

Pico's Kabbalistic Exegesis in *Heptaplus*: An Outline of the Problem

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Abstract: The paper deals with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's concept of kabbalistic exegesis. This is mostly apparent in his works *Commento* (1486), *Conclusiones* (1486), *Apologia* (1487) and *Heptaplus* (1489). Firstly, the study focuses on the origins and motifs of Pico's kabbalistic exegesis in the framework of *prisca theologia*. Secondly, it analyses potential Jewish sources (e.g., "Abulafia", "Recanati"), translated by Flavius Mithridates, and then considers, how Pico incorporates those into his kabbalistic exegesis in *Heptaplus* in particular. In this context, it must be said that due to Mithridates, Pico's concept of Kabbalah acquires an almost supernatural and divine character.

Keywords: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Flavius Mithridates, kabbalistic exegesis, Heptaplus

Introduction

Giovanni Pico, called *Count of Mirandola and Concordia*, is not only known as the author of *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, but also obtained fame as the creator of "new" syncretic philosophy and humanist theology, which is presented mainly in his works *Commento* (1486), *Conclusiones* (1486) and *Hepta-*

plus (1488/1489).¹ Apart from the analysis of Neoplatonic sources,² modern researchers focus on the reception of kabbalistic exegetical tradition.³ They proceed from the assumption that, while editing the *Oratio* and *Commento*, Pico was in contact with the Jewish scholar Elia del Medigo (1458–1493) as well as with the Jewish convert Flavius Mithridates (1450–1490?).⁴ Due to the latter,

¹ *Oratio de hominis dignitate* – see Giovanni Pico: *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, in: *Id.: De hominis dignitate. Heptaplus. De ente et uno e scritti vari*, E. Garin (ed.), Firenze: Vallecchi 1942: 101–165; Giovanni Pico: *Oration on the Dignity of Man. A New Translation and Commentary*, F. Borghesi, M. Papio and M. Riva (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012: 108–277; ‘Appendix A. Pico’s Oration,’ in: B. Copenhaver: *Magic and the Dignity of Man. Pico della Mirandola and His Oratio in Modern History*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019: 459–482. *Conclusiones* – see ‘Appendix C. Selections from Pico’s 900 Conclusions’, in: B. Copenhaver: *Magic and the Dignity of Man...*, *op.cit.*: 485–501; ‘Part 2: Text, Translation, and Commentary’, in: S. A. Farmer: *Syncretism in the West: Pico’s 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Tempe: Arizona 1998: 183–553. *Commento* – see ‘Commento dello illustrissimo signor conte Joanni Pico Mirandolano sopra una canzona de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni cittadino fiorentino secondo la mente et opinione de’ platonici,’ in *De hominis dignitate...*, *op.cit.*: 445–581; Giovanni Pico: *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*, translated by S. Jayne, New York: Peter Lang, 1984; *Benivieni neoplatonista versének kommentárja*, translated by M. Imregh, Budapest: KGRE: L’Harmattan, 2012. *Heptaplus* – see ‘Heptaplus: De septiformi sex dierum geneseos enarratione ad Laurentium Medicem,’ in: *De hominis dignitate...*, *op.cit.*: 167–383; *The Heptaplus: On the Sevenfold Narration of the Six Days of Genesis*, translated by D. Carmichael, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998: 63–174; *Heptaplus avagy a teremtés hat napjának hétszeres magarázata*, translated by M. Imregh, Budapest: Arcticus, 2002. For a report of Pico’s life, see G. Busi: *Vera relazione sulla vita e i fatti di Giovanni Pico conte della Mirandola*, Torino: Aragno 2010; F. Borghesi: ‘A Life in Works’, in: M. V. Dougherty (ed.): *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008: 202–219.

² For example: see M. J. B. Allen: *Studies in the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico*, London: Routledge, 2017: 151–183.

³ Kabbalah is Jewish mystical teaching, characterized as the reception of tradition by oral transmission, involving two main parts. The first is speculative and dominated by the doctrine of Sefirot (from *safar* – calculate), while the other is practical kabbalah with the doctrine of names (*Shemot: Keter, Hokmah, Binah, Hesed, Din, Tiferet, Nesah, Hod, Yesod* and *Malkut*). See also ‘Audiui tamen quosdam qui addunt super numero decem numerationum ipsam Ensoph per unam numerationem quia dicunt postquam omnes numerationes sunt decem in numero suo habent omnino finem numero ideo est dicendum quod creavit coronam superiorem tamquam ens id est quoddam occultum ipso ensoph et est causa causarum seu adinventio adinventionum.’ (in Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989]: 236).

⁴ Giovanni Pico: *Lettere*, F. Borghesi (ed.), Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2018: 113: “Postquam enim Hebraicae linguae perpetuum mensem dies noctesque invigilavi, ad Arabicae studium et Chaldaicae totus me contuli, nihil in eis veritus me profecturum minus quam in Hebraica profecerim, in qua possum nondum quidem cum laude, sed citra culpam epistolam dictare.”

Pico earnestly studied Hebrew, Aramaic and Chaldean and gained access to an enormous number of Hebrew manuscripts that Mithridates gradually made available to him as he translated them into Latin.⁵ In this context, the work *Sitrei Torah* (*De Secretis Legis*) by the ecstatic kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1240–1292) can be mentioned, which was revised by Mithridates. He also translated Abulafia's letter for his disciple Jehuda, *Ve-zot li-Yehuda* (*Summa brevis cabale que intitatur Rabi Jeude*), where he criticises the doctrine of Sefirot and voices a preference for the doctrine of Semot.⁶ However, Pico's library has another important work, *Peruš ha-tefillot* (*Liber de secretis orationum et benedictionum cabale*) by Menahem Recanati (1250–1310), a kabbalist from the 13th century, who elaborated the concept of theosophical-theurgical kabbalah, in some aspects differently from Abulafia. While Abulafia desired to attain a mystical

See also Giovanni: *Opera omnia* (1557–1573), Basileae 1557 [Hildesheim: Olms 1969]: 385 – 386: “Nam ille docere me Chaldaicam linguam nulla voluit ratione, nisi adiuratum prius, et quidem conceptis verbis, ne illa cuiquam traderem, facere fidem huius rei tibi potest noster Hieronymus Benivenius, quid cum adesset forte dum me ille docebat furens Mithridates hominem eliminavit.” F. Bacchelli: *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki 2001: 6–7; G. Murano: *La Biblioteca arabo-ebraica di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 2022: 62–65; E. P. Mahoney: ‘G. Pico della Mirandola and E. del Medigo, N. Vernia and A. Nifo’, in: G. C. Garfagnini (ed.): *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994). Mirandola, 4–8 ottobre*, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1997: 128–138.

⁵ Mithridates' translations include: Azriel of Gerona: *Quaestiones super decem numerationibus cum responsibus suis*; *Sepherabaik cum expositione celi enar*; Abraham ibn Waqar: *Liber de radicibus seu terminis cabalae; Expositio Decem Numerationum; De proportione divinitatis; Liber combinationum in cabala et alia manuscripta in papiro*; Abraham Axelrad: *Corona nominis boni*; Gersonides, *Cantica Canticorum Salmonis per Fl. Mithridatem ad Picum traductio* (*Commento al-Cantico dei Cantici nella traduzione di Flavio Mitridate*, edited and translated by M. Andreatta, Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 2009). J. Gikatilla: *The Book of Punctuation. Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, edited by A. Martini, Torino: Nino Aragno, 2010; *The Book of Bahir. Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, S. Campanini (ed.), Torino: Nino Aragno, 2005. *The Great Parchment. Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, G. Busi & S. Campanini (eds.), Torino: Nino Aragno, 2004. *Four Short Kabbalistic Treatises*, S. Campanini (ed.), Berlin: Institut für Judaistik–Firenze: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 2019.

⁶ A. Abulafia: *Imrey Shefer*, Leipzig 1854, I: 37–38. Compare with ‘We-zot li Jehuda’, in S. Campanini: ‘Talmud, Philosophy, Kabbalah: A Passage from Pico della Mirandola's Apologia and its Sources’, in *The Words of A Wise Man's Mouth are Gracious. Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, edited by M. Perani, Berlin–NY, 2005: 442–443: ‘Nec est dubium quod prima pars prior est in esse temporis discendi in cabala, quam secunda pars. Et secunda prior est gradu et nobilitate quam prima, quia est finis in creandis individui humanae speciae et fieri similis heloim, et qui pervenit, ad hunc gradum est cuius intellectus exit in actum solum.’

union with God via the kabbalist technique *gematria*, Recanati aimed to unite with God using system of the 10 Sefirot, which emanate from En Sof.⁷

However, Pico is believed not to have collaborated so closely with Mithridates three years later (1488/1489), because the Jewish convert was simultaneously imprisoned in Rome on suspicion of murder, and their paths were never meant to cross again. Thus, according to modern interpreters Pico was predominately in contact with another Jewish scholar, Yohanan Alemanno, who mediated Arabic and Hebrew sources for him and introduced Pico to the secrets of Greek and Arabic philosophy, or Jewish mysticism. It is possible to highlight his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, which the Rabbi began working on in 1469 and subsequently, at Pico's suggestion, returned to during his second stay in Florence (1488) Attention can also be drawn to his work *Collectanea* (a commentary on a work of the Arabic philosopher Ibn Tufayl), which should demonstrate numerous parallels with the works *Commento* and *Oratio*. Alemanno's work was to serve Pico together with the treatise *Hay ha-'olamin* (*On Immortality*), during the creation of his work *Heptaplus*.⁸

Thus, Moshe Idel affirms that the Jewish scholar could also influence Pico's kabbalistic concept in his *Heptaplus*. Indeed, Alemanno combined the Spanish and Italian theosophical-theurgical branch (represented by Recanati) with the ecstatic-prophetic kabbalistic elements (Abraham Abulafia). Fabrizio Lelli also emphasises similar motifs, which are found in Pico's kabbalistic curriculum. Moreover, Idel underlines his belief by proclaiming that Mithridates translated

⁷ M. Recanati: *Commentary on the Daily Prayers. Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text and an English Version*, G. Corazzol (ed.), Torino: Nino Aragno, 2008: 1. 2., 170–171: "Et iam sapientes nostri dicunt quod, antequam creasset deus sanctus et benedictus mundum suum, erat ipse deus sanctus et benedictus et nomen eius solum tantum, ut etiam dicit magnus rabi Eliezer in amporismis suis itaque in cogitatione sua velle producere et facere esse decem numerationes, quarum vita et nutritio est ab ipso benedicto et excelso vocato ensoph, et in virtute essentiae est essentia primae numerationis, a qua virtus omnium numerationum. Et hoc est secretum magnitudinis eius ad sciendum et cognoscendum res separatas et que processerunt ab eo. Verum tamen inquirere de ea prohibetur, sicut dicunt sapientes nostri in occultis a te noli inquirere, quod intellegunt de hac prima numeratione." Gematria – one of the kabbalistic mystical techniques (notarikon, themurah), where the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are represented as numbers.

