

EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ANTIQUITY

Edited by Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Christine Shepardson, Peter Gemeinhardt

Gaetano Lettieri / Maria Fallica /
Anders-Christian Jacobsen (eds.)

Progress in Origen and the Origenian Tradition

25



PETER LANG

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Pasquale Terracciano

Blurred Lines: Origen the Kabbalist

Abstract: The essay explores a side of Origen's Renaissance *mnemohistory*. Starting from Pico della Mirandola's account of the Kabbalah, in which Origen assumes a privileged role, to the end of Sixteenth century, when sometimes he would himself be considered among the Kabbalists, the article shows how this paradigm would affect the history of Renaissance philosophy.

Keywords: Christian Kabbala, Allegory, Esoteric teaching, *Prisca theologia*

In a pivotal page of the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola has written:

I come now to those things that I deduced from the ancient mysteries of the Hebrews and that I cite as confirmation of the sacrosanct and Catholic faith. So that these things not be considered, by those who are ignorant of such matters, imaginary trifles or the fables of storytellers. I wish to explain to all men what they are and what they are alike; where they come from; by whom and by how many enlightened authors they are confirmed; and how enigmatic, how divine, how necessary they are for those of our own faith for the safeguard of our religion against the importunate calumnies of the Jews. Not only the famous doctors of the Hebrews, but also from among men of our opinion Esdras, Hilary and Origen write that Moses on the mount received from God not only the Law, which he left to posterity written down in five books, but also a true and more occult explanation of the Law.¹

Through this passage, Pico states the existence of an esoteric and perfect knowledge divulged to Moses; in the following lines he asserts that this revealed doctrine is the mysterious Kabbalah. For corroborating the Christian conformity of his theory, he referred to a biblical author, Esdras, and two theologians, Origen of Alexandria and Hilary. This statement can also be found in the preface of Pico's *Apologia*, (into which Pico merged a large part of the *Oratio*) written after the condemnation of several theses contained in his *Conclusiones*;² moreover, the account of the double revelation is

1 G. Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man [Oratio de hominis dignitate]*, English translation by F. Borghesi / M. Papio / M. Riva, Cambridge 2012, 253–255.

2 G. Pico della Mirandola, *Apologia*, ed. P. E. Fornaciari, Florence 2010. As it is well known, in December 1486, the 23-year-old Pico published 900 theses (*Conclusiones*) to be disputed in Rome. Pico's disputation never came about, and his *Conclusiones* faced the first Inquisitorial action in the history of printing (see S. Farmer, *Syncretism in the west: Pico's 900 theses*, Temple 1998, 533; R. Hirsch,

extensively contained in the defence of the thesis according to which “there is no revealed science better than Magic or Kabbalah to certify the divinity of Christ.” In the *Quaestio quinta de magia et cabala* of the *Apologia*, Pico indeed clarifies the mythical origin of the Kabbalah as the hidden doctrine that God gave to Moses and then orally transmitted until Ezra decided to write it down in seventy books; this secret teaching also corresponds to the anagogical method of reading the Scripture.³

Origen of Alexandria assumes a privileged role in his account. The Church Father confirms the existence of an esoteric tradition in Christianity, starting with Jesus himself.⁴ Origen has explained that when Paul talks of “sentences of God” (*eloquia Dei*), he was referring to this secret revelation at the Sinai;⁵ furthermore he has witnessed the oral diffusion of this doctrine in the Sanhaedrin;⁶ he is aware, as the Kabbalists, of the hermeneutical richness of numerology;⁷ he is the only Christian theologian who has explicitly quoted Jewish masters in his books, and he is also the authority for understanding why the Jews themselves don’t follow the Kabbalah.⁸ Moreover, the section on language of Origen’s *Contra Celsum* was employed by Pico for turning Plato’s *Cratylus* into a theurgist dimension, following a similar line of reasoning of Marsilio Ficino, whose lesson was crucial.⁹ Indeed, in apparent

Printing, Selling and Reading, 1450–1550, Wiesbaden 1967, 89). From those 900 theses thirteen propositions were extracted, deemed unacceptable or dangerously close to heresy: the defence of these theses was gathered into the *Apologia*.

