



AGRIPPA VON NETTESHEIM'S
INFLUENCE ON SEBASTIAN
FRANCK



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Abstract

Sebastian Franck commented and translated parts of Agrippa's *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, confirming that Franck knew at least some of this philosopher's work. However, there is no detailed research on the influence Agrippa had on Franck—a gap this paper tries to fill. In a paper of Keefer, the author advocates that Franck was much influenced by Agrippa. The major claim of this paper is that Agrippa's influence on Franck should not be overestimated, primarily because Franck deliberately did not cite from the *Occulta philosophia*. Only *De Vanitate Scientiarum* and one paragraph of *Oratio habita papiae* are shown to have had a direct influence on Franck. The influence on Franck's philosophy has to be analyzed very carefully to avoid such fallacies. In a comparison of the metaphysical belief systems of both Franck and Agrippa, important parallels concerning the soul and Christology can be found. Notably, Agrippa and Franck were both believers in the Platonic doctrine of the tripartite soul. However, Franck did not cite this concept from Agrippa. A difference between Agrippa and Franck was that Agrippa had a cosmological perspective that was strongly influenced by Neoplatonism and Hermeticism. In contrast, the Neoplatonic concept of the world soul did not make sense in Franck's philosophical system of beliefs because Franck denies the idea that the world is conducted by rationality. His pessimistic view of the world and the human being did not blend with this idea of the world soul. These differences demonstrate that Franck did not agree with many concepts found in the *Occulta philosophia*. The *Corpus Hermeticum* was also not as important for Franck as it was for Agrippa. Franck focused primarily on the *Pimander* and to a certain extent on the thirteenth book (rebirth), whereas for Agrippa many parts were relevant. Research on the influence of the Hermetic books on Franck just began in the 21st century and this paper further contributes to a better understanding of how the Hermetic books affected Franck. Franck used Agrippa to convey his understanding of the *Corpus Hermeticum* to his readers. However, it remains an open question why Franck integrated only a small part of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the writings of Agrippa into his philosophy.

Keywords: Agrippa von Nettesheim, Sebastian Franck, mind, soul, inner Christ, world soul, Christology, conception of god, astrology

1. Introduction

Sebastian Franck translated and commented on parts of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* of Agrippa von Nettesheim in his second *Kronbüchlein*.¹ Therefore, we know that Franck read Agrippa.² However, Lehel³ investigated the influence of the hermetic books of Franck and found they referred only very briefly to Agrippa. Moreover, there are no definitive indications of Agrippa's *Occulta Philosophia* in the works of Franck, and this book was not found in his library after his death. The fact that Franck took great care in his translation and commentary on *De Vanitate Scientiarum* means that it could be assumed he knew Agrippa very well, so why is Agrippa's other significant work *Occulta Philosophia* never mentioned by Franck?

Lehel pointed out that Agrippa made a lecture in Padua about Hermes Trismegistos in the year 1515, which this paper suggests introduced an interesting aspect of Agrippa's philosophy to Franck, to which he closely adhered in his fourth *Kronbüchlein*:

The word of god is infinite as god/infinite/unspeakable/a mind/no human being can talk about it/it is not possible to see or to hear god/... only one can speak about it metaphorically/the word of god is not different/than the emanation/being/Emanation/Image/Character/and illusion of god/in all creatures/especially but in heart of all calm human beings/... it has enlightened and taught/ Adam/ Abel/ Noha/ Loth/ Abraham/ Job/ Trismegistum/ Mercurium/ Plotinum/ Cornelium/and the heart of all pious pagans.⁴

¹ Franck, *Sämtliche Werke*, 117-185. There is no English translation of the collected works of Sebastian Franck.

² Agrippa's *De vanitate scientiarum* was founded at this library after his death 1542 (Bruckner, "Verzeichnis der hinterlassenen Bücher Sebastian Francks", 289). Franck also mentions Agrippa in his fourth *Kronbüchlein* where he enumerates wise philosophers like Hermes Trismegist and Plotin together with Cornelius Agrippa (Franck, *Sämtliche Werke*, 244).

³ Lehel, "Narrheit, Paradoxität und Hermetismus bei Sebastian Franck", 162.

⁴ Franck, *Sämtliche Werke*, 244. The text in original: Gottes Wort ist wie Gott/ onendlich/onaussprechlich/ ain Gaist/das kain lebendig mensch reden/ sehen/ oder hören kann / und leben. So vil man aber menschlich davn und bildtlich reden kan/ so ist Gottes Wort nichts anders/ dann der außfluß/ wesen/ außguß/bild/Character/unnd schein Gottes/ in allen Creaturn/ sonderlich aber in aller gelassenen menschen hertz/ als ain siegel getruckt/ das in allen Creaturn weset/ in allen glaubigen prediget/ in allen gottlosen kifet/ küplet/ hadert/vnnd die Welt vmb die sünd strafft/ und das von anfang/ Adam/ Abel/ Noha/ Loth/ Abraham/ Job/ Trismegistum/ Mercurium/ Plotinum/ Cornelium/ unnd aller frummen Haiden hertz hat erleücht und gelert.". Franck cites from the fourth *Kronbüchlein*. The text from Franck was translated by the author from the Middle High German language.

Franck listed “Cornelium” Agrippa beside Plotin and Hermes Trismegistos as “illuminated philosophers.” In the literature, Franck himself was classified as theological spiritualist.⁵ The influence of Johannes Tauler and Meister Eckhart was mentioned, and Franck cited these authors in many works. Dejung⁶ is one of the most famous researchers in the literature on Franck and he wrote a dissertation about the philosophy of history of Sebastian Franck, which mentioned Agrippa many times.⁷ According to Dejung, Franck cited Agrippa word for word very often.⁸ However, his research does not focus on the influence of Agrippa on Franck.

