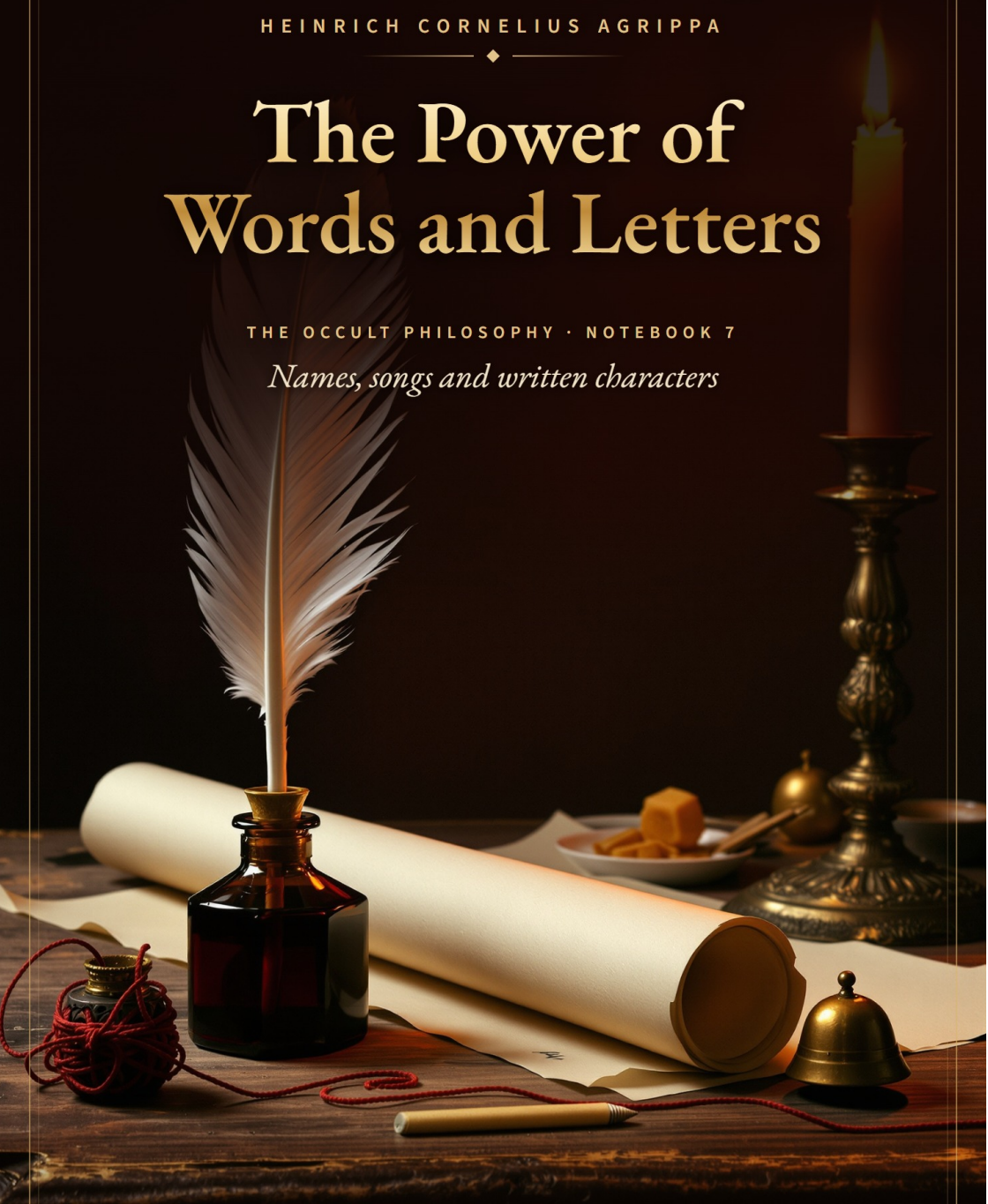


HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA

The Power of Words and Letters

THE OCCULT PHILOSOPHY · NOTEBOOK 7

Names, songs and written characters



BOOK I · CHAPTERS 69-74

BLUSABOOKS



The Power of Words and Letters

HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA · THREE BOOKS OF OCCULT
PHILOSOPHY · BOOK I, CHAPTERS 69–74

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.

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FOREWORD

In the sixth notebook Agrippa spoke of the power of imagination and will. Now, in the last chapters of the first book, he asks: **what power does a word have?** Can a name, a song or an inscription act upon the world — and why are the Hebrew, Greek and Latin letters divided among the signs of the zodiac and the planets?