3 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 178.

4 Pico della Mirandola, 2012, 259. The passage of Origen is Or. Cels. 3.21. The thesis has been held also by his master Clement of Alexandria. See G. Stroumsa, *Hidden wisdom. Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, Leiden/Boston 2005, 113.

5 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 180.

6 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 182.

7 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 172.

8 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 188–190.

9 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 177: *Similiter de nominibus quod habeant aliquam activitatem naturalem etiam notum est omnibus. Quam quidem activitatem naturalem non habent ut significativa sunt ad placitum, sed ut sint in se quaedam res naturales. Ideo dixi nomina illa habere virtutem in Magia naturali non ut significativa sunt, nisi forte essent aliqua quibus significatio esset naturalis, sicut Stoici dicunt de omnibus nominibus, quibus ut adversantur peripatetici, ita Plato in Cratilo assentitur de his quae sunt recte imposita. Origenes autem de hebraicis hoc sentit, et ideo dicit quod quaedam nomina hebraica in sacris litteris... fuerunt sic reservata et non mutata in aliam linguam, in qua non retinissent suam naturalem significationem et consequenter virtutem. See Or. Cels, 1.24–25. Cfr. M. Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary [In Philebum]*, ed. and trans. by M.J.B. Allen, Temple 1975, 141 and Ficino, *Argumentum in**

concordance with *Cratylus* – which debated the question of whether the meaning of words was derived from human agreement or if it was intrinsic in the genesis of the words – Origen testifies to the unique natural “power” (*vis*) of certain Hebrew words which do not denote created things, but are directly related to the divine mysteries: these formulas could not be translated without losing their natural meaning and their “power”.

The depth and the limit of Pichian Origenism have been widely explored from the second half of the twentieth century,¹⁰ also because the longest and most erudite section in Pico’s *Apologia* regards the thesis according to which it is “more rational to believe that Origen is saved, than to believe he is damned”.¹¹ Pico’s fervour has suggested that the issue of the personal salvation of the Church Father could shed light on several other parts of the *Apologia*, and that the defence of Origen could ultimately become a

Cratylum, in Id., *Opera*, Basel 1579, II, 1309. For the philological problems and the inner philosophical reasons that underlie Ficino’s choice as well as for an interpretation of the crucial role that the reference assumes in Ficino and Pico, see F. Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pierleone da Spoleto. Tra filosofia dell’amore e tradizione cabalista*, Florence 2001, 39 (n. 133), and G. Bartolucci, *Vera Religio. Marsilio Ficino e la tradizione ebraica*, Milano 2017, pp.79–93. See also V. Perrone Compagni, *Abracadabra: le parole nella magia (Ficino, Pico, Agrippa)*, in: *Rivista di Estetica* 19 (1/2002), 105–130 (120–128) and S. Touissant, *Ficin, Pic de la Mirandole, Reuchlin et le pouvoir des noms: à propos de Néoplatonism et de Cabale chrétienne*, in: W. Schimdtt-Biggemann (ed.), *Kristliche Cabbala*, Stuttgart 2003, 67–79.