In the twenty-first century, there have been a few investigations about the influence of hermetic philosophy on Sebastian Frank.⁹ Hannak produced a very detailed investigation of the influence of hermetic philosophy on Sebastian Franck (a German translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was found in the library of Augsburg, and scholarship generally accepts that Franck was the author, though this translation was never published). She suggests that Franck’s doctrine of the “inner word” or “inner Christ” can be found in the *Pimander*. At the beginning of her treatise on Franck, she mentions the influence of mystical spiritualism and Agrippa,¹⁰ however, she did not investigate the influence of Agrippa in detail. Barbers¹¹ analyzed Agrippa’s influence on Franck very shortly and referred extensively to German Mysticism but only briefly to Gnosticism. Johannes Tauler was very relevant in German Mysticism, and his strong familiarity with Caspar von Schwenckfeld, Hans Denck, and Johannes Bänderlin was also emphasized in Barbers. A very well-known name in the research of Franck is Siegfried Wollgast, who has published many papers and books about him.¹² Wollgast’s thoughts about the influence of Agrippa on Franck were that Franck interpreted Agrippa only in such a way that he fit into Franck’s own philosophical approach. We will borrow from that approach in this paper. For example, Agrippa’s main conclusion of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* was that sciences and art are not compatible with the word of God. Franck’s reception of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* shows that

⁵ Especially the very well known Franck-researcher Christoph Dejung emphasizes the spiritualism of Franck (Dejung, *Wahrheit und Häresie*. Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichtsphilosophie bei Sebastian Franck; Dejung, “Kryptoradikalität in Francks Ulmer Declaration“, 107-140).

⁶ Dejung, *Wahrheit und Häresie*.

⁷ Dejung, *Wahrheit und Häresie*, 38 and 45.

⁸ Dejung, *Wahrheit und Häresie*.

⁹ For example: Lehel, “Narrheit, Paradoxität und Hermetismus bei Sebastian Franck“, 145-171; Hannak, *Geist=Reiche Kritik. Hermetik, Mystik und das Werden der Aufklärung in spiritualistischer Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit*; Wollgast, “Kryptoradikalität in Sebastian Francks Guldin Arch und Das verbüthschiert Buch“, 141-163.

¹⁰ Hannak, *Geist=Reiche Kritik*, 73.

¹¹ Barbers, *Toleranz bei Sebastian Franck*.

¹² For example: Wollgast, *Der deutsche Pantheismus im 16. Jahrhundert. Sebastian Franck und seine Wirkungen auf die Entwicklung der pantheistischen Philosophie in Deutschland*. See also: Wollgast, *Kryptoradikalität in Sebastian Francks Guldin Arch und Das verbüthschiert Buch*, 141-162.

he did not want to be influenced by dogmatic or scholastic scholars. Wollgast accentuated that Franck did not want to suggest the complete negation of all knowledge and sciences, as he felt Agrippa had done.¹³ Wollgast tried to bring Franck near to a materialistic pantheism. However, he ultimately had to reject this thesis, meaning that for him Franck's understanding of God was more compatible with an idealistic pantheism (for Wollgast, each form of pantheism is also a kind of pantheism).¹⁴

Agrippa's philosophy is interpreted as syncretism in the literature. The hermetic influence on Agrippa has been analyzed very well by Wouter Hanegraaff.¹⁵ Hanegraaff focused on the influence of the Christian Hermetist Ludovico Lazzarelli, who has not been studied much in the literature. He proved that the relationship between Hermeticism and magic is very complex. Frances Yates¹⁶ underestimated the complexity of that relationship. Yates taught that Agrippa was a representative of the hermetic tradition in the Renaissance, whereby she did not make a distinction between magic and Hermeticism. Hanegraaff demonstrated that one reason for Yates's interpretation was that she was citing systematically from the *Asclepius* and not from the *Pimander*.¹⁷

Beside Hermeticism, Agrippa was also influenced by Neoplatonism,¹⁸ from kabbalah, astrology,¹⁹ and manticism.²⁰ He covers these topics in the *Occulta philosophia*, but not in *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, where he condemned all such "sciences." The major message of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* was that only Jesus Christ has spoken the truth. Bowen²¹ wrote a paper that dealt with the paradox of Agrippa's two contradictory theses in his two major books. She concluded that such a paradox is not a rarity in the Renaissance (e.g., Erasmus, Rabelais), and Agrippa was one example of that. A version of *Occulta Philosophia* had been circulating since 1510, and Agrippa published the book in an extended form in 1533. His refusal of magic,

¹³ Wollgast, *Der deutsche Pantheismus im 16. Jahrhundert*, 90.

¹⁴ Wollgast, *Der deutsche Pantheismus im 16. Jahrhundert*, 151-165.

¹⁵ For example: Hanegraaff, "Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa", 92-98. Hanegraaff, "Better than magic. Cornelius Agrippa and Lazzarellian Hermetism", 1-25.

¹⁶ Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition*, 130-144.

¹⁷ Hanegraaff, "Better than magic", 2.

¹⁸ For example: Lechner, *Transzendenz und Immanenz Gottes bei Giordano Bruno*, 34-37.

¹⁹ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, Book I, Chapter XXII-XXIX. In Chapter XXII you find at the beginning: „Manifestum est, quod omnia inferioria subsunt superioribus & quodam modo (ut inquit Proclus) sibi invicem insunt, scilicet in infimis suprema & in supremis infima“ (It is manifest that all things inferior are subject to the superior, and after a manner (as said Proclus) they are one in the other, namely in inferior are superior, and in superior are inferior) (Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres* I, XXII).

²⁰ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, I, LIX-LX.

²¹ Bowen, "Cornelius Agrippa de Vanitate: Polemic or paradox", 249-256.

astrology, hermeticism, and manticism, and his confession to Jesus Christ and to the Bible in *De Vanitate Scientiarum* can be interpreted as protection against the scrutiny of church authorities. Because *De Vanitate Scientiarum* and *Occulta Philosophia* are very different in the content, it is assumed that the Bowen's thesis is correct, and *De Vanitate Scientiarum* was a diversionary tactic Agrippa used to avoid condemnation by the authorities.