⁸ F. Lelli: 'Introduzione,' in: Yohanan Alemanno: *Hay ha-'olamin (L'immortale). Parte I: la Retorica*, edited and translated by F. Lelli, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1995: 8–9; *Idem.*: 'Umanesimo Laurenziano nell'opera di Alemanno,' in: D. L. Bemporad and I. Zattelli (eds.): *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Firenze: Olschki, 1998: 53–55; A. Lesley: *The 'Song of Solomon's Ascents' by Yohanan Alemanno: Love and Human Perfection according to a Jewish Associate of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, doctoral dissertation, California Univ., 1976.

Hebrew texts which were considerably in concordance with Alemanno's type of kabbalistic exegesis, and *de facto* copied Pico's lifelong study programme.⁹

In his thesis, Idel assumes that both protagonists met in Florence two years earlier (1486). This hypothesis is based on the analysis of the third part of Pico's *Commento*, where two Hebrew names, "Maenan e Johanan", appear.¹⁰ The former belonged to the medieval scholar Menahem Recanati, while "Johanan" corresponds to the name "Yohanan", and according to Garin, belongs to Alemanno, who was active in Florence. He was there first from 1455 to 1462, and returned in 1488, when he worked in the home of the banker Jehiel ben Samuel Pisa. Thus, Idel believes Pico knew some of Alemanno's works two years earlier. Garin's view was rejected by Secret with reference to the documented encounter of the two Renaissance intellectuals later in 1488. His opinion was in the minority; other researchers (Nowak, Lesley, and Wirszubski) did not agree with him. Conversely, they worked with the theory that Alemanno could already have influenced the drafting of Pico's *Conclusiones* (1486) and, via their oral consultations, co-determined the actual selection of Mithridates' activities as translator.¹¹ Garin's error was successfully refuted relatively recently. Due to the thorough analysis of *Sefer ha-Bahir* conducted by Campanini, the name "Yohanan" was credibly identified as Rabbi Yohanan, which is apparent in the following excerpt: "Sic enim dixit rabi Johanan omnes libri textus sunt sancti et lex etiam sancta, sed canticum canticorum est sanctum sanctorum."¹² There-

⁹ M. Idel: 'The Kabbalistic Backgrounds of the «Son of God» in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Thought', in: F. Lelli (ed.): *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, 2014: 23–24; *Idem.*: 'The Magical and Neoplatonic of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance,' in: D. B. Ruderman (ed.): *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in the Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, 1992: 111; F. Lelli: 'Un collaboratore ebreo di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Yohanan Alemanno', *Vivens Homo* 5/2, 1994: 421. M. Idel: 'Appendix 3. R. Yohanan Alemanno's Study Program,' in *Idem.*: *Kabbalah in Italy 1280–1510*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011: 340–343.

¹⁰ Giovanni Pico: *Commento*, 535: ... *del divino e celeste nella Cantica sua, e però Johanan e Manaen ebrei e Jonathan caldeo dice che fra tutti e' cantici della scrittura sacra quello è el più divino*. M. Idel: *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, Budapest: Central University Press, 2005: 185.

¹¹ E. Garin: 'Marsilio Ficino, Girolamo Benivieni e Giovanni Pico,' in *Giornale storico della filosofia italiana* 23, 1942: 93–99; F. Secret: *Les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, Paris: Dunod, 1964: 43; J. Perles: 'Les savants juifs à Florence à l'époque de Laurent de Médecis', *Revue des études juives* 12, 1886: 245; A. Lesley: *The Song of Solomon's Ascents...*, *op.cit.*: 30–31; B. C. Novak: 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Jochanan Alemanno', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45, 1982: 125–147; Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 256–257.

¹² *The Book of Bahir...*, *op.cit.*: 174, 215; Saverio Campanini: 'Introduction,' in: *ibid.*: 97.

fore, it appears that Alemanno's importance was not particularly prominent in the early phase of Pico's kabbalistic development.

The paper focuses on whether Mithridates' influence was only evident in Pico's "early" kabbalistic period (1486–1487), or whether it was manifest in the editing phase of *Heptaplus* (1488/1489) via his translations and interpretations. First, the article studies Jewish potential sources (e.g., "Abulafia" and "Recanati") translated by Mithridates, which Pico could use in the framework of *prisca theologia*. Second, it considers how he could incorporate these into his kabbalistic exegesis of *Heptaplus*. However, the two interpretation methods may be interconnected.

Kabbalistic Exegesis in the Context of *Prisca Theologia*

It is known that Mithridates first moved within Ficino's circle and, shortly afterwards, started working for Pico. He not only presented himself as an expert in biblical languages (i.e., Hebrew, Chaldean, and Aramaic) and a physician, but also used the title "philosophus".¹³ Aware that he should impress the Florentine scholars as much as possible, he considered himself a legitimate friend of Plato (*legitimus Platonis amicus*). Although he taught Pico Hebrew, he also attempted to convince his pupil that he was being introduced to "the old Jewish wisdom", which was comparable with both Pythagoras' and Plato's doctrines.¹⁴

Oratio contains a passage seeking the synthesis of Hebrew and Platonic sources: "as for those matters pertaining to philosophy, it truly seems you are hearing Pythagoras or Plato, whose conclusions bear such affinity to the Christian faith that our own Augustine pronounced immense gratitude to God that the Platonic books made their way into his hands".¹⁵ In *Heptaplus*, this dictum is then supported by Pico's statement: *nihil aliud esse Platonem quam Moysen Attica...* Ultimately, not even Ficino doubted it; he also used the same

¹³ "Magister Wilhelmus Raymundus Mithridates, artium et sacre theologie professor, apostolice sedis acolitus et linguarum hebraicae, arabicae, caldaicae, graecae et latinae interpres." G. Bauch: 'Die Einführung des Hebräischen in Wittenberg', *Montschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* XLVII, 1904: 79: *Homo est, ut audio, doctissimus omnium linguarum... peritissimus, praeterea theologus, philosophus.*

¹⁴ M. Ficino: *Supplementum Ficinianum. Marsilii Ficini florentini philosophi platonici opuscula inedita et dispersa*, P. O. Kristeller (ed.), Firenze: Olschki, 1937 [reprint: Firenze: Olschki, 2000], I: 35.

¹⁵ Giovanni Pico: *Oration on the Dignity of Man...*, *op.cit.*: 273.

arcane reply in his *De religione christiana* (1474).¹⁶ Thus, it is not surprising that this phrase was also transferred in Mithridates' *Sermo* (1481): "...ut Numenius Pythagoricus in volumine De bono scribit... Et idem rursus, Nihil aliud esse Platonem quam Mossen actica...". The aforementioned facts evidence that the Jewish convert wanted to gain Pico's trust. Thus, he offered him kabbalistic texts whose common feature was the combination of the Jewish and Greek sources within the concept of *prisca theologia*.¹⁷

Such an authentic Hebrew source was Recanati's *Commentary on the daily prayers*, which Mithridates translated for Pico into Latin in 1486 under the title "Liber de secretis orationum et benedictionum cabalae". Here he proceeded in the spirit of the humanist principles, *ad fontes*, presenting his *occultum mysterium* in the form of glosses and original comments, most of which were in the margins. He also knew that Pico needed this text for his private studies. However, he could never have presupposed that this work could enter the hands of other interested parties. This explains why *Liber de secretis* (and other word by word translations of Mithridates) can be characterised by an almost mechanical rendition of the Hebrew original, which should have helped Pico understand often very difficult mystical-theurgical treatises on the Jewish liturgy.¹⁸

It must be mentioned that Mithridates was greatly interested in continuing to work with Pico. As Corazzol believed, he could have been motivated by not only the dream of constant financial security, but also the desire to apply his

¹⁶ "Plato usque adeo Iudaeos imitatus est, ut Numenius Pythagoricus dixerit Platonem nihil aliud fuisse quam Moysen Attica lingua loquentem. Addit in libro De bono Pythagoram quoque Iudaica dogmata sectatum fuisse. Plato in Epinomide scientiarum causam inquit fuisse barbarum quondam qui primus haec invenit; post addit ab Aegyptiis Syriisque cuncta manasse. Iudaea vero ex quadam sui parte, quam Galileam Plinius vocat, semper in Syria a scriptoribus habita est et ex parte quadam Phoenicia etiam apud priscos appellatur, ut Eusebius probat..." (M. Ficino: *Opera...*, *op.cit.*: 29–30). Giovanni Pico: *Heptaplus...*, *op.cit.*: 172.

