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Original research paper

Оригинальная исследовательская статья

**Evolution of the Doctrine of Signatures of Things and the
Adamic Language in the Chemical Philosophy
of the 16th and 17th Centuries***

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to investigate paths along which a transformation of the doctrine of natural signs was developed in works by Paracelsians, forming one of the main religious and philosophic currents of Late Renaissance. The modifications of the doctrine are discussed in a context of intensive speculations on the essence of the primordial language of humankind and on the possibility of its restoration, which can describe the intellectual life of that epoch. It is argued that within “chemical philosophy” the possibility of restoration of the Adamic language directly depends on mastering the art of interpreting natural signs (*signatura rerum*), which can give a key to correct understanding of nature. And shifts in the conceptualization of such signatures involved transformations in formulating and solving of the Adamistic problems, which did not exclude reverse causation. It is also ascertained that the most orthodox followers of Paracelsus usually appealed to the Adamistic narrative in order to reinforce legitimacy of the symbolic hermeneutics of nature, developed with chiefly medico-pharmacological purposes. Meanwhile, relatively more independent Paracelsians often paid more attention to *linguo-philosophic* issues. Realizing the deficiency of the doctrine of signatures for reconstruction of the primordial language, they postulated the necessity of one (or two) of the following premises: (a) supplementing the doctrine with a mystical illumination; (b) acceptance of a weaker version, according to which natural signs are just sparse reference points slightly simplifying empirical study of nature; (c) abandonment of search for the *Ursprache* and constructing its artificial substitute, a universal semiotic system.

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Keywords: Renaissance esotericism, Book of Nature, symbolic and allegoric hermeneutics, Paracelsus, Rosicrucians, Oswald Croll, John Webster.

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Эволюция учения о сигнатурах вещей и языке Адама в «химической» философии XVI–XVII веков*

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Аннотация

Цель статьи – проследить пути, по которым происходила трансформация доктрины о природных знаках (сигнатурах) в трудах представителей парацельсианства – одного из ведущих религиозно-философских течений позднего Ренессанса. Изменение этой доктрины рассматривается в контексте интенсивных размышлений о сущности изначального языка человечества и возможности его реставрации, которые отличали интеллектуальную жизнь той эпохи. Доказывается, что в свете «химической» философии возможность обретения первозданного языка непосредственно зависела от владения искусством объяснения сигнатур, дававшим ключ корректному постижению природы. При этом сдвиги в осмыслении сигнатур влекли за собой трансформацию в постановке и решении адамической проблематики, что также не исключало обратной каузации. Выясняется, что наиболее ортодоксальные последователи Парацельса обращались к адамическому нарративу, как правило, для того, чтобы усилить легитимность символической герменевтики природы, разрабатываемой ими в основном из медико-фармакологических интересов. В свою очередь

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более независимые парацельсианцы нередко уделяли больше внимания собственно лингвофилософским вопросам. Видя недостаточность «сигнатурной» доктрины для воссоздания первоязыка, они утверждали необходимость одной (или двух) из следующих мер: а) дополнение этой доктрины идеей о мистическом озарении свыше; б) принятие ее слабой версии, по которой природные знаки суть нечастые ориентиры, незначительно упрощающие эмпирическое изучение природы; в) отказ от поисков первоязыка в пользу создания его искусственной замены – универсальной знаковой системы.

Ключевые слова: ренессансный оккультизм, Книга Природы, символика-аллегорическая герменевтика, Парацельс, розенкрейцеры, Освальд Кролл, Джон Уэбстер.

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Introduction. The Foundations of Paracelsus

Among the various views and designs inspired by the idea to recreate the language of Adam, especially relevant in the 16th – first half of the 17th centuries, only one fairly branched line of thought is traced. The central figure in its history was Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493–1541), a Swiss physician and natural philosopher, the founder of the so-called chemical philosophy and one of the creators of new, post-Galenian medicine. A.G. Debus [Debus 1977], W. Pagel [Pagel 1982], P. Meier [Meier 1993] researched the sources and principles of that philosophy and medicine. As the initiator of this line, Paracelsus established the fundamental principles that distinguished it from other intellectual movements developed within the Adamic project¹ during the Renaissance. In accordance with these principles, the primordial language of mankind, which was distinguished by a greater correspondence to the world than later tongues, had been lost but could be retrieved. An indispensable condition for this was the

¹ For analysis of this project in general, see: [Karabykov 2014].