We know from Franck that he only cited *De Vanitate Scientiarum* and not *Occulta Philosophia*. The question is why Franck believed that Agrippa was an "illuminated philosopher" when he wrote such contradictory works? Is the thesis of Wollgast correct that Franck interpreted Agrippa only in so much as Agrippa fit his own conceptualization? With this question in mind, we will investigate the influence of Agrippa on Franck in terms of metaphysical concepts like god, Christ, or the soul. It is also necessary to show some parallels between Franck and Agrippa where Franck was not directly influenced by Agrippa. These passages will demonstrate that this content can only be found in the *Occulta philosophia* and Franck did not use this source. This investigation will also reveal why Franck did not use the *Occulta Philosophia*. We will also look closely at the translation and commentary of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* by Franck. The focus of the investigation will be the doctrine of the soul and world soul of both philosophers, because the similarities as well as the differences will appear very clearly when analyzing these concepts.

Another question is what can we contribute to the existing literature on Franck with a work that focuses primarily on determining the extent of Agrippa's influence on him? As mentioned, Hannak and Lehel have already started a new chapter in the literature about the influence of the *Corpus Hermeticum* on Franck. Moreover, Franck never cited Agrippa's *Oratio habita Papias in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti De Potestate et Sapientia Dei*; however, this paper aims to demonstrate that it is very likely that he knew this document of Agrippa. Furthermore, this paper will prove that mostly it was only the first book of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that was relevant for Franck. Rather, he primarily used *De vanitate scientiarum* and *Oratio habita Papias in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti De Potestate et Sapientia Dei*, and only the first and the thirteenth book of *Corpus Hermeticum*, whereas Agrippa made an extended reference to the fourth book of *Corpus Hermeticum*.

The first claim of this essay is that Franck was not as strongly influenced by Agrippa as some authors have suggested. For example, Keefer concluded that Franck "was a writer much

influenced by Agrippa.”²² He correctly alluded to the fact that Franck used *De vanitate scientiarum*, but probably overestimated Franck’s conflation of gnostic philosophy²³ and hermetic philosophy:

“And if we are willing (as was Sebastian Franck, a writer much influenced by Agrippa) to dismiss the more rabid claims of heretics like Simon Magus and Mani as the inventions of polemicists, then we are left in Simon's case with something not unlike the doctrine of Hermes.”²⁴

Of course, there is core content (probably from “Hermetic rebirth”) between Simon Magus and Hermes Trismegistus where Agrippa and Franck agree; however, there is no trace of *Occulta philosophia* in the works of Franck (not even indirectly), and Keefer is directly referring to the third book of *Occulta philosophia* when he conflates Simon Magus and Hermes Trismegistos.²⁵ The second claim of this paper is that Franck had many different philosophical influences (Trismegistos, Plotin²⁶, Agrippa, Gnostic philosophy); however, one has to go into great detail when investigating from where the contents of Franck come. Franck often even directly uses other sources without a direct quotation.²⁷

The third claim of this paper is that Franck was mainly interested in Agrippa’s *De Vanitate Scientiarum*.²⁸ However, Franck was certainly not influenced by the magical *Occulta philosophia*. Magic, astrology, and manticism played no major role in his works.

Franck was often mentioned in the literature as a representative of the spiritualistic theology. But especially the work of Hannak showed the hermetic influence on Franck. Therefore, Franck research has not yet come to an end. This paper aims to revisit the Hermetic influence with a specific focus on Agrippa. Precisely if one accepts the influence of the Hermetic books on Franck as a given, then given his knowledge of Agrippa the question arises as to why the *Occulta Philosophia* played no role in philosophical theology. This essay will not be able to answer this question definitively either, but it could start an interesting discussion. In many areas of his philosophical theology, Franck revealed a close relationship to Gnostic philosophy.

²² Keefer, “Agrippa's Dilemma: Hermetic "Rebirth" and the Ambivalences of *De vanitate* and *De occulta philosophia*”, 649.

²³ Keefer’s thesis was that Agrippa conflated Simon Magus and Hermes Trismegistus with the exception of “inventions of polemicists” (Keefer, “Agrippa's Dilemma”, 649).

²⁴ Keefer, “Agrippa's Dilemma”, 649.

²⁵ Keefer, “Agrippa's Dilemma”, 648.

²⁶ The Enneads were found in the library of Franck (Bruckner, “Verzeichnis der hinterlassenen Bücher Sebastian Franck”, 289).

²⁷ The most extreme case was shown by Gilly who proofed that Frank copied his heretic chronicle from von Lutzenburg (Gilly, “Das Bekenntnis zur Gnosis von Paracelsus bis auf die Schüler Jakob Böhmes”, 388).

²⁸ The influence can be found in: Franck, *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 4, 117-185 (*Kronbüchlein* 2).

Concerning to this influence he was not alone in Renaissance philosophy. The article could also be a suggestion to deal with the Gnostic influence in the Renaissance in general. If you consider Hermeticism as a special Gnosis or Gnosis as a special Hermeticism, then it could be said that the Hermetic part was already extensively researched in Renaissance research.