¹⁷ Fl. Mithridates: *Sermo...*, *op.cit.*: 101. Eusebius: *Praeparatio Evangelica*, T. Caisford (ed.), Oxford: Oxonii et typographeo academico, 1843: IX, 6, 9. Trapezuntius: *Rhetoricorum libri quinque*, Venezia: Vindelino da Spira, non ante 1472: IX, 3: "Numenius autem pythagoricus aperte scribit nihil aliud esse Platonem quam Moysem attica lingua loquentem, et in primo volumine de bono Plato inquit atque Pythagoras quae Brachmanes Magi Aegyptii Judaeique invenerunt ea graecae ipsi exposuerunt." See also G. G. Stroumsa: *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999; G. Bartolucci: *Vera religio. Marsilio Ficino e la traduzione ebraica*, Torino: Paideia 2017: 74–77.

¹⁸ See also M. Ficino: *Opera...*, *op.cit.*: 933: "Argonautica et hymnos Orphei, et Homeri et Proculi, Theologiamque Hesiodi... adolescens, nescio quomodo, ad verbum mihi soli trasntuli..."; G. Corazzol, 'Introduction', in: M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 99–101; S. Campanini: 'Introduction', in: *The Book of Bahir...*, *op.cit.*: 77–79.

extraordinary philological talent.¹⁹ Thus, he offered Pico, his medium, Hebrew texts that were meant to place him on the right interpretational path. In one of the *Liber de secretis* glosses, the division between philosophical speculation, and kabbalistic contemplation was underlined. It is evident that Mithridates' endeavour was to encourage Pico to choose the latter option. If such a discipline is to acquire real relevance, it must be revealed gradually *via allegorica*. That explains why the term "cabala" is not directly observed in the *Liber de secretis*, instead it is found in its hidden form: "verum tamen sapientes nostri in libro midrax tillim, idest glossa psalterii." However, the term "cabala" appears in Pico's *Apologia*.²⁰

In this manner, Mithridates indicated the indispensability of kabbalistic doctrine. If he wanted to highlight its priority over philosophy, he needed to cover it in authentic and esoteric attire. To further emphasise its quality, he inserted *occultum mysterium* into Recanati's system of hierarchically arranged sciences. At the lowest level of knowledge, Mithridates considered that natural philosophy concerned merely sensual knowledge; however, he gave the highest rank to the kabbalah as the supernatural knowledge God revealed to the patriarchs, prophets, and their followers, the sages, who received this *mysterium* "not through written documents but through orderly successions of revelations from one man to another"²¹ The same distinction between the sciences is represented in the form of three worlds, which are assigned the term "Merkavah" (Chariot): firstly, the Sefirot world is equivalent to the upper Merkavah; secondly, the

¹⁹ Compare with Corazzol's opinion (G. Corazzol: 'Introduction', in M. Recanati, *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 104: 'At the time of his life, Mithridates was trying to see his privileges as a talented convert restored, and Pico was to be the medium to rehabilitation. In order to do so, he had great interest in pleasing Pico with his work and wanted to succeed in his project. This would certainly lead him to stress and bend the passages in which he saw a Christianizing potential – but also required the soundest accuracy so that Pico would understand what was implied in those texts belonging to a different culture.

²⁰ M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 7. 17. 1, 295; Giovanni Pico: *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae et Concordiae comitis Apologia*, in *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 174.

²¹ Giovanni Pico: *Apologia*, *ibid.*: 175–176: "... ex praecepto Dei populo communicasse, de hac vero mandatum ei a Deo, ne ipsam scriberet, sed sapientibus solum qui erant septuaginta communicaret, quos idem Moyses ex praecepto Dei elegerat ad custodiendam legem, eisque itidem praeciperet, ne eam scriberent, sed successoribus suis viva voce revelarent, tum et illi aliis et sic ordinem perpetuo. Ex quo modo tradendi istam scientiam per successivam, scilicet receptionem, unius ab altero dicta est ipsa scientia Cabalae, quod idem est, quod scientia receptionis, quia idem significat Cabala apud Hebraeos, quod apud nos receptio." *Idem.*: *Oration...*, *op.cit.*: 245, 261.

middle Merkavah belongs to the angelic world, thirdly, the lower Merkavah corresponds to the lower world.²²

Attention is now focused on whether Pico's concept of "cabala" can somehow correspond to with Recanati's curriculum, or more precisely, with Mithridates' misrepresentation (i.e., Christianising interpretation). This hypothesis is verified using the example of his second "kabbalistic" thesis, which is following: "Whatever other kabbalists may say, I would divide the visionary part of kabbalah into four, corresponding to the fourfold division of philosophy that I have usually proposed. First is what I call knowing how to revolve the alphabet, corresponding to the part of philosophy that I call comprehensive philosophy. The second, third, and fourth part is the threefold Chariot, corresponding to a threefold particularizing philosophy about divine, middle, and sensible natures."²³ Here, Pico contemplates the speculative branch of the kabbalah, dominated by the Sefirot. The term "threefold Merkavah" is also relevant. What is its function? In Idel's view, it serves as an intermediary bond between Pico's and Alemmano's concepts of mathematical astrology and kabbalah, whereas Corazzol links *triplex merchiava* with Recanati's reflection on three worlds (or Chariot). Specifically, the Sefirot is linked to Pico's concept of divine nature; the angelic world corresponds to middle nature; and the third, lower world is equivalent to intellectual nature. Within the Sefirot system, "the threefold

²² M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 1. 1, 167–168: "... Tu autem interrogasti ut placeret mihi illuminare oculos tuos de petitionibus tuis nobilibus ascendentibus in una harundine plenis et bonis in quibus est colligatio et conexio curruum qui dicuntur merchaba..."; *Ibid.*: 12. 1. 6, 352–353: "... quod dicta philosophorum et opiniones eorum et demonstrationes eorum non sunt capiendae nisi in rebus naturalibus et omnibus his que inferius quam sphaera (lunae), que dicuntur apud sapientes nostros currus inferioris. Non autem debemus uti demonstrationibus eorum et rationibus in his quae sunt super naturam, cuiusmodi sunt que continentur in curru medio et in curru superiore, quia ab eis philosophi distant velut oriens ab occidente vel (quam) caelum a terra elevatur. Ideo nos debemus non quaerere de his probationes sensibiles sed credere his quae revelata sunt nobis quae tradidit deus sanctus et benedictus patriarchis et prophetis qui postea revelarunt sapientibus nostris".

²³ "Quicquid dicant alii cabaliste, ego partem speculativam cabalae quadruplicem dividerem, correspondentem quadruplici partitioni philosophiae, quam ego solitus sum affere. Prima est scientia quam ego voco alphabetariae revolutionis, correspondentem parti philosophiae quam ego philosophiam catholicam voco. Secunda, tertia, et quarta pars est triplex merchiava, correspondentes triplici philosophiae particularis, de divinis, de mediis, et sensibilibus naturis" (Giovanni Pico: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 2, 108). 'Appendix C', in: B. Copenhaver (ed.): *Magic and the Dignity of Man...*, *op.cit.*: 2K2, 497.

Merkavah” is further symbolised by three higher Sefirot: *Keter*, *Hokmah*, and *Binah*.²⁴

Why did Mithridates place natural philosophy at such a low level? According to Busi, his opposition to the Aristotelian philosophical tradition was one of the main reasons. Corazzol offers an even more specific explanation. The Jewish convert was known to hold his *ars interpretandi* in high respect and to have exclusively initiated Pico into his enigmatic *mysterium* in person: *Vide Pice et intellige. Ego autem nolo tibi exponere nisi rediero in urbem*.²⁵ Thus, he struggled to bear any competition. Indeed, it is clear from Ficino’s testimony that he mainly saw this in Pico’s teacher, del Medigo, who accompanied him from Padua to Florence. In a letter addressed to Domenico Benivieni, the Florentine Platonist described one of the disagreements that occurred in Pico’s home between Mithridates and del Medigo.²⁶ This probably concerned to the Cretan scholar’s orientation towards the Averroist-Aristotelian tradition, combined with elements based on Maimonides’ philosophy, in which he introduced his pupil Pico. Although del Medigo translated numerous mediaeval Hebrew mystical texts for him, Renaissance scholars were also aware of him having a somewhat restrained stance towards Neoplatonic kabbalistic knowledge, which Mithridates vehemently preferred and zealously promoted.²⁷

²⁴ Compare also with Recanati’s *Perush ha-tefillot*: “cuiusmodi unt que continentur in curru medio et in curru superiore...”, in: G. Corazzol: ‘L’influsso di Mitridate sulla concezione pichiana di cabala’, in: M. Perani & G. Corazzol (eds.): *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell’ebraismo siciliano del XV. Secolo*, Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2012: 173. Giovanni Pico: *Conclusioni cablistiche*, P. E. Fornaciari (ed.), Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 1994 [2009]: 36–37; Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 139; M. Idel: ‘The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance’, in: D. B. Ruderman (ed.): *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, New York: New York University Press, 1992: 119–124.

²⁵ Cod. Chigi, fol. 308r (Ch. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: Fol. 81r: 72: *nemo nisi Mithridates intellexisset haec in heb[raico]*. G. Corazzol: ‘L’influsso di Mitridate sulla concezione pichiana di cabala...’, *op.cit.*: 171.

²⁶ M. Ficino: *Opera...*, *op.cit.*: 873: “Helias at Abraam Hebraei medici atque peripatetici adversus Gulielmum Siculum disserunt”.

²⁷ B. Kieszkowski: ‘Averroismo e platonismo in Italia negli ultimi decenni del secolo XV’, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 2, 1/14, 1933: 286–301; M. Engel: *Elijah Del Medigo and Paduan Aristotelism*, London: Bloomsbury Academia, 2017: 6–9; G. Busi: ‘Toward a New Evaluation of Pico’s Kabbalistic Sources’, *Rinascimento* 48, 2008: 175–178; K. P. Bland: ‘Elijah Del Medigo’s Response to the Kabbalah of Fifteenth-Century Jewry and Pico della Mirandola’, *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1, 1991: 23–53.

If he no longer wanted to endure del Medigo's presence in Pico's circle, he had no other option besides trying to eliminate him. However, the Jewish convert also knew that Pico sought to create harmony between the Peripatetics and the Neoplatonists. Following the example of the Byzantine intellectuals (Plethon and Bessarion),²⁸ he was persuaded that, although both doctrines differ stylistically (*verba*), they do not contradict each other, at least regarding their most important philosophical notions (*res*).²⁹ Mithridates thus drew Pico's attention to Maimonides' hidden interpretation of Aristotle's natural philosophy to reveal the core of the truth. The Jewish convert's vision was then reflected in Pico's thesis: "Just as Aristotle himself concealed under the guise of philosophical speculation and obscured by terse expression the more divine philosophy that ancient philosophers veiled under the fables and stories, so Rabbi Moses of Egypt in the book that Latins call the *Guide for the Perplexed* embraces mysteries of kabbalah through hidden interpretations of deep meaning while seeming through the outer bark of words to proceed philosophically."³⁰

²⁸ See Plethon's work *De differentiis Platonis et Aristotelis* and Bessarion's work *In calumniam Platonis* (1469). Compare with Pico's Letter (Giovanni Pico: *Lettere...*, *op.cit.*: 121): "...ut iam pro mei viribus ingenii, pro mea quanta maxima potest assiduitate et diligentia, Platonem cum Aristotele et vicissim alternis studiis Aristotelem cum Platone conferrem". J. Hankins: *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance II*, Leiden: Brill 1990: 417–429; J. Monfasani: 'Bessarion Latinus,' *Rinascimento* 21, 1981: 165–209; J. Molinari: *Libertà e discordia, Pletone, Bessarione, Pico della Mirandola*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2015: 52–77.

²⁹ "Nullum est quaesitum naturale aut divinum in quo Aristoteles et Plato sensu et re non convenient, quamvis verbis dissentire videantur. Id: *De hominis dignitate* 162: Et, ut taceam de caeteris, quis est qui nesciat unum dogma ex nongentis, quod scilicet de concilianda est Platonis Aristotelisque philosophia, potuisse me citra omnem affectatae numerositatis suspicionem in sexcenta, ne dicam plura, capita deduxisse, locos scilicet omnes in quibus dissidere alii, convenire ego illos existimo, particulatim enumerantem?" (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 1, 83. "... editione opusculum etiam De Ente et Uno... Controversiamque super ea re a Platonis Aristotelisque sectatoribus habitum recensuit, asseverans Academicos illos, qui contrarium contenderunt, verum Platonis dogma non assecutos, sensuumque prorsus comunione inter Aristotelem et Platonem de Uno et Ente, sicut et de reliquis in universum, et si verba disiderent, demonstratus erat non defuisse" (Gianfrancesco Pico: *Vita...*, *op.cit.*: 44: R. Ebgi: 'Saggio introduttivo', in: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: *Dell'Ente e dell'Uno*, Milano: Bompiani, 2010: 124–148.

³⁰ "68. Rabi moises de eiptho in dux neutrorum Liber magnus manuscriptus in papiro n. 294." G. Tamani: 'I libri ebraici di Pico della Mirandola', in: *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola...*, *op.cit.*: 513. Compare with Pico's thesis: "Sicut Aristoteles diviniorem philosophiam, quam philosophi antiqui sub fabulis et apologis velarunt, ipse sub philosophicae facie dissimulavit, et verborum brevitate obscuravit, ita Rabi Moyses Aegyptius in libro, qui a Latinis dicitur dux neutrorum, dum per superficiale verborum corticem videtur cum philosophis ambulare, per latentes profundi

Evidently, the concealed truth must be connected merely with the supernatural part of kabbalah, which Aristotelian-oriented philosophers never obtain, as follows from Mithridates's gloss in Recanati's *Liber de secretis*: "supernaturalia fecerunt quae nullus eorum fecit, nec faciet, quia alia scientia eorum est et alia scientia mens et opinio doctorum et sapientum nostrorum est."³¹

How could Maimonides's *Guide* influence Pico's *Heptaplus*? Both works have a similar distinction between the educated elite, enabled to discover the true interpretation of the law (using speculative science) and the vulgar, who cannot understand it. Maimonides also distinguished two types of knowledge: the work of Creation (*scientia naturalis*), and the work of the Chariot (*scientia spiritualis / vera philosophia*). The former, (e.g., including the study of physics) is necessary for introducing the scholar the true path of knowledge. However, this is only mediated by the "Work of the Chariot" in the form of *vera philosophia* (metaphysics). Savants do not immediately have free access to it and must gradually reveal it *via allegorica*, as Pico did. Indeed, the first of ancient theologians, Moses,³² and later Pythagoras and Plato, discovered that *scientia spiritualis* should be veiled in various parables and riddles.³³

However, Maimonides thought that divine science had deeper roots, which Pico believed to be true. It was concealed beneath the bark of law and the rough

sensus intelligentias mysteria complectitur Cabalae" (Giovanni Pico: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 63, 113).

³¹ "Quia secundum opinionem horum philosophantium <et> mendacem mentem eorum sequeretur necessario quod sursum non esset sedes gloriae neque essent hierarchiae angelorum neque animalium sanctorum ferentium, nec numerus facierum haberetur nec alarum nec offanim nec nomina omnium scirentur, sed quod omnia haec habentur apud eos tamquam fabula et quodam narratum. Tu autem non sic. Separavit te d<omi>nus deus tuus, dedit tibi legem suam in qua pars eorum manifestatur. Prophetiae videntur prophetati sunt quod philosophantium talium nullus fecit. Deceverunt rem et determinarunt horam et tempore dato pervenit" (M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 12. 1. 3: 350–351).

³² Compare with Alemanno's statement: "The kabbalist believe that Moses, peace be with him, had precise knowledge of the spiritual world [...] Whenever he wanted to perform signs and wonders, Moses would pray and utter divine names, words and meditations until he had intensified those emanations. The emanations descended into the world and created new supernatural things. With that Moses split the sea, opened up the earth and the like" (Y. Alemanno: *Hesheq Shlomo* [Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana, 1535, fols. 104a–105b], translated by Moshe Idel, 185).

³³ Iamblichus: *La vita pitagorica*, edited by del Corno, Milano: Adelphi, 1978: XXVIII, 146; Plato, *Epistles* III: 314b; W. J. Hanegraaff: *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2012: 52–68; E. Wind: *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, New York, c1958: 19–22.

vestiture of language (*per superficialem corticem verborum*), so that on the surface it appeared merely opinions (*opiniones*) of the Aristotelian philosophers. It is merely in the core of the text one finds its true meaning in the form of metaphysics (*scientia spiritualis*).³⁴ What key could help scholars in its decoding? It is probably no coincidence that the key reappears in Mithridates' translations and penetrates Pico's kabbalistic concept under the title "the art of revolving the alphabet". This term was already mentioned when the speculative part of kabbalah was defined above. However, it is not only *Apologia*, where a closer specification is provided, as is evident from this dictum: "In universali autem duas scientias hoc etiam nomine honorificarunt, unam quae dicitur [...] idest ars combinandi, et est modus quidam procedendi in scientiis, et est simile quid, sicut apud nostros, dicitur ars Raymundi licet forte diverso modo procedant... Utraque istarum apud Hebraeos etiam dicitur Cabala, propter rationem iam dictam, et de utraque istarum etiam aliquando fecimus mentionem in conclusionibus nostris. Illa enim ars combinandi, est quam in conclusionibus meis voco, Alphabetariam revolutionem..."³⁵

What source did Pico draw from? The *Preface* to the *Heptaplus* contains the name "Abraam", which, according to Idel, is linked to the name Abraham Abulafia.³⁶ This representative of the ecstatic kabbalist branch was familiar to Pico due to Mithridates' translations. In this context, Abulafia's commentary on Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed* entitled *Sitrei ha-Tora* can be high-

³⁴ Maimonides: *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I, edited by S. Pines, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963: 5, 8–9: "It is not purpose of this Treatise to make its totality understandable to the vulgar or to beginners in speculation, nor to teach those who have not engaged in any study other than the science of law... Do you not see the following fact? God, may His mention be exalted, wished us to be perfected and the state of our societies to improved by His was regarding actions. Now this can come about only after the adoption of intellectual beliefs, the first of which being His apprehension, may He be exalted, according to our capacity. This, in its turn, cannot come about except through divine science, and this divine science cannot become actual except after a study of natural science. This is so since natural science borders on divine science, and its study precedes that of divine science in time as has been made clear to whoever has engaged in speculation on these matters. Hence God, may He be exalted, caused His book to open with the Account of the Beginning, which, as we have made clear, is natural science. And because of the greatness and importance of the subject as it really is, we are told about those profound matters – which divine wisdom has deemed necessary to convey to us – in parables and riddles and in very obscure words."

³⁵ Giovanni Pico: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 180.

³⁶ M. Idel: 'The Kabbalistic Backgrounds of the «Son of God»...', *op.cit.*: 33–34.

lighted.³⁷ Here, Abulafia elaborated on themes concerning the work of creation (*de opere geneseos*), which could also be helpful in conceiving the six days of creation in *Heptaplus*. The second translation is *Liber Redemptionis* (*Sefer ha-ge'ula*), whose most likely author is, again, the ecstatic kabbalist. In this work Abulafia gradually reveals 36 secrets, which are shrouded behind the mask of words in Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and correspond to the division of Abulafia's work into three parts. Thus, the Hebrew concept of "ge'ula" (*Redemptor*), (or) more precisely its individual Hebrew letters contains interpretations of 36 secrets of the Torah: 14, 12, and 10. They must simply be revealed.³⁸

Therefore, Abulafia wanted to capture the name of the Redeemer (*Redemptor*), which, until that point, had been obscured under the "rough bark" of Maimonides' rational philosophy (i.e., in the Work of the Chariot).³⁹ What method could be used? According to Wirszubski, one can consider kabbalistic exegesis proceeding from the mystery of *Sefer Yetzirah*, where is further assumed that God created the world through the 32 paths of his wisdom, that is, by means of the 10 Sefirot and the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The

³⁷ A. Abulafia: *De Secretis Legis*, Cod. Vat. Ebr. 190: fol. 336v (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*, 94–95): "Incipit liber de secretis legis quem composuit Abraam (Mihi videtur Abulhafia) super 36 secretis quae revelavit Rabi Moises tempore sui obitus. In nomine domini dei Israel intendo scribere expositionem triginta sex secretorum quae occultavit sapientissimus Rabi Moises filius Maimon in suo libro venerabili qui dicitur More per viam cabale, et licet dixit ea ibi per viam philosophiae alibi innuit ea esse per viam philosophie alibi innuit ea esse per viam cabale unde voco librum hunc de secretis legis." See also M. Idel: *Kabbalah in Italy (1280–1510)...*, *op.cit.*: 42.

³⁸ Cod. Chigi, fol. 284v (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 85): "continet secundum revolutiones suas ad omnia misteria capitulorum eius in summa 36 secreta. Et sunt haec prima quae continentur in parte prima sola sunt 14 secreta et in parte secunda sunt 12 secreta et in parte tertia sunt decem secreta. Et noli tu putare quod non sunt in eo secreta magis particularia quam haec sed quod sunt multa alia praeter haec sed bene unumquodque illorum est pars ex his necessario vel ex specie propinqua vel ex specie remota velut primum principium sexcentorum et 13 preceptorum quae non sunt nisi decem verba tantum sed partes eorum ascendunt ad numerum sexcentorum et tresdecim et intellige illud". Compare with Abulafia's *De Secretis Legis* Cod. Vat. Ebr. 190, fol. 340r–v (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 90): "et dicemus quod summa secretorum in universali est 36. et qui apponet animum suum super eis ad scienda ea per speculationem et comprehendere intentionem ex eis ut dixit discipulus ille qui recepit in libro redemptionis, quod redemptio erit ei hebraice Geulla tihie lo [...] quod gimel continet tria que sunt tres partes deinde aleph unum, lamed 30, he 5, collecti sunt triginta sex quotus est numerus lo, idest ei, nam lamed est 30, vau 6".

³⁹ Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 115b (in M. Idel: *Maimonide e la mistica ebraica*, translated by R. Gatti, *Il Nuovo Melangolo*, 2000: 65).

latter corresponds to what Pico described by means of the term *ars combinandi*, as already mentioned in Pico's *Apologia*. Abulafia further thought such a linguistic-kabbalistic exegesis should be called divine science⁴⁰ since it leads naturally from the sensual experience of the world of law (i.e., literal meaning) to its inner spiritual depths *via allegorica*. Moreover, when using a mystical technique called *gematria*,⁴¹ based on a permutation and combination of letters of the Hebrew alphabet, this method allows a scholar to achieve a true prophecy and ultimately also to unite with the name of God (*nomen ineffabile*, alias the active intellect) in the framework of *unio mystica*.⁴²

Wirszubski was also convinced of the affinity of Pico's and Abulafia's opinions, assuming that Pico drew mainly from Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah*. However, Campanini refers to another source, Abulafia's letter *Ve-zot li-Yehuda*, addressed to his disciple Jehuda. According to Idel, Pico mediated the

⁴⁰ A. Abulafia: *De Secretis Legis*, fol. 362v (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 131): "... Et intendit in ea dirigere illum quem dilexit. et intentio sua finalis fuit ad illud quod notificavit in verbis suis primis ex ea. Et dixit nobis quod articulus seu principalis intentio eius in libro suo fuit ad declarandum illud quod possibile fuit declarari de sapientia naturali et de sapientia divina ad illos qui intelligunt intelligenter. et dixit quod hoc est de summa et continentia secretorum legis. Et dixit illud quod dicunt sapientes nostri cabalae quod secreta revelanda non sunt. et intellexit per secreta illud quod intelligunt sapientes nostri quod sunt secreta legis et sapientiae cabalae... Itaque in veritate cum speculatus fueris in speculatione cabalae intelliges secreta ipsius Torae idest legis vel iudicii et in veritate comprehendes per illum non solum ex secretis legis tantum sed etiam ex rebus naturalibus et mathematicis et universaliter de omnibus scientiis divinis et humanis manifestis et occultis."

⁴¹ Cod. Vat. Ebr. 190, fol. 422r (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 137): "Et quidem continet etiam opus currus Revolutionem legis seu spheram legis a qua poteris intelligere secreta omnia sua. probatur quia numeri utriusque correspondent nam mahase merchabe ut dictum est continet numeros 682... Et tot continet sphaera seu revolutio legis quae dicitur Galgal attora probatur quia... 3.30.3.30.5.400.6.200.5. collecti sunt 682. Confirmatur ex libro venerando sepher iesire, qui incipit Abraam pater noster primum verbum dicitur bixloxim, idest cum triginta... cuius numeri [2.300.30.300.10.40] representant maase merchaba, nec aliud intellexit per vocabulum bixloxim idest cum triginta nisi opus currus divini."

⁴² Paris BN 774, fol. 117 (M. Idel: *Maimonide e la mistica ebraica...*, *op.cit.*: 70): "... Quest'ultimi comportano dei metodi di combinazione delle lettere e dei loro segreti, che non possono essere dimostrati dalla maggior parte dei pensieri speculativi, dal momento che essi non comprendono né i loro misteri né nessun'altra cosa a questo proposito. Ciò nonostante, essi possono essere dimostrati a un piccolo numero di intellettuali [appartenti] alla divina Qabbalah, quelli il cui intelletto è stato oggetto di illuminazione [...] È l'intelletto Agente che ci ha rivelato la vera conoscenza ultima." See also B. Copenhaver: *Magic and the Dignity of Man...*, *op.cit.*: 440–441; M. Idel: 'Universalitè and Intergretation: Two Conception of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism,' in: M. Idel & B. McGinn: *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1996: 27–57.

knowledge of Abulafia's terminology based on Maimonides' Aristotelian-oriented philosophy. Back in 1486, his translator Mithridates intuitively discerned that Pico required source materials for his philosophical-theological purposes.⁴³ Abulafia's texts frequently contain Mithridates' interpretative interventions which, in the form of textual interpolations, aim to underline their Christological character. Notably, such topics do not occur in the original Hebrew sources.⁴⁴

Pico's Kabbalistic Exegesis in Heptaplus: Abulafia and Recanati

What is the relationship between Recanati' and Abulafia's kabbalistic projects? In *De Secretis Legis*, the ecstatic kabbalist was persuaded of the superiority of his *ars combinandi* over the science of *Sefirot*.⁴⁵ However, in Pico's *Conclusiones*, his clarification took the form of an almost equal relationship. This can also be expressed by the apparent distinction between the speculative part of Kabbalah and its practical part: "Whatever the rest of the kabbalists may say, the first distinction that I would make divides knowledge of kabbalah into knowledge of Sefirot and Shemot, similar to practical and visionary [speculative] knowl-

⁴³ M. Idel: 'Flavius Mithridates: 'Vetus Talmud' and other Askenazi tradition', in: *Flavio Mitridate mediatore...*, *op.cit.*: 84.

⁴⁴ For instance, Abulafia's *Summa brevis cabale* [Cod. Vat. Ebr. 190, fol. 125v].

⁴⁵ A. Abulafia: *De Secretis Legis*, Cod. Vat. Ebr. 190, fols. 345r–346r (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 129): "... Secundus vero modus est sciendi legem secundum intelligentias suas cum suis secretis et occultamentis in misterio scilicet secretorum nominum divinorum contentorum in ea et in rationibus precepti sui quod ore ad os traditur quod vocantur secreta legis. et hoc quidem ut proficiantur in ea et per eam duae species hominum quae in pronuntiatione non differunt sed bene in orthographia scilicet per sin et samech. (hoc volo declarare ego Pico quia ipse non intelligeret. homines quidem docti hebraice dicuntur sechalim et scribuntur per samech hoc modo... In pronuntiatione non differunt sed bene in orthografia, modo intelligere potes)." Compare with *Summa Brevis Cabalae Quae Intitulatur Rabi leude*, fol. 122r (*Ibid.*: 134): "Dico igitur nunc quod haec sapientia cabalae occulta quidem est a multitudine doctorum nostrorum qui exercentur in sapientia alia nostra quas dicitur Talmud. et dividitur quidem in duas partes in universali, quae sunt scientia nominis dei tetragramaton per modum decem numerationum quae vocantur plante inter quae qui separat dicitur truncare plantas. et hi sunt qui revelant secretum unitatis. Secunda pars est scientia magni nominis per viam viginti duarum licterarum a quibus et ab earum punctis et earum accentibus composita sunt nomina et Characteres seu sigilla que nomina invocata sunt quae locuntur cum prohetis in somniis et per hurim et tumim et per spiritum sanctum et per prophetas."

edge."⁴⁶ However, it appears that Pico confused the original definition of the Jewish Kabbalah, perhaps in error, since its speculative part is more closely connected with the science of Sefirot and the practical part with the science of Shemot (names). Nevertheless, *princeps concordiae* did the opposite; the science of names is assigned to the speculative part of Kabbalah, and according to Pico the fact that it works with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet is characteristic. Conversely, the practical branch is linked to the science of the 10 *Sefirot*, acting as mediators of divine power emanating from the higher celestial sphere to the earth.

Why did Pico make such an error? According to Farmer he assumed that the *via practica cabale* should be of a magical-theurgical nature (with the exegetical and mystical aspect).⁴⁷ Its true aim could be related to the above-mentioned – that is, to seek the pure divine name. This can only be decoded through the original and non-semantic names contained in the Hebrew alphabet, understood by the technique of *gematria*. Notably, Pico was inspired by Abulafia's *ars combinandi*, incorporating it into his kabbalistic project, as is evident from his third kabbalistic thesis: "Knowledge that is the practical part of Kabbalah puts into practice all of formal metaphysics and lower theology."⁴⁸ According to Blum, the function of lower theology "can easily be understood as that part of theology that deals with the conduct of life." In such a view, Pico is depicted as a thinker who works brilliantly with scholastic terminology and paradoxically makes ideal use of it for his concept of humanist philosophical theology. Conversely, Chaim Wirzsubski refers to the Pseudo-Dionysian cataphatic theology associated with the doctrine of names.⁴⁹ However, Campanini apparently succeeded in revealing the real source of Pico's thesis (see above).

This is the already-mentioned letter by Abulafia's *Ve-zot li-Yehuda*, in which the ecstatic kabbalist discerns between Talmud and hidden wisdom. The latter is conceived as the art of meditating on the name of God through the 10 Sefirot and as an art that enables the penetration of the mystery of the Tetragrammaton

⁴⁶ "Quicquid dicant caeteri Cabaliste, ego prima divisione scientiam Cabalae in scientiam Sephirot, tamquam in practicam et speculativam distinguerem" (Giovanni Pico: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 1, 107–108).

⁴⁷ S. A. Farmer: *Syncretism in the West...*, *op.cit.*: 128–130.

⁴⁸ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: *Opera omnia*, 3, 108: "Scientia quae est pars practica cabale practicat totam metaphysicam formalem et theologiam inferiorem." (English translation, see 'Appendix C', in: Brian Copenhaver (ed.): *Magic and the Dignity of Man...*, *op.cit.*: 2K3, 497.)

⁴⁹ P. R. Blum: 'Pico, Theology, and the Church,' in: M. V. Dougherty (ed.): *Pico della Mirandola...*, *op.cit.*: 52–53; Ch. Wirzsubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 254.

through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. While the science of Sefirot originated earlier, the latter is, according to Abulafia, nobler and has a higher status. It allows scholars to embark on the trail of a true prophecy along a mystical exegetic path. Its culmination is the perception of the true beauty. However, a sage must first undergo a process of physical, moral and spiritual purification. In *Commento*, Pico develops the same subject while drawing his inspiration from Plato's dialogue *Symposium*, which he combines with Arabic and Hebrew sources. In summary, I argue that his main goal is to find the ideal beauty. Man should therefore free himself from all admiration for the beauty of the body (i.e., moral and spiritual purification) and set out to discover its spiritual dimension in the form of a purely "parte intellettuale", through which the *magus* can join with the angelic mind. Thus, Pico was particularly inspired by Abulafia's kabbalistic project, as Idel supposed (see above).

Evidently, this is only a partial truth, predominately acceptable for Pico's early work (*Commento*, *Conclusiones*, and *Oratio*). Nevertheless, in *Heptaplus*, he offers another option, mediated to him by Mithridates, when connecting Abulafia's *ars combinandi* with Nahmanides' concept of the kabbalah.⁵⁰ However, another Hebrew source, *Liber Combinationum* (perhaps emerged in Abulafia's circle), contains similar opinions of two Jewish scholars on the nature of the true name of God. Regarding Abulafia's name, the situation is much more complicated. In *Heptaplus*, he is mentioned sporadically, and, in Black's view, Pico no longer worked with this name.⁵¹

Let us return to Recanati. Was his role also marginalised in *Heptaplus*? It is known that in his *Liber de secretis*, the word "cabala" does not occur; it is instead substituted with the term "Midrash Tehillim". *Heptaplus* has a similar appellation: "occultum mysterium", "divinitatis secreta", "dei eloquia", or "sapientissima dogmata", which denotes something "ancient" and "secret".⁵² If "an authentic mystery" is the attribute of such a kabbalistic teaching, it cannot be recorded in the written form and shared publicly with other uninitiated savants. Indeed, the knowledge of secrets should only be transmitted orally. However,

⁵⁰ "Similiter dicam de magno doctore rabi Moise filio Nahaman Gerundinensi qui dixit in principio legis expositionis quam ipse commentatus est in haec verba: habemus in manibus nostris traditum a sapientibus cabalae ipsius veritatis, quod tota lex est plena nominibus dei sancti et benedicti, et angelorum ordinis sacri caelestis..." (Cod. Vat. Ebr. 190, fols. 345r-346r, in Ch. Wirzsubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 128-129).

⁵¹ C. Black: *Pico's Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics*, Leiden: Brill: 81, 142-144.

⁵² Giovanni Pico: *Heptaplus...*, *op.cit.*: 174, 374, 376.

it is significant that Mithridates introduced such an interpolation into the Latin translation of Recanati's work: "Et tibi nolo tacere quin revelem secretum quod recepi de hac particula traditum ab ore in os..."⁵³

Pico's hidden allegorical exposition also has a practical function, as follows from his *Oratio*: "contain a vein of understanding – in other words, the ineffable theology of the supersubstantial deity – a font of wisdom that is the exact metaphysics of the intelligible and angelic forms, and the river of science that is the most steadfast philosophy of natural things." In *Heptaplus* Moses again meditates: "on the emanation of all things from God, and on the grade, number, and order of the parts of the world."⁵⁴ In Wirszubski's version, all the considerations of Hebrew letters and numbers can be included in the Jewish language mysticism, where the names can be expressed as numbers using the kabbalistic technique (*gematria*).⁵⁵ However, is Pico's kabbalistic concept compatible with Recanati's theosophical-theurgical model of kabbalah? In *Liber de secretis*, the Jewish scholar ponders the Hebrew names through which angels and other celestial entities communicate with God. *Haec nomina* have their power and efficacy, which can be revealed only by Jewish prophets and sages.⁵⁶

Mithridates was well aware of Pico's interest in *ars practica cabale*. Thus, in his translation, he could not refrain from including an insertion intended to underline the magical meaning of Recanati's kabbalistic concept: "... intelliges causam multarum operationum, quae fiunt per verba, non solum via huius sanctissimae scientiae per nomina sancta et purificata, sed etiam per viam artis magicae quae contrariatur illi, in qua sunt nomina immunditiae."⁵⁷ According to Mithridates, Pico could thus better understand why Recanati reflected the

⁵³ M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 5. 2, 227–228. Here Recanati was probably inspired by the Wisdom of Zohar (see also *ibid.*: 5. 2. 1): "Expositio autem textus huius particulae cyneris indicatur etim in libro sepher azohar hoc modo. Zoth, idest haec, indicat legem de ore natam. Thorath, idest lex, indicat legem scriptam."

⁵⁴ Giovanni Pico: *De dignitate hominis...*, *op.cit.*: 111; *Id.: Heptaplus...*, *op.cit.*: 176.

⁵⁵ Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 140–141.

⁵⁶ "Scias autem quod, quamvis secundum naturam non potest esse armonia nex vox sine organis et instrumentis apropiatis illis, quae sunt organa loquelae, tamen sine dubio scias quod angeli caelestes et tota militia caeli loquitur et sunt inter eos voces fortes et intelliguntur ab his quibus deus sanctus et benedictus concessit gratiam intelligendi, sic ut intelligebant prophetae. Et tandem sapientes nostri postquam cessavit prophetia et omnis qui novit operari partem huius scientiae quae fit per invocationem nominum audiunt voces illorum quos invocant et responsa recipiunt ab eis quamvis quidem illud non fiat per motum labiorum et per pronuntiationem linguae" (M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 12. 1. 1, 348).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 3. 3. 1., 205.

power of individual Hebrew names, on which Jewish savants contemplated in their daily prayers. However, a prerequisite for such a meditation is the process of moral and intellectual purification of each sage (*purgatio*). After this step they can recite *haec nomina* and achieve a status of ecstatic rapture. Furthermore, they are enabled to distinguish two kinds of names (*aliis verbis*, this phase is only permitted to chosen savants). The first are *nomina sancta* which, according to Recanati, are related to the spiritual world of the *Sefirot* within the higher Merkava. The second type – *nomina inmunditiae* – gain their power and efficacy only by invoking the names of demons (i.e., via necromancy).⁵⁸

Recanati's influence was already evident in Pico's *Apologia*, where two types of names are distinguished. However, it adopts on a new form, when the *princeps concordiae* sets two groups of adepts against each other: "the true kabbalists" and "necromancers" (servants of the devil), whom, like Recanati, he did not hesitate to compare to Jews. For those: "ita et quidam apud Hebraeos, res divinas falsis et vanis superstitionibus polluentes, imo in rei veritate, quasi nihil a Necromantibus differentes, dixerunt se habere secreta Dei nomina, et virtutes quibus daemones ligarent, et miracula facerent, et Christum non alia via fecisse miracula".⁵⁹ Evidently, in Pico's view, the true kabbalists are those who know how to control *nomina dei* and transfer them to numbers, and vice versa. This is precisely what Moses supposed to have considered when meditating on "the grade and numbers" in the framework of *prisca theologia*. According to Mithridates' translation of *Liber de secretis*, the numbers are also compatible with the term "Middot" or "proprietas" (i.e., synonym for *Sefirot*). Thus, the true goal of Pico's practical Kabbalah was to find the holy name of God (*nomen ineffabile*).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Dico igitur quod qui expergiscitur de somno suo debet prius purificare se ipsum ab inmunditia et pollutione. Purificatio autem haec non fit nisi cum aqua..." (*ibid.*: 4. 1., 207). See also S. Campanini: 'Introduction...', *op.cit.*: 91–92.

⁵⁹ Giovanni Pico: *Apologia...*, *op.cit.*: 181. Compare with Pico's *Conclusiones*: "Tota Magia, quae in usu est apud Modernos, et quam merito exterminat ecclesia, nullam habet firmitatem, nullum fundamentum, nullam veritatem, quia pendet ex manu hostium primae veritatis, potestatum harum tenebrarum, quae tenebras falsitatis, male dispositis intellectibus obfundunt" (Giovanni Pico: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 1, 104). "Nomina deorum, quos Orpheus canit, non decipientium daemonum, a quibus malum et non bonum provenit, sed naturalium virtutum, divinarumque sunt nomina, a vero Deo in utilitatem maxime hominis, si eis uti sciverit, mundo distributarum" (*Ibid.*: 3, 106).

⁶⁰ "At vero, quia nos in hoc compendiolo nostro utimur hoc vocabulo midoth, idest proprietatibus, quemadmodum sapientes nostri uti sunt, quorum doctrinam imitamur, cave tibi et custodi animam tuam nimis ne scandalizeris et diceres quod deus sanctus et benedictus habet proprietatem determinatam vel quantificatam... Iam enim in hoc sola auctoritas est sapientum

However, what language is suitable for revealing it? Some clues exist in Pico's *Preface to Heptaplus*, where the Jewish book entitled *the Wisdom of Solomon* (*Sapientia Salomonis*) is mentioned.⁶¹ What source is Pico drawing from? Mithridates' *Sermo*, contains the dictum of Erithraen Sibyl (*Sibylla Eritrea*), giving the witness about the Son of God, and similarly, the Hebrew authority of Philo of Alexandria (*vulgatissimam Philonis non Biblii sed Hebraei auctoritatem*) is emphasised. However, in Wirszubski's view, neither shows signs of authenticity, although they have a common source. This is Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones*, in which Mithridates discovered the authenticity of the Sibylline oracles and the reference to the book *Sapientia Salomonis*. Thus, it is highly probable that his misinterpretation was later transferred to Pico's *Heptaplus*.⁶²

Regarding the "lingua hierosolyma", a similar concept of language in *Oratio* has already been found. Evidently, it was the Chaldean language, as it is clear from the following statement: "For this reason, when he explains the Chaldean theology, Evantes the Persian writes that man is born with no image of his own, that they are many, alien, and accidental. Hence that saying of the Chaldeans: [...], which means that *a man is a living thing whose nature is variable, manifold, and inconstant*."⁶³ In this context, the Chaldean language – like "lingua hierosolyma" – can be characterised as a mysterious and pure language (*lingua*

nostrorum, qui vocarunt nomina sanct(a) midoth, idest proprietates vel mensuras..." (M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 1. 11, 192).

⁶¹ "... Extat apud Hebraeos, Salomonis illius cognomento sapientissimi, liber cui *Sapientia* titulus, non qui nunc in manibus est, Philonis opus, sed alter, hierosolyma quam vocant secretiore lingua compositus, in quo vir, naturae rerum sicuti putatur interpres, omnem se illiusmodi disciplinam fatetur de Mosaicae legis penetralibus accepisse" (Giovanni Pico: *Heptaplus...*, *op.cit.*: 170).

⁶² Fl. Mithridates: *Sermo...*, *op.cit.*: 112–113; Lactantius: *Divinarum institutionum libri septem*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, 1265, 2003, 2011, 2009 (Monachii; Lipsiae: Saur, 2005): I.6, 8–12; Ch. Wirszubski: 'Introduction', *op.cit.*: 31: "Fertur et Panaeretus Jesu filii Sirach liber, et alius pseudepigraphus, qui *Sapientia Salomonis* inscribitur. Quorum priorem hebraicum repperi... Secundus apud Hebraeos nusquam est, quin et ipse stylus Graecam eloquentiam redolet; et nonnulli scriptorum veterum hunc esse Judaei Philonis affirmant."

⁶³ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: *De dignitate hominis*, 108. Chaim Wirszubski: 'Introduction', in: Fl. Mithridates: *Sermo...*, *op.cit.*: 38. English translation – 'Appendix A', in: B. Copenhaver (ed.): *Magic and the Dignity of Man...*, *op.cit.*: 462.

barbara) due to its secret message.⁶⁴ However, on what basis did Pico create such a linguistic construct? Mithridates' *Sermo*, indicates that the Jews had *antiquissima oracula*, intended only for chosen savants, who reached the age of 40. The same motif is present in Pico's *Heptaplus*, which is also under the patronage of St. Jerome and Origen: "it was decreed by the ancient Hebrews, as Jerome records, that no one not of mature should deal with this account of the creation of the world."⁶⁵

Since the kabbalistic teaching is divine, it was offered to selected adepts in the form of a linguistic riddle. Mithridates indicated this fact as follows: "Apud Chaldaeos: vetustissimum Hyonetic oraculum ita chaldaee predixerat [...] propter illum qui primo peccavit deus excrucietur..."⁶⁶ He also wanted to highlight the authenticity and antiquity of the message, claiming it was written in the Chaldean language of Ethiopian character. Indeed, the mythical creator

⁶⁴ Giovanni Pico: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 22, 105: "Nulla nomina ut significativa et in quantum nomina sunt, singula et per se sumpta in Magico opere virtutem habere possunt, nisi sint Hebraica, vel inde proxime derivata." *Idem.*: *Apologia...*, *op.cit.*: 175: "Origenes autem de Hebraicis hoc sentit, et ideo dicit, quod quaedam nomina Hebraica in sacris literis, sicut Osanna, Sabaoth, halleluia et similia, fuerunt sic reservata, et non mutata in aliam linguam, in qua non retinissent suam naturalem significationem, et consequenter virtutem." Compare with Reuchlin, *De arte cabbalistica*, in: *idem.*: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 849: "In hanc utilitatem clementes angeli saepe figuras characteras formas et voces invenerunt, proposueruntque nobis mortalibus et ignotas et stupendas, nullius rei iuxta consuetum linguae usum significativas, sed per rationis nostrae summam admirationem in assiduam intelligibilem pervestigationem, deinde in illorum ipsorum venerationem et amorem inductivas, non enim secundum institutum aut placitum hominis significant, sed ad placitum Dei. Unde ad vos illud a nobis transtulit doctissimus vestra aetate atque secta Mirandulanus Comes quod in nongentiis conclusionibus ait. Non significativae voces plus possunt in magia quam significativae, quaelibet enim vox virtutem habet in magia in quantum Dei voce formatur, quia illud in quo primum magicam exercet natura, vox est Dei, haec. Pico." *Idem.*: *De verbo mirifico*, in: *ibid.*: 42–43: "Barbara vero dicuntur, hebraica vel proxima inde derivata... simplex autem sermo, purus, incorruptus, sanctus, brevis et constans Hebraeorum est; quod deus cum homine, homines cum angelis locuti, perhibentur coram et non per interpretem, facie ad faciem..." See also A. Ansani: 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Language of Magic,' in: *L'Hebreu au Temps de la Renaissance*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992: 89–104.

⁶⁵ Fl. Mithridates: *Sermo...*, *op.cit.*: 89: "... quod Hebraei usque ad annum quadragesimum suae aetatis legere non audent (ut in volumine Habodazara habetur, ita vaticinati sunt)." Compare with Mithridates's translation: "Ideo sancti doctores nostri cabalistic prohibent ne quis usque ad annum quadragesimum ei vacet, quando presupponunt praedicta sciri" (Gersonides: *Comento...*, *op.cit.*: 109–110). Giovanni Pico: *Heptaplus...*, *op.cit.*: 176: "Propterea fuit decretum veterum Hebraeorum, cuius etiam meminit Hieronymus, ne hanc mundi creationem quisquam nisi matura iam aetate attingeret" (English translation: 70).

⁶⁶ Fl. Mithridates: *Sermo...*, *op.cit.*: 117.

of the Chaldean oracles was the Persian prophet Zoroaster, to whom Plethon gave the first place among the wise men in the genealogy of the *ancient theologians*. His opinion was followed by those of Ficino and Pico, which Mithridates knew well.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Polotsky deciphered the secret message credibly, as it is evident from the dictum: “Avri’al de-hav qadma eloha etsalav”. According to him, a short passage can be identified as the Aramaic language (rather than the Chaldean), which was also accepted by Wirszubski and Idel. However, Mithridates made one significant error in his Latin translation: “qui primo peccavit deus ex cruciabitur”, because “God”, and not “man”, was crucified, in contrast to the Aramaic original.⁶⁸ Thus, the Jewish convert evidently wanted to prove the authenticity of the secret mystical text using the ancient and mysterious Chaldean language. Moreover, Mithridates did not directly designate the hidden doctrine with the word “cabala,” he only used the term “vetustissimum oraculum.” Furthermore, he demanded that only philologically gifted and properly mature sages could be initiated into his mysterious interpretation of Jewish Kabbalah. This misinterpretation was also transposed and fully accepted in Pico’s *Oratio* and *Heptaplus*.