10 For a general overview of the interpretation of the *Apologia* and the *Oratio* connected with Origenism see W. G. Craven, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of his age. Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher*, Genève 1981. E. Wind, *The revival of Origen*, in: D. Miner (ed.), *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, Princeton 1954, 412–424; then in E. Wind, *The eloquence of the Symbol*, Oxford 1992; L. Giusso, *Origene e il Rinascimento*, Rome 1957; H. Crouzel, *Pic de la Mirandole et Origène*, in: *BLE* 66 (1965), 174–194 and 272–288; Id., *Une controverse sur Origène à la Renaissance: Jean Pic de la Mirandole e Pierre Garcia*, Paris 1977; M. Schär, *Das Nachleben des Origenes im Zeitalter des Humanismus*, Basel / Stuttgart 1979; D. Nodds, *Origen of Alexandria among the Renaissance Humanists and Their Twentieth Century Historians*, in: D. Kries / C. Brown Tkacz (eds.) *Nova Doctrina Vetusque: Essays on Early Christianity in Honor of Frederic W. Schlatter, S. J.*, New York 1999, 51–64; P. Terracciano, *Omnia in figura. L'impronta di Origene tra '400 e '500*, Rome 2012; A. Fürst / C. Hengstermann (Hg.), *Origenes humanista, mit Pico della Mirandolas Traktat, De salute Origenis disputatio*, Münster 2015; P. Terracciano, *The Origen of Pico’s Kabbalah: Esoteric Wisdom and the Dignity of Man*, in: *JHI* 79/3 (2018), 343–361.

11 Farmer, 1998, 435.

defence of Pico. The debate was directed toward Origen's possible influence in Pico's theory of eternal punishments, to his critical attitude concerning the dogma in the ecclesiastic authority, and, above all, to his ascendancy in Pico's doctrine of the dignity of man.¹² Surprisingly, the role of Origen in the Pichian shaping of the Christian Kabbalah has been poorly analysed, in spite of the fact that, in the fatal years 1486–1487, the only direct references to Origen – excluding the mentions in the *De salute Origenis disputatio* – are all concerned with Kabbalistic issues.¹³ Despite a renowned tradition which has inquired after the possibility that Origen was the secret inspiration of Pico's anthropology, it can instead be reasonably argued that the Mirandulane was primarily attracted by Origen as the preferred advocate of the long chain of hidden wisdom which Pico was on the point of revealing in 1486, and that it is only through this point that he affected Pico's doctrines.¹⁴

The image of the Church Father as master of secret wisdom – already present in Antiquity in a scattered way – had a profound legacy in the sixteenth century and is one of the ways in which Origen was received. He was, obviously, also read as the exegete of the free will and the theologian of infinite mercy; but the *esoteric* aspect is nonetheless relevant. In the following pages, by inquiring into the characteristics of this heritage, a fragmentary, collateral aim can be pursued regarding the legacy of the Mirandulane. The history of the reception of Pico's works is, in fact, far from complete.¹⁵ In the last decade a few studies have been devoted to this topic: in particular,

12 E. Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, vita e dottrina*, Florence 1937, 141; E. Cassirer, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. A Study in the History of the Renaissance Ideas*, in: *JHI* 3 (1942), 330; Giusso, 1957; E. P. Mahoney, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Origen on Humans, Choice and Hierarchy*, in: *Vivens Homo* 5/2 (1994), 359–376; G. Busi / R. Egbi, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Mito, Magia, Kabbalah*, Milan 2014, XXXII. For a critique on the Origenian influence on the debate on the eternal punishment developed in the second section of the *Apologia* see the sources published by G. Mariani, *Giovanni Pico e Roberto da Lecce. Annotazioni su una ritrovata fonte dell'Apologia e l'origenismo quattrocentesco*, in: *Schifanoia* XLVI–XLVII (2014) 137–148.

13 Pico della Mirandola, 2010, 24–26; for *Heptaplus* and in *Comento* see Id. *De hominis dignitate. Heptaplus. De Ente et uno et scritti vari*, a cura di E. Garin, Florence 1942; 172–174 (*Heptaplus*); 580 (*Comento*).

14 Terracciano, 2018.

15 E. Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Comitato per le celebrazioni centenarie in onore di Giovanni Pico*, Parma (1963), 55; O. Kristeller, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and its Sources*, now in Id. *Studies in Renaissance, Thought and Letters III*, Roma 1993, 227–304; S. Campanini, *Il commento alle Conclusiones Cabalisticæ nel Cinquecento*, in: F. Lelli (ed.) *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, Florence 2010, 167–230 (170).

the surprising vitality of the *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ* throughout the successive century has been brought to light.¹⁶ The same must be supposed for the *Quaestio quinta de magia et cabala* contained in the *Apologia*, for which we do not have a similar study. The debate Pico began on the true Kabbalah carried on through a list of commentators, of advocates and opponents.

