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Skuhala Karasman, Ivana

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**Ivana Skuhala Karasman**

Institute of Philosophy, Ulica grada Vukovara 54, HR–10000 Zagreb  
ivana@ifzg.hr

**A Comparison of Pico’s and Skalić’s Understanding of  
Christian Cabala\***

**Abstract**

*The founder of what was later to be known under the name of Christian Cabala is thought to be the Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). He has namely written The 72 Cabalist Theses that were published in Rome in 1486 as part of his 900 Theses. The Croatian philosopher Pavao Skalić (1534–1575) wrote on Christian Cabala in his work Encyclopaediae seu orbis disciplinarum, tam sacrarum, quam prophanarum Epistemon as well, where he calls it “symbolic philosophy”. In this paper I will expound on the understanding of Christian Cabala as found in the works of Pico and Skalić and show what similarities and differences underlie their comprehension of it. Based on Epistemon, it is evident that Skalić was familiar with Pico’s understanding of Cabala, but Skalić was far more influenced by the German humanist Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) and his work De arte cabalistica, whom, unlike Pico, he actually mentions by name in his own writings.*

**Keywords**

Christian Cabala, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Pavao Skalić

**Introduction**

The first documented use of the term *Christian Cabala*<sup>1</sup> is found in the work titled *Adumbratio cabbalae christianae* by the Flemish alchemist Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (1618–1699). However, the founder of what was later to be known under the name of Christian Cabala is thought to be the Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). He has namely written *The 72 Cabalist Theses*<sup>2</sup> that were published in Rome in 1486 as part of his *900 Theses*. In these Cabalistic theses he uses Cabala<sup>3</sup> to confirm fundamental Christian teachings, which earned him the flattering title of the founder

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This article expands and elaborates on the presentation I held at the international symposium “From Petrić to Bošković: Croatian Philosophers in the European Context” as part of the *21<sup>st</sup> Days of Frane Petrić* organized by the Croatian Philosophical Society in Cres that took place from September 26 to September 29, 2012.

1

See: Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*,

Vol. 4, I–K, “Kabbala”, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1976, p. 664.

2

The full title of this work is *Conclusiones cabalistae numero LXXI. secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium fundamentis christiana religionem maxime confirmantes*. Even though the title suggests only 71 theses, there are, in fact, 72.

of Christian Cabala. The origin of Christian Cabala needs to be examined in light of the search for different sources that would affirm fundamental Christian teachings. In Florence, Pico met the prominent Neo-Platonist philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), who translated *Corpus Hermeticum* into Latin (14 tractates known as *Poimander*, after the title of the first tractate). In such an environment:

“[...] of Forentine Neoplatonism, with its Hermetic core, it was not difficult to assimilate Cabala, which was believed to be an ancient wisdom tradition descending from Moses, and which in fact has gnostic elements which the Renaissance scholar could assimilate to the Hermetic type of gnosticism.”<sup>4</sup>

Pico acquired his knowledge of Cabala by reading *Sefer ha Bahir*<sup>5</sup> (*The Book of Illumination*), *Sefer ha Zohar*<sup>6</sup> (*The Book of Splendor*) and *Sefer Jecirah*<sup>7</sup> (*The Book of Creation*). He was also familiar with the works of Cabalists such as Yosef ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248–after 1305), Yohanan Alemanno (around 1435–after 1504) or the 13th century mystic Abraham ben Samuel Abulafi (1240–1292) and the Italian Jew Flavius Mithridates (1450–1483) provided him with Cabalistic manuscripts. It is apparent from this that Pico was largely influenced by Spanish Jews (such as the aforementioned Abulafi and Mithridates) and hence his understanding of Cabala is actually a simplified form of Spanish Cabala. According to Sheila J. Rabin, Pico's use of Cabala in his *Theses* constitutes the most original part of his natural philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Pico also writes on Cabala in his later work *Apologia* published in 1487, a year after the *Theses*. In my article I will also recount some of his positions on Cabala stated in this work.

