These inner words, then, are also produced in the work of regeneration: "Thus our words can produce many miracles, if they are formed by the word of god, and by means of them our univocal generation is also accomplished" (III, 36); that is, the conception by means of which the mind (the *mens*, i.e. the supreme part of the human soul, according to Agrippa's classification of the constituent elements of the human organism) conceives itself, i.e. the intrinsic word generated by the mind, i.e. self-knowledge, is accomplished (III, 36). "In this univocal generation the son is similar to the father all manners, and the begotten according to species is the same as the begetter, and this generation is the power of the verb formed by the *mens*, a verb well received in a subject arranged by ritual, like a seed in a matrix generation and birth; now I say well arranged and ritually received because all things do not participate in the verb in the same way, but one in one way and the other in another. And these are very hidden secrets of nature, of which nothing else is to be spoken in public" (III, 36).

This is spiritual generation, which takes place through assimilation, identification or identification of the begotten and the begetter. It is what in *Pimander* is called indiamiento, and which Dante expressed with the voices: *immiarsi, intuarsi, illuiarsi, indiarsi*. In Hermeticism, this is the 'magisterium of the Sun', in which mercury, by amalgamating, is converted into gold. And, if we are not mistaken, this is the 'genetliac dignification' that Agrippa speaks of in his letter to Father Aurelius, which characterises the second of the three classes of initiates that Agrippa distinguishes. And, since it is indispensable to possess the inner verb in order to proceed with magical operations, and since this intrinsic verb is obtained univocal generation, it follows that the keystone of the whole spiritual and magical edifice is to be found in that rite by means of which this regeneration is accomplished. It is the famous key that Agrippa kept for himself and his close friends.

Having completed this univocal generation, the sacred words acquire all their power. "The sacred words do not, therefore, have their power in themselves, as words, but they have it through the occult power of the gods, which works through their virtue in the spirits of those who adhere to them faith, in whom the occult virtue of God is transferred through these names, as through vehicles, as by means of vehicles, is transferred, having purified by faith their ears to hear, and having become the temple and dwelling-place of God by means of divine invocations and great purity of morals, and being able to receive the influence of these divine beings. Whoever, therefore, practices, according to the rite, these divine words or names with that purity of mind, in that way, with that law with which they are traditionally handed down, will do as many marvellous deeds as those we read about Medea, who knew how to induce peaceful sleep, calm the storms of the sea and stem the flow of rivers" (III, 11).

Another important theory of magic, the theory "signatures" and "magical characters", based on the properties of vibrations, especially sound vibrations. It is known, in part, what aggregating and disintegrating power physical radiation possesses. Leaving aside the radioactive properties and remaining in the field of acoustics, it is known how it is possible, by emitting with adequate intensity a certain musical note, to shatter glass objects that respond to that particular note ⁽⁷⁹⁾, and it is known how, by filling tubes or cylinders with vapour, it is possible, by vibrating these plates and cylinders with sound, to make the dust and vapour, above and within respectively arranged, assume regular geometric configurations that vary with the variation of the sound. There is therefore a natural relationship between the pitch of a sound and these certain configurations; and this relationship between the verb and the form, between the number and the matter, is the one that lies at the basis of the theory of signatures and magical characters, which Agrippa deals with in particular in chapter 33 of Book I. This is the basis for the function of 'symbols', which, as the name implies, is to connect, to bring together.

The question of signatures is thus also connected to the concepts of the geometrical philosophy of the Pythagoreans; and similarly, the question of sacred names is related to the Kabbalistic philosophy, based on the function that the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet have in the Kabbalistic tradition. Agrippa, who knew the Pythagorean and Hermetic tradition as well as the Hebrew language and literature and the Kabbalistic tradition very well, gives in his book an extensive treatment of all these topics: Pythagorean arithmetics, music, the magical operations related to them, astrology and other divinatory methods, signatures and characters and the various forms of writing.

Corresponding to all these numerical and harmonic properties and virtues of nature are the faculties and virtues of man, by means of which the microcosm stands in relation to the macrocosm; and we have already seen the function that the inner voice perceived and vibrating in the magician has, as much in univocal generation as in magical operations.

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Human transience and initiatory stability

Agrippa deals at length in the third book of the *Occult Philosophy* with the constitution of man and his future after the death of the body; but his exposition is rather obscure and farcical. The subject was important enough, and its conceptions bold and independent enough, to attract the attention and hostility of the theologians, who, fiercely at war with Agrippa, were on edge and wanted nothing better than to bring the one who had vanquished and mocked them before the court of the Inquisition under the charge of magic and heresy. Agrippa, a master of cunning, cheated them out of their cards, ruffling their exposition, systematically resorting to amphibology, rehashing the various and discordant opinions of the various philosophers, and having the air of not taking sides among them. He then gave them the bay, asserting left and right that they were theologians, incapable understanding his writings.

The reader should not be surprised, therefore, if the exposition is not as clear as would be desirable; and, as we do not want to be told that we make Agrippa say what he did not mean, we will quote the most important passages in this respect, suitably ordering them and giving the reader the opportunity to verify the accuracy of what we say.

According to Agrippa, man was created in the likeness of God, and just as there is a divine trinity in the macrocosm, so there is a human trinity in the microcosm (III, 36). He follows Mercury in this

⁽⁷⁹⁾In the year 1913, in Florence, at our sudden and unforeseeable request, an initiate, using only his inner voice, suddenly smashed an ordinary glass, situated at a distance of about two metres above a table in a public place, perfectly in view and in such a condition as to exclude any possibility of trickery. This confirms Agrippa's judgement on the relative importance of the two voices, external and internal.

Trismegistus, who, according to Agrippa, says that "man made in the image of god represents the trinity itself, because he possesses within himself an intelligent mind, a life-giving verb, and a spirit resembling a divine thunderbolt that spreads through everything, filling, moving and connecting things" (III, 36). (III, 36). This spirit is reasonable, and in some way it has a body; not that it has a gross body, however, but it has a very subtle body, and that it can unite well with the *mens*, that is, with the higher and divine part that is in us. And Agrippa adds (III, 36) that we should not be surprised if he says that the rational soul is spirit and something corporeal, that is to say, that it has and tastes something corporeal as long as it is in the body and uses it as an instrument, as long as we understand well what the Platonists call this corpuscle of the soul that serves as a vehicle for it.