2. The use of Origen by Pico is deeply rooted in his global project of rethinking ancient traditions in order to elaborate a new image of man and cosmos. Cutting the elements from this project might cause them to change their function. The primary features of the portrait of Origen that Pico constructs are two: the expositor of the natural connection between special names and objects (correlated to the interpretation of the *Cratylus*), and the witness of the diffusion of the Kabbalah. They became part of the common assemblage used in the debate on magic and esoteric arts. It is well known to Renaissance scholars, however, that under the uniform reproduction of blocks of texts – basically a series of unvaried plagiarisms that flood from book to book – the quotations often refer to different, and sometimes opposite, doctrines. In this process, although the two features are interweaved and often remained linked in tradition for a certain span of time, they will have a partially different fate. Indeed, the meaning of the support of Origen to Pico's Kabbalah, pulled out from visible and invisible wires to Pico's entire project, will gradually change and have its own future life; the first element, instead, will be altered in lesser extension, even if it is destined to a long fortune too, partially yet known to scholarship.¹⁷ Origen's belief in the miraculous power of certain names had a wide echo indeed. The argument, derived from Ficino, was used a few years later by Polidoro Vergili in his *De Inventoribus* (1499), and by Paolo Ricci, Galatino, Reuchlin (who employs exactly the same words of Ficino's *Cratylum*),¹⁸ Zorzi, Agrippa,¹⁹

16 Campanini, *Il commento*, 2010.

17 A. Coudert, *Some theories of a Natural Language from the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century: Studia Leibnitiana 7, Magia Naturalis un die Enttehung der modernen Naturwissenschaften*, Wiesbaden 1978; B. Vickers, *Analogy versus Identity: The Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580–1680*, in: Id. (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, Cambridge 1984; J. Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man: Vol. 1: Ficino to Descartes*, Madison 1995; M. J. B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino on Significatio*, in: *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002), 30–43.

18 J. Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, W.-W. Ehlers / L. Mundt / H.-G. Roloff / P. Schäfer (eds.), Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt 1996, 198.

19 Reuchlin 1996, 430–434 in Lib. 3, Cap. 9 *De divinis nominibus eorundemque potentia et virtute*; 430. *Unde Origenes praecipit ea in suispsis characteribus incorrupte conservanda et Zoroastes etiam vetat barbara et antiqua verba mutari; nam*

Giulio Camillo and many others. The legacy of this reading of the *Cratylum* would require a specific essay to explore properly; however, it is useful to keep in mind that it often flowed in parallel with the Kabbalistic exposition, on which I will concentrate in the following pages.

The account of the secret revelation received by Moses, as could be expected, poured into the debate on Christian Kabbalism, often relying on Pico's own words. This didn't happen immediately. The cost of the fecund originality of Pico laid in some ingenuity and in several contradictions. Among those who would take up the Pichian report, those more prepared in Jewish studies would cut and edit his account. Johannes Reuchlin, proud of his Kabbalistic library and, perhaps, sceptical of the authenticity of the supposed ancient books bought by Pico and of his list of Kabbalists,²⁰ passed over the chain of Christian sources proposed by Pico and insisted on a wider enumeration of Jewish sources and Kabbalists.²¹ The first controversialists skipped – to the best of my knowledge – the Pauline interpretation proposed through Origen. Paolo Ricci reflected on the relationship between allegorism, and Kabbalah derived from Moses, but did not comment on the role of Ezra and Origen.²² Galatino, who also reflected upon the relationship between the allegorical sense and Kabbalistic interpretation, said nothing on the role of the Greek Father in his report of the genesis of the Kabbalah.²³

(ut inquit Plato in Cratilo) omnia divina verba, sive nomina, vel a diis primum vel ab antiquitate, cuius initium haud facile scitur, vel a barbaris prodita sunt; Iamblichus quoque similiter praecipit ea non esse ex sua lingua in aliam transferenda: 'Non enim eandem – inquit – mentem servant nomina in aliam linguam interpretata.