2. Conception of god, Christology, and the angels

As will become apparent, the conception of god and Christology are central concepts in the works of both Franck and Agrippa. Their definitions of god were very similar, because both philosophers embraced a Neoplatonic conception of god, where god is above all things and cannot be described with words or any other medium. On the conception of god, the influence of Agrippa on Franck was low, because both took the concept of Plato, Plotin, and other representatives of the Platonic tradition. More important was the influence of Agrippa on Franck concerning Christ. Agrippa's Christology has never been studied in detail, however, several works make very interesting references to it. As already mentioned, Agrippa gave a lecture about Hermes Trismegistos in Padua in 1515. Only the introduction of this lecture is extant, the rest is lost. It is quite possible that Franck had more detailed information about this lecture than we have today, however, the text which still exists is still useful for our investigation. The introduction of the lecture can be found, for example, in the Opera-edition of 1600²⁹, which has the title *Oratio habita Papiae in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti De Potestate et Sapientia Dei*. The content of the lecture was the translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* through Marsilino Ficino. The most interesting statement about Christology is the following:

Favente nobis ipso ter maximi Mercurij Pimandro, mete divinae potentiae domino videlicet nostro Iesu Christo Nazareno crucifixo, qui verus Pimander, qui magni consilij angelus, vero mentis lumine illustrat: quem verum deum et verum hominem, regenerationis autorem consitemur, futuriq; patre seculi iudicem expectamus.³⁰

²⁹ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos*.

³⁰ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera II*, 1098. Agrippa obviously referred to the Poimandres (Trismegistus, *Corpus Hermeticum*, I). The English translation: "thrice great Pimander Mercurius, mind of divine power, that is to say our Lord the crucified Nazarene Jesus Christ, who is the true Pimander, who as the messenger of great counsel illuminates our mind with the true Light, whom we profess to be truly God and truly man, the father of regeneration, and whom we expect as the judge of the coming age." (Hanegraaff, "Better than magic", 16).

Hanegraaff³¹ concluded correctly, that Agrippa believed that Christ revealed himself to Hermes long before Christ incarnated in Jesus. Christ, or the word of god, was not only speaking to Jesus, but also to pagan philosophers. Hanegraaff³² referred to Lazzarelli, who was used as a source by Agrippa in the *Oratio habita Papiæ*. According to Hanegraaff, Lazarelli even believed that Poimandres (Christ) reappeared as Giovanni “Mercurio” da Corneggio during his lifetime.

Franck dealt with Christ in the *Guldin Arch* and in his *Paradoxa*. As in the lecture of Agrippa, the word of god or Christ was spoken in the *Poimandres*³³ to Hermes Trismegistos:

“This Hermes writes/how the word of god spoke to him (which he called mentem Dei or Pymander) and taught and showed him everything/and it asked him/that he should listen...and says to him/inwardly/. I am that light/a soul/your god/older than the nature/however the birth of the light/blossom and glance is the son of god/...”³⁴

With the exception of Lazzarelli and Agrippa, no one spoke as explicitly about “Christ in Hermes.” There are no traces of Lazarelli in the books of Franck; and therefore, it seems obvious that Franck instead directly cited from Agrippa’s *Oratio habita Papiæ*. Franck never mentioned *Oratio habita Papiæ*, but this does not mean that he did not know the script of Agrippa. Franck and Agrippa both believed that Christ spoke to Hermes Trismegistos. This was consistent with Franck’s Gnostic theory of inner Christ (Christus in nobis).³⁵ He believed Christ had spoken to other philosophers like Plato or Plotin by this means.³⁶ The difference for Agrippa is that Christ is a cosmic essence who was incarnated in Hermes. This means that the essence comes from outside and not from inside. Agrippa believed, together with Lazarelli, that

³¹ Hanegraaff, “Better than magic“, 17.

³² Hanegraaff, “Better than magic“. Yates mentioned Lazzarelli and Joannes Mercurius da Corregio repeatedly in her work. However, she did not mention the cited passage. Hanegraaff has emphasized the importance of the statement of Agrippa (Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 171-173)

³³ Hermes Trismegistus, *Corpus Hermeticum*, I.

³⁴ Franck, *Die Guldin Arch – darein der Kern und die Hauptsprüch der heyligen Schrift, alten Leerer und Väter der Kirchen/auch der erläuchten Heyden und Philosophen*, Chapter XLI. The text in the original language: „Nun dieser Hermes schreibt/ wie Gottes wort mit ihm geredt (daß er mentem Dei oder Pymander nennt) hab innerlich on inn alles gelert und gezeigt/ und in darzü gebetten/ er solle nun hören ... und sagt zü im/inn im. Diß liechte bin ich/ ein gemüt/ dein Gott/ elter dann die natur/aber deß liechts gepurts/plü und glanz ist Gottes Sun/...”

³⁵ Hannak, *Geist=Reiche Critik. Hermetik*, 128. Franck refers to his very important doctrine of the „inner Christ“ on many passages.

³⁶ For example in: Franck, *Guldin Arch*, Title at the beginning. At the beginning of the *Guldin Arch* Franck emphasizes: “*Divine people/have talked/driven by the Holy Spirit*”. Additionally, Franck numerates eight Christian and eight pre-Christian authors (for example: Plato, Aristoteles, Pythagoras and the sibyls). Hermes Trismegist is added to the „illuminated“ (as Agrippa) at another passage. See also: Hannak, *Geist=Reiche Critik*, 126.

Christ reappeared in Corneggio, thus the cosmic essence comes from outside into the human being. For Franck, the essence was the inner Christ. That means if the human being recognized his spirit or the inner Christ, it had recognized god.³⁷ Agrippa's thoughts on the spiritualized human being will be discussed in more detail below.

Franck and Agrippa both held the belief that there are supernatural beings like angels and felt that in the visible cosmos, there are other invisible worlds. Therefore, their philosophies clearly cannot be interpreted as pantheism. Agrippa mentioned in the *Occulta Philosophia* beings like angels, demons, and guardian spirits.³⁸ Franck covers the topic of angels and fallen angels in the *Guldin Arch*. Like Agrippa, he distinguished between good and evil angels. For Franck: "The evil spirits are called part of god/because they are his prisoners."³⁹ The fallen angel is the devil who tempted the human soul. Franck's answer to this temptation: "All inner thoughts of the heart/we are certain/that the devil does not see them/from the movement of the body/from the indication of the affects/... the secrecy of the heart/only knows/from whom is stated/that only you recognize the secrecy of the heart/."⁴⁰ For him, the answer to how to encounter the devil you can only find in the human spirit, that is, the inner Christ (see below). The heart is a synonym for the spirit, that is, the inner Christ. Franck cannot be interpreted in that the human being possesses both good and evil inside, and beyond that there is nothing (pantheism). The human being has god inside, however, there is the invisible world of the angels. We can see that the chapter in the *Guldin Arch* does not rely on the third book of the *Occulta Philosophia*, where Agrippa talked about angels, guardian spirits, and demons, because Franck does not differentiate between these two categories. Therefore, concerning supernatural beings and angels, Agrippa's direct influence cannot be found in the *Guldin Arch* or *Paradoxa*.

