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## GUGLIELMO RAIMONDO MONCADA BETWEEN THE JEWISH AND THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL TRADITION

*The purpose of this paper is to show that influence of Mithridates's thinking is not only visible in the period of his collaboration with Pico as some interpreters suppose, but also in his *Sermo de Passione Domini*.*

**Keywords:** Flavius Mithridates, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Jewish Mysticism, Christian Kabbalah, *prisca theologia*.

This article is gratefully dedicated to Jarmila Bednařiková

### Introduction

Guglielmo Raimundo Moncada (Samuel ben Nissim Abu'l-Faradi of Agrigento alias Flavius Mithridates), a Sicilian Jewish convert, was certainly a learned man, an excellent translator and a teacher of Hebrew, Arabic languages,<sup>1</sup> who knew the value of his own services for Christian colleagues. We can underline the fact that his translation activities not only influenced the beginning of the concept of the Christian Kabbalah (Pico

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<sup>1</sup> For instance see: *Fl. Guillelmus ramundus mithridates artium medicine et sacre theologie professor et linguarum hebraice, ha rabice, Caldayce, grece et latine inter pres et sacrosancte romane ecclesiae acolytus...* WIRSZUBSKI (1963: 46).

della Mirandola or Reuchlin), but the impact of this project is also apparent in the 17th century (Kircher, Knittel, etc.).

Modern scholars often emphasize the dependence of Pico's concept of Kabbalah on Mithridates's kabbalistic approach expressed in his translations, especially in the phase of preparation of his 900 Theses between 1485–1486. It was Chaim Wirszubski, who assumed in his pioneer study, *Pico's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, that Mithridates was in a sense Pico's forerunner in his attempt to confirm Christian belief through Jewish Mystical Texts.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays we can encounter his followers working on the project called "The Kabbalistic Library of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," coordinated by G. Busi, who is in agreement with Wirszubski's opinion showing Mithridates as a mediating figure, who had discovered the true reading of Jewish Mysticism to make explicit what the text actually implies for a Christian reader (Pico)<sup>3</sup>.

These intellectuals turn their attention mainly to Mithridates' collaboration with Pico. However, he wrote another important sermon (*Sermo de passione domini*, 1481), involving his Kabbalistic point of view before he began to encounter *princeps concordiae*. For this reason the paper not only focuses on Moncada's translation intensive activities of Jewish Mystical Texts as modern interpreters do, but also on the above cited sermon, which was for the first and last time published in a critical edition by Ch. Wirszubski in 1963. Therefore we are going to analyze particularly this sermon trying to find Kabbalistic affinities between it and Mirandola's works such as *Conclusiones* (1486), *Apologia* (1487) and *Heptaplus* (1489).<sup>4</sup>

### **Christian Kabbalah and the concept of *prisca theologia***

In 1481 we can meet Moncada in the service of Cardinal de Cibo in Rome (later Pope Innocent VIII), where he accepted an offer to preach the sermon on the Passion (*Sermo de Passione Domini*) before Pope Sixtus IV and Cardinals, on Good Friday. The purpose of this sermon was to draw attention of clergy to the uniqueness of the Christian Religion proceeding from ancient Jewish Mysticism, known as Kabbalah. The origin of this word is derived from the dictum of the first book *Genesis*, where we can read that God gave to Moses two laws on Mount Sinai: the first in the form of stone tables and the other as an oral law. So this sage received the latter

<sup>2</sup> WIRSZUBSKI (1963: 69–70); CORAZZOL (2008: 104).

<sup>3</sup> BUSI (2005: 85).

<sup>4</sup> G. Pico, *Opera omnia* I, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York, 2005.

law as well, but he could not write it down. He was only allowed to hand the law over orally to seventy wise men and their followers. This law, i.e. a secret mystery, is called “Kabbalah” meaning the reception of tradition by oral transmission.