20 J. Reuchlin, *De Arte cabalistica libri tres*, W.-W. Ehlers / F. Felgentrau (eds.), Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt 2010, 114–116. For his kabbalistic library see J. Reuchlin, *L'arte cabbalistica (De arte cabalistica)*, G. Busi / S. Campanini (eds.), LI-LXX, Venice 1995.

21 A characteristic of *De Arte Cabalistica* is the absence of a Christian interlocutor in the debate: this element could maybe explain the choice of Reuchlin, deeply committed to showing his astonishing knowledge of Jewish sources. It could be worth adding that, although his project agrees with the idea that the final aim of the Kabbalah is in showing the truth of the Christianity, Reuchlin works also towards a recovery of Pythagorean wisdom as a forgotten part of the Kabbalah. According to him, furthermore, the revelation of the hidden law went back from Adam and not from Moses, so he was less interested than Pico – and probably found more dangerous – in putting Christian exegetes in this history of the dissemination of the Kabbalah.

22 P. Israelite (Ricius), *In cabalistarum seu allegorizantium eruditionem Isagoge*, Augsburg 1510, f. 4. 7v.

23 P. Galatino, *Opus de Arcanis Catholicae veritate*, Basel 1550 (first edition Ortona a Mare 1518), 20 f. He reports, anyway, the issue of the uniqueness of the language,

Meanwhile, the Kabbalah-allegorical interpretation left visible traces in the editorial history of Origen's texts. In the 1513 Venetian edition of *De Principiis*, the editor, Constantius Hyerothaus, declared that Dyonisius the Aereopagite had enhanced a method of interpretation which was called Kabbalah by the Jews and consisted of allegorical and anagogical reading, "on which Origen had many times written".²⁴ The fact that these words appeared in Venice cannot be a coincidence. In effect, the crucial turn that gave precedence to Pico's version of the revelation to Moses and to the role of Origen in this must be dated to those years in the Serenissima, represented by the work of the Venetian Friar Francesco Zorzi.²⁵ In his monumental volumes, *De Harmonia Mundi* (1519–25) and *In Sacram Scripturam Problemata* – which enjoyed a broad European reception in the sixteenth and seventeenth century – the presence of Origen is explicit and pervasive,

according to the aforementioned witness of the *Contra Celsum*; *ibidem*, 92–93, following Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico*, 1996, 198.

