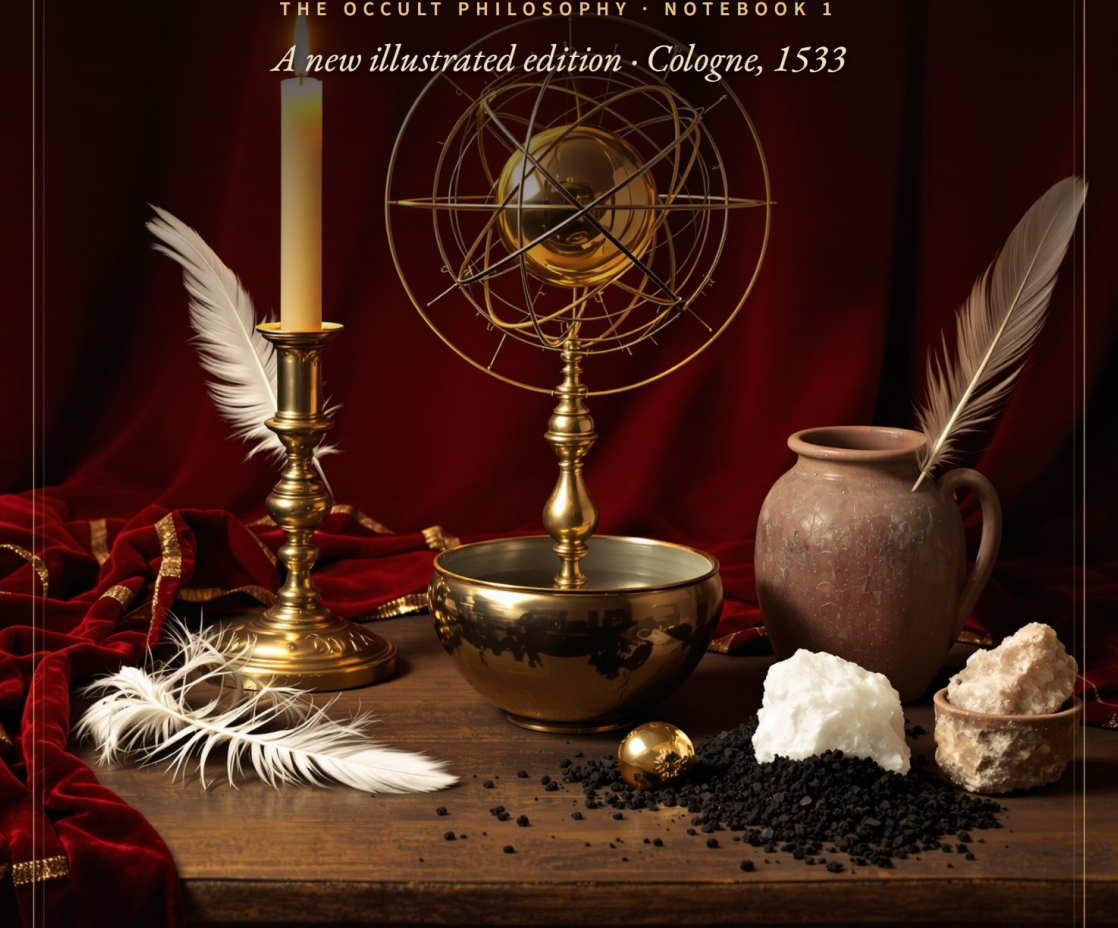


HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA

Magic and the Four Elements

THE OCCULT PHILOSOPHY · NOTEBOOK 1

A new illustrated edition · Cologne, 1533



BOOK I · CHAPTERS 1-12

BLUSABOOKS



Magic and the Four Elements

HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA · THREE BOOKS OF OCCULT
PHILOSOPHY · BOOK I, CHAPTERS 1–12

Every chapter — four parts

IN AGRIPPA'S WORDS

*the complete chapter, from the Latin
edition of 1533*

IN PLAIN WORDS

what Agrippa actually claims

TERMS

the chapter's concepts explained

HISTORICAL NOTE

*where the idea comes from and what
modern science says*

A historical text, not a manual. This book does not replace medical advice.

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FOREWORD

In 1510 a twenty-four-year-old man from Cologne sent the famous abbot Johannes Trithemius a manuscript called *De occulta philosophia* — "On Occult Philosophy". The abbot replied with a letter praising the work and giving one piece of advice: "Give milk to calves, and wine only to those who are strong." The author, **Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim**, kept and reworked the manuscript for another twenty years. It was printed in full — in three books — only in 1533.

It became the encyclopaedia of Renaissance magic. Agrippa gathered in one place what Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, Aristotle, Pliny, the Neoplatonists, the Kabbalists and the medieval physicians had written about the hidden powers of nature, the stars, numbers, words and spirits. The book was read by alchemists and doctors, astrologers and theologians; inquisitors condemned it and the occultists of the following centuries copied it. Without it one cannot understand John Dee, Paracelsus, or even Goethe's *Faust*.