knowledge of signatures, which are natural signs that God traced in his universe, created primarily for man. The doctrine of signatures was investigated by M. Bianchi [Bianchi 1987], T. Willard [Willard 1989] H. Haferland [Haferland 1989, 99–103], J. Bono [Bono 2008, 305–309], if to mention the few. Paracelsus himself described the art of interpreting signatures as “pre-installed” (*praedestinierten*, *signata*)². “Nature marks every thing in such a way that it can be seen from [itself] why it [can] be useful”³ [Paracelsus 1930a, 86]⁴. Such marks almost always are reduced to the similarity between a given subject and the object of its beneficial effect or the similarity can manifest itself in various ways, directly or indirectly [Sennertus 1619, 589; Porta 1619, 25–27]. Thus, the variety of signatures includes examples of obvious similarities between a thing, *e.g.* a plant, a mineral, *etc.* and a body organ or symptoms of a disease against which it is used. But that spectrum also encompasses speculatively deduced, theoretical and indirect correspondences attributed to objects that seem to have nothing in common. Paracelsian treatises on medical botany abound with examples of external similarities that bear witness to internal properties. In one of these tracts, written by the English naturalist William Coles (1626–1662), we read: “Wall-nuts have the perfect Signature of the Head: The outer husk or green Covering, represent the *Pericranium*, or outward skin of the skull, whereon the hair groweth, and therefore salt made of those husks or barks, are exceeding good for wounds in the head. The inner wooddy shell hath the signature of the Skull, and the little yellow skin, or Peel, that covereth the Kernell of the hard *Meninga & Pia Mater*, which are the thin scarfes that envelope the brain. The Kernel hath the very figure of the Brain, and therefore it is very profitable for the Brain...” [Coles 1657, 3].

² Cf. similar identification in Croll’s tract: “...ex arte praedestinata, id est signata” (from the art of predestined, that is, pre-installed) [Crollius 1643b, 38]. Along the way, I note that this significant semantic moment is often lost in translations.

³ Hereinafter, quotations from primary sources, with the exception of *Confessio Fraternitatis*, are given in my translation. In the footnotes, the original of the corresponding fragment is given. Where there is no page number in a reference, quotes are taken from the foreword or other non-paginated sections. “Die natur zeichnet ein ietlichs gewechs so von ir ausgêt zu dem, darzu es gut ist.”

⁴ Hereinafter, Paracelsus’ works are cited from his collected works edited by K. Sudhoff. Footnotes indicate the volume and, in parentheses, the year of publication.

In the eyes of Paracelsus and his followers, Adam was the first to “extract” the signatorial art and theory from natural things, making it the property of his posterity. Mastery thereof was the quintessence of Adam’s wisdom: in comparison with that, the creation of language was nothing but an appendage, relatively modest from the vantage point of the major interests of the first man. Drawing the image of Adam in his own likeness, Paracelsus presents him as a diligent researcher of nature, whose main desire was to gain medical knowledge [Paracelsus 1930b, 185; Crollius 1643a, 210]. Therefore, it would not be a mistake to consider that the significance of “pre-installed art” (*Kunst signata*) for the development of Adamicist problematics in the construct of Paracelsus and many of his followers was ambivalent. On the one hand, a correct and complete explanation of natural signs was thought as *sine qua non* in regard to the creation (and recuperation) of the original language. The Swiss philosopher repeatedly points to this, appealing to the relevant part of Genesis⁵: “You should first know that pre-installed art teaches you to give all things the right names. Our forefather Adam knew and owned it fully. Therefore, immediately upon completion of Creation, he gave all things, each individually, their special names. ...and became the first interpreter and creator of signs”⁶ [Paracelsus 1928, 397]. Thriving on the ground of anthropocentric and anthropomorphic views, the most significant of which was the analogy of macro- and microcosm, the signatorial doctrine nourished and fed in turn the unlimited epistemic optimism that Paracelsus displayed. “All that God created for the benefit of people, He gave it to them as property in their hands, for he did not want it to remain hidden. And although all this was created hidden, He did not leave them without external visible signs that would indicate a special purpose [of each thing],”

⁵ Cf.: “And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field” (Genesis 2:19–20).