³⁷ Therefore, the christology of Franck is not identical with the gnostic doctrine of Basilides and Valentine who assume an incarnation of Christ. According to Valentine Christ incarnates in Jesus at the baptism of Jordan and left Jesus at the condemnation of Pontius Pilate (Irenaeus, *Des heiligen Irenäus fünf Bücher gegen die Häresien*, I,7,2).

³⁸ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, III, 21-23. Agrippa differentiates between good and evil angels. He also mentions the „fallen angels“. There are also evil demons who want to seduce human souls to evil deeds.

³⁹ Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXXIII. The text in the original language: „Die bösen Geyster werden auch Gottes genennet/darumb das sy seyn gefangner seind“

⁴⁰ Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXXV. The text in the original language: „Alle innwendigen Gedancken des herzens/seind wir gewiß/daß der Teüffel nit sihet/sonder aus bewegnuß des Leibs/vnd anzeygung der affect/nimpt er vilmals die gedancken etwas ab/die heimligkeyt aber des herzens/weyßt allein der/von dem gesagt wird/du allein erkennst die heimligkeyt der herzen/.“

3. Doctrine of the soul of Agrippa and Franck

The doctrine of the soul investigates the terms “world soul” and “human soul.” In this, parallels between Agrippa and Franck can be found. Agrippa’s philosophy of the tripartite soul originated from the Platonic tradition, which subdivided the human being into mind, soul, and body. The mind is the divine and immortal part of the human being. In this sense, god is inside the human in the Platonic and hermetic tradition. Many philosophers share Agrippa’s doctrine of the soul, as discussed in *De Vanitate Scientiarum*. Some do not assume a soul, like Grates Thebanos, who believed that the body is moved by Nature. Others like Euripides believed that the soul emerges from behind the Earth as cabbage.⁴¹ Agrippa did not explicitly tell us his doctrine of the soul. However, in the *Occulta Philosophia* he referred directly to this question, and his attitude becomes clear. In the first chapter of the third book, Agrippa explained how the human being can find the truth through divine religion. There is only one possibility, namely, soul and body have to be in union. The magician assumes that a human being can be healthy only when the mind, soul, and body are consonant. The ascent of the soul to god was approached in chapter six of book three (*Quomodo his ducibus anima humana scandit in naturam divinam, efficiturque; miraculorum effectrix*).⁴² The knowledge of god is possible only at the peak of spiritual life. In this condition, our divine mind attracts full truth about all things. The human being does not envision only things that happened in the past but is also able to obtain prophecies about how the things will be in future.⁴³ The mind receives the power to change things at will. However, one is only able to act through religion when one has a spiritualized mind.⁴⁴ Such a spiritualized human being could heal people or even bring them back to life. However, whosoever commits such good deeds without purification, picks up judgement over himself.⁴⁵ That means a human being must be purified in order to become spiritualized. To summarize, the soul of the human being is immortal and the spiritualized mind is the highest part of the human being, which never sins and returns to god.⁴⁶ When humans successfully recognize the

⁴¹ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos*, (Occulta philosophia), III, 52.

⁴² Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos*, (Occulta philosophia), III, 6 (“How by these guides the soul of man ascended up into the Divine nature, and is made a worker of Miracles”)

⁴³ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos*, (Occulta philosophia), III, 6.

⁴⁴ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos*, (Occulta philosophia), III, 6. At the end of the chapter it is stated: „sed nemo potest operari per puram & solam religionem, nisi qui totus factus est intellectualis.“ (But whosoever shall attempt this and not be purified, does bring upon himself judgement, and is delivered to evil spirit, to be devoured.”)

⁴⁵ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos*, (Occulta philosophia), III, 6.

⁴⁶ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos*, (Occulta philosophia), III, 36.

spiritual mind, they can achieve magic such as, for example, the art of manticism and the art of healing.⁴⁷

The doctrine of the soul of Agrippa was very similar to Franck's. The latter says in the *Guldin Arch* in chapter 81 (on the natural human being/the mind of the human being): "Mind/body and the soul/ are three different parts/however for the human being/the mind dictates/the soul appears/body echos."⁴⁸ Like Agrippa, he followed the Platonists concerning the tripartite soul. The mind not only dictates, but is also immortal.⁴⁹ In the chapter "On Soul" in the *Guldin Arch*, Franck discussed the different ideologies of "Philosophi" and concluded that the spiritual mind is the immortal part of the human being. Agrippa only concluded that in the *Occulta Philosophia*, but nowhere does Franck cite the *Occulta philosophia* in the *Guldin Arch* or in *Paradoxa*. Franck had other influences like German Mysticism, where the doctrine of the soul had been assumed by the platonic philosophy. For Franck, Agrippa was an influential philosopher who was mentioned from time to time. However, it is conspicuous that the *Occulta Philosophia* was cited nowhere. How can this coincidence be explained?

Franck and Agrippa did have a very similar concept concerning the creation of the soul. Both believed in its preexistence. Franck borrowed that concept from Johannes Tauler and from the Neoplatonic philosophy that the soul emanates from god.⁵⁰ That means the soul is not created from god as in the orthodox Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism). Agrippa discusses this concept with ambivalence, however, he shows a strong tendency toward the concept of emanation.⁵¹ The difference between the ideology of emanation and the ideology of orthodoxy was derived from the theistic idea of god, in which God as a person creates the soul, while the concept of emanation does not assume such a process or event. Neoplatonic philosophy, Gnosticism, and Hermeticism all include concepts of emanation.