Gershom Scholem regards the term kabbalah to be only one of the many terms used to designate mystical teaching. Talmud speaks of *razei Torah* (secrets of Torah), but Jewish Mysticism can also be described as *ma’aseh bereshit* (the work of creation) and *ma’aseh merkabah* (the work of chariot). Further Scholem stresses the significance of esoteric or gnostic tradition, borrowed from Arabic or Greek culture (Gnosticism), in the Kabbalistic movement, which emerged in Europe in the middle of 13th century in France (Provence) and then in the 13th century in Spain. The Kabbalah involves two main parts. The first one is speculative, which is dominated by the doctrine of *Sefirot*, the other younger is practical Kabbalah with the doctrine of names (*Semot*) and angelogy. The *Sefirot* – (from *safar* – calculate) as lower worlds are founded and united by *Eyn – Sof* (Infinity). There are ten *Sefirot*, which are represented by number ten: *Keter, Hokmah, Binah, Hesed, Din, Tiferet, Nesah, Hod, Yesod, Malkut*.<sup>5</sup>

There is no doubt, M. Idel respects Scholem’s kabbalistic observation, as well as he refuses his effort to make parallels between the early Kabbalistic texts and the older Gnostic motifs.<sup>6</sup> Next Idel offers another reconstructionist view of reading of Kabbalistic texts based on phenomenological methodology: *which may be described as an attempt to use the more elaborate conceptual structures of Kabbalah in order to examine various ancient motifs (talmudic, midrashic, and apocryphal works in a variety of language) and to organize them in coherent structures*.<sup>7</sup> If Scholem pointed out an external mythological background of Jewish materials and tried to underline the theoretical function of Kabbalah more, Idel, on the contrary, referred to the authentic esoteric Jewish lore of Mystical Texts. Moreover we cannot not deny their practical and personal mystical experience, also rejected by Scholem.<sup>8</sup> In this context Idel speaks particularly about the concept of mystical union (*unio mystica*) in Jewish tradition. So in Kabbalah we can find not only theoretical discussion on the possibility of union with God contained in the thought of the Kabbalist from the 13th century Menahem Recanati (theosophical-theurgical branch of Kabbalah), but also the descriptions of personal mystical experience manifesting in the works of

<sup>5</sup> SCHOLEM (1978: 6–7, 182–189); SADEK (2003: 47–50, 55–60).

<sup>6</sup> IDEL (2000: 21–22).

<sup>7</sup> IDEL (2000: p. 30–32).

<sup>8</sup> IDEL (1988: 7–10).

Avraham Abulafia (1250–1292], who was the founder of the ecstatic branch of Kabbalah, see below).<sup>9</sup>

As it follows from his *Sermo de Passione Domini* Mithridates never uses the word “Kabbalah” explicitly, but more frequently the term *Vetus Talmud*,<sup>10</sup> which is reminiscent of what Origen and Jerome relate about the reading of certain Biblical texts, especially their Mystical interpretation.<sup>11</sup> Still, it is possible to say that Moncada was the first to transform Jewish Kabbalah into a Christian form, when translating and Christological interpreting a corpus of Jewish Medieval Texts.<sup>12</sup>

We should not forget that Mithridates had many predecessors in the Christian history who tried to prove *implicitly* the dominance of the Christian belief at the expense of the Jewish belief. Those defenders of the faith, predominantly converted Jews, often fought very furiously. For instance Fr. Petrus Alfonsi (12th century), *is best known as the first author to attack the Talmud for its failure to conform to reason and therefore its inferiority to Christianity*.<sup>13</sup> Alfonsi wrote *Dialogi contra Judaeos* (1110), in which he defended two kinds of Christian teaching – the creation and the Trinity – by means of the *auctoritas* of Scripture. Joachim da Fiore incorporated Alfonsi’s concept of the Trinity into his famous theology of the Trinity’s action in history, which is found in his works *Expositio in Apocalypsim* and *Liber figurarum*.<sup>14</sup>

Other Christian thinkers attempted to uphold the doctrine of the Trinity with the aid of Jewish ‘weapons’, specifically by a Christian interpretation of rabbinic texts, primarily Midrash or Talmud (but not Kabbalah). For example Arnaldo de Villanova and his *Allocutio super Tetragrammaton* (1292), which was devoted to the mystery of the Trinity; Alfons de Valladolid (Abner de Burgos, 14th century), a converted Jew. He was the first to quote the word “Kabbalah”, meditating about the Incarnation. We can also mention the Jewish convert Ramon Martini, who considering the mystery of the Trinity via help of quotations from Jewish books (Talmud). So in his doctrine is not only present the effort to defend the fundamental Christian dogma, but also his intention to demonstrate the superiority of Christian theology over the Jewish faith.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For instance see: IDEL (1988: 20); ID. (1989: 27–57).

<sup>10</sup> MITHRIDATES (1963: 87, 93).

<sup>11</sup> Jerome, *Epist.* LIII, *Patrologia Latina* XXII, p. 547.