This is the **seventh and last** notebook of Book I in the series "Agrippa · The Occult Philosophy". It contains **Book I, chapters 69–74**: the power of speech and words, **proper names**, songs and enchantments, the writing of inscriptions and curses, and the **correspondence of letters** with the signs, planets and elements, with the table of letters from the original edition.

How to read it. Every chapter has four parts. *In Agrippa's words* — the complete chapter, translated from the Latin edition of 1533. *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. This is a book of history, not a manual.

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 LXIX

OF SPEECH AND THE
POWERS OF WORDS

IN AGRIPPA'S WORDS

Since there is great power in the passions of the soul, **it must further be known that there is no less power in words and in the names of things, and the greatest of all in composed speeches and discourses.**

By these chiefly we differ from the brute animals and are called rational, not from that reason which is taken according to the soul and is called the faculty subject to passions, which, as Galen says, the animals also have in common with us, some more, some less; **but we are called rational from that reason which is understood according to the voice, in words and speech,** which is called enunciative reason, and it is in this part above all that we surpass the other animals. For among the Greeks *logos* means reason, speech and word alike.

But the word is twofold, inner and uttered.

The inner word is a conception of the mind and a motion of the soul which takes place in the thinking faculty without voice, just as in dreams we seem to speak and dispute, and when awake, keeping silent, we often run through a whole discourse.

The uttered word is a certain act in the voice and in the property of speaking, and it is brought forth by a man's breath, the opening of the mouth and the speech of the tongue; and in its nature joined the bodily voice and speech to the mind and understanding, making it the messenger of our conceptions to the hearers.

Words, therefore, are the most fitting medium between the speaker and the hearer, carrying with them not only the conception but also the power of the speaker, with a certain energy, pouring it into the hearers, and also into other bodies and lifeless things.

But **more effective than the rest are those words which represent greater things**, namely intellectual, celestial and supernatural ones, both more plainly and more mysteriously; and those which are instituted from a worthier language and of holier dignity. For they are, as it were, certain signs and representations, or sacraments, of things, and they acquire the power of supernatural things, both from the power of the things expressed, of which they are the vehicles, and from the power that was planted in them by him who instituted and uttered them.

IN PLAIN WORDS

*After the passions of the soul, Agrippa turns to words and claims that there is even more power in them. Man differs from the animals not by feelings, which animals have too, but by the ability to speak, and that is why the Greek word *logos* means both reason and speech. He distinguishes the inner word, that is, the thought we silently "speak" within ourselves, from the uttered word, carried by voice and breath. The uttered word is a bridge between speaker and hearer: it passes on not only the thought but also the speaker's power, and in Agrippa's opinion it can act even on lifeless things. The strongest words are those that speak of high, divine things and come from a sacred language, because they are, as it were, the signs and carriers of those things.*

TERMS

Logos (Gr. *logos*) — a Greek word with many meanings: word, speech, reason, reckoning; for the Stoics and the Christians also the rational ground of the world.

Galen — Galen of Pergamon (c. 129–216), a Greek physician whose teaching on body and soul ruled European medicine until as late as the 17th century.

Inner and uttered word (Gr. *logos endiathetos* and *logos prophorikos*) — the Stoic distinction between a thought that stays in the mind and a thought that sounds out in the voice.

Enunciative reason (Lat. *ratio enuntiativa*) — reason that shows itself in statements and speech, as distinct from the part that only feels and desires.

Sacrament (Lat. *sacramentum*) — here in the wider sense: a visible sign that contains and carries an invisible, holy power.



ILLUSTRATION 1

The power of speech and words: for Agrippa, a word carries the thought and the soul of the one who speaks it.



HISTORICAL NOTE

The distinction between the inner and the uttered word was made by the Stoics, and from them it passed to Philo of Alexandria and the Church Fathers, who linked it with the opening of the Gospel of John: "In the

beginning was the Word." The idea that a word carries the speaker's power and acts on the hearer almost like a physical radiation Agrippa took from Marsilio Ficino and the Neoplatonists. Modern linguistics agrees that human language, with its grammar and endless number of possible sentences, is unique, yet animals communicate too: bees by dancing, monkeys by different alarm calls for different predators. Inner speech was studied in the 20th century by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky, and brain imaging shows that silent thinking in words activates the same language centres as speaking aloud. Words really do affect people: they change mood, decisions and even the feeling of pain, as placebo and nocebo studies show. But this happens only through the hearer's hearing and understanding. There is no testable evidence that words act on lifeless things, and such claims, for example about water crystals changing under kind or unkind words, have not held up in controlled experiments.