⁶ “Da sollen ir erstlich wissen, das die kunst signata leret die rechten namen geben allen dingen. die hat Adam unser erster vater volkomlich gewußt und erkantnus gehabt. dan gleich nach der schöpfung hat er allen dingen eim iedwedern seinen besondern namen geben... und wie er sie nun tauft und inen namen gab, also gefiel es got wol, dan es geschach aus dem rechten grunt, nit aus seinem gut gedunken, sonder aus einer praedestinierten kunst, nemlich aus der kunst signata, darumb er der erst signator gewesen.”

says the Swiss thinker⁷ [Paracelsus 1928, 393]. Due to this optimism, finding of the primordial language did not seem too difficult to him.

On the other hand, the extolment of the *Kunst signata*, quite explainable in the light of the Paracelsian doctrine, which had a medical-philosophical character, entailed devaluation of the properly Adamicist problematics. This tendency was manifested in a significant diminution of the ontological “quality” and heuristic potential of the primordial language. According to the philosopher, that was a secondary and to a certain degree artificial creation, as compared to the signatures of things. Paracelsus believed that if the language of Adam deserves special study, then it was only as an element of the great semiotic ensemble, combining the natural and cultural domains of reality. Consequently, it was to be studied in this pan-Semiotic perspective [Bianchi 1987, 70; Haferland 1989, 101–102].

It remains to be said that the Swiss thinker himself, who willingly resorted to the Biblical story about the giving of names, understood the essence of the primordial language rather trivially, and this also testifies to the superficiality of his linguo-philosophic interests. Paracelsus believed that the main thing that distinguished the Adamic language from later tongues was the metaphorical (motivatedness) of the names given by the protoplast to all natural things [Paracelsus 1928, 397–398]. In Paracelsus’ opinion, a similar feature was inherent in the Hebrew language, which, however, he did not identify with the original language of mankind. Thus, the importance of mastering of the signatorial art for establishing names could be explained only by that, with the help of the *Kunst signata* it seemed possible to find such a trait of a thing, the whose appellation) would form the foundation of the object’s name. But if one extends this conclusion to the situation of the original naming, one is to admit that in its original elements Adam’s language was arbitrary and did not differ from other tongues.

Alternatives and continuations

Turning to other adherents of the doctrine of signatures, we can notice that the degree of its inclusion in the context of Adamicism varied notably. For the most part, the spiritual heirs of Paracelsus held the view that, only after comprehending the natural signs, Adam was able to create his own epistemically and, according to some, magically perfect language. Those whose work on *signatura rerum* proceeded

⁷ “Das alles was got erschaffen hat dem menschen zu gutem und als sein eigentumb in seine hent geben, wil er nit das es verborgen bleib. Und ob ers gleich verborgen, so hat ers doch nicht unbezeichnet gelassen mit auswendigen sichtbarlichen zeichen, das dan ein sondere praedestination gewesen.”

in a different – not Paracelsian – way might not see any essential correlation between these lines of thought. Thus, in his famous work *De occulta philosophia (On Occult Philosophy)* (1533), the German physician, humanist, esotericist Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) pays attention to both proper Adamicist and natural semiotic themes but considers them as devoid of direct relationship to each other. According to Agrippa, the only thing that makes them related is the acknowledged primacy of astral determination. He claims that, having succeeded in understanding the stellar influences on the world, Adam created the names in accordance with the essence of things [Agrippa 1533, 90–91]. With some hesitation and ambiguity, the author of *De occulta philosophia* finds those names in Hebrew, paying tribute to Jewish mysticism [Agrippa 1533, 95–96]. From his point of view, Adam was primarily a Cabbalist and not a diligent explorer of nature. For, recognizing the presence of special signs in creation, Agrippa does not establish even a distant relationship between them and the Hebrew letters, which alone “have the greatest similitude with celestials, and the world”⁸ [Agrippa 2004, 224]. In addition, in his construct there is no idea that the Hebrew names were created by the forefather by “translating” natural signs into linguistic ones. Another theorist, the Italian natural philosopher Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615), liberated astrology and magic from a traditionally religious context and developed the doctrine of signatures without any reference to the Biblical or, in particular, Adamicist narrative. In his interpretation, the fathers of this doctrine were the legendary pagan sages: Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Zoroaster, *etc.*, who were able to detect secret powers (*arcane vires*) of things in their similarity, and then use them in magic [Porta 1619, 25–27].