⁴⁷ Agrippa damned all human arts in *De Vanitate Scientiarum*. To human arts you can add manticism, astrology and the art of healing.

⁴⁸ Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXXXI. The author translated to English. The text in the original language: „Also seind Geyst/ fleysch/ und die seel drey ding/ aber ein mensch/ der Geist dictiert/ die seel wirckt vnnd schlächt/ der leib gibt den hall“

⁴⁹ Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXXIX. "...what the soul is/should be sufficient for us/that we believe and know that she is/and is an immortal wind and mind". The author translated to English.

⁵⁰ Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXXIX.

⁵¹ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, III, 37.

Because the soul is preexistent, it was not created by god and will not be condemned by god. It would be logical that the doctrine of transmigration would be part of the doctrine of the soul.⁵² All Greek Neoplatonic philosophers, Hermes Trismegistos, and most of the gnostic philosophers believed in the transmigration of the soul, which means the soul must return to a body until it is completely free of all sins. For Agrippa, there was already in *De Vanitate Scientiarum* a very unexpected tendency toward transmigration of the soul.⁵³ In chapter 52, he cited Pythagoras, where the latter talks about reincarnation.⁵⁴ Franck developed this idea very similarly to Agrippa in his chapter “On soul” in the *Guldin Arch*, where he discussed many doctrines of philosophers concerning the concept of transmigration. As already mentioned, Franck knew *De Vanitate Scientiarum* and it is very likely that he borrowed this passage from Agrippa. In the end, he is indifferent concerning the question whether transmigration exists or not. Agrippa is more explicit concerning the question of transmigration of the soul in the *Occulta Philosophia*.⁵⁵ In chapter 41 of the third book of *Occulta philosophia (Quid de homine post mortem, opiniones variae)*⁵⁶, Agrippa discussed the doctrines of philosophers concerning transmigration of the soul. It is interesting that he cited Origen: “*Et hac doctinae ratione etiá magnus illus Origenes enarandum censuit illud Christi evangiliú; Qui gladio ferit, gladio perit. Quin & ethnici philosophi eiusmodi retaliatiois ordine Adrastiam esse pronunciant...*”⁵⁷ Very similar to Agrippa, Franck discussed the difference between the doctrine of metempsychosis and the doctrine of reincarnation. Metempsychosis had been represented by Plato which means that a soul was incarnated in the body of a human, but if it was very sinful, it has to reincarnate in the body of an animal in the next life. It seems to be almost certain that Franck used the passages of Agrippa’s *De Vanitate Scientiarum* (Chapter 52) in his discussion of the question of reincarnation and metempsychosis. The doctrine of reincarnation differs in that it proports that a soul that incarnates in the body of a human cannot reincarnate in the body of an animal in his next life. Agrippa cited the Hebrew cabalists: “*Verum Hebreorum cabaliste animas in*

⁵² From a perspective of the Christian Platonism the concept of the Cambridge Platonist Cudworth can be mentioned who links Christianity and Platonism. Cudworth rejected the doctrine of pre-existence of the soul very consistently. Therefore, he was not under strong suspicion of being a representative of the doctrine of transmigration of the soul (Cudworth, *The true intellectual system of the universe, The First Part*, 38).

⁵³ See also: Lechner, “Die Transmigration bei Agrippa von Nettesheim“.

⁵⁴ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos (2)*, (De vanitate scientiarum), 52.

⁵⁵ Lechner, “Die Transmigration bei Agrippa von Nettesheim“, 88-112.

⁵⁶ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, III, 41 (“What concerning men after death, diverse opinions”).

⁵⁷ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, III, 41. English translation: “and by the ground of this doctrine, that great Origen supposed the Gospel of Christ to be declared. He who used the sword shall perish by sword. Moreover, the ethical philosophers pronounced that retaliation of this kind is adrastia, viz, an inevitable power of divine laws...”

bruta precipitari non admittunt.”⁵⁸ Franck has the same approach as Agrippa in his chapter “On soul” in the *Guldin Arch*. The former cited Hermes Trismegistos and Iamblichus, who believed in reincarnation and not in metempsychosis, but it seems to be obvious that Franck borrowed this reference from *De Vanitate Scientiarum* (Chapter 52).⁵⁹

One major difference between Agrippa and Franck was that they did not agree on the question of whether a world soul reigns over the world. Agrippa had a Neoplatonic belief in this question, whereas Franck had a gnostic belief. In the first book of the *Occulta Philosophia*, there is an exact definition of the term world soul (*anima mundi*): “*Hic quidem spiritus talis fermè est in corpore mundi, qualis in humano corpore noster; sicut enim animae nostrae vires per spiritum adhibentur membris, sic virtus animae mundi per quintam essentiam dilatatur per omnia.*”⁶⁰ This definition relies on a hermetic microcosm-macrocosm doctrine. In neoplatonic philosophy *nous* is “above” a world soul and is the idea of god.

Hermeticism and astrology do not play an important role in Franck’s philosophy (in contradiction to Agrippa). The papers cited in the introduction show that Franck’s works deal with the conception of god, the word of god, and the creation in hermetic philosophy. Franck mainly cited Trismegistos from his first book (*Pimander*). Franck never investigated the microcosm-macrocosm doctrine or addressed astrology seriously or systematically. He also thinks poorly about the concept of the world soul, because his view did not recognize a difference between the Neoplatonic world soul and the Christian Holy Spirit. Franck tried to read the Holy Spirit into the books of pagan philosophers Plato, Porphyrius, Plotin, Hermes Trismegistos, and Numenius. In Porphyrius, he found a concept that was very similar to the Christian Trinity. However, Porphyrius named the “third god” the world soul and not the Holy Spirit. It seems to be that Franck only saw a terminological difference. Franck defined the Holy Spirit in the *Guldin Arch* as follows: “The Holy Spirit is nothing else/then grace of god/power/wind/emanation/respiratory/finger and goodness/that he shines in all things/.../and he has in mind and being no difference to the word of god/...”⁶¹ This supports the thesis that

⁵⁸ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, III, 41. English translation: “But the Cabalists of the Hebrews do not admit that souls are turned into brutes”. Translation was done by the author.