This human spiritual trinity, namely 'the human soul is composed of the mind, *mens*, the reason, *ratio*, and the eidolon, *idolum*. The mind enlightens, reason flows into the *eidolon*, and all three constitute but one soul. Reason if not illuminated by the mind is not immune to error. But mind offers no light to reason unless god illuminates it, as the first light; for in god is the first light that appears above all intellect, and for this reason it cannot be called intelligible light. But when this light is infused into the mind, it becomes intellectual and can be intellectually grasped; then when through the mind it is infused into reason, it becomes rational, and can not only be intellectually grasped, but can be cogitated. Then, when through reason it is infused into the *eidolon* of the soul, it becomes not only cogitable but also imaginable, without nevertheless being corporeal. But when it migrates from there into the ethereal vehicle of the soul, it becomes bodily for the first time, not yet otherwise manifestly perceptible, until it has passed into the elemental body, either in the simple, aerial body or in the compound body, where this light becomes manifestly visible to the eye" (III, 43).

We therefore have a *soul*, an *ethereal vehicle* of the soul, and a *body*. The soul, although a unit, is composed of three parts: the *mens*, the *ratio* and the *idolum*; the body is divided into two parts, the aerial elemental body and the compound elemental body. The divine light that illuminates the *mens* descends down this ladder, and thus we have the intellect in the *mens*, reason in the *ratio*, and the imaginative faculty in the *eidolon*; as it descends further, it acquires a corporeal character, and in the human body of flesh it even becomes visible to the eye. "The mind, the *mens*, is above fate in providence, and therefore is not affected by the influences of the heavenly bodies, nor by the qualities of natural things...; but the *eidolon* of the soul is in fate, above nature, which is in some sense the knot of soul and body, below fate, above the body, and for this reason the *eidolon* undergoes changes due to the influences of the heavenly bodies, and the qualities of natural and corporeal things. I call the *eidolon* of the soul this power that enlivens and governs the body, which is the origin of the senses, by means of which the soul itself exerts powers of senses in this body; it feels corporeal things by means of the body, moves the body in space, governs it in space, and nourishes it in torpor. Two very powerful virtues dominate in this *eidolon*: "the first is called the imagination, or imaginative or cogitative force... the other is called the sense of nature, which we spoke of in the chapter on the haruspices. Man, therefore, by the nature of the body is subject to fate; man's soul, by means of its *eidolon*, moves nature into fate, but by means of the mind it is above fate in the order of providence; reason then is free by its own right. The soul, therefore, by means of reason, descends to the mind where it is filled with divine light; sometimes it descends to its *eidolon*, where it is affected by the influences of the heavenly bodies and the qualities of natural things and is distracted by the passions and the occurrences of sensible objects; sometimes it withdraws wholly into reason, either by investigating other things through argument or by contemplating itself. For it is possible for the rational part of the soul, which the Peripatetics call the possible intellect, to reach the point of being able to discourse and operate freely, without needing to have recourse to the workings of the imagination" (III, 43). The sense of nature that is one of the two powerful virtues dominant in the *eidolon* is the sense of perceiving and divining, the universal receptive sensibility; fantasy is the projective and shaping faculty of imagination.

"The mind man (III, 41), whose nature is holy and whose kind is divine, because it never commits error, is free from all punishment. As for the soul, if it has done well, it partakes of the joy of mind, and leaving the body in its ethereal vehicle it transcends freely to the chorus of heroes, or goes to the gods

supreme. There rendered blissful, by perpetual happiness in all its senses and powers, perfect in the knowledge of all things, it enjoys divine vision and possession of the kingdom of heaven, and partaking of the divine power it bestows these benefits and various gifts in the lower regions like an immortal god. But, if it has done wrong, the mind judges it, and abandons it to the will of the demon, and the poor soul, without the mind, wanders lost in the hells in the form of an *eidolon*, which is given the name of imagine (*imago*)".

This is the esoteric doctrine of the conditional immortality of the human soul. Agrippa draws his inspiration mainly from the Neo-Platonic and hermetic doctrines of *Pimander* and *Asclepius*, as well as the rabbinic tradition; but this doctrine is the universal doctrine of esotericism found in the Pythagorean tradition, Orphism, the mysteries, hermeticism, and the oriental traditions. "The human soul," writes Agrippa (III, 37), "according to the doctrine of the Platonists, proceeding immediately from God, unites itself through suitable intermediaries to this more crashed body; to this end, in its very descent, it is clothed with a celestial and aerial corpuscle, which some call the ethereal vehicle of the soul, others the chariot of the soul. By means of this little body, by the command of God, who is the centre of the world, it first infuses itself into the midpoint of the heart, which is the centre of the human body, and from there it spreads itself through all the parts and all the members of the human body; which it does by joining its chariot to the natural heat, by means of the heat of the spirit generated by the heart; by means of this heat it immerses itself in the humours; by which it adheres to the members, and approaches all of them equally, even as it transfuses itself from one to another: in the same way as the heat of fire adheres closely to air and water, though carrying itself towards water through the air. Thus it is manifest how immortal soul, by means of the immortal corpuscle, that is, the ethereal vehicle, is enclosed in the gross and mortal body. But when by sickness or disease ... the man dies, the soul flies away with this ethereal vehicle, and when it has left the body, the guardian genii and demons follow it and bring it before its judge, where, once the sentence has been pronounced, God quietly leads the good souls to glory, and the violent demon drags the bad ones to ejection. We have seen elsewhere that this judgment is pronounced by the *mens rea* itself.

Agrippa reports the distinction Hermes makes between the world and man: world is for Hermes a reasonable and immortal animal, man is reasonable but mortal; is, he says, corruptible; that is, we say, such that he can undergo corruption. "For (III, 36), as Hermes says, since the world is immortal, it is impossible for any of its parts to perish, and the word death is vain. And as emptiness, so death, is nowhere to be found. Therefore we do not say that, when the soul and the body of man separate, anything of either of them perishes or returns to the void. This same argument can evidently also be made with regard to beasts and anything else; the survival of the human soul can thus be compared to that of the molecules and cells of his body; and man is a mortal being in so far as various possibilities present themselves to him at the death of the body. In all cases, however, there is the supreme part of co-science, usually not even perceived by man, which does not undergo variation and disintegration. "The mind, this elevated part (III, 36), is never damned, but leaving its associates to their punishment, it returns unharmed to its origin. As for the spirit that Plotinus calls the rational soul, being free by nature, it can adhere to one or the other at will; if it constantly adheres to the higher part, it eventually unites and is beatified with it until it is taken up into god; if it adheres to the lower soul, it becomes depraved and demeritised, until it becomes an evil demon.