<sup>12</sup> PICO (2005: 180).

<sup>13</sup> MCGINN (1989: 12); RESNICK (2006: 27–55).

<sup>14</sup> SCHOLEM (1997: 26–27); WIRSZUBSKI (1989; 161–169).

<sup>15</sup> For example MARTINI (1967: 411–416).

According to Mithridates's point of view and his adherents this doctrine should confirm the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazaret as well: *Habiturus sermonem da passione domini nostril Iesu Nazareni, cuius misteria hodie celebrantur*.<sup>16</sup> So according to Mithridates's belief Kabbalah was later recorded in the times of Ezdras. Then not only can Jewish wise men, after reaching forty years, read in the mysteries written in the Torah, but Christians also can: *quod Hebrei usque ad annum quadragesimum sue etatis legere non audent...huc beatissime pater et vos reverendissimi cardinales aures dirigite: animum advertite: archanum misterium est... Futurum est cum venerit Messias omnes orationes cessare, preter confessionem*.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Jews did not comprehend the secret mystery fully enough. Since the Jews thought about the captivity of Jerusalem, the temple literally (*dras – littera occidens*): *quod vere templum dei erat censuerat: cum dixit, soluite templum hoc: et post triduum resuscitabo illud: significans brevi suam futuram passionem: et se a Iudeis interficiendum*.<sup>18</sup> They did not understand all the Kabbalistic messages about the victory of the true Messiah, the Son of God, as the Christians did via dictum of *Vetus Talmud* (*spiritus vivificans*), which is evident from his following statement: *veniet messias filius Davidis Hierosolimam ut salvos faciat Israelitas similis pauperi: et sua virga cunctis dominabitur ex Davidis sententia dabo tibi gentes hereditatem suam et possessionem tuam terminos terre reges eos in virga*. but more frequently turned his attention to Christian writers, such as the Gospels, Apostle Paul, Hilarius and Origen.<sup>19</sup>

Kabbalah is now interpreted by Moncada and then by Pico as the noblest spiritual wisdom, because it conducts us away from: "*sursum nos ducens a terrenis coelestia, a sensibilibus ad intelligibilia, a temporalibus ad aeter-*

<sup>16</sup> MITHRIDATES (1963: 80).

<sup>17</sup> MITHRIDATES (1963: 90, 103); PICO (2005: 108, 110, 180).

<sup>18</sup> PICO (2005: 178): *Sicut enim apud nos est quadruplex modus exponendi Bibliam, litteralis, mysticus sive allegoricus, tropologicus et anagogicus, ita est apud Hebreos: litteralis apud eso dicitur Pesat, quem modum temeny apud eos rabi Salomon Chemoy et similes; allegoricus midas, unde sepe apud eos audies Midras Ruth, Midrasthillym, Midras Coeleth, idest expositio per Midras, idest mistica, super Ruth, super psalmos, super Ecclesiastem, et sic de aliis (et istum mosum sequuntur maxime doctores Talmutici); tropologicus dicitur Sechel, quem sequuntur Abraham Abnazara, ubi litteraliter non exponant, et Levi Bengerson et multi alii, et ante omnes rabi Moyses Egyptius; anagogicus dicitur cabala, et hoc quia illa expositio, que dicitur ore Dei tradita Moysei et accepta per successionem modo predicto, quasi semper sensum sequitur anagogicum.*" . Compare with: CAMPANINI (2005a: 432–433).

<sup>19</sup> PICO (2005: 176).

na.”<sup>20</sup> This true wisdom (Kabbalah) can also be connected with the ancient theology (*prisca theologia*)<sup>21</sup> as follows from Mithridates’s sermon: ... *hi vero a pariseis acceperunt: quod sepe numero Grecos fecisse Eusebius auctor est. cum magnam partem philosophice discipline Greci ab Hebreis transtulerunt. ut Numenius Pythagoricus in volumine De bono scribit. Plato atque Pythagoras que Abrahamanes et Iudei invenerunt: ea ipsi grece exposuerunt. Et idem rursus, Nihil aliud esse Platonem quem Mossen atica lingua loquentem.*<sup>22</sup>