⁵⁹ Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXXX.

⁶⁰ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri tres*, I, 14. English translation: “This spirit is after the same manner in the body of the world, as ours is in the body of man. For as the powers of our soul are communicated to the members of the body by the spirit, so also the Vertue of the Soul of the World is diffused through all things by the quintessence.”

⁶¹ Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXII. The translation was done by the author. In the original text: „Der heylig Gottes Geyst ist nichts anders/ dann Gottes gnad/ kraft/ wind/ außguß/ außfluß/ athem/ finger und gütte/ damitt er inn

Franck did not know the *Occulta philosophia*, or he was not as interested in it as he was in *De Vanitate Scientiarum*. It is more likely that he knew the *Occulta Philosophia*, but he did not use it because Agrippa's magic did not fit into his philosophy. Agrippa was a representative of the neoplatonic philosophy, and there is a difference between *nous* and world soul; however, in the gnostic philosophy the term "world soul" was not important, because the world is not led by reason. In Franck's citing of Plato and Plotin, it is difficult to find a synthesis between Platonic philosophy and Christian orthodoxy.⁶² For a reasonable world, his concept of the world and of the human being is too pessimistic.⁶³ Wollgast confirmed this thesis about Franck. He even goes beyond it, because he argued that Franck was an antitrinitarian, which seems to be justified by a letter from Franck to Campanus.⁶⁴ That means Franck was not interested in the *Occulta philosophia*, because this work of Agrippa had a too strong cosmological aspect.

Very similar to the works of Agrippa is Franck's concept of the relief of the soul from the body or the ascent of the soul to god, which he approached in nearly all his works. In *Paradoxa*, Franck identified the human mind with the inner Christ, which resides in each human being. The pagan philosophers Plato, Trismegistos, Seneca, and Cicero recognized the divine mind in the human being and often called this "reason": "Seneca named sometimes god as nature and reason (as Francesco Petrarca), the divine mind in us..."⁶⁵ The knowledge of the inner divine mind (inner Christ) should be the target of each human. Insofar as this, Agrippa and Franck agreed. Agrippa connected this knowledge with magical skills of humans that can be reached if a human is fully spiritualized. Franck did not say the latter explicitly, but one can conclude it from his remarks, which included that Jesus recognized his inner Christ and he had the ability to heal humans.

As Wollgast ascertained, Franck cited in *Paradoxa* (Paradox 89) directly from *De Vanitate Scientiarum*.⁶⁶ Agrippa emphasized in chapter 58 of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* that it is not

allen Dingen leucht/ glastet/ lebt/ schwebt vnnd webt zu guttem/ und hatt im Geyst vnnd Wesen kein unterscheyd von dem wort/ ..."

⁶² Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXIX.

⁶³ For example: Franck, *Guldin Arch*, LXXXVIII. "Human being is foolish by natur in divine things/ignorant/and a fool/his wisdom is foolishness". The original German text: „Der Mensch von Natur aus inn göttlichen Dingen thorecht/ unwissend/ und ein narr/ und sein weißheyt ein thorheytt“.

⁶⁴ Franck, "Letter to Johannes Campanus", 219-233. See also: Wollgast, *Der deutsche Pantheismus im 16. Jahrhundert*, 161.

⁶⁵ Franck, *Paradoxa*, 227. In German: „Seneca nennt zuweilen Gott die Natur und die Vernunft (wie auch Francesco Petrarca), den Geist Gottes in uns, ...“

⁶⁶ Franck, *Paradoxa*, 144. Wollgast makes a remark in Paradox 89 (temple, pictures, Celebrations, sacrifice and ceremonies do not belong into the New Testament) that Franck cites directly from *De Vanitate scientiarum* (Citation number: 115).

necessary for humans to build sanctuaries and temples. God cannot be known from temples or ceremonies, but rather human beings have to find god by looking inward. In Agrippa, one has to differentiate between the inner Christ and “being of Christ” who incarnated in Jesus. Insofar as this, Franck only used parts of the doctrines of Agrippa to substantiate his own thesis. Therefore, it is not surprising that Franck nowhere used the *Occulta Philosophia*, which did not support his views. The preface of the lecture of Agrippa in Padua of 1515 (*Oratio habita Papiae*) was also never mentioned, but we have already demonstrated that Franck likely used the passage where Agrippa said that Christ revealed himself in Hermes. Schimansky proposed that Franck believed in “Christ without church,”⁶⁷ and from that perspective, there was no difference between him and Agrippa. However, the Christology of the two authors does show a difference.

4. The importance of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* for Agrippa and Franck

Franck only translated and commented on a small part of *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, but we can see that the philosophy of that book definitely influenced him. The beginning of chapter 100 of *De Vanitate Scientiarum* agreed very well with his spiritualistic philosophy:

*En audistis modo quam sint omnes disciplinae ambiguae, quam bisulquatae, quam incertae, quam plenae periculo ut quantum ex ipsis est, nescire cogamur ubinam quiescat veritas, etiam in Theologia, nisi fit, qui habeat clavem scientiae & discretionis, clausum enim est veritatis armarium, variisque obductum mysteriis, atque ipsis etiam sapientibus, sanctis praeclusum qua ad tantum, tam incomprehensum thesaurum nobis paretur ingressus.*⁶⁸

Franck borrows from that idea of Agrippa in his *Paradoxa*, specifically in *Paradoxa* 121 (*Scriptura occidens litera. Verbum Dei vivificans spiritus est*)⁶⁹ and *Paradoxa* 122 (*Veritas non potest scribi, aut exprimi*)⁷⁰, where theological spiritualism appeared. An essential argument of the soteriology of Franck was not described in detail, but for Franck, the knowledge of the inner

⁶⁷ Schimansky, *Christ ohne Kirche. Rückfrage beim ersten Radikalen der Reformation: Sebastian Franck*. Schimansky believed that Hans Denck had the strongest influence on Franck.