As for the passions, memories, sensations, they remain with the soul after it has separated from the body (III, 41).

The eschatological initiatory doctrine is expounded by Agrippa in his third book, from chap. 35.° to 44.°. This last chapter, which summarises the essential traits scattered artfully and with confusion in the others, is very important: "The mind, since it comes from god, that is, from the intelligible world, is immortal and eternal, the celestial reason is long-lived because of the benefit of its origin coming from heaven; but the *eidolon*, which comes out of the womb of matter and depends on sublunar nature, is subject to death and corruption. The soul therefore is immortal by its mind, long-lived by reason in its vehicle

It is therefore not immortal without union with the immortal mind; in the same way, the *eidolon* of the soul, that is to say, the sensitive and animal soul, being drawn from the womb of matter, perishes together with the body when the latter is resolved, or remains, as a shadow, not long in the vapours of its dissolved body, and does not participate at all in immortality, unless it too is united with the most sublime power. This soul, therefore, which is united with the mind is called the stable and unfallen soul (*stans ac non cadens*); but not all men have attained to the mind (*mentem adepti sunt*), because, as Hermes says, God the father has willed to propose it as the certame and reward of souls; and those who neglect this, deprived of the mind, enslaved to the bodily senses, made like unreasoning animals, have the same kind of death, as Ecclesiastes says, in these terms: The death of man and the death of animals is the same, and the condition is the same on both sides; as man dies so do they die. They all breathe in the same way and man has nothing more than the beast. That is what Ecclesiastes says. It is for this reason that most theologians hold that species of souls is not at all immortal after death, and that they have no other hope than that of the resurrection, which will restore all men.

Agrippa was well aware that most theologians follow a doctrine, which does not exactly conform to this passage from Ecclesiastes, but he also knew that by throwing the categorical Old Testament sentence at their feet he was giving them a hard time, and putting a fine barrier between himself and his enemies in defence. To accept his assertion, it would have to be assumed, as indeed is far from being excluded, that he is playing with the meaning of the word "theologians" here, meaning by theologians the followers of ceremonial magic or "theology", and reserving for those others the designation of "theologastri". That he followed the traditional doctrine of the ancient magicians, he himself explicitly tells us at the end of the same chapter, with which he closes his treatment of the subject.

"Finally, it should be known that every noble soul has four kinds of operations: one divine because of the image of the divine property; the second intellectual because of the formality of its participation with the intelligences; the third rational because of the property of its own essentiality; and the fourth animal or natural because of the communion it has with the body and with the things here below; So that in the whole of world there is no work so admirable, so excellent, so wondrous that the human soul, having in its entirety the image of divinity, called by the magicians a standing and not a falling soul, cannot do by its own virtue and without any external administration. The form therefore of all magical virtue comes from this soul of man, standing and not falling" (III, 44).

If Agrippa returns with such insistence not only to the concept, but also to the technical expression, of the "standing and not falling soul", the reason lies precisely in the fact that this was precisely the traditional technical expression used since ancient times. In the "Sermon on the Rebirth and Profession of Silence on the Mountain", contained in *Pimander* (*), the disciple Tatius says this master Hermes (Thot): "Fortified by God, O father, I contemplate not with the eyes, but with the intellectual energy of the powers". The Greek text says: "Ἀκλινῆς γενόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὧ πάτερ... that is: Made by God stable, ἀκλινῆς not falling; a term which Ficino translates with *indeclivus*, and Francesco Patrizi with *stabilis a Deo factus* ⁽⁸⁰⁾ And this term, which is the one used in the late texts Alexandrian Hermeticism (**) , corresponds perfectly, both in application and

(*) In today's editions of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the title *Pimander* is assigned to treatise I alone. The one Reghini refers to is treatise XIII, called the *Secret Discourse on the Mountain on Regeneration and on the Re-Gorge of Silence* (Ed.).

⁸⁰ Cf. *Il Pimandro*; ed. Athanor, 1924, p. 84; cf. *Hermetis Trismegisti Poemander*, ed. critica di Berlino, 1854, p. 121; and cf. *Hermetis Trismegisti libelli integri XX... a Francisco Patricio... de graecis latini redacti* - Ferrara 1591, p. 16.

(**) Festugière (in *Corpus Hermeticum*, tome II, *Traité XIII-XVIII...*, texte établi par A. D. Nock et traduit par A. Festugière, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1973, p. 205) translates ἀκλινῆς γενόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ as *devenu inébranlable de par Dieu*, rendered - in the Italian ed. of the same critical text (*Corpus Hermeticum*, edition and commentary by A.D.

in the etymological structure to the term without comparison older *sahu*, which designates precisely the body by means of which the deceased conquered and secured immortality and bliss. In fact, *aha* in the ancient Egyptian language means to stand on, to face, and as the prefix *s* is used in this language to form causative verbs, so *saha* means to make stand on, to place on, to erect, to raise, to place⁽⁸¹⁾. In the ancient Egyptians, the dead was also called *kherit*, i.e. he who has fallen; and it was only through the *sahu*, the body that stands, formed through ritual ceremonies and the sacred words pronounced by Thot Hermes, that immortality was made possible. It should be noted that the name *Tat* of the interlocutor in the dialogue, who claims to have become stable thanks to god, is nothing other than the exact Greek transcription of the Egyptian voice *Tat*, a word that "means *stability, duration*, and is especially used to indicate *divine rest*, the state of *perfect stability* (the soul's final goal); thus in chapter 1.^o of the Book of the Dead we read: "I am *Tat* (i.e. eternal), son of *Tat* (the eternal), I am conceived in *Tatu* (in- eternity)"⁽⁸²⁾; and the hieroglyphic pronounced *Tat* is the nilometre, i.e. the tamarisk trunk on which tradition said the remains of Osiris' corpse had come to rest before his resurrection. In the Greek language, even before Christianity, the verb ἀν-ίστημι and the word ἀνά-στασις, both of which etymologically mean the same thing as the Egyptian *saha*, are used by Herodotus and since Homer in the sense of rising from the dead. Christianity consequently adapted the word ἀνά-στασις to its conception of resurrection, a conception which from the primitive resurrection ἐκ νεκρῶν taught by Jesus, John and Paul went, through the influence of the popular Jewish conception of resurrection, gradually transformed into the gross, profane and religiously orthodox conception of the resurrection of the flesh (τῆς σαρκός)⁽⁸³⁾. The symbolism of medieval hermeticism, for example in Basil Valentine, and the Masonic symbolism also corresponds to this technical and traditional allegorical language whereby human *fallenness* is contrasted and transformed into initiatory *stability*.