Turning to adherents of the “chemical” philosophy, we first consider the views of Oswald Croll (c. 1560–1608), a German occultist and one of the most orthodox Paracelsians, who developed the doctrine of signatures for medical botany. Following his teacher, Croll sees the connection between the creation of the language and the “pre-installed art” comprehended by the protoplast. Like Paracelsus, he preferred to focus on the study of natural signs but, shifting the Adamicist problematics to the periphery, made it less trivial. The initial establishment of names is related in mystical tones and does not contain “too human” or compromising details. In the opinion of the German esotericist, Adam became an ideal names-giver not so much because

⁸ “[Hebraeae literae] habent similitudinem maximam cum coelestibus & mundo”.

he managed to rely on the *Kunst signata* but due to the initial exclusion from the general order of nature, over which the Creator had elevated man. Adam was the only terrestrial creature to be given the Lord's gift of breath, "thereby teaching knowledge of the properties of all things"⁹ [Crollius 1643b, 38–39]. Defined by the likeness of Adam to God, his language is mysterious, and Croll does not claim to reveal its secret. Unlike Paracelsus, he does not consider the original language as one close to Hebrew or any other specific tongue. Neither he reduces its *raison d'être* to an ordinary metaphorical transference. The devotion for mystery, strengthening of mystical pathos in both Adamistic and natural-semiotic relations testify to the fact that our "chemist" no longer shares the limitless epistemic optimism of his teacher. Instead, he focuses on the mystical elitism of "pre-installed art" and the original names setting¹⁰.

Oswald Croll was not the only Paracelsian in whose work a tendency to diminish faith in the heuristic power of the signatorial doctrine was manifested. With much greater clarity, such a trend was declared in the writings of later representatives of "chemical" philosophy, separating them in two opposing directions. Rudiments of those ways were combined in Paracelsus' thinking. One part of the "chemists" inclined toward a positive empirical study of signs and similarities in the natural world, trying to reconcile Paracelsianism with Baconian empiricism and / or with university Galenianism and Aristotelianism (Daniel Sennert, William Coles, Wolfgang Ambrosius Fabricius). Others turned onto a mystical path, arguing the need for supernatural illumination in successful cognition of signatures. The first group produced a weak version of the *Kunst signata*. According to it, the amount of natural signs is very modest, being limited by cases of visual similarity between objects. For such was the plan of God, who had put the signatures only in some creatures, so that, like sparse road signs, they could guide people in their empirical study of the world. One of the authors of that version, Daniel Sennert (1572–1637), a physician and scientist from Wittenberg, considered it unreasonable to eliminate the cardinal difference between Adam's original cognitive constitution and any

⁹ "Deus enim omnium rerum vires ac Naturam hominem ipsum [uno tantum spiritus Divini afflatu] docuit."

¹⁰ Cf.: "These mysterious secrets were always hidden from the philosophizing mob and most of all when people began to abuse knowledge, turning to evil that which was granted by God for health and good" (Haec secretorum secretissima semper fuerunt occultata a vulgo philosophantium, & maxime postquam Homines coeperunt abuti Sapientia, disponentes ad malum, quam Deus in salutem & utilitatem eorundem concesserat) [Crollius 1643a, 211].

historical, even exceedingly righteous and brilliant naturalist. “Before the Fall, Adam had that knowledg (*sic*) [which was ‘naturally in us’], but none hath it since”¹¹ [Sennert 1662, 24]. Thus, precisely because Adam’s path is unknown to us and his language is totally lost, we are doomed to be empiricists who gain knowledge from sensory experience, that is necessarily insecure. The Creator made up for its insecurity with constant and obvious signs that teach us to find our ways in the maze of nature [Sennertus 1619, 117–125, 589–606; Coles 1657].

On the contrary, the mystical wing of Paracelsianism, extremely active in the first half of the 17th century, fostered the belief that the cognitive deficiency of mortals could be overcome in an act of God-given illumination. It pertained not only to individual inspiration: that was the time when the spiritual atmosphere of the West was heated by eschatological expectations. They were especially high in the Protestant countries, where some trembled in anticipation of the apocalypse, while others sought the last (and radical) Reformation, which promised to establish the millennial kingdom of Christ on Earth¹². With the advent of this era, the millenarians taught the world was to “shall awake out of her heavy and drowsy sleep” and, up to the end of its history, to be at the zenith of its intellectual strength, coupled with earthly prosperity and spiritual flourishing [Confessio 2003, 318]. In the words of *Confessio Fraternitatis* (1614) phrased by the mysterious Rosicrucians, an esoteric union invented or created by several German intellectuals at the dawn of “the Age of Geniuses,” these gifts would be fruit of “the blessedness of our age” [Confessio 2003, 317]. Paracelsus’ heirs in the religious-mystical lineage, the Rosicrucians persistently emphasized the idea of spiritual selectivity and initiation into mysteries, which was natural for a secret society. If the world as a whole is on the verge of total transformation, then there are already people who, by the grace of God, have crossed this threshold and preach to the world from the blessed kingdom that is still inside them. These elected perfectly understand “the great Book of Nature” that “stands [potentially] open to all men” and is equal to the Bible [Confessio 2003, 318]. For “these characters and letters, as God hath here and there incorporated them in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, so hath he imprinted them most apparently into the wonderful creation of heaven and earth, yea in all beasts”, as the authors of the *Confessio* teach [Confessio 2003, 318]. Unlike Paracelsus