⁶⁸ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos Tomos* (2), 233. English translation: „You have now heard how all disciplines are dubious, insidious, uncertain and full of danger, so that we must confess that we do not know where the truth is to be found, not even in theology, unless we could find out any person who had the key of knowledge and wisdom; because the shrine of truth is closed to us and hidden behind many mysteries, yes, even the wise and holy people themselves will not open the door to this priceless treasure.”

⁶⁹ “The letter kills, the spirit gives life”.

⁷⁰ “The truth can neither be said nor written”

Christ (god inside human) is the key for the ascent of the soul. Franck translated chapter 102 (*ad encomium asini digression*) from *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, and in the end, he concluded in a way that does not arise from Agrippa:

Therefore, Agrippa concludes in his peroration/you aces/you desire heaven/not the forbidden tree/but the vivid timber/you want wisdom/throw away all the arts/... to deeply inside of you/and you will recognize all things.⁷¹

The consequence of Agrippa's "Lob des Esels" (praise of the ass; chapter 102 of *De Vanitate Scientiarum*) is that a person has to look inward to realize the inner Christ. This interpretation arose for from Franck, but not for Agrippa. For Agrippa the word of god was an encoded secret.⁷² The latter is only true for *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, because in the *Occulta philosophia* Agrippa occupied himself very intensively with the arts that were condemned in *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, such as astrology, manticism, and kabbalah. Franck seemed to interpret this paradox of Agrippa's works by believing that the *Occulta philosophia* was just not as important, and so nowhere in his work was this text cited or mentioned.

5. Conclusion

The investigation of the influence of Agrippa on Sebastian Franck revealed very interesting similarities between the two philosophers. The conception of god is Platonic in the works of both, but a small difference can be detected in their Christology. For Franck, Christ or the word of god is transcendent and in human beings. All wise philosophers and Jesus recognized their inner Christ. Franck was not directly influenced by Agrippa concerning the conception of god. Therefore, one has to differentiate between similarities and influence. Franck probably knew Agrippa's *Oratio habita Papias*, because his argument in the *Guldin Arch* concerning the revelation of Christ in Hermes is very similar to that of Agrippa. However, insofar as Frank focused more on the "Inner Christ" and not on the cosmological Christ, he did not completely agree with Agrippa. To follow Christ, human beings have to recognize their spiritual mind or the inner Christ. Agrippa differentiated between the mind as an immortal part of a human being and the being of Christ, who was "incarnated" in Jesus and Hermes Trismegistos. Both Franck

⁷¹ Franck, *Sämtliche Werke*, 134. Cited from the second *Kronbüchlein*. In the original language: „Derhalb schleüßt Cornelius inn seiner Peroration/ Nun aber/ O jr Esel/ so jr diese ware himmlische/ nit des verbotnen bawms/ sonder des lebendigen holtz/ weyßhait zu erlangen begert/ so werfft von euch aller Menschen kunst/ ... Vnd gehet in euch selbs/ so werdet jr alle ding erkennen“.

⁷² Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Opera in duos tomos (2)*, (*De Vanitate Scientiarum*), 100.

and Agrippa agree that the ascent to god is successful when a human being recognizes the spiritual mind. However, for Agrippa the spiritualized human has occult-like abilities, for example, healing or the art of manticism. According to Franck, one could argue that Jesus also had these abilities, because he detected Christ inside himself. However, Franck does not mention the latter argument specifically. Both philosophers assumed the tripartite soul, made up of the mind, soul, and body. The spiritual mind is immortal in the perspective of both, and they are both influenced by Platonists and Mysticism. However, Franck did not use Agrippa for the tripartite soul. There are again similarities, but no direct influence can be found concerning the tripartite of the soul. Agrippa and Franck also speculated on the theory of transmigration or reincarnation, in which the soul emanates from god, not created by god as in Christian orthodoxy. Franck definitely used Agrippa's *De Vanitate Scientiarum* to explain the difference between transmigration and reincarnation.

As previously mentioned, Franck did not mention the *Occulta Philosophia* in his works. The reason for that is probably that he was not a follower of astrology, manticism, kabbalah, and the microcosm-macrocosm doctrine. All these concepts are part of a syncretistic philosophy of Agrippa. Therefore, it is also logical that the concept of the world soul was not suitable for Franck. In conclusion, we agree that Wollgast was right that Franck only integrated the parts of Agrippa that fit in his own philosophy. The problem with Wollgast, however, was that this statement about Franck was purely a hypothesis that has never been examined in detail. One reason for this could be that there were many influences on Franck's philosophical theology and Wollgast was less interested in the influences. Wollgast also briefly mentioned the Hermetic and Gnostic influences, but he did not elaborate on the latter either. The chapter on the Hermetic and Gnostic influences on Franck had not been written until the twenty-first century. Wollgast also had not answer to the question why Franck did not use the *Occulta Philosophia*.

Thus, philosophy of Franck and Agrippa are congeneric concepts, but there are more fundamental differences than might be assumed at a first glance. Therefore, the author concludes that Franck's philosophy is more influenced by gnosticism and less by the *Corpus Hermeticum*. For Franck, only the first book (*Pimander*) and possibly parts of the thirteenth book (rebirth) were of interest, whereas for Agrippa, the *Corpus Hermeticum* was wholly relevant to his philosophy. Therefore, the influence of Agrippa on Sebastian Franck should not be overestimated.

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