This idea is not new, we can encounter it in the thoughts of M. Ficino endeavouring to make the bridge between the Persian religion, the Neoplatonic and the Christian philosophy. In his *De religione Christiana* the order of ancient theologians is explained, among whom Plato has a prominent position drawing his wisdom from Moses and then he handed the ancient theology over to: *Zoroaster, Mercurius, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras consererunt.*<sup>23</sup> Pico holds the same concept combining it with the Aristotelian philosophy or the Pythagorean doctrine and the Jewish Mysticism.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, there is a difference between Ficino’s and Pico’s and Mithridates’s statement. While they want to defend the superiority of Christianity over Judaism,<sup>25</sup> he merely strives to harmonize these two religions. Therefore ancient Jews possessed all the wisdom, so pagan knowledge is merely its new imitation. For this reason he often quotes rabbinical sentences to support Jesus’s missionary and messianic effort. Nevertheless Mithridates just did not repeat references of the Old Talmud, but more frequently citations of one of medieval defenders of Christian belief Ramon Martini and his work *Pugio fidei*, in particular,<sup>26</sup> but without anti-judaistic attacks.

20 IBID., p. 178

21 SCHMITT. (1966: 505–531); VALCKE – GALIBOIS (1994: 119–121).

22 MITHRIDATES (1963: 101).

23 FICINO (1959: 25). Compare with: HANKINS (1990: 29–81).

24 For example see: PICO (2005: 181).

25 PICO (2005: 178).

26 For instance see: Mithridates’s sermon: *Illi triginta argeonteos dedere ut Zacharias vaticinatus est... estimarunt pretium meum triginta argenteis: Amos... mercati sunt iustum pro argento: ubi veteres Talmudiste... mercati sunt iustum id est Deum sanctum et benedictum: et iidem alibi... mercati sunt iustum id est messiam filium Ioseph. (Fl. Mithridates, Sermo de Passione Domini, p. 86). Compare it with Martini’s *Pugio fidei*: *In Zacharia quoque cap. 11 v. 12 in persona Dei taliter scribitur: Et appendent mercedes meam triginta argeonteos... Apud Amos cap. 2 v. 6: Sic ait Dominus super tribus sceleribus Israel, et super quattuor non convertam vel non reducam eum super mercatione sua, vel propter hoc quia mercati sunt argento iustum... Quartum scelur fuit, quod iustum argento mercati sunt, et morti postmodum tradiderunt, videlicet Do-**

### Moncada as a translator and interpreter of Jewish Mystical Texts

It is possible to say that Moncada regarded himself to be first Christian expert in the Aramaic and the Hebrew languages. Since 1485 Mithridates has taught Pico the Hebrew, the Aramaic and the Arabic languages knowing the value of his own translations very well: *Ego autem nolo tibi exponere nisi rediero in urbem...* The proof of Pico's Hebrew study can be found in his two letters. The first one was sent to M. Ficino:<sup>27</sup> *Postquam enim Hebraicae linguae perpetuum mensem dies noctesque invilagivi, ad Arabicae et Chaldaicae totus me contuli, nihil in eis veritus in qua possum nondum quidem cun laude, sed citra culpam epistolam dictare [...]*.<sup>28</sup> The other was addressed to the humanist A. Cornea: [...] *scito me post multam assiduis indefessisque lucubrationibus navatam operam Hebraicam linguam Chaldaicamque didicisse, et ad Arabicae evincendas difficultates nunc quoque manus applicuisse*.<sup>29</sup>

The intensity of Mirandola's study of Hebrew Texts is apparent from his *Oratio*, where he claimed proudly that Pope Sixtus had ordered the translation of some Kabalistic works from Hebrew into Latin.<sup>30</sup> However, there is no real evidence for Pico's opinion. Besides, Sixtus died in 1484, two years before *Princeps concordiae* arrived in Rome to defend his Kabalistic Theses in public debate with learned men from all the world. According to Scholem's and Campanini's view it was probably Mithridates, an enigmatic figure in the literary history of his days, who misinformed Pico about Sixtus's interest in Kabbalistic books and then the same scholar translated them for the Christian thinker.<sup>31</sup>

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*minum Jesum Christum Messiam nostrum.* MARTINI (1967: 845–6). Compare it with Mithridates's follower Pico della Mirandola and his Thesis: *Si dictum illud prophete, Vendiderunt iustum argento, cabaliste exponamus, nihil aliud nobis significat, quam hoc scilicet, ut Deus redemptor venditus fuit argento.* PICO (2005: 109).