¹¹ “Et si enim Adamo ea inerat rerum ante lapsum Cognitio, ut ijs omnibus secundam suam scientiam vera nomina imponere posset: nulli tamen homini post lapsum a naturae hoc amplius concessum est” [Sennertus 1619, 121].

¹² For a picture of apocalyptic and millenarian sentiments in the early Modern Europe, see: [Johnston 2011; Laursen & Popkin 2001; Yates 2003, 58–81].

and Croll, they see in natural signs primarily signs forecasting the future and not a source of medical knowledge. At the same time, the Rosicrucians continue to comprehend the signatures in the Adamicist perspective. According to their pamphlet, they cognized both books of the Creator and, having brilliantly repeated the “path of Adam,” created from the signatures their “magic writing, and have found out, and made, a new language for ourselves, in the which withall is expressed and declared the nature of all things” [Confessio 2003, 319]. Aspiring to the future, the ideologists of the Brotherhood do not talk about their actions in terms of restoring the *Ursprache* and primordial wisdom. They seemed to evaluate their imagined system more modestly, and that modesty would be shared later by nearly all projectors of universal languages. Schemes of such artificial systems would be offered as palliatives against the “Babylonization” of the world, when all hopes for the restoration of the language of Eden would have run out¹³. At the same time, the Rosicrucians postulate continuity, linking their creation with the “language of our forefathers, Adam and Enoch,” and this strongly distinguishes their system from all known historical tongues [Confessio 2003, 319].

Webster’s program

The semiotic thinking of the authors of *Confessio Fraternitatis*, one of the most striking millenarian texts of that era, developed at the intersection of retrospective and perspective trends that coexisted in the Adamicist project at the later stage of its development. In order to form their new-old language, according to their testimony, the Rosicrucians had to find the necessary natural semiotic material, and both of those steps could not be carried out without divine assistance. We see a similar situation in the speculations of John Webster (1610–1682), a Puritan minister and educational reformer. Like the Rosicrucians and a number of other Protestant thinkers of that era (Croll, Boehme, Comenius), whose ideas echo in his *Academiarum examen* (1654), Webster believed in the infallible “symphony” of both Books of God. But if the Bible, which was now hidden by “the Papists,” has been returned to the nations through the efforts of the Reformers, then Nature, always available to the eyes of mortals, still remains in neglect [Webster 1654, 19–20]. The Puritan sees the cause of it in the cult of humanistic scholarship, with its extolment of philology and practical barrenness, echoing the sad diagnosis given to the modern culture in

¹³ For the best research on the 17th-century projects of universal language, see: [Maat 2004; Slaughter 1982].

*Confessio Fraternitatis*¹⁴ [Webster 1654, 19–21, 33]. Accordingly, the panacea can consist in a categorical refusal to build a secular culture and in returning to nature, which, for Webster, remains written in the language of emblems and hieroglyphs. He sees in each creature “living and speaking pictures, [not as dead letters, but as] preaching symbols”¹⁵ [Webster 1654, 30].

However, disappointed at the unfulfilled promises of the Rosicrucians, he criticizes those who, following Paracelsus and considering signatures to be an easily comprehensible subject, reduced them to signs of external similarity between things [Webster 1654, 30]. Adam himself did not create his perfect language because he was a pedantic empiricist, capable to recognize “pre-installed art” in nature. This language was embedded in the forefather during the act of Creation as a reflection of light, an echo of the divine voice of the Almighty, of his creative “*Fiat!*” “Like so many *Harmoniacal* and *Symphoniacal* voices,” all the created manifests “the wisdom, power, glory, and might of the transcendent central Abygge of unity, from whence they did arise” [Webster 1654, 27–28]. According to Webster, Adam deliberately “lived... in the language of the Father,” which, alas, cannot be said about his descendants, brought down by the Fall [Webster 1654, 26]. What should they do then? Seeking an answer, the author of *Examen* noticeably fluctuates between maximalist and minimalist programs. The former was inspired by the Adamicist speculations of “chemists,” while the latter was inspired by the universal language movement which was in full swing at that time. The maximalist program strove to comprehend the “language of nature,” which came close to Adam’s tongue in the writings of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), mentioned in this connection by Webster [Webster 1654, 26; Karabykov 2018]. The goal of the minimalist plan was the creation (or, as the author once says, “discovery”) of a universal sign system, which would be primarily of visual-graphic nature. Although the Puritan eagerly emphasizes the utilitarian benefits that this “mediator between the nations” promised