If Pico asserted that Philo was not the author of the book *Sapientia Salomonis*, what authority – hidden under the bark of rough words in Maimonides’ philosophy – did he use? Wirszubski thought he was referring to another authentic Hebrew source, Nahmanides’ *Commentary on the Pentateuch* (*Libellus de secretis legis manifestandis educto a sancto doctore Rabi Moise gerundinense*).⁶⁹ Accord-

⁶⁷ G. G. Pletho: ‘Commentary on Chaldaean Oracles.’ in: *Philosophy in the Renaissance: An Anthology*, edited by Paul Richard Blum & James G. Snyder, translated by Jozef Matula, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023: 34–48; S. Gentile: ‘Giorgio Gemisto Pletone e la sua influenza sull’umanesimo fiorentino’, in: P. Viti (ed.): *Firenze e il concilio del 1439*, Convegno di Studi (Firenze, 29 novembre–2 dicembre 1989): 813–832; M. J. B. Allen: *Synoptic Art. Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Firenze 1998: 39–40; K. H. Dannenfeldt: ‘The Pseudo-Zoroastrian Oracles in the Renaissance’, *Studies in the Renaissance* 4, 1957: 7–30.

⁶⁸ Ch. Wirszubski: ‘Introduction,’ in: Fl. Mithridates: *Sermo...*, *op.cit.*: 36; M. Idel: ‘Flavius Mithridates: ‘Vetus Talmud and other Ashkenazi traditions’, in F. Lelli (ed.): *La cabbalà in Italia...*, *op.cit.*: 87.

⁶⁹ Nahmanides: *Commentary on the Pentateuch* (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 219): “et Salomo rex cui dedit Deus sapientiam in scientiam totam ex Lege fuit ipsi et de ipsa didicit usque scivit secretum omnium generationum et etiam potentias herbarum et proprietatum earum usque quo scripsit in ipsis etiam librum medicinarum et sicut modus qui scriptus est [1 Kings 5:13] et locutus est supra arboribus de cedro quae in Libano e(s)t usque hyssopum qui egreditur in pariete. et vidi librum caldeizatatum vocatum Sapientia magnis Salomonis et scriptum in ipso... omnia haec scivi[t] ex Lege et omnia invenit in ipsa, in

ing to Corazzol, Pico apparently regarded him as a strong kabbalistic authority. He may have obtained this information from Recanati's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, where Ramban is called "a noble theologian". Ogren has no doubts about its importance for Pico's project, believing that *Heptaplus* was formally structured according to his model. Since Nahmanides elaborated on the concept of the cosmic cycle, which is divided into two parts, "that of *shmittot*, which are seven years cycles based upon six years of work and a sabbatical year of rest, and that of *yovelot*, which are fifty year cycles based upon seven *shmittot* and a final year of release."⁷⁰ It is a *de facto* mystical interpretation of biblical *Leviticus*: "For six years sow your fields...But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest... so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years... Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you..."⁷¹

Pico's *Heptaplus* is also arranged into seven chapters, each containing another seven sub-chapters, corresponding to the number 49 (*shmittot*) The Year of Liberty is consistent with the number 50 (the day of Great Jubilee). "From the principle in the preceding conclusion one can equally know the secret of the 50 gates of intelligence, and of the thousandth generation of the kingdom of all ages."⁷² According to Wirszubski, Pico used *Expositio super decem numerationum* as his source, where he discussed the mystery of the great Sabbath that

declarationibus suis, in subtilitatibus suis, in literis suis, et in virgulis eius, sicut memoravi, et sic dixit in ipso scriptura et multiplicata fuit sapientia Saomonis magis quam sapientia omnium filiorum orientis".

⁷⁰ B. Ogren: 'The Forty-nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Heptaplus* and Nahmanidean Kabbalah', *Rinascimento* XLIX, 2009: 28, 41–43.

⁷¹ *Holy Bible. New International Version*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000: 3–12. See also M. Halbertal: *Nahmanides. Law and Mysticism*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020: 201–238.

⁷² Giovanni Pico: *Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 69, 113: "Ex fundamento praecedentis conclusionis sciri pariter potest secretum quinquaginta portarum intelligentiae, et millesimae generationis, et regni omnium saeculorum. *Expositio decem numerationum.*" (Vat. Ebr. 191, f. 73^r). C. Black: *Pico's Heptaplus...*, *op.cit.*: 227: "Sabbatum magnum est magnus Iobeleus et dicitur magnum quia constat ex septem hebdomadibus annorum; et dicitur annus quinquagesimus; et haec numeratio habet quinquaginta portas quae dicuntur portae intelligentiae quas omnes deus sanctus et benedictus tradidit moysi doctori nostro praeter unam et ideo haec numeratio dicitur iobel et est sabatum magnum quia indicat legem de ore natam, quae exponit legem scriptam quae vocatur mons domini et hoc est secretum textus dicentis cum secuti fuerint Iubeleum tunc ipsi ascendent in monte." Nahmanides: 'Dal commentario alla Torah: introduzione e commento a Genesi 1–3', translated by S. Campanini and M. Perani, in: *Nahmanide esegeta e cabbalista: Studi e testi*, Firenze: Giuntina, 2020: 304–305.

will occur in the 50th age, the enumeration of which includes the 50 gates of intelligence (the sefirah *Binah*). However, it is possible, as Giacomo Corazzol believes, that Pico may have drawn further from Recanati, in whom both the cycles (*shmittot* and *yovelot*) also appear: “omnis generatio est quinquaginta annorum ex quibus co(n)stat iobeleus, ac si dixisset ad quinquaginta milia annorum, quod est magnus iobeleus.”⁷³ In Pico's case, it is the seventh day, the day of the Victorious Sabbath when all things will rest in the true and secret name (*nomen ineffabile*), that is, the Son of God (i.e., Christ / sefirah *Hokhmah*): “for He is Alpha and Omega (as John writes) and He called himself the beginning, and we have shown that He is the end of all things, in which they are restored to their beginning.”⁷⁴

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Pico's kabbalistic exegesis of *Heptaplus* contains several crucial factors. First, such a concept is embedded in the tradition of the ancient wisdom (*prisca sapientia*). Although its representatives are Pythagoras and Plato, it is nevertheless characterised by only a partial experience of truth. This entire philosophical-mythological corpus is interpreted *via allegorica*. However, Pico served as a bond between Greek and Jewish scholarship. The privilege of the Old Testament prophet is that while he stood at the beginning of the genealogy of the ancient theologians, he was offered *prisca sapientia* in the form of the absolute truth. More precisely, in Pico's view, Moses guaranteed

⁷³ G. Corazzol: ‘L'influsso di Mitridates...’, *op.cit.*: 199, 166. See also M. Recanati: *Commentary...*, *op.cit.*: 248; Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 176.

⁷⁴ Giovanni Pico: *Heptaplus...*, *op.cit.*: 380: “Est enim α et ω (ut scribit Ioannes), et ipse principium se appellavit; et nos demonstravimus finem omnium rerum esse, ut in principio suo restituantur... Primum igitur illud advertendum, vocari a Mose mundum hominem magnum. Nam si homo est parvus mundus, utique mundus est magnus homo.” Compare with Pico's *Conclusiones*: “Ubicunque in scriptura fit mentio amoris maris et feminae nobis mystice designatur coniuncto Tipheret et Chieneseth Israhel, vel Beth et Tipheret” (*Idem.: Opera omnia...*, *op.cit.*: 17, 35). M. Recanati, fol. 212ra (Ch. Wirszubski: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, *op.cit.*: 35: “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman [Deut. 22:22]: I have already made known to you that the secret of the union of a man with his wife is the union of Tiferet with the Shekinah...”. M. J. B. Allen: ‘Cultura hominis: Giovanni Pico, Marsilio Ficino and the Idea of Man,’ in: G. C. Garfagnini (ed.): *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola...*, *op.cit.*: 194; R. B. Waddington: ‘The sun at the center: structure as meaning in Pico della Mirandola's Heptaplus...’, *op.cit.*: 75–80.

it in six days of the creation (*scientia naturalis*), while Christ (as the *principium*) was identified with the truth (i.e., the Victorious Sabbath) on the seventh day.

Second, Pico's concept of science refers to another discipline that Moses hid in the interpretative field in the form of a treasure – under “the rough vestiture of language”, so that only the chosen elite could access it. This *occulta scientia cabalae* (or *scientia spiritualis*) is distinguished by the antiquity and authenticity of the framework of *prisca theologia*. Thus, it cannot be fully revealed to all people. Additionally, due to Mithridates, it acquires an almost supernatural and divine character, which can be discovered in medieval Hebrew texts. However, it is known that only truly skilled philologists can penetrate the secrets of such a mystical doctrine.

Third, it appears that Pico was also unsuccessful. Although he could compare the individual Hebrew originals with Mithridates' Latin translations, he was too dependent on the numerous misinterpretations of his teacher, or rather the demiurge. In this context, the Jewish convert included his “secret mystery” in not only his translations, commentaries, and insertions, but also his previous work *Sermo*, and Pico, as a devoted disciple, followed him faithfully.

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