27 Compare with this Latin text: "*Petisti a me Illustrissime Princeps ut Alcoranum Mahometi de Arabico in latinum sermonem traducerem [...]. Quod petisti igitur de Arabico in latinum sermonem converti. Deinde in hebraicum et postea in chaldeum et syrum. Est autem sermo chaldeus et Syrus unicus, characteres diversis; quemadmodum et Syrus, qui cum Arabico convenit in characteribus, et sermo quidem diversus est. Denique unusquisque sermo in sua columna collocabitur.*" MITHRIDATES (1963: 50).

28 PICO (2000: P20).

29 PICO (2000: P36).

30 PICO (2000: 110–112).

31 CAMPANINI (2008: 72–80); SCHOLEM (1997: 21–24).



However, Pico bought Kabbalistic books and had them translated for a large sum of money to be able to study them.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Moncada was employed by Pico to translate Kabbalistic works included many Christianizing interpolations. We know that *Princeps concordiae* needed these materials very urgently for his private reading and studying. Therefore the method of Mithridates's translation was predominantly a mechanical rendition of Hebrew texts often with mistakes, the original text being translated literally (word-by-words): *Dico tibi Pice quod non est possibile invenias dominem qui ita optime interpretaretur hec cum non sunt inteligibilia vix in hebraico red<d>it ea intelligibilia in latino, ideo si intelligis refer gratis Mithridati, et videas difficillima facilia sequitur.*<sup>33</sup>

One of them was an opus by ecstatic Kabbalist Avraham Abulafia working in the southern Italy as well as in Sicily (Mesina and Palermo), thus in the same regions as Mithridates did: *Ego scio quod hic auctor fecit multa mirabilia Panhormi hoc anno et celebratur in monumentis Hebreorum Panhormitanorum in Sicilia mirum in modum et scio que sunt....* That's why it is not surprising that Mithridates proffered to Pico's translations of the ecstatic Kabbalist knowing the value of his own Christological interpretations very well: *Scias Pice quod non intelligit Abrram patriarcham solum sed etiam se ipsum quia sic vocabatur et vere magnus homo fuit...*<sup>34</sup>

Moncada also translated Abulafia's letter to one of his disciples, *Summa brevis cabale que intitatur Rabi Jeude (We-zot li Jehuda)*,<sup>35</sup> where he criticizes the doctrine of the *Sefirot* and prefers the doctrine of *Semot*, because theosophists do not understand it well: *and their names [of Sefirot] are well known from their books, but they are very perplexed concerning them.*<sup>36</sup> According to this ecstatic Kabbalist the doctrine of the *Sefirot* is well known in the history of Kabbalah, but the doctrine of Names concentrating on the pronunciation of the twentyfour Names being more noble than the *Sefirot*.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> PICO (2005: 178).

<sup>33</sup> CORAZZOL (2008: 100–103).

<sup>34</sup> Compare with: WIRSZUBSKI (1989: 170–172).

<sup>35</sup> From Mithridates's other translations see: *Liber de Radicibus seu Terminis Cabalae, Expositio Decem Numerationum* dealing with the doctrine of the *Sefirot*, anonymous work *De proportione divinitatis (Ma'areket ha-Elohut)*, *Liber combinationum in cabala et alia manuscripta in papiro*, *Sefer Zohar* and *Corona nominis boni (Keter Shem tov)* of Avraham Axelrada. Compare with: BUSI (2005: 43–85); LELLI (1997: 316); ID. (1998: 53–54); WIRSZUBSKI (1989: 53–65); LELLI (1994: 206–220); TAMANI (1997: 515–518); KRISTELLER (1965: 70–74); WIRSZUBSKI (1963: 51–74).

<sup>36</sup> ABULAFIA. *Imrey Shefer*. Printed by Jelinek in Philosophie und Kabbalah. Leipzig: 1854, 1:37–38.

<sup>37</sup> “*Nec est dubium quod prima pars prior est in esse temporis discendi in cabala, quam*

Hence we can attain the knowledge of God by the technique of pronouncing the Ineffable Name and after death we can unite with Him (the Active Intellect). *Sefirot* have another function. They are spiritual powers which help man to reach the mystical union with God (the Active Intellect) via the mystical technique *gematria*. If man wants to acquire this mystical position, he must carefully pronounce the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This process is described in Abulafia's epistle *Shewa'Netivot ha-Torah: The seventh is a unique method which includes all the other methods. It is the holiest of the holy, appropriate only for the prophets. It is the sphere that encompasses every thing, and with the apprehension of it, the speech [dibbur] that issues from the agency of the Active Intellect by the power of speech will be perceived. For it is effluences that issues from the Blessed Name through the meditation of the Active Intellect upon the power of speech, as the Master [i.e. Maimonides] stated in the Guide of the Perplexed II, 36...*<sup>38</sup> We can remark that Abulafia's concept of Ecstatic Kabbalah, which leads us to the mystical union with God, was inspired by Maimonides's work *More nevu'kim* and by his translator Samuel ibn Tibbon.