Agrippa therefore actually followed the doctrine of the magicians and used their terminology. He also brings back the rabbinic tradition of the resurrection bone, without, however, mentioning whether it is to be understood literally or not. "In the human body, says Agrippa (I, 20), there is a certain minimal bone, which the Jews call *luz*, about the size of a hulled chickpea, which is not subject to any corruption, which is not conquered by fire, but is always preserved unharmed, from which (as they say) like a plant from a seed in the resurrection of the dead our human body springs up again, and these virtues are not declared by reasoning but by experience".

In Aramaic, *luz* is actually the name of the coccyx, that is, the cone-shaped bone, consisting of three or four small bones, and attached to the lower end of the 'sacrum', which lies at the bottom and serves as the base of the spinal column. The legend made this indestructible corpuscle the core of the resurrection of the flesh. This legend of the "resurrection bone", in relation to the passage in Psalms that says: *unum ex illis (ossibus) non confringetur*, accepted as an axiomatic truth by Mohammedan and Christian theologians and anatomists alike, was also accepted by Averrès; and the bone *luz* was also called the "Jewish bone". But *luz* in Hebrew has other various meanings: indi-

Nock and A.-J. Festugière..., edited by Ilaria Ramelli, Bompiani, Milan, 2005, p. 385) - as *having become firmly established by God*. Festugière dedicated a juicy gloss to the word ἀκλινής (*ibidem*, p. 214, n. 51; p. 399 of the Italian edition), which is worth transcribing: "[ἀκλινής = "stable, en repos", implique à la fois ἀνάπαυσις, ἰδρυσις, στάσις. Terme mystique exprimant la stabilité de l'homme parfait, régénééré. Cf. Philon, *Qu. in Exod.* II 96 (*immutabilitas*) ; *de gigant*, 12, 54 (γνώμη ἀκλινής qui fait que Moïse est édifié, ἰδρυσάμενος, en Dieu) ; *ibid.* II, 49 : στάσις τε καὶ ἡρεμία ἀκλινής ἢ παρὰ τὸν ἀκλινῶς ἐστὸτα αἰεὶ θεόν (II, p. 51, 20 Cohn) ; *Qu. in Exod.* II (II 669, Mangey) : πέρας εὐδαιμονίας τὸ ἀκλινῶς καὶ ἀρρεπῶς ἐν μόνῳ θεῷ στήναι. Voir aussi les commentaires sur *Exod.* 24, 12 : καὶ εἴτε κύριος πρὸς Μωϋσῆν- Ἀνάβηθι πρὸς μὲ εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ, en particulier Philon, *Qu. in Exod.* II 40. H.C.P.J. Plotin parle de l'ἀκλινής νοῦς, II 9, 2, 3 : ἓνα νοῦν τὸν αὐτὸν ὡσαύτως ἔχοντα, ἀκλινῇ πανταχῇ, μμούμενον τὸν πατέρα καθ' ὅσον οἶόν τε αὐτῷ. Voir aussi Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius*, Sitzb. Heidelb. Ak., 1914, 8, p. 15, *Hist. Monach.*, p. 105, no. 2'. (Ed.).

(81) See Simone Levi's *Coptic-Geroglyphic Vocabulary* - Turin, 1887, p. 296. In Coptic, correspondingly *ohi* means to *stand*, and *uahemsoni* meaning *παλιγγενεσία* is formed from *ohi* as ἀνά-στασις, the resurrection, from στάσις; cf. Peyron Am., *Lexicon Linguae Copticae*, 1835, pp. 161-162.

(82) Francesco Rossi: *Grammatica copto-geroglyphica* - Turin, 1878, page 278.

(83) Cf. Arturo Reghini: *Le parole sacre e di passo ed il massimo mistero massonico* - Todi, 1922.

It is also the name of a city in the land of the Hittites about which a Talmudic legend says: 'the angel of death had no power over it; outside its walls are placed the old people who are tired of life and meet death there'.

The Pentateuch (Gen. XXVIII) relates that the city of Bethel (house of God) was originally named Luz. It was at this town that Jacob had the famous dream of the "Jacob's Ladder", by which angels ascended and descended as the divine virtues ascend and descend by the ladder of magical correspondences. When Jacob woke up, he said: 'Truly the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it,' and in fright: 'How terrible is this place! It is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven'. And rising up in the morning, he took the stone that he had put under his head, and he made it into a monument, and spread oil upon it, and called by the name of Bethel the city that was formerly called Luz; and by the same name of Bethel he called the stone that was made into a monument (Gen. XXVIII, 16-22).

It is also said that in front of the entrance to a cave that was close to Luz was an almond tree with a hole in its trunk; through this hole one entered the cave and found the way to the city, which was completely hidden ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

The allegory of these legends is quite transparent, and is confirmed by the figure of a talismanic teraphim, reported by Vulliaud ⁽⁸⁵⁾, which between the two eyes and a little upwards bears the Hebrew word *luz* written on it, precisely at the point where Shiva's frontal eye is located and where certain ancient images of Avalokiteshvara bear a kind of chickpea.

Guénon, rightly criticising Vulliaud ⁽⁸⁶⁾, observes how this position of the word *luz* in the teraphim should be related to its esoteric meaning. And since it is very probable that Agrippa was perfectly aware of much of what we have reported, it can also be assumed that he understood its esoteric meaning. Otherwise, to say that the virtues of the osso *luz* are declared by experience would be a turlupinature. It was just not the case that such a sensitive part as that of the 'sacred bone' should have been struck at by the doctors of sacred things, who are prevalent in the universities and the courts, and certainly not too willing to give up the comfortable and consoling doctrine of resurrection of bodies. Which, as we can see, rests on a rather delicate point... of theology.