This is the **first notebook** in a series that divides Agrippa's work by theme, so that every reader can take what interests them. It contains **Book I, chapters 1–12** — the foundations of the whole work: what magic is and what its practitioner must be, the four elements, their threefold nature, and how the elements are present in everything, from stones to stars. At the end Agrippa reaches the question that fascinates him most: the **occult virtues**, powers that cannot be explained by heat or cold.

How to read it. Every chapter has four parts. *In Agrippa's words* — the complete chapter, translated from the Latin edition of 1533, nothing shortened. *In plain words* — what Agrippa actually claims. *Terms* — the concepts of the

chapter; all of them are gathered in the glossary at the end. *Historical note* — where the idea comes from and what modern science says about it.

This is a book of history, not a manual. Agrippa himself wrote that no one should agree with him more than he agreed with himself. Read it as a window onto a time when natural science, philosophy and magic were still one and the same knowledge.

In the series "Agrippa · The Occult Philosophy":

1. Magic and the Four Elements — Book I, chapters 1–12
2. Occult Virtues, Sympathies and Antipathies — chapters 13–21
3. The World of the Planets — chapters 22–36
4. Talismans, Fumigations and Rings — chapters 37–48
5. Light, Fascination and Divination — chapters 49–57
6. Dreams, the Soul and the Imagination — chapters 58–68
7. The Power of Words and Letters — chapters 69–74

CHAPTER I

HOW THE MAGI GATHER POWERS FROM THE THREEFOLD WORLD — AS THESE THREE BOOKS WILL SHOW

IN AGRIPPA'S WORDS

Since the world is threefold — elemental, celestial and intellectual — and each lower world is governed by the higher and receives the influx of its powers, the Archetype himself, the supreme Maker, pours into us the powers of all his greatness through the angels, the heavens, the stars, the elements, the animals, the plants, the metals and the stones — the very things he created to serve us.

Therefore the magi do not think it foolish to believe that **by these same steps, passing through each world, we can ascend to the archetypal world itself** — to the Maker of all things and the First Cause, from whom all things come. And that we can not only make use of the powers already present in the nobler things, but also draw down new ones from above.

So they seek the powers of the elemental world through various mixtures of natural things — through medicine and natural philosophy. The powers of the heavens they join to these by the rules of the astrologers and the teachings of the mathematicians. And all of this they strengthen and confirm by the power of various intelligences — through the sacred ceremonies of religion.

This threefold order and course I will try to set out in these three books: the first contains natural magic, the second celestial, the third ceremonial.

But I do not know whether I can be forgiven that I — a man of slight wit and learning — have so boldly undertaken so difficult, so weighty and so intricate a

work in my very youth. Therefore, whatever I have written here, I do not want anyone to assent to it more than I do myself — **and I myself assent to it only insofar as it has not been condemned by the Catholic Church and the congregation of the faithful.**

IN PLAIN WORDS

Agrippa imagines the world as a three-storey building: at the bottom are the elements and natural things, in the middle the heavens and the stars, at the top the spiritual world and God. Powers flow from above downwards, so a person can climb up by the same steps and connect with those powers. Each storey has its own field of knowledge and its own book: natural, celestial and ceremonial magic. At the end of the chapter he cautiously submits everything he has written to the judgement of the Catholic Church.

TERMS

Magi (Lat. *magi*) — originally the name of the priests of ancient Persia; for Agrippa, the wise who study and use the hidden powers of nature.

Archetype (Lat. *archetypus*) — God as the original pattern of all things, after which everything else is formed.

Elemental world (Lat. *mundus elementalis*) — the lowest part of the world, made of the four elements: fire, earth, water and air.

Intellectual world (Lat. *mundus intellectualis*) — the spiritual world grasped by the mind rather than the senses: angels and pure spirits.

Influx (Lat. *influxus*) — power that "flows into" lower things from higher ones; the English word "influence" comes from the same root.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) wrote the first version of this work around 1510, while still a young man, and sent it to Abbot Johannes Trithemius — hence the remark about his "very youth". The full, expanded

work appeared only in 1533 in Cologne, and the local inquisitor tried to stop its printing; this explains the cautious ending of the chapter. The scheme of the threefold world comes from Neoplatonism (Plotinus, Proclus) and from Renaissance Florentine thinkers — Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who wove it together with the Hermetic texts and the Kabbalah. The idea of powers descending step by step from God down to stones is the ancient notion of the "great chain of being". Modern science does not support this picture of the world, but for historians Agrippa's book is one of the most important sources for understanding how Renaissance people thought of nature, the heavens and God as a single whole.



ILLUSTRATION 1

The threefold world: from the elements through the heavens to the intellectual world — climbing by the same steps.