Similarly, Pico's Kabbalah is divided into the speculative Kabbalah with the doctrine of *Semot* and practical Kabbalah including the doctrine of *Sefirot*, which are intermediary between the revealed deity (*deus revelatus*) and the created world, whereas in Jewish Mysticism God is not revealed (*nomen ineffabile*: YHWH). Mirandola's second Kabbalistic thesis further defines speculative Kabbalah as: *Quidquid dicant alii cabaliste, ego partem speculativam cabalae quadruplicem dividerem, correspondentem quadruplici partioni philosophiae quam ego solitus sum affere. Prima est scientia quam ego voco alphabetariae revolutionis, corespondentem parti philosophiae quam ego philosophiam catholicam voco. Secunda, tertia, et quarta pars est triplex merchiava, corespondentes triplici philosophiae particularis, de divinis, de mediis, et sensibilibus naturis.*<sup>39</sup> Actually the 'revolution of the alphabet' (*alphabetariae revolutio*) is the same as Abulafia's *ars combinandi*, which means that "it contains the revolving of law or the sphere of the law (*revolutionem legis seu sphaeram legis*) by which all its secrets in

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*secunda pars. Et secunda prior est gradu et nobilitate quam prima, quia est finis in creandis individui humane speciei et fieri similis heloim, et qui pervenit ad hunc gradum est cuius intellectus exit in actum solus.*" ABULAFIA, Cod. Vat. Ebr. 190, ff. 121v–122v. In: PERANI [ED.] (2005: 442).

<sup>38</sup> ABULAFIA (2006: 8).

<sup>39</sup> PICO (2005: 2, 108). Compare with Alemanno's concept of Kabbalah: *The speculative pars of the Kabbalah concerns knowledge of the interconnection of the three worlds by means of the ten Sefirot, and the allusions and secrets of the Torah and the hierarchy of these three worlds and their area of influence.*" In: IDEL (1992: 118).

the Torah can be understood; this is proved by the fact that their numbers correspond (*gematria*).

Mithridates knew another kabbalistic work: *Portae Iustitiae* (*Sha'are Sedeq*) by Joseph Gikatilla,<sup>40</sup> who changed Abulafia's approach to the *Sefirot*. He does not consider them as media helping us to reach the mystical union with God. Though, according to M. Idel, Gikatilla thinks that the *Sefirot* have a mystical character,<sup>41</sup> but without a magical operation, which he refuses in his *Introduction* to the work *Sha'are Orach* (The Gate of Light): *Such people will bring upon themselves only their own ruin. As our Sages have stated, Anyone who does not tend to the glorification of his Creator would be better off not having been created.*<sup>42</sup> In the same work Gikatilla offers to a meditating thinker a possibility to get to the knowledge of the Holy Name of God: *Know that all the Holy Names in the Torah are intrinsically tied to the Tetragrammaton, which is YHVH. If you would contend, however, that the Name EHYE is the ultimate source, realize that the Tetragrammaton is like the trunk of the tree [from which the branches grow] and the Name EHYE is like the root from which grow the other roots. It is the trunk of the tree that nurtures the branches bears a different fruit.*<sup>43</sup> So he regards the *Sefirot* as an instrument to reach the knowledge of God's name.