Croatian philosopher Pavao Skalić (1534–1575)<sup>9</sup> wrote on Christian Cabala in his work *Encyclopaediae seu orbis disciplinarum, tam sacrarum, quam prophanarum Epistemon* as well, where he calls it symbolic philosophy.<sup>10</sup> His work *Epistemon* was first published during the Protestant phase in his life, in Basel in 1559, and then again after he repatriated to Catholic Cologne in 1571, only now

“[...] under a modified title that does not contain the term encyclopedia anymore, but simply states it as the title (which is incorrect) of a previously published manuscript damaged by someone else's hand: *Epistemonis catholici liber primus* in the collection *Miscellaneorum tomus secundus, sive catholici Epistemonis, contra quandam corruptam et depravatam Encyclopaediam libri XV* [...]”<sup>11</sup>

In the specified work and

“[i]n accord with the program of writing an introduction to an encyclopedia or a certain field of science stated in the title of the edition, Skalić collected different genres of texts in the same volume. He succeeds in executing this program in six of them. The earliest texts are two thesauri. He wrote the first one titled *Conclusiones* as a young man in Bologna around 1552, using Pico della Mirandola's *Conclusiones* as a model and main citation source, but without ever actually referencing it. His proposals to display his theses for public debate in Bologna, or later in Rome, were to no avail. Like Pico, Skalić also divided his *Conclusiones* into subthesauri, a whole 17 of them, which does not mean that he covered as many sciences or disciplines.”<sup>12</sup>

In this paper I will expound on the understanding of Christian Cabala as found in the works of Pico and Skalić and show what similarities and differences underlie their comprehension of it. Based on *Epistemon*, it is evident that Skalić was familiar with Pico's understanding of Cabala, but Skalić was far more influenced by the German Humanist Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522)

and his work *De arte cabalistica*, whom, unlike Pico, he actually mentions by name in his own writings.

## 1. A Comparison of the Understanding of Christian Cabala in Pico and Skalić

At the very beginning it is necessary to lay down the fundamentals of Pico's understanding of Cabala from which Christian Cabala developed later. In his deliberation of the mystery of the name of God he turns to Jewish texts. He claims they hold evidence of God's name referring to the Christian understanding of the Trinity, which is apparent from the 5th thesis, where he writes:

“According to the principles and postulates of Cabala, every Jewish Cabalist is forced to inevitably accept the very thing that the Catholic faith of the Christians prescribes on the Trinity and every divine person, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, without any addition, reduction or change. Corollary. Not just the ones that deny the Trinity, but also the ones who define it in a way different from the Catholic Church, e.g. the Arians, the Sabelians and the like, can indisputably be rebutted if one acknowledges the principles of Cabala.”<sup>13</sup>

3

On the origin and development of Cabala see: Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, The Jewish Publication Society, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1987.

4

Frances Amelia Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Routledge, London–New York, 2001, p. 20.

5

*Sefer ha Bahir* is the earliest Cabalistic document that appeared around 1180 in the South of France.

6

*Sefer ha Zohar* is the capital work of Cabala, originating around the year 1275 in Castile.

7

*Sefer Jecirah* was written in the 6th century.

8

Sheila J. Rabin, “Pico on Magic and Astrology”, in: M. V. Dougherty, *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 155.

9

On the understanding of Cabala of Pavao Skalić see my article “Razumijevanje kabale u *Epistemonu* Pavla Skalića”, *Gazophylacium, časopis za znanost, umjetnost, gospodarstvo i politiku*, 1–2 (2010), p. 77–82.

10

Skalić states on symbolic philosophy: “Itaque symbolica doctrina nihil aliud est quam earum rerum, quae sub obscurioribus rerum in dicitis tradebandur explicatio.” “The symbolic doctrine is therefore nothing more than the explanation of those things that were propagated under [even] more obscure names.”

Pauli principis de la Scala et Hun[garia], marchionis Veronae, et domini Creutzburgi Prussiae, *Miscellaneorum de rerum causis et successibus et de secretiore quadam methodo qua eversiones omnium regnorum universi orbis et futurorum series erui possint libri septem*, Ex Officina Typographica Theodori Graminaei, Coloniae, 1570, p. 48.

11

Mihaela Girardi-Karšulin, “Uvod o Pavlu Skaliću i njegovu *Epistemonu*”, in: Pavao Skalić/Paulus Scalichius, *Epistemon*, Mihaela Girardi-Karšulin (ed.), translated by Ivan Kapec and Neven Jovanović, Institut za filozofiju, Zagreb, 2004, p. 28.

12

Ivica Martinović, *Žanrovi hrvatske filozofske baštine od 15. do 18. stoljeća*, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Splitu, Split, 2011, p. 62.

