

The Power of Numbers

Number as the ground of the world



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The Power of Numbers

HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA · THREE BOOKS OF OCCULT
PHILOSOPHY · BOOK II, CHAPTERS 1–9

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 concepts explained

HISTORICAL NOTE

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

A historical text, not a manual.

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FOREWORD

In the first book Agrippa spoke of the things of earth — stones, plants, fumigations and words. Now he climbs a storey higher and opens the second book with a claim that startled his century: **without mathematics there is nothing to be found in this art.**

This is the **first notebook** in the series "Agrippa · The Occult Philosophy · Book II". It contains **Book II, chapters 1–9**. Agrippa begins with the wonders mathematics alone can work: moving statues, mirrors that show distant armies, an iron idol hanging in the air. Then he goes through the numbers themselves, **from the one to the six**. Each ends with a **scale** — a table from the original edition showing how that number runs through every storey of the world.

How to read it. Every chapter has 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 concepts, all gathered in the glossary. *Historical note* — where the idea comes from and what modern science says.

In the series "Agrippa · The Occult Philosophy · Book II":

1. The Power of Numbers — Book II, chapters 1–9
2. The Sacred Numbers — chapters 10–15
3. Marks and the Tables of the Planets — chapters 16–22
4. Harmony and the Measure of Man — chapters 23–28
5. Observations of the Heavens — chapters 29–37
6. Images, Talismans and Characters — chapters 38–52
7. The Soul of the World — chapters 53–60

CHAPTER I

OF THE NECESSITY OF MATHEMATICS AND OF WONDERFUL WORKS

IN AGRIPPA'S WORDS

The mathematical sciences are so necessary to magic, and so akin to it, that he who professes this art without them wanders wholly from the way, labours in vain and by no means attains the desired effect.

For all that is and comes to pass in these lower natural powers, all is done and governed by **number, weight, measure, harmony, motion and light**. And of all that we see in these lower things, in them is the root and the foundation.

And yet **even without natural powers, out of the mathematical sciences alone, works may be brought forth that are like the natural ones** — as Plato says, things that are not indeed partakers of truth and divinity, but certain images akin to themselves, such as bodies that walk or speak, which nevertheless lack the power of a living creature.

Such among the ancients were **the statues of Daedalus** and those that were called *automata*, which Aristotle mentions; and the self-moving tripods of Vulcan and of Daedalus, which, as Homer relates, went of themselves to the contest; and those of which we read that they moved of themselves at the banquets of the gymnosophist Iarbas, and the golden statues, like cupbearers and builders, that stood by at the feasts.

We read also of **the statues of Mercury that spoke**, and of **the wooden dove of Archytas that flew**; and of the wonders of Boethius, which Cassiodorus

relates: a bronze Diomedes that blew a trumpet, a bronze serpent that hissed, and counterfeited birds that gave forth the sweetness of song.

Of this kind are all those that come from **geometry and optics** — the wonders of images which we mentioned in the foregoing books, where we spoke of the element of air. Thus are made mirrors, some concave, some cylindrical, which make the images of things appear in the air, in places outside themselves, as it were shadows.

And we read that **Pompey the Great**, among the spoils from the East, brought to Rome a mirror in which an army of armed men could be seen. And there are made certain transparent mirrors which, prepared with the juices of certain herbs and irradiated with an artificial light, fill all the air round about with wonderful images.

And I myself know how to make two mutual mirrors in which, when the sun shines, all that its beams illuminate may be seen most clearly through distant spaces of many miles.

Wherefore, if a magician be experienced in natural philosophy and in mathematics, and know the middle sciences that come from both — **arithmetic, music, geometry, optics, astronomy** and those which are the sciences of weights, measures, proportions and joinings — and know also the mechanical arts that arise from them, **what wonder is it if he, surpassing other men in skill and in wit, bring to pass many wonderful things**, which even the wisest and most learned greatly admire?

Have not the traces of the works of the ancients remained to this very day? The pillars of Hercules and of Alexander; **the Caspian gates, cast of bronze and barred with beams of iron so that they can be broken by no wit and by no art**; the pyramid that Julius Caesar raised at Rome near the Vatican; and masses heaped up by art in the midst of the sea, mountains and works of stone — such as I have seen in Britain, heaped up with an art scarcely to be believed.

And we read in trustworthy historians that by like arts rocks have been cut away, valleys filled up, mountains levelled to a plain, stones bored through, promontories opened to the sea, the bowels of the earth dug out, rivers turned aside, seas joined to seas, waters restrained, the depths of the sea measured, lakes emptied, marshes dried, new islands made and others again restored to the continent.

All this, though it seems to strive with nature herself, has nevertheless, as we read, been done, and to this day we discern the traces of it — **which the common people falsely say to be the works of demons, because the arts and the masters of them have vanished out of memory, and there is none who cares to understand them and search them out.**

And so, beholding some wonderful sight, their mind being darkened, they lay every effect upon demons, or account as miracles that which is the work of the natural or the mathematical sciences.

As if a man knew not the power of the loadstone and saw heavy iron carried upward or hanging in the air — as once at Trier the iron idol of Mercury, as we read, hung in the midst of the temple from loadstones, which this verse attests: *The iron staff-bearer flies in the midst of the air.*

The like is read of the idol of the Sun in the temple of Serapis in Egypt. **Would not anyone straightway say that this is the work of demons? But if he shall learn the power of the loadstone upon iron and make trial of it, all his wonder will cease, and there will remain no doubt that it is the work of nature.**

And here it behoves you to know: **as through natural things we gather natural powers, so through abstracted, mathematical and celestial things we receive celestial powers** — namely motion, life, sense, speech, prophecy and divination — even in a less prepared matter, such as is not wrought by nature but by art alone.

And so it is said that there may be made images that speak and foretell things to come, as William of Paris relates of a bronze head cast under the rising of Saturn, which, as is affirmed, spoke with human voices.

But he who shall know how to choose out a prepared matter, most ready to suffer, and the strongest agent, will without doubt bring forth mightier effects.

For it is a general opinion of the Pythagoreans: **as mathematical things are more formal than the physical, so are they also more real** — and as they are less dependent in their being, so also in their working. But among all mathematical things **numbers**, being the most formal, are also the most real — and to them power and efficacy, both for good and for evil, is ascribed not only by the philosophers of the gentiles, but also by the Hebrew and the Christian theologians.