Pico's inspiration by Mithridates is obvious, because he created the concept of *Sefirot*, as follows from text of Gikatilla's *Portae iustitiae*: *Et scias quod omne opus geneseos et secretum decem numerationum sigillatum est cum nomine elohim a principio et usque ad finem... Et hoc est principium omnibus cognominibus coniunctis cum deo benedicto. et quando memorabis apud nomen et secretum decem graduum ad numerationes quia scilicet decem verba quibus mundus creatus est inveniens doudecim ab his usque ad decem.* "Secretum decem numerationum" are ten *sefirot* represented by number ten. The *Sefirot* as lower worlds are founded and united by *Eyn – Sof* (Infinity = *infinitum*): *Si Deus in se ut infinitum, ut unum et secundum se intelligatur, ut sic nihil intelligimus ab eo procedure, sed seperationem a rebus, et omnimodam sui in seipso clausionem, et extremam in remotissimo suae divinitatis recessu profundam ac solitarium retractionem, de eo intelligimus ipso penitissime in abyssu suarum tenebrarum se contegente, et nullo modo in dilatatione ac profusione suarum bonitatum ac fontani splen-*

<sup>40</sup> Josef Gikatilla (1248–1305), from his works: *Sefer Ginnat Egoz* (Garden of the Walnut), *Sha'are Tzedeq* (Gates of Righteousness), *Sha'are Orach* (Gates of Light).

<sup>41</sup> IDEL (1994: XXVIII).

<sup>42</sup> GIKATILLA (1994: 4).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

*doris se manifestante*. The source for this thesis is Recanati's *De secretis Orationum et Benedictionum Cabale* a Kabbalist from the 13th century as well, translated and interpolated with Christian insertion by Mithridates.

We can say that Recanati elaborated the concept of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah in some aspects differently from Abulafia. Meanwhile, the ecstatic Kabbalist desires to attain the mystical union with God via the Kabbalistic technique *gematria (unio mystica)*, Recanati aimed to unite man with God with the help of the system of the ten Sefirot, which emanate from Eyn sof: *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 amphorismis suis itaque ascendit 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 essencie sue est essencia prime numerationis, a qua procedit virtus omnium numerationum.*<sup>44</sup> The sage must observe all the commandments of the Torah, because as Rabbi Azriel of Gerona said: *The perfection of the supernal Merkavah depends on the perfection of the inferior man*. Man is now characterized as a microcosm (inferior man) performing his duties leading him to the reunion with the macrocosm (*Shekinah* = the Divine Presence) in the form of death in a kiss.<sup>45</sup>

There are two types of 'the kiss of death' (*binsica, mors osculi*).<sup>46</sup> The first one is described in above mentioned thesis.<sup>47</sup> The soul will be mystical

<sup>44</sup> RECANATI (2008: 70).

<sup>45</sup> RECANATI, *Commentary on Pentateuch*, In: IDEL (1988: 43–44).

<sup>46</sup> *Mors osculi* see: (*Song of Songs 1:2*). „Another interpretation: “Let him kiss with the kisses of his mouth.” Compare with the Zohar: *What did King Salomon mean by introducing words of love between the upper world (sefira Tiferet) and the lower world (sefira Malkut), and by beginning the praise of love, which he has introduced between them, with “let him kiss me“? They have already given an explanation for this, and it is that inseparable love of spirit for spirit can be [expressed] only by a kiss, and a kiss is with the mouth, for that is the source and outlet of the spirit. And when they kiss one another, the spirits cling to each other, and they are one, and then love is one.*“ *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. I. (1989: 364–365).

<sup>47</sup> Pico's sources were: *Et Michael est archangelus maior qui stat in hierarchia Divinitatis a latere dextro et procedit a pietate et ideo quaerit clemenciam pro Israel et est sacerdos Dei altissimi nihil enim est inferius qui [sic] non habeat suum simile superius et hoc secretum manifestum in partikula factum est die octava ubi dicitur [Lev. 9:4] quod hodie dominus apparet fobie heb[raice] הארני ככילא nam litere nátah indicat hunc numerum 50.200.1.5 et tot indicat litere ארנא id est Aaron, scilicet 1.5.200.50. similiter dictio ככילא indicat numerum hunc 1.30.10.20.40. et totidem indicat litere לאכיינ [Michael] scilicet 40.10.20.1.30. et hi duo Aaron et Michael docent merita“ „; And from whom do I ask a sacrifice? From Israel. You knot already [Recanati goes on to say] that Michael is the High Priest above, because his power is from [the sefirah*

and sacred to God by prayer, allowing man to attain the space of desire or knowledge. It is necessary to concentrate in prayers. Kabbalists use the term *kavanna*<sup>48</sup> (concentration) to describe the mind's ascent to the world of *Sefirot* through prayer: Kavanna is connected to the doctrine of Names (see: ABULAFIA), which is based on the enunciation of the letters of the Tetragram (YHWH). By this technique the magus can attain the knowledge of *Sefirot* and further achieve the terrible mystery of the presence of the Lord (*Shekinah*).