13

Joannes Picus Mirandulanus, “Conclusiones cabalisticæ numero LXXI. secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium fundamentis christiana religionem maxime confirmantes”, in: Joannes Picus Mirandulanus, *Opera omnia*, Bottega D'Erasmio, Torino, 1971, 5th thesis, p. 108: “Quilibet Hebraeus Cabalista secundum principia et dicta scientiae Cabalae cogitur inevitabiliter concedere de trinitate et qualibet persona divina, patre, filio, et spiritu sancto illud praecise sine additione, diminutione aut variatione, quod ponit fides catholica Christianorum. Corollarium. Non solum qui negant trinitatem, sed qui alio modo eam ponunt, quam ponat Catholica ecclesia, sicut Arriani, Sabelliani, et similes, redargui possunt manifeste si admittantur principia Cabalae.”

Similarly, in the 7th thesis he states:

“No Jewish Cabalist can deny the name of Jesus if we explain it in the ways and according to the principles of Cabala, which in fact means nothing other, i.e. God, God as Son and the wisdom of the Father through the third person of the Trinity, which is the most fervent fire of love, joined together by choice in the unity of the human nature.”<sup>14</sup>

Brian P. Copenhaver argues in his article “Number, Shape, and Meaning in Pico’s Christian Cabala: The Upright Tsade, the Closed Mem, and the Gaping Jaws of Azazel” that Pico possibly intended his 72 *Cabalistic Theses* to form a round number and serve as a talisman to draw the greatest angels. It is possible, Copenhaver continues, that Pico found the incentive to use talismanic magic in the teachings of Yohanan Alemanno.<sup>15</sup> In practical Cabala the names of the angels,<sup>16</sup> 72 of them, are used to create talismans. The number 72 is important symbolically because it is the product of the numbers 9 and 8. Thus the number 9

“[...] being the final member in the number sequence, simultaneously announces the ending and the beginning, i.e. a transition to a new level. It contains the idea of rebirth and sprouting, as well as the idea of death [...]. As the ultimate number in the material world, the number 9 opens up a phase of transmutations. It marks the closing of the cycle, the end of the road, the tying of the loop.”<sup>17</sup>

The number 8 presents the cosmic balance, “[i]t is the number of the cardinal directions in the world, as well as the ordinal ones [...]”.<sup>18</sup> Skalić associates God’s name with the number 72:

“Hence, if between four letters we take the letter *jod* four times, and thusly descending we take *hej*<sup>19</sup> three times, *vav* two times, *hej* once, immediately the number 72 will appear, the amount that discloses the name of God, incomprehensible and unutterable, one that is called the unitary symbolic in order to signify the uniqueness of God.”<sup>20</sup>

He thus adopts the well-known postulate according to which the letters *jod*, *he*, *vav*, *he* יהוה, the tetragrammaton, compose the name of God, which is also provided by Pico in his 15th thesis:

“By the name *jod*, *he*, *vav*, *he*, which is an unutterable name and one that will be the name of the Messiah according to the Cabalists, it can clearly be seen that he will be God, son of God through the holy spirit that became a man, and after him, he will descend upon men as the protector of the perfection of the mankind.”<sup>21</sup>

Skalić also writes about the 70 angels of the world who joined Moses, while 2 are pivotal in the mystery of salvation: “[t]his becomes clear to us from the unutterable name JHVH, through 72 names that are clearly assembled in the Holy Scripture in Ex 14 from ‘Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front. ...’ all the way to the end where it is written ‘The waters were divided, ...’.”<sup>22</sup> It is clear from the stated that both Skalić and Pico were well-acquainted with the symbolism of numbers, as will be proven further on in the paper.

Pico divides Cabala into the science about sephiroth and the science about *shemot*, or speculative and practical science, respectively.<sup>23</sup> The division into speculative and practical Cabala occurs at the beginning of 14th century. The practical Cabala is thus a collection of magical practices that were used in Judaism from the Talmudic era until the Middle Ages. It actually teaches how to connect with magical forces. Speculative Cabala on the other hand refers to the 10 sephiroth. Most of the content of the practical Cabala originated independently and earlier than the content of the speculative Cabala. Skalić does not introduce the above-mentioned subdivision, even though Reuchlin,<sup>24</sup> who undoubtedly exerted an extensive influence on his understanding of Cabala, actually provides it by citing Pico.

In *Apologia* Pico however distinguishes between *ars combinandi*, which he also calls *ars Raymundi*, and the science that deals with the forces of higher things that are beyond the Moon.<sup>25</sup> *Ars Raymundi* refers to the system developed by the medieval Catalan philosopher Raymond Lull (1232–around 1316) that is comprised of 9 letters B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K that symbolize each individual set of rules of the 9 principles, while the letter A signifies the unutterable absolute. What is then the connection between Cabala and *ars Raymundi*? As Paul Richard Blum states, *ars Raymundi* can be called Cabala only

14

Ibid., 7th thesis, p. 108: “Nullus Hebraeus Cabalista potest negare, quod nomen Iesu, si eum secundum modum et principia Cabalae interpretetur, hoc toto praecise et nihil aliud significat, id est Deum Dei filium patrisque sapientiam per tertiam divinitatis personam, quae est ardentissimus amoris ignis, naturae humanae in unitate suppositi unitum.”

15

Brian P. Copenhaver, “Number, Shape, and Meaning in Pico’s Christian Cabala”, in: Anthony Grafton, Nancy Siraisi (ed.), *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Discipline in Renaissance Europe*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England, 1999, p. 50.

16

These are the names of the angels as listed by Reuchlin in his work *De arte cabalistica*: Vehuiah, Ieliel, Sital, Elemiah, Mahasiah, Ielahel, Achaiah, Cahethel, Haziell, Aladiah, Lauiah, Hahaiah, Iezael, Mebahel, Hariel, Hakamiah, Louiah, Caliel, Leuiiah, Pahaliah, Nelchael, Ieiaiell, Melahel, Haiuiah, Nithhahiah, Haaiah, Ierathel, Saeehiah, Reiaiel, Omael, Lecabel, Vasariah, Iehuih, Lehabiah, Chauakiah, Manadel, Aniel, Haamiah, Rehael, Ieiazell, Hahahel, Michael, Veualiah, Ielahiah, Sealiah, Ariel, Asaliah, Mihael, Vehuel, Daniel, Hahasiah, Imamiah, Nanael, Nithael, Mebahiah, Poiel, Nemamiah, Ieialel, Harahel, Mizrael, Vmabel, Iahhael, Anauel, Mehiel, Damabiah, Mauakel, Eiael, Habuiah, Roehel, Iabamiah, Haiiaiell, Mumiah. Iohannes Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*, in: Joannes Picus Mirandulanus, *Opera omnia*, Bottega D’Erasmus, Torino, 1971, p. 593.

17

Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *Rječnik simbola*, Grafički zavod Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1999, p. 119.

18

Ibid., p. 465.

19

*Hej* is the Ashkenazi pronunciation of the letter *he* (ה).

20

Skalić/Scalichius, *Epistemon*, p. 247.

21

Picus Mirandulanus, “Conclusiones cabalisticarum numero LXXI. secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium fundamentis christiana religionem maxime confirmantes”, 15th thesis, p. 109: “Per nomen iod, he, vau, he, quod est nomen ineffabile, quod dicunt Cabalisticarum futurum esse nomen Messiae, evidenter cognoscitur futurum eum Deum Dei filium per spiritum sanctum hominem factum, et post eum ad perfectionem humani generis super homines paraclatum descensurum.”

22

Skalić/Scalichius, *Epistemon*, p. 249.

23

Picus Mirandulanus, “Conclusiones cabalisticarum numero LXXI. secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium fundamentis christiana religionem maxime confirmantes”, 1st thesis, p. 107–108: “Quicquid dicant caeteri Cabalisticarum ego prima divisione scientiam Cabalae in scientiam Sephirot et Semot, tanquam in practicam et speculativam distinguerem.” “Whatever the other Cabalists may say, I would firstly distinguish the division of the science of Cabala into the sciences sephirot and *shemot*, i.e. into practical and speculative science.”

24

Iohannes Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*, in: Joannes Picus Mirandulanus, *Opera omnia*, Bottega D’Erasmus, Torino, 1971, p. 604: “Vester Mirandulanus innotentis conclusionibus scripsit his uerbis, quicquid dicant caeteri Cabalisticarum, ego prima divisione scientiam Cabalae in scientiam Sephirot et Semot, id est, numerorum et nominum tanquam in practicam et speculativam distinguerem.” “Your Mirandolian wrote in [the work] *Nine Hundred Theses*, whatever the other Cabalists may say, I would firstly distinguish the division of the science of Cabala into the sciences *sephirot* and *shemot*, i.e. [science] about numbers and names or practical and speculative [science].”

25

Joannes Picus Mirandulanus, “Apologia”, in: Joannes Picus Mirandulanus, *Opera omnia*, Bottega D’Erasmus, Torino, 1971, pp. 180–181: “In universali autem duas scientias hoc etiam





in a metaphorical sense.<sup>26</sup> The science of combining found in Lull is only a connection between magic and Cabala. Another important difference between Cabala and *ars Raymundi* lies in the fact that Lull uses letters of the Latin alphabet in his system, whereas Cabala uses the Hebrew alephbet.

Pico divides speculative Cabala into four parts, as it is stated in the 2nd conclusion:

“Whatever the other Cabalists may say, I would perform a fourfold division of the speculative part of Cabala, which is consistent with the fourfold division of philosophy I commonly propose. The first one is the science I call [the science] about the alphabetary revolution, which corresponds to the part of philosophy I call Catholic/general philosophy. The second, third and fourth parts compose a threefold Merchiana, which corresponds to the threefold particular philosophy, [i.e. the science] about divine, mediated and sensory natures.”<sup>27</sup>

As it was stated beforehand, the speculative Cabala deals with sephirot. Sephirot are Divine emanations wherein the Divine creative power resides. There are ten of them: Kether Elyon (the supreme crown of God), Hokhmah (the wisdom of God), Binah (the understanding of God), Hesed (the love or kindness of God), Gevurah or Din (the might of God), Rahamim (the compassion of God), Netsah (the enduring perseverance of God), Hod (the magnificence of God), Yesod (the foundation of all the active forces in God) and Malkhuth (the kingdom of God). As opposed to Pico, who does not account for the names of sephirot anywhere in his theses, Skalić does name the 10 sephirot in his encyclopedia: the crown, the wisdom, the reason or intelligence, the mildness or kindness, the solemnity or strictness, the adornment, the triumph, the acknowledgement of the glory, and the kingdom. Thus Skalić writes how “[t]here are ten levels of the ladder left over which we can climb from the bottom to the top, to the knowledge of everything that truly is [...]”.<sup>28</sup> Following the Cabalistic tradition, Pico connects the highest sephira Kether Elyon with Malkhuth, the lowest one, which can be observed in the 66th thesis where it is stated:

“I compare our soul with the ten sephirot in a way that its unity corresponds to the first [sephira], its intelligence to the second, its intellect to the third, its higher lustful [part] with the fourth, its higher valiant [part] with the fifth, its free will with the sixth. And all of this should be converted upwards, like the seventh downwards to the eighth, and the combination between the two by indistinguishability or mutual adhesion rather than by simultaneous inclusion with the ninth and by the power inhabiting the first abode with the tenth.”<sup>29</sup>

In the 48th thesis he relates the order between the 10 sephirot to the order between the celestial spheres:

“Whatever the other Cabalist may say, I say that ten spheres correspond to ten enumerations in such way that, starting from the edifice, Jupiter is in the fourth, Mars in the fifth, the Sun in the sixth, Saturn in the seventh, Venus in the eighth, Mercury in the ninth, the Moon in the tenth, and then the firmament above the edifice is in the third, the first stimulant is in the second and the celestial empyreus in the first.”<sup>30</sup>

Cabalists namely believe that the world of sephirot is connected with the world that is situated outside of God, because “[...] from the Cabalistic perspective, not only does everything appear in everything, but everything also affects everything.”<sup>31</sup> The idea that everything in the world is mutually intertwined can be found in Skalić as well. He comprehends man as a microcosm that is connected with the macrocosm through the angel Metatron. At this point it is necessary to return to the symbolism of the numbers, or rather that of the number 10, for there are exactly 10 sephirot (the root of the word sephira is the word *sefar*, which means ‘to count’). Ten is also the sum of the first four numbers, 1+2+3+4 and signifies completion. The number 10 is mentioned in

the *Talmud* as well. Thus the world was created by ten sayings, there were ten generations from Adam to Noah, Abraham was tested with 10 temptations, ten miracles came to pass in Egypt, ten miracles were performed at the Temple, and ten things were created at twilight on Saturday eve.<sup>32</sup> In *Sefer Jecirah*, the number 10 is affiliated with the ten fingers.<sup>33</sup> Skalić states that there is nothing beyond the number 10,<sup>34</sup> and in accordance with the Pythagorean philosophy, he writes: “Thus, *tetractys* is the first even composite number that is the cause of every perfection, containing one, two and three.”<sup>35</sup> Other than the number 10, the number 22 is also significant in Cabala:

“When Cabalists talk about the divine attributes and the sephirot, they describe this hidden world from ten aspects; when, on the other hand, they talk about the divine names and letters, they are obligated to use the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet that were used to write the *Torah* or, as they would put it, the letters wherein its secret essence was made accessible for communication.”<sup>36</sup>

nomine honorificarunt, unam quae dicitur ars combinandi, et est modus quidam prodedendi in scientiis, et est simile quid sicut apud nostros dicitur ars Raymundi, licet forte diverso modo procedant. Aliam quae est de virtutibus rerum superiorum quae sunt supra lunam, et est pars magiae naturalis suprema.“ “Generally, two sciences have been known under this name: one that was called the science of combining, and represents a way of advancing in sciences and is similar to what with ours is called the science of Raymund, even though they might advance in different ways. The second [science] deals with the forces of higher things that are beyond the Moon and forms the highest part of natural magic.”

26

Paul Richard Blum, “Pico, Theology, and the Church”, in: M. V. Dougherty (ed.), *Pico della Mirandola: New essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 52.

27

Picus Mirandulanus, “Conclusiones cabalisticarum numero LXXI. secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium fundamentis christiana religionem maxime confirmantes”, 2nd thesis, p. 108: “Quicquid dicant alii Cabalisticarum, ego partem speculativam Cabalae quadruplicem dividerem, correspondentes quadruplici partitioni philosophiae, quam ego solitus sum afferre. Prima est scientia quam ego voco Alphabetariae revolutionis, correspondentem parti philosophiae, quam ego philosophiam catholicam voco. Secunda, tertia et quarta pars est triplex Merchiana, correspondentes triplici philosophiae particularis, de divinis, de mediis et sensibilibus naturis.”

28

Skalić/Scalichius, *Epistemon*, p. 227.

29

Picus Mirandulanus, “Conclusiones cabalisticarum numero LXXI. secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium

fundamentis christiana religionem maxime confirmantes”, 66th thesis, p. 113: “Ego animam nostram sic decem Sephirot adapto, ut per unitatem suam fit cum prima, per intellectum cum secunda, per rationem cum tertia, per superiorem concupiscibilem cum quarta, per superiorem irascibilem [corr. ex irascibile] cum quinta, per liberum arbitrium cum sexta. Et per hoc totum ut ad superiora se convertitur, cum septima ut ad inferiora cum octava, et mixtum ex utroque potius per indifferentiam vel alternariam adhaesionem quam simultaneam continentiam cum nona, et per potentiam qua inhabitat primum habitaculum cum decima.”

30

Ibid., 48th thesis, p. 111: “Quicquid dicant caeteri Cabalisticarum [corr. ex Cabalisticarum], ego decem sphaeras, sic decem numerationibus correspondere dico, ut ab aedificio incipiendo, Iuppiter sit quartae, Mars quintae, Sol sextae, Saturnus septimae, Venus octavae, Mercurius nonae, Luna decimae, tum supra aedificium firmamentum tertiae, primum mobile secundae, coelum empyreum primae.”

31

Gershom Scholem, *Kabala i njezin simbolizam*, translated by Dragutin Hlad, MISL, Zagreb, 1998, p. 141.

32

See: *Talmud*, translated by Eugen Verber, Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, Beograd, 1990, V, 1–5.

33

See: *Sefer Jecirah*, translated by Lazarus Goldschmidt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1969, p. 49.

34

Skalić/Scalichius, *Epistemon*, p. 59.

35

Ibid., p. 61.

36

Scholem, *Kabala i njezin simbolizam*, p. 44.



Of course, the number 22 has a symbolic meaning as well: it signifies the manifestation of the being in its diversity in space and time. In *Sefer Jecirah*, it is stated that God creates all creatures and everything that needs to be created through 22 letters<sup>37</sup> (3 matrices, 7 double consonants, and 12 simple consonants). The three matrices are the letters א (*alef*), מ (*mem*) ו (*shin*) and three elements are assigned to them: air (wind), water and fire. The letters א (*alef*), מ (*mem*) and ו (*shin*) are also connected to the human body: the head was created from fire, therefore the head is assigned to the letter ו (*shin*); the body was created from air so it is assigned to the letter א (*alef*); and the stomach is assigned to the letter מ (*mem*) since it was created from water. In the beginning, the sky was created from fire, the Earth from water and the air from wind. The *Sefer Jecirah* lists the seven double consonants as well, which are B (Bh), G (Gh), D (Dh), K (Kh), P (Ph), R (Rh), T (Th). They represent life, peace, wisdom, wealth, mercy, the seed and the reign. The twelve simple consonants are H, V, Z, H, T, J, L, N, S, O, S, Q and they refer to the face, to hearing, smell, speech, eating, sleeping, activity, walking, anger, laughter, thinking and dreaming. Cabalists also believe that every letter has 70 aspects and different aspects “[...] are secrets that can be discovered in every word.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to the aforementioned, a specific numerical value is attributed to each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alephbet.

Skalić also mentions the 22 letters of the Hebrew alephbet associating them with a certain kind of angel by citing Reuchlin. It is significant that the letter כ (*kaf*) denotes the archangel Metatron,<sup>39</sup> who according to Skalić is called “[...] the operative reason of the material world”.<sup>40</sup> According to Jewish tradition, Enoch was taken from Earth by God and turned into Metatron – the prince of angels. His body turned into blazing fire, his sinews into flame, his eyelashes into lightning flashes, and his eyeballs into fiery torches. Pico mentions Metatron in the 10th conclusion, considering him to be “[...] what Orpheus calls Pallas, [what] Zoroaster [terms] the mind of the father, [what] Mercurius [titles] the son of God, [what] Pythagoras [describes as] wisdom, and Parmenides [as the] intelligible sphere.”<sup>41</sup> Metatron is thus important for Pico's speculative Cabala, but as the supreme archangel he is a force in practical Cabala as well.

It has been shown here how Pico and Skalić understand speculative Cabala, which is to say the science about sephirot. However, in order to comprehend their understanding of Cabala entirely, it is necessary to explain the science about *shemot* as well. The Hebrew word *shemot* (שמות) means ‘names’ and signifies “The Book of Exodus”, the second book of the *Torah*. Thus *Shemot* begins with the words: “These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.”<sup>42</sup> The title *shemot* refers to the practical part of Cabala that “[...] practices formal metaphysics and lower theology.”<sup>43</sup> Pico's division of Cabala into practical and speculative is in fact the traditional understanding of the division of Cabala for “[the u]nderstanding of the name of God as the highest concentration of divine power creates a connecting link between two sets of ideas, one that was initially affiliated with magic and the other that referred to the mystic speculation in itself.”<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The similarities and the differences between the understanding of Cabala in the works of Pico della Mirandola and Pavao Skalić have been shown in

this article. From all the aforementioned it is clear that Skalić was familiar with Pico's understanding of Cabala, even though he does not mention him anywhere in his *Epistemon*. In his understanding of Cabala Skalić was much more influenced by Johannes Reuchlin after all, whom he references in the *Epistemon* under the Grecized byname Capnion.<sup>45</sup> Even though it is apparent that Skalić knew about Reuchlin and his work “[i]t would be difficult to point to all the borrowed parts, because Skalić connected the texts he borrowed from Reuchlin in a new way and was generally excerpting much more than using the parts in a literal sense, at least when the Basel edition is concerned.”<sup>46</sup> Hence, Skalić became familiar with Pico's understanding of Cabala through Reuchlin's work *De arte cabalistica*. One should not forget that Reuchlin himself was under influence of Pico in his understanding of Cabala, and he cites him numerous times in his *De arte cabalistica*. Namely, as Frances Amelia Yates points out: “By all means Pico's work influenced Reuchlin, and so he came to Italy in order to learn Hebrew and profit from the abundance of Hebrew literature that was circulating Italy.”<sup>47</sup> With his understanding of Cabala Pico also influenced two other significant Cabalists of the Renaissance: Francesco Zorzi (1466–1540) and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535).

Translated by:

**Ivana Maurović**

37

*Sefer Jecirah*, p. 54.

38

Scholem, *Kabala i njezin simbolizam*, p. 74.

39

On Metatron see: Gershom Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1955, p. 67.

40

*Ibid.*, p. 299.

41

Picus Mirandulanus, “Conclusiones cabalisticarum numero LXXI. secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium fundamentis christiana religionem maxime confirmantes”, 10th thesis, p. 108: “Illud quod apud Cabalistas dicitur Ж illud est sine dubio, quod ab Orpheo Pallas, a Zoroastre paterna mens, a Mercurio Dei filius, a Pythagora sapientia, a Parmenide sphaera intelligibilis nominatur.”

42

Ex 1, 1–5.

43

Picus Mirandulanus, “Conclusiones Cabalisticarum numero LXXI. Secundum opinionem propriam, ex ipsis Hebraeorum sapientium fundamentis Christiana religionem maxime confirmantes”, 3rd thesis, p. 108: “Scientia quae est pars practica Cabalae, practicat totam metaphysicam formalem et theologiam inferiorem.”

44

Scholem, *Kabala i njezin simbolizam*, p. 45.

45

*Ibid.*, p. 71.

46

Mihaela Girardi-Karšulin, “Komentar”, in: Skalić/Scalichius, *Epistemon*, p. 355.

47

Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, p. 27.

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**Ivana Skuhala Karasman**

**Usporedba Picova i Skalićeva razumijevanja kršćanske kabale**

**Sažetak**

*Osnivačem onoga što će biti poznato pod nazivom kršćanska kabala smatra se renesansni filozof Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463.–1494.). On je, naime, napisao 72 kabalističke konkluzije koje se nalaze unutar njegovih 900 konkluzija, koje je 1486. godine objavio u Rimu. Kršćansku kabalu u svom djelu Encyclopaediae seu orbis disciplinarum, tam sacrarum, quam prophanarum Epistemon tematizira i hrvatski filozof Pavao Skalić (1534.–1575.) nazivajući je simboličkom filozofijom. U radu ću iznijeti Picovo i Skalićevo razumijevanje kršćanske kabale te pokazati koje sličnosti, a koje razlike postoje u njihovom shvaćanju iste. Na temelju Skalićeva Epistemona vidljivo je kako se Skalić bio upoznat s Picovim razumijevanjem kabale, no Skalić je više bio pod utjecajem njemačkog humanista Johannes Reuchlina (1455.–1522.) i njegova djela De arte cabalistica, kojeg za razliku od Pica i spominje u svom djelu.*

**Ključne riječi**

kršćanska kabala, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Pavao Skalić

**Ivana Skuhala Karasman**

**Die Vergleichung von Picos und Skalićs Verständnis der christlichen Kabbala**

**Zusammenfassung**

*Als Gründer dessen, was später unter dem Namen der christlichen Kabbala bekannt wird, gilt der Renaissance-Philosoph Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). Er hat nämlich 72 conclusiones cabalisticæ geschrieben, die sich innerhalb seiner 900 conclusiones befinden, die er 1486 in Rom veröffentlicht hat. Die christliche Kabbala thematisiert in seinem Werk Encyclopaediae seu orbis disciplinarum, tam sacrarum, quam prophanarum Epistemon auch der kroatische Philosoph Pavao Skalić (1534–1575), der sie symbolische Philosophie nannte. In diesem Text werde ich Picos und Skalićs Verständnis der christlichen Kabbala vorbringen und dabei zeigen, welche Ähnlichkeiten und welche Verschiedenheiten man in ihrem Verständnis der christlichen Kabbala finden kann. Aufgrund von Skalićs Epistemon ist sichtbar, dass Skalić mit Picos Verständnis der christlichen Kabbala vertraut war, jedoch stand er weit mehr unter dem Einfluss des deutschen Humanisten Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) und seines Werks De arte cabalistica, den er auch, zum Unterschied von Pico, in seinem Werk erwähnt hat.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

christliche Kabbala, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Pavao Skalić

**Ivana Skuhala Karasman**

**Comparaison de la compréhension de Pico et de Skalić de la Kabbale chrétienne**

**Résumé**

*Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463 à 1494), le philosophe de la renaissance, est considéré comme le fondateur de ce qui sera connu comme la Kabbale chrétienne. Il a en effet, écrit 72 conclusions kabbalistiques incorporées en ses 900 conclusions, publiées à Rome en 1486. Dans son œuvre Encyclopaediae seu orbis disciplinarum, tam sacrarum, quam prophanarum Epistemon Pavao Skalić (1534 à 1574), le philosophe croate, traite aussi la Kabbale chrétienne, en la nommant la philosophie symbolique. Dans cet article je vais exposer les conceptions de Pico et de Skalić de la Kabbale chrétienne et montrer quelles sont les similitudes et les différences entre leur compréhensions. Sur la base de d'Epistemon de Skalić il est évident que Skalić a connu la conceptions de la Kabbale de Pico, mais il a été beaucoup plus sous l'influence de l'humaniste allemand Johannes Reuchlin (1455 à 1522) surtout de son œuvre De arte cabalistica, qu'il mentionne dans son œuvre, contrairement à Pico.*

**Mots-clés**

Kabbale chrétienne, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Pavao Skalić