APPENDIX TWO

RECENT STUDIES ON AGRIPPA

I decided to add a section—reprinting only two of the dozen papers I published on Agrippa—to the short series of collected studies I published in Italian under the title *Magia bianca, magia nera nel Rinascimento*, a volume which for incomprehensible reasons disappeared from bookshops and libraries in less than a month, October 2004.

As a reviewer, not disposed to flatter an old lady, noted in RQ 2005, my work on Renaissance magic and Agrippa began fifty years ago, when this author was suggested to me by the late Eugenio Garin as the subject of my first paper and, two years later, as the field of my thesis. I continued to study Agrippa’s texts and documents, publishing many essays on his work (I cite their titles in the footnotes of this book only when needed to support my present arguments). When a student I started this research reluctantly, but now I consider Agrippa to be a great figure in the history of Renaissance thought, especially in Germany. Moreover, in the context of the philosophical, scientific and religious issues of the sixteenth century, he is an author who merits more attention than he has so far received, even if we take into account several papers published in the last twenty years or so. It is remarkable that the fifth centenary of his birth in 1986 passed virtually unnoticed, whilst the centenary of the publication of the *Malleus maleficarum* was celebrated with a congress, the second in the series ‘Bayreuther Historische Kolloquien’, organized ‘als wissenschaftlichen Kontrapunkt zu den zahlreichen Medienspektakeln dieses Jahres’.

I chose as an introduction to Part II ‘Agrippa as a critical magus’, a general paper read at a conference in Wolfenbüttel, which concerns mainly his *De incertitudine et vanitate omnium scientiarum atque artium* and focuses on the passage from his passion for magical disciplines (which produced an encyclopedia *De occulta philosophia*) to his critical or paradoxical attitude (one might speak of “scepticism”, if this term is not taken in a technical sense according to Popkin’s and Schmitt’s interpretation related to

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the ‘second Academy’ and Diogenes Laertius). In the commentary by Pierre Villey, De vanitate was however considered the main source of Montaigne’s Apologie de Remond Sebond: this change from Master of Magic to “enemy of all learning” is the problem chosen by many, indeed by almost all the historians dealing with Agrippa.

The other (older) paper I am reprinting comes from a lecture given at the Warburg Institute in a series organized by D. P. Walker; it dealt with a historical problem which, after more than 30 years, has still not attracted enough attention among historians of the theory of magic, nor among historians of the Reformation, the Radical Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Agrippa was a Nicodemite. In the early thirties of the sixteenth century or perhaps as early as 1526 he maintained ideas very far from orthodoxy and spread them in a secret and clandestine manner (but this clandestine way did not, however, keep the faculties of theology, the Inquisitors and the Index from finding his ideas perfectly clear as well as unacceptable).

In this paper I gave just one example. In Book III of De occulta philosophia Agrippa hinted at the doctrine of psychopannychism and tried to conceal it from Catholic censors or readers. This doctrine of the so-called ‘sleep of the souls’ expresses the heretical thesis that after death, the human soul instead of going directly to Hell, Purgatory or Paradise will ‘sleep’ until the Last Judgement. This is ‘psychopannychism’, an idea that had been discussed in a few pages by the Fathers of the Church, and which, in Agrippa’s time, was present only in the preaching and pamphlets of radical Reformers; it was discussed around 1534 in a book which has been considered the “starting point of Calvin’s Theology”, but it was not easy to find it in a learned philosopher before Michael Servetus. Psychopannychism is connected with theological discussions on the soul’s destiny after death and with the Last Judgement, a subject dear to prophets and preachers on the Apocalypse, a beloved text, which attracted ever more intense commentary in Europe after Savonarola. The presence outside Italy of this attitude of concealment, and the need to redate Nicodemism to a few years before the date proposed by Carlo Ginzburg in his monograph,

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