The influence of Recanati's *Commentary on the Torah (Be'ur 'al ha-Torah)* is apparent. Pico used these writings for his concept of the devekut in his thesis: *Modus quo rationales animae per archangelum deo sacrificantur, qui a Cabalistic non exprimitur, non est nisi per separationem animae a coprore, non corporis ab anima nisi per accidens, ut contingit in morte osculi de quo scribitur: praeciosa in conspectu domini mors sanctorum.*<sup>49</sup> This thesis defines the real physical death, when the human body is separated from the soul. Azazel, (another name is Samael) called Devil, is characterized in *Sefer Zohar* as the angel thrown down into the darkness by God: *So he is called "fallen down": he fell from heaven, and then he fell again into the depth of darkness. Azazel is the one "with opened eyes", because darkness was not scattered over him, because he did not protest or rage against Heaven like the one [mentioned] above.*<sup>50</sup>

The fallen angel Azazel represents the fifth sefira *Din* (judgment), situated in the northern part of the sefirotic system: *Qui sciet proprietatem Aquilonis in cabala, sciet cur sathan Christo promisit regna mundi, si cadens eum adorasset.*<sup>51</sup> The Christological interpretation for this thesis is derived from the following passage of one of the most essential medieval Kabbalistic work *Book of Bahir (Sefer ha-Bahir)*, translated by Mithridates in 1486, saying that every evil comes to the inhabitants of earth from the north: *Quae nam hec est proprietates? Hec scilicet formam manus habet et sunt ei multi legati et omnes vocantur rah rah. Verum tamen inter eos sunt maiores et minores et ipsi damnant mundum quia informe in parte septentrionali est. Nihil enim aliud est informe nisi illud rah quod stupidos redit filios mundi in tantum quod peccent et natura male innata tota que in homine est*

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called] Charity, and it is said in the Midrash that the sacrifices the souls of the just like continual burnt offerings." *Expositio Decem Numerationum*, Cod. Vat. Ebr. 191, f. 78v. In: WIRZSUBSKI (1989: 21, 22).

48 IDEL (1988: 103).

49 PICO (2005: 11, 108–109).

50 *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. II., (1989: 652).

51 PICO (2005: 47, 111.), compare with: Mat 4: 8–9.

*inde est, Et quare positus est in sinistra? Quia nullam potestatem habet in toto mundo nisi in septentrione nec assuetus est nisi in septentrione, quia si iret in meridiem antequam disceret iter ipsius meridionalis parties, et quomodo possit seducere in parte meridionali perderet omnes illos dies quibus disceret et non faceret peccatre. Ideo semper est in sinistra et hoc est quod scribitur quia natura cordis hominis rah est ab adolescentia sua.*<sup>52</sup>

### Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to show that influence of Mithridates's thinking is not only visible in the period of his collaboration with Pico as some interpreters suppose, but also in his *Sermo de Passione Domini* his Kabbalistic concept can be strongly produced in some aspects different from Jewish lore. First: Christian Kabbalah has to prove uniqueness of the Christian doctrine such as the mystery of Trinity, Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazaret. So God could not be *not revelatus* hidden in the Tetragrammaton, but he was decoded, namely as Christ: YHSWH, through the Jewish Mystical Techniques the combination and permutation of the Hebrew Alphabet. On that account Christian Kabbalah became polemically important to demonstrate that Christological theology could be found even in the esoteric Jewish Traditions.

Second: Mithridates does not use directly the word "Kabbalah", but more often he accepts the term "Old Talmud", which is derived from the rabbinical period, or more precisely, from his Christian predecessors, probably attempting to support the antiquity of the Christian Kabbalah. Third: Moncada makes an effort to harmonize Judaism and Christianity with the help of the ancient theology (*prisca theologia*). Because it was Moses who received God's wisdom as the first sage and then this was transferred to his disciple Plato. For this reason we can find in Moncada's Christological interpretation of Kabbalah the attempt to combine the originally Jewish Mysticism with the platonical and pythagorean philosophy.

All the three mentioned aspects of Christian Kabbalah were considerably inspiring for one of Moncada's followers, G. Pico della Mirandola, in particular as we could see in his works, where he inferred his Kabbalistic statement from Moncada's translations of Jewish books, as well as from his *Sermo*, which is the most evident especially from Pico's *Theses* and *Apologia*.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Book of Bahir*. Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version (2005: 163, 206–207).

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