¹⁴ Cf.: “Concerning the alteration and amendment of Philosophy, we have (as much as at this present is needful) sufficiently declared, to wit, that the same is altogether weak and faulty; yet we doubt not, although the most part falsely do allege that she (I know not how) is sound and strong, yet notwithstanding she fetches her last breath and is departing” [Confessio 2003, 313].

¹⁵ Despite the influential thesis of Peter Harrison about the direct influence of the literary exegesis of Protestants on the rise of the literal-mindedness in the era of the Scientific revolution of the 16th–17th centuries, a symbolic understanding of nature lasted the longest in the midst of radical Protestant denominations [Harrison 1998; Fissel & Cooter 2008, 146–147; Zakai 2010, 17–26, 231–73].

to deliver, the new system should have become a means to heal all the consequences of the Babylonian catastrophe, including cognitive-epistemological ones. Webster thinks of it as a more effective tool for cognition and translation of knowledge than existing languages. The effectiveness of this system should not come from the *Kunst signata* that stands behind it, for the keys to the “pre-installed art” are generally lost [Webster 1654, 28–30]. The author takes a different concept as the cornerstone of his design, which played a paramount role in the 17th-century new philosophy of language. These were mentalism, according to which every thing perceived by a person imprints in his mind its “ideal-shape”, and a representationalist view of language [Webster 1654, 21; Formigari 1988, 86]. Like many in his time, Webster believed that if one transposes such – the same for everyone – image, into an adequate external form, one can create the desired semiotic system. Mentalism and representationalism seem to underlie his maximalist program too, the theoretical foundations of which are not clearly defined.

The author of *Academiarum examen* does not follow the “chemists” in referring to the doctrine of signatures, whose meaning is only open to the illuminated by God. Instead, he appeals to hieroglyphics, steganography and cryptography – the sacred and profane means of communication. Finding them similar in structure to his system in its weak (“the universal character”) and strong (“the language of nature”) versions, Webster believes that they are also based on the translation of mental images into graphic ones [Webster 1654, 24–25].

Conclusion

The cultural rise of the doctrine of signatures was manifested in high esteem, in which the “arts” associated with it (physiognomy, palmistry, etc.), were held as well as in their remarkable variety claiming to read the whole Book of Nature. All this sheds light on causes of the marginalization of linguistic issues in the Adamicist construct of Paracelsus and his followers. However, we observe not mere pushing to the periphery but also substitution. In its process understanding of natural signs *in toto* was gradually shaped in a new quasi-linguistic concept of the language of nature, brought closer to the language of Adam. The most fundamental development of this concept (*Natursprache*) was proposed by the mentioned German mystic and theosophist Jacob Boehme. He advanced the Paracelsian doctrine of natural signs and of the primordial language. Unlike Boehme, most orthodox Paracelsians used the Adamicist narrative mainly for

theological justification of their activity. The latter was directed by utilitarian, chiefly pharmaceutical, purposes and embraced the related fields of medicine, natural magic and alchemy. On the contrary, those of the “chemical” philosophers who earnestly considered the essence and restoration of the Adamic language, came to suggest combined strategies, realizing the difficulty of this task. According to those strategies, the study of natural signs was to be supplemented with divine inspiration of a researcher (Boehme, Ellistone, *etc.*) or with creation of a new sign system that was to replace the primordial language (Rosicrucians, Webster, *etc.*). A special place was occupied by the weak version of the signatorial doctrine (Sennert, Coles, Sala, *etc.*), which reconciled Paracelsian and Galenic principles and affirmed *only relative value* of cognition of signatures, clearly insufficient to solve the Adamicist problematics. Therefore, being confident that *Ursprache* had been lost and could not be recreated under current conditions, the supporters of that version moved the Adamicist project nearer to its logical conclusion.

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