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Dignification.

The possibilities of attaining *virtus*, *immortalitas*, and *sapientia*, i.e. magical power, transmutation of the transient soul into a stable soul, and actual knowledge, are closely connected with each other and all three depend on that "univocal generation" or generation of knowledge, of the one in man, which in turn is brought about by special and occult magical practices. This operation therefore deserves the technical name of "great work", by which it is referred to in the Hermetic and Masonic traditions; its importance cannot be exaggerated in any way, and Agrippa shows that he knows what he is talking about when he repeatedly affirms that in it lies the key *totius negotii*.

We have seen that on this point, so essential and fundamental in doctrine and ritual, Agrippa keeps himself very reserved, both in his writings and in his letters to his friends, so as draw himself ad-

(84) Cf. *the Jewish Encyclopaedia*, VIII, 219.

(85) Cf. Paul Vulliaud: *La Kabbale Juive*, 1923, vol. II.°, 49.

(86) Cf. René Guénon: *The Jewish Kabbalah*, in "Ignis"; April-May 1925, p. 113. - Cf. also: René Guénon: *L'homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, 1925, p. 203.

Avalokiteshvara (the lord who sees into the deep) is the name of a Bodhi Satwa, worshipped by the Buddhists of the North. In Hesiod's cosmogony, the Cyclopes, sons of Uranus and Gaia, have only one eye, while the Cyclopes who help Vulcan in his workshop have three. The third and only eye, in the middle of the forehead, has *cyclic* or Cyclopean vision.

And this reserve is not simply the result of his obedience to the recommendations of Abbot Trithemius, nor of the prudence required to avoid the claws of the holy inquisition, but rather depends on the fact that the transmission of these mysteries can only take place by infusion from spirit into spirit. This is the *traditio*, since every doctrinal transmission, if not based on, accompanied by, and received with the escort of the spiritual *traditio*, is in danger of becoming a betrayal.

"The arcane, necessary, and secret thing," says Agrippa (III, 3) to anyone who wants to work in the art of magic, and which is the beginning, the complement, and the key to all the operations of magic, "is the dignification man to this high virtue and power". For miraculous things can only be worked by the intellect, which is in us, the most sovereign intelligence of the soul; "for (III, 3) we who aspire to this high dignity must think of two things: how we are to detach ourselves from the affections of the flesh, from the mortal sense, and from the passions of matter and body; and the other, by which way we are to rise to this pure intellect, united with the virtues of the gods, without which we can never happily attain to the knowledge of secret things and the virtues of miraculous operations. All dignification consists in these two points'.

These are the two goals to be achieved, one after the other, as the first is but the prelude to the second. The first operation consists in the solution, in the loosening of the bonds by which the consciousness feels bound to the body, in the liberation from the material and mortal sense; the second consists in the attainment of stability, fixation or coagulation and union and unification with the pure intellect. The first part is the catharsis, the purification, the hermetic rectification, the digrification of the rough stone in Freemasonry; the second, is the initiation, the finding of the philosophical occult stone in Hermeticism, the formation of the cubic stone of the masonry mastery ⁽⁸⁷⁾. These two points of dignification are given, according to Agrippa, by nature, merit and a certain religious art (III, 3); and religion and wisdom teach us how to purify our minds and restore them to their divine purity (III, 53).

Agrippa follows, or rather agrees in this argument with the Neo-Platonic and Hermetic writers, referring back to them at times, even explicitly. "As god knows all things, so too man can know all that is knowable, having in common with the adequate object the essence, or, as others say, the true itself. There is nothing in man nor any disposition in which some spark of truth does not shine; and there is nothing in god that is not also represented in man. Consequently, whoever knowledge himself will know the world of which he is the simulacrum.... Now, when man is united with god, everything in man is united with him, first of all the mind, then the spirit and the animal forces, the vegetative virtues and the elements, right down to matter, which also takes with it the body in which the form has subsistence, leading it to a better destiny and a heavenly nature, until it is glorified in immortality.

Agrippa makes, if we are not mistaken, a somewhat veiled allusion to the various gradations of asceticism and ascension up to that of glorification achieved in full bodily life with survival, not only of the soul, stabilised and unified, but also of the body. This is the case with Enoch, Moses and Elijah in the Jewish tradition, Romulus and Apollonius in the pagan tradition and Flamel in the hermetic tradition ⁽⁸⁸⁾.

Purification is absolutely necessary and can only be accomplished gradually. "He who ignores the purification of the soul will not be able to understand divine things. One must come step by step and as if by ascending from step to step to this purity of soul; for one who has not been initiated into these mysteries does not at once clearly comprehend all things, but one must accustom the soul little by little until the understanding prevails in us, and that by applying oneself to the divine, one may understand all things.

(87) For reasons of analogy and correspondence, the reference of technical and traditional terms lends itself to a certain variability. It may be assumed, for example, that the operation begins after the purification is complete; then two phases can still be distinguished, the first of which is more accurately entitled to the hermetic precept of *solve et coagula*, and the second of which is more accurately entitled to the name of *magisterium of the sun*.

(88) Cagliostro's ritual deals extensively with these two 'perfections': the 'moral' and the 'physical'. See in *proposito* our articles on Cagliostro and his "initiatory Lent" in "Ignis" (1925).

divine light is mixed with it' (III, 53). And a little further on he adds: 'The spirit is purged and expiated by means of purityabstinence, penance, almsgiving; and certain sacred institutions also bestow upon it... because the soul must be healed by means of religions, studies and cults for the vulgar, so that, restored to health, confirmed by the truth, and equipped with divine garrisons, it does not fear the shocks to come' (III, 53).

At the end of the 55th chapter of Book III, Agrippa summarises "how to separate our soul from animal life, and from every multitude, and erect it until it ascends to the same one, good, true, beautiful, for the individual degrees of both knowable things and cognitions", and refers for further discussion to Proclus in his *Commentaries on Alcibiades* ⁽⁸⁹⁾. We are not going to quote the entire passage, but we do not want to give up quoting these few lines:

"We must leave behind all multiform, distracting, and fallacious knowledge in order to attain to the simplest truth. Hence we must leave behind the multitude of affections, senses, imaginations, and opinions, which are as diverse from one another as others are contrary to others at will, and we must ascend to the sciences, in which it is permissible for there to be a manifold variety, but no contradiction. For all the sciences are mutually connected, and one helps the other by subordinating itself to it, until one science presupposes all of them and is presupposed by none, to which all the others must be referred. And yet this is not the summit of knowledge, but above it is the pure intellect.