- 24 *Sublimis Origenis Opus Peri archon: seu De principiis: correctum & ordinatum: ac undequaque cautis erroribus: & in abstrusis sensibus interpretatum. Addito tractatu De natura materie ad inuenta Origenis: & Methodo in disciplinam eiusdem: a Constantio Hyerotheo: [...] Item Apologia Pamphili martyris & Ruffini Aquilegie presbyteri pro Origene*, Venice 1514: *De quibus beatissimus quoque meminit Dionysius in his quae scripsit de ecclesiastica Hierarchia. Ex his prodiit illud interpretandi genus (quod Cabale sensus est apud Hebraeos: magia ex natura apud barbaros et graecos) quum litterae sententia, per allegoriae et anagogiae intelligentiam ducitur, de quare eleganter hic noster Origenes plurima.*
- 25 For a general bibliography P. Giovanni Degli Agostini, *Notizie istorico-critiche intorno alla vita e le opere degli scrittori viniziani*, 2 vols., Venice 1754, 332–363; U. Vicentin, *F. Zorzi Teologo Cabalista O. F. M.*, in: *Le Venezie francescane* 31 (1954), 121–162; 174–226; C. Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione. Studi sulla cultura del Cinquecento e del Seicento*, Napoli 1974, 189–292; Id., *Francesco Giorgio Veneto e Marsilio Ficino*, in: G.C. Garfagnini (ed.), *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, Florence 1986. For his role in the history of the Christian Cabala, see J. L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*, New York 1944; F. Secret, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, Paris 1964; C. Wirszubski, *Francesco Giorgio's Commentario on Giovanni Pico's Kabbalistic Theses*: *JWCI* 37 (1974), 145–156; F. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, London 1979, 29–36; G. Busi, *Francesco Zorzi. A methodological dreamer*, in: J. Dan (ed.) *The Christian Cabbala*, Cambridge 1997, 97–125; S. Campanini, *Le fonti ebraiche del De Harmonia Mundi di Francesco Zorzi*, in: *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 38 (1999), 29–74; S. Campanini, *Francesco Zorzi: armonia del mondo e filosofia simbolica*, in: A. Angelini / P. Caye (eds.), *Il pensiero simbolico nella prima età moderna*, Florence 2007, 239; Id., *Saggio introduttivo to F. Zorzi, L'Armonia del Mondo*, Milan 2010.

to the extent that the role of the Church Father is the key to understanding his syncretistic Pantheon.

The richness of Zorzi's knowledge of patristic and Jewish sources is integrated into a coherent Neoplatonic system, combined with Pythagoric and Vitruvian fascinations. Zorzi held a strong conviction that the Kabbalah could prove the truth of Christianity. His own predilection for Origen derives from his role as cultural broker of the different ancient wisdoms. Specifically, following the path of Giovanni Pico's interpretation, he considered Origen the Christian exegete most familiar with the secret philosophical doctrines of the Jews. According to Zorzi, Origen and Plato had themselves followed secret Jewish teachings. Furthermore, he stated that Origen in his *Peri Arcon* testified that Enoch was the first who wrote on the secret doctrines of the Kabbalah.²⁶

In *De Harmonia Mundi*, in reviewing the list of Jewish masters "that tune up the chorus of the divine truths", Zorzi detailed the order of those who had received the interpretation of the Kabbalah after Ezra. He reproduced there, with few omissions, the same Reuchlian list expressed in *De Arte Cabbalistica* that included only Jewish rabbis.²⁷ Zorzi extended the reception to St. Paul, St. John, Dionysus, and Origen as commentators of these doctrines, grafting the erudite and detailed accounts of Reuchlin onto Pico's framework. Concerning the Alexandrian, Zorzi adds that:

Origen, either because he tried to hide the precepts revealed by God, to avoid sinning, according to the rules of the prophet, or because, having sworn to his master Ammonio, did not dare to reveal what was boiling in his mind, apparently remains on the surface in order to allude the hidden core to the initiates. Nevertheless, on the ground of a few sentences expressed in the *Contra Celsum*, someone argues that he has moved away from that school, and has come to enjoy the mysterious fruits, simply following the platonic doctrines. However (if I'm not mistaken), his doctrine, as well the doctrine of Plato, in many places closely recalls the Hebrew theology.²⁸

26 Zorzi, 2010, 194: *Cabalistae autem, qui a vero oraculo acceperunt (nam cabala ore receptio dicitur) vel ab doctis ab huiusmodi didicerunt, secretiora legis sensa prosequentes, de multis qui scripserunt, ii sunt, primus Hanoc, de quo meminit Thadeus in epistola, et Origenes in Periarchon.*

27 Zorzi, 2010, 196 f., compare with Reuchlin, 2010, p. 108 f.: the most significant omission regards the notice that Jesus of Nazareth, different from the Christian Jesus, was a disciple of Yehoshua, son of Perahiah.

28 Zorzi, 2010, 196–198: *Ezra primus (ut fertur) haec monumenta sacratissima commisit septuaginta voluminibus, quae prius ore tantummodo docebantur... Ex his autