



GIOVANNI PICO E LA CABBALÀ. [GIOVANNI PICO AND THE KABBALAH]. CENTRO INTERNAZIONALE DI CULTURA "GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA"

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Jewish mysticism embodies a form of mystical interpretation that aims to understand, through allegorical exegesis, the divine meaning of the Biblical texts (Scholem 32). This consideration rests on the three principles of the Torah: the principle of God's name, the principle of the Torah as an organism, and the infinite meaning of the divine word. In order to study the divine meaning hidden in the biblical writings, four different methods of interpretation are employed: literal, Agadic, allegorical and theosophical. The Kabbalah, literally meaning 'tradition', is the sum of these methods, which together form Jewish mysticism. Since it first came to light in the region of Languedoc in southern France in the twelfth century, Kabbalah exerted a profound influence on Jews and non-Jews to obtain a deeper understanding of the traditional forms and conceptions of Judaism and general mysticism. It attained its fullest development in thirteenth-century Spain with the pseudo-epigraphic *Sefer ha-Zohar* [*Book of Splendor*] by Rabbi Moshe de Leon (1250-1305). The text became the main source of study for kabbalists as well as for a large number of Christian scholars. Humanism encouraged Renaissance scholars in the intellectual pursuit of magic through the discovery, translation, and study of ancient texts. This is the case with Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), the first Christian luminary to take a deep interest in the Kabbalah. As a humanist, Pico was exposed to ideas about magic and astrology, which were both mainstream subjects in natural philosophy (Rabin 152). Kabbalah was one of the movements Pico became involved with in order to prove the truth of Christianity. His main contribution is "to have conveyed to the Christian world a specific interpretation of the Jewish Kabbalah, and have given rise to a real and proper independent discipline that many imitators would have rendered more distant from its Jewish origin" (Fabrizio vii). This sentiment was reflected in several of his works, such as the *Oratio* (1486), the *Apologia* (1487), and the *Heptaplus* (1489).

The present collection of essays compiled by Fabrizio Lelli aims to assess the relationship between Kabbalah and its role and influence in Pico's philosophical works and those of other fellow philosophers. To this end, the format chosen is a nine-chapter volume configured in a multidisciplinary approach to provide current scholarly contributions on the relationship between Jewish mysticism and Pico's use and conception of Kabbalah within his literary corpus.

The volume opens with Brian Copenhaver's article, "Pico risorto: cabbalà e dignità dell'uomo nell'Italia post-unitaria" [Pico Revived: Kabbalah and Human Dignity in Post-Unitarian Italy] where the reception of various of Pico della Mirandola's philosophical texts is analyzed from the standpoint of contemporary philosophy within the 19th and 20th century Italian historical context: the national awakening of Italian identity as a nation, Risorgimento and the Fascist movement. Considered as a simple scholastic and an apprentice of Kabbalah for centuries, researchers and scholars encounter a new image of Pico rediscovered in the readings of his main works, that of a thinker whose texts represent a realistic and rational philosophical thinking, rather than just an interest in the natural cosmos and magic.

Moshe Idel examines in his article, "The Kabbalistic Backgrounds of the 'Son of God' in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Thought", the strategy applied by Pico to bend Christianity to some central aspects of Kabbalah. The different Jewish esoteric doctrines represented a challenge to understanding the core of Jewish mysticism and spread through various Jewish mystics during the fifteenth century in the Italian kingdoms. Pico's methods for combining his hermeneutic strategies he acquired from these different movements are explained, showing his approach to the use of Kabbalah in order to prove Christ's Messianic role and

"convince Jews as to the correctness of Christian theology" (44).

Guido Bartolucci, in his article "Marsilio Ficino e le origini della cabala cristiana" [Marsilio Ficino and the origin of Christian Kabbalah], discusses the role of Marsilio Ficino, one of Pico's collaborators in the development of Christian Kabbalah. Ficino represents, according to Bartolucci, a predecessor of Pico in terms of his interest in Jewish mysticism, blending the current Humanist traditions and the philosophical movements of that period – Neoplatonism and Hermetism – with the different Kabbalistic streams from active Tuscan Hebrew scholars. In "Filosofia e cabbalà nel "Comento al Cantico dei cantici" di Lewi ben Geršom tradotto in latino per Giovanni Pico della Mirandola" [Philosophy and Kabbalah in the *Comment* on *Song of Songs* by Levi ben Gershon translated into Latin by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola], Michela Andreata explores this commentary by Hebrew philosopher and Talmudist Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344) and the Latin version commissioned by Pico to Jewish convert Flavio Mitridate. Andreata argues the importance of Mitridate's translation editing an additional commentary of the text, which served as a heavy tool of knowledge in Pico's conception of Kabbalah.

In his own chapter, "Pico, i Da Pisa e 'Eliyyà Ḥayyim da Genazzano" [Pico, Da Pisa and 'Eliyyà Ḥayyim of Genazzano], Fabrizio Lelli discusses the intellectual contributions of several Jewish family members in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Tuscan cultural circles. Among these personalities were Yehi 'el ben Yiṣḥaq da Pisa and 'Eliyyà Ḥayyim of Genazzano. Their profound interest in Jewish esotericism and new doctrines were expressed in the form of additional works, absorbing Pico's writings on speculative activity in Kabbalah and blending them with new doctrines and interpretations of the texts. The rise of these new contributions developed within a Christian environment, and their relationship with the establishment of mercantile activities by families related to these scholars is also discussed.

In his contribution "The Law of Change and the Nature of the Chameleon: Yosef ben Šalom 'Aškenazi and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," Brian Ogren explores the metempsychosis (reincarnation) and transmigration studied in Jewish circles by scholars Yoḥannan Alemanno and Yosef ben Šalom 'Aškenazi taking as an example a fourteenth-century commentary of Kabbalistic text *Sefer yeširah* [*Book of the Creation*]. The study permits Ogren to establish the role of 'Aškenazi's Kabbalist tradition within Pico's Renaissance notions of mutability and possibility.

The role of Pico's philosophical contributions on Kabbalah not only developed in the form of treaties with a philosophical and religious purpose, but also influenced Christian iconography and visual images to comply with the current political propaganda. This study is exposed in Patrizia Castelli's article "Simboli ed emblemi della cabbalà Cristiana nel rinascimento" [Symbols and Emblems of Renaissance Christian Kabbalah].

Saverio Campanini's contribution "Il commento alle "Conclusiones Cabalisticæ" nel Cinquecento" [Comment on *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ* in the Cinquecento] focuses on Pico's *Conclusiones*. Published in 1486, the treatise is made of nine hundred theses which embody much of his philosophical and religious thought and include propositions drawn from Plato, Aristotle, Caldeans, Arabic thinkers, and various scholastic philosophers and Kabbalah. Forty-seven of the theses were based on Kabbalistic propositions, and the Church condemned thirteen of them. The author analyzes the process of "canonization" suffered by these nine hundred theses and the controversy established between the supporters and his adversaries.

The volume concludes with Crofton Black's "Eucherius of Lyon, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Sixtus of Siena: Early Christian Exegesis and Kabbalah in the Bibliotheca Sancta," wherein the author analyzes the shift led by sixteenth-century Christian scholars in regards to the exegetic methods used to interpret the Scriptures. While Christian medieval commentators emphasized the importance of the literal sense, Renaissance biblical scholars favored to non-standard traditions of interpretation, which involved non-literal reading and Kabbalah. In this sense, Black explores the role of Sixtus of Siena's *Bibliotheca sancta*, a compendious guide to biblical interpretation published in Venice in 1566, which represented a continuation of Pico's method, blending and integrating Kabbalistic and earlier Christian ideas into mainstream hermeneutics.

The result of this collection of essays serves as a reliable guide to comprehending Pico's admiration for Kabbalah and the role played by Jewish mysticism in the study of Renaissance natural philosophy among Italian Christian thinkers. The articles compiled in this volume manage to acquaint readers with the scholarly landscape of current Pico della Mirandola studies and serve as an indicator for new approaches to

appreciating Pico's place in the history of philosophy.

Notes

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