This propaedeutics in the Neo-Platonists and in Agrippa is not inspired by moral or devotional reasons. They are reasons of a magical, technical order, advising detachment from the affections of the flesh, from the senses, from imaginations, opinions and sciences. It would indeed be absurd to recommend liberation from all imagination, opinion and science, and to base this prescription and proscription on belief, prejudice and sentiment; it can only be based on the technical necessities recognised by experience. On the contrary, it is necessary to carefully purge oneself of all opinions, beliefs and imaginations; and to accustom oneself, at the outset, to be serenely aware of the limitation, at least *pro tempore*, of our direct perception and experience.

Detaching oneself from affection means overcoming all sentimentality, and therefore a false path is trodden when one relies on the adoration of fetishes constructed by faith and sentiment and believes one can get who knows where by exasperating affection. The path to be followed is the *via virtutis*; but the word virtue is to be understood in the sense recognised by Agrippa, i.e. in its original, classy, pagan, Roman meaning, an meaning for which the word *virtus* is etymologically related and connected to the voices *vir* and *vires*. In the transition from its ancient meaning to the Christian and modern meaning, the word *virus* has indeed undergone a deformation that corresponds more or less to the deformation of the word *luz*, which, from its traditionally correct frontal position in the talismanic teraphim, has been transformed into a function and location too profane for a sacred bone.

When Agrippa speaks of the dulling of the senses and the tranquillity of mind that is needed in order to attain the essential contact with the divinity, he is not engaging in moral or theoretical speculation. He simply and briefly indicates what technically or, as he says, ritually must be done. The preceding and preliminary catharsis makes this phase of the 'great work' less uncomfortable and less dangerous; the soothing of the senses is not so easily achieved either. If it is enough for sight to proceed peacefully in the dark with eyes closed, it is quite different for hearing, since it is not advisable to resort to artificial means to prevent the ears from hearing noises. And on the other hand, it is not easy, especially if one is obliged to live in a big city and possesses no other riches than spiritual ones, to have a quiet and peaceful place. With the fever of speed, the raging traffic and the eagerness to make noise that rages in our times, the poor apprentice, who is about to dull his senses, is in for a treat! As soon as a little inner recollection begins, the conspiracy of the noise-makers is unleashed

(89) Cf. this ch. 55 with the chapter entitled: 'Many degrees, by which we ascend from the multitude to the one', in Proclus, *De Anima et daemone*.

against him: the sirens of industrial plants, the bursting engines of trucks, the furious flapping of housewives' clothes, the ringing of the telephone, the loudspeaker, the gramophone, and the devil take them. When one thinks of the disturbance that such noises can cause even to those who simply have to absorb themselves in cerebral work, such as calculating or composing, one will understand how overcoming the initial difficulties and arriving at the point where one can dull one's senses and abstract oneself as well as one could do by living comfortably in a hermitage presents some difficulties.

Once the senses have been dulled, mental tranquillity must be attained; and even here the difficulties are different for those who can live blissfully, savouring *the otium religiosorum*, and for those who must, whether they want to or not, participate in the struggles and work of life, and are therefore obliged to attend to, if not pre-attend to, a number of tasks and annoyances. Thoughts aroused in this way come to the surface insistently when, the senses having been dulled, one tries mental silence; an inner condition from which one then takes the steps to ascend step by step, to open one door after another until one ascends and enters the sanctuary and reaches what Giamblicus, Agrippa, Campanella, etc., call the intrinsic contact with divinity.

It is therefore necessary to will, very strongly will, to will untiringly; and, by overcoming the initial external difficulties, one can absorbed in the practice of the spiritual exercises even in conditions that would seem to be designed to make all abstraction impossible. The function of the will is thus a function of the first order in the accomplishment of the "great work", and Agrippa, in Chapter 28 of Book II.^o, entitled: On the Composition and Harmony of the Soul of Man, rightly makes the First Mobile correspond to the will by establishing the correspondence between the celestial spheres and the forces of the soul.

Agrippa's stormy and restless life must have been poorly adapted to the practice of this "He himself cited this fact to show his friends that he was but a sentinel, pointing out to others the entrance to the sanctuary. We know, however, that when he was in his early twenties, he had already composed the first books of the treatise on occult philosophy and, even then, had determined what the main thrust of his fundamental work should be. The boldness of conceiving such a vast work at that age, of bringing together in a synthetic and systematic vision all the elements of the science of Magic, that is to say, in essence the elements of all the sciences, grasped in their framing and subordination to the supreme science, can only be the fruit of youthful unconsciousness or of a spiritual maturity already achieved. The prestige Agrippa enjoyed among his contemporaries at the age of twenty, the esteem in which he was held by Abbot Trithemius, and the subsequent course of his life, lead us to believe that Agrippa had attained a high degree of knowledge and spiritual development when he was a student in Paris at a very young age. At that time, he was not distressed by the cares of his family and was not forced by struggles with theologians and disagreements with the powerful into a restless, wandering life, and it may well be that he had then found his Virgil. Such rapidity of spiritual development is not a very common thing, and the hasty would do well not to rely on this precedent; but neither is it an isolated event, and we know of other examples.

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Magical operations performed or attested by Agrippa.

The Treatise on Occult Philosophy thus contains a systematised exposition of magical doctrine and practices. It is a work of synthesis and intelligent interpretation and exposition, in which Agrippa displays a truly astounding erudition that is acknowledged even by his most bitter denigrators: theology, history, philosophy, hermeticism, Pythagoreanism, Judaism and Kabbalah, classical and Germanic mythology, magical practices, divinatory arts, astrology, etc.

Agrippa, and one can understand why, has kept to the system reporting on the various topics he deals with the various opinions of others, without usually stating explicitly or making it clear what his thoughts on the matter are; he appears to have no other aim than to refute the various opinions and to work mainly of an informative and erudite nature. Unlike the treatise on the *Vanity of the Sciences*, *Occult Philosophy* therefore has a serene, expository, doctrinal character; and it is in no way polemical. It is only in a few rare passages that Agrippa's bad language does not hold back, and escapes into some ironic and polemical joke. Thus Chapter 54 of Book I, where he speaks of *various animals and other things and their significance in auguries*, ends with this broadside against his black beasts: "The people consider the meeting of monks as a bad omen, especially when they meet in the morning, because these people mostly live only on funerals and dead bodies, like vultures".

Similarly, when Agrippa reports from all sides a great number of miraculous facts, tales of strange things and curious phenomena, in general he does no more than expound everything connected with the subject he treats of, without giving too much away by letting us know whether he believes it and to what extent; and this may explain, it seems to us, also the existence of various contradictions into which he sometimes falls; Thus, for example, after relating (I, 58) the fasting of Elijah, and the fact told by Boccaccio that there was in his time in Venice a man who every year went forty days without eating, he then says (II, 10) that it is a certain thing that one dies when one has gone seven days without eating.

Given this caution, the personal testimony he sometimes gives in the field, declaring that he has performed certain magical operations himself or has seen them performed, becomes more interesting. This is the case, for example, of the transmission of thought at a distance: "A man can naturally and without any superstition, without the help of another spirit, communicate his thought to another, however distant they may be, in less than twenty-four hours; and this is what Trithemius also did once (I, 6)"; and shortly afterwards (I, 6), speaking of the secret of mirrors, he says:

"It is a secret that Pythagoras practised at other times and that even today is known by some people, as I know it"; and almost the same thing he says about mirrors at the end of Chapter 23 of Book II.

Elsewhere (I, 14), speaking of the extraction of quintessence from gold and silver to transform other metals into gold and silver by means of , he says: "We know how to do this and we have seen it practised a few times; but we could not make more gold than the weight of the gold from which we had extracted the spirit". This interesting passage attests to the truthfulness of his testimony, as well as to the care and scientific rigour he took in experimenting; evidently, after dissolving gold with aqua regia, he had regained the gold in metallic form after a certain number of operations, and ascertained that there had been neither loss nor gain in weight. It is a truth of a chemical order that he ascertained, and he reports it to us with all candour, although this condition does not, at least at first sight, agree with the theories of alchemy.

This truthfulness of Agrippa must be borne in mind when reading the account of other, admittedly somewhat more extraordinary magical operations: "I myself have seen and known (III, 24) a certain person who wrote on a virgin parchment the name and sign of a certain spirit at the hour of the moon, and then made a river frog swallow it, and uttering in a low voice a few verses put the frog back into the water, whence came, immediately afterwards, rain and hail. I have seen the same person write the name and sign of another spirit at hour of Mars on note, give it to a raven, and let it fly away, after murmuring a few verses, and, suddenly, from the side where the raven had flown, a mass of clouds rises with lightning, shaking of sky and earth, and frightful thunder...". More incredible is what he says about observing the proper time for certain agricultural operations. "It is a manifest thing (III, 64) that I have seen in Italy and France, and I have known the way, that is, to plant a walnut tree in such a way that it remains dry and arid throughout the year, and produces, on St John's Eve, leaves, flowers and ripe fruit. And this miracle consists only in observing the planting time.

Every now and then, in the course of his exposition, Agrippa touches on very deep mysteries about which he does not explain himself; and we have already had occasion to quote some of these passages. We will quote two more. In the first passage (II, 20) he alludes to a mysterious method of omnomanancy: "No one should be surprised that a number of things can be foretold by means of the numbers of names, because according to the testimony of the Pythagoreans and the Kabbalists of the Jews, there are in these numbers certain mysteries hidden and understood by very few people..."; a passage in which he does not refer to the ordinary Pythagorean and Kabbalistic method of omnimantic divination known to all.

Finally, the passage in Book II, Chapter 4 is very important: "There is an element that surpasses and penetrates everything, and that is fire. There is a thing, created by God, which is the subject of all admiration, is found in the earth and in the heavens, and is in animal, vegetable and mineral form, which is found everywhere, which is not known, which no one calls by its name, but which is hidden under numbers, figures and enigmas, without which neither alchemy nor natural magic can succeed". This is the "great magic agent", as it is called by Eliphas Levi.

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An appreciation.

Having thus come to the end of our modest work, we feel able to rectify the unfavourable assessment of Agrippa and his work to date.

Prost, in his work, which is very valuable for the richness and accuracy of its historical and biographical documentation, and which we have used extensively and usefully for this study, judges Agrippa with an entirely secular eye. He recognises his human virtues; that he was a good friend and good teacher, a conscientious and attentive head of a family; he recognises the purity of his morals, the generosity of his character, his courage, the dignity of his conduct and the seriousness of his opinions as a teacher; but he reproaches him for his mordacity, his aggressive, rebellious, vindictive, belligerent spirit, prone to irony and invective. It reproaches him with ambition, greed for the favours of the great, interest, and having drawn the means to act from charlatanism; and above all, it reproaches him with the vainglory he showed in passing himself off as a nobleman, as a theologian, as a doctor, as a doctor of law and as a man of arms without ever having been any of these things.

In other short words, Prost's indictment starts from the preconception that magic is a superstition, that is to say, a vain science; and that therefore a man of genius who deals in it must necessarily be a charlatan; and this charlatan is then reproached for having behaved in his action without observing the norms of that morbid morality, which moralists and priests are so fond of preaching to others from the pulpit and the cathedra, only to then rage as Agrippa challenged them: *People, thou shalt not steal...*⁽⁹⁰⁾.

This judgement is absolutely unfair and unjustified; and the same can be said of those pronounced by Folet and Orsier who dealt with Agrippa after Prost, largely following his appreciations.

(90) As in the case of Cagliostro, the systematic and shameless defamation of Agrippa seems to be reflected in the concept and judgement of some writers who are not exactly the last. Stanislaus de Guaita dedicates a total of twenty lines to Agrippa, dealing with him in passing and quoting Naudé about the witch of Woippy. Eight lines and no more are dedicated to him by E. Levi in his *History of Magic*, asserting that he wrote against the sciences that could not give him happiness, and that he found neither true science nor peace. Even from the little more he says about it in the *Dictionnaire de littérature chrétienne*, one gets the impression that he speaks of it with little understanding or direct knowledge. Similarly, we cannot share Kremmerz's appreciation, who says (Giuliano Kremmerz - *La porta ermetica* - Ediz. di Roma - 1924, p. 68) that Agrippa "had too great a reputation for uncertain faith, because he became, as we would say today, a spiritualist à la Allan Kardec, and he had to regret it". We too have known a few Kardecian spiritualists, but we must certainly be bad physiognomists because we have not been able to catch the resemblance to Agrippa.

For us, magic is not a superstition. A science and a tradition of magic existed in Agrippa's time and exist, whether or not the theologians and chatterers like it, even today. Whoever knows these things from experience, necessarily also assesses their *vital* importance; and sets his action on this knowledge. Agrippa already had this knowledge from his earliest youth; and he determined his life and actions according to his own knowledge and the social contingencies of his time. He saw the spiritual inadequacies of the church, the excesses of the clergy, the horrors of the Inquisition, and the opportunities and means of action offered by the great movement of the Renaissance and the stormy ferment of the

'Reformation'. By humanistically linking himself to classical antiquity and harmonising paganism and Christianity, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Kabbalah and Hermeticism in a syncretization enlightened by initiatory understanding, he set about a work of framing and culturally arranging all these elements in the light of the supreme science, the 'spiritual tradition'. A humanist himself, a lover of good letters, a writer of style, an Italian of education, he understood how, in the face of the cynical and fanatical reign of a religious superstition, devoid or oblivious of all understanding and sacred experience, humanism could offer a way to re-establish such knowledge, to bring spirits back to the proper consideration of magic or occult philosophy, to reconstitute in the West, in Christendom, an effective spiritual hierarchy; Humanism set human values against revealed values, set reason, culture, experience, eclecticism against faith, against poverty of spirit, against the denial of one's senses, against one-sidedness; but in the depths of human consciousness lay the divine consciousness and, by knowing oneself, man rose to divine knowledge, and thus to the understanding of the deepest mysteries of magic and those religious studies, which Agrippa claimed were hidden to the vulgar. Seen, framed and exposed in this way, even all miracles, magical operations, and divinatory arts were but testimonies, echoes, and applications, more or less exact or more or less fantastic, of this one and supreme science, called by the ancients by a name: *maja*, which indicated that it was nothing other than the science of nature, of all nature, physical and physical, human and divine.

To this work re-evaluation and affirmation of ancient magic, Agrippa waited throughout his life with a tenacity and pertinacity that nothing could shake. And since the prevailing religion burdened the social life of the time with the horror and madness of the inquisition, he was the first to dare to take the terrible enemy head-on, and set a generous example that, followed by his disciple Viero, was able to free our civilisation from this shame.

When he went into battle, he had no other weapons at his disposal than his intelligence, his culture, his courage and his pertinacity. With his spiritual talents, he was able to win and maintain an influence on the minds of his friends, i.e. those who were able to account for these talents. In order to influence others and carry out his actions, Agrippa used the means allowed to him; and, when one considers what is considered more than legitimate in the struggles of external and domestic politics, Agrippa's claims to noble and chivalric titles, his practice of the medical profession not perfectly validated by regular academic titles and his nonchalance in turning the imperial privilege of a strictly legal nature granted to him to the advantage of the safety of his writings, are after all very venial sins, even assuming that he was really obliged and had in any case undertaken to observe the rules, all outward and cerebral, of the moralistic convention still unhappily prevailing today.

His erudition was truly humanistic. As an authentic Rosicrucian, he seemed to know every language, to know every science, to cure every disease. His capacity for work, his ardour for struggle, tireless, and his understanding and experience of sacred things are beyond compare with those of contemporary 'occultist' mushrooming. Such is the fact that he holds a very high place in the initiatic hierarchy and tradition, and that his writings are among the most important in magical literature.

For our part, we feel it is our duty and our right not to accept the devaluation Agrippa by learned but incompetent laymen, not to be deceived or imposed by systemic denigrations.

theological hatred, and to rehabilitate the figure of the legendary magician, the noble fighter, paying him our sincere and fraternal homage.

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- 10) LEON CHARVET - *Correspondence d'Eus. Chapuys et d'Agrippa*. - Article in the. 'Revue Savoisienne' - 1874, p. 48.
- 11) "Illustrazione Italiana' (25 April 1880). It reports a legend about Agrippa.
- 12) GABRIELE d'ANNUNZIO - *Holy Kabbala*. - Article in the newspaper 'La Tribuna' of 29 Oct. 1887. - In this juvenile article D'Annunzio quotes ten lines from *De Occ. Phil.*; and among other things says that the Count of Cabalis gave his name to the work, as Pico della Mirandola says!
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- 15) JOSEPH ORSIER - *Un aventurier célèbre du XVI^e siècle, Cornélis Agrippa*. - Article held in the 'Revue des Idées', 15 September 1910 - Also contains gross date errors in the highly developed biographical part. () *

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- 1) MORERI LOUIS - *Le grand dictionnaire historique* - 1.^a edition, 1674 - See pp. 175-76 of the 18.^a edition (1740).
- 2) PIERRE BAYLE - *Dictionnaire historique et critique* - Rotterdam, 1697 - Numerous later editions. Contains an extended article very well done on Agrippa, in he refutes errors and accuses of Moreri, Thévet, Del Rio, etc.
- 3) SPRENGEL und TENNEMAN - Article on Agrippa in t. I of the *Allgemeine Encyclopedie der wissenschaften und kunste* - 1818.
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- 5) J. COLLINS DE PLANCY - *Dictionnaire Infernal ou Répertoire Universel* - 5.^a edition-- Brussels 1845 - pages 7-9 and pp. 509-10 (Appendix).
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- 7) Michaud's *Biographie Universelle* - Paris, Nouv. Ed. - Vol. I, pp. 246-247; article by Guizot.
- 8) *Nouvelle Biographie Universelle* by Didot. - T. I - 1852 - pp. 421-23. Article by F. Hofer.
- 9) *Handwörterbuch zur Geschichte der Philosophie* by Noack - Leipsig, 1879; under Agrippa, pp. 14-16.
- 10) Frank's *Dictionnaire des Sciences Philosophiques* - Paris 1875, pp. 15-17.
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(*) Joseph Orsier was also the author of the essay: *Henri Cornélis Agrippa. Sa Vie et son Œuvre d'après sa Correspondance (1486-1535)*, Chacornac, Paris, 1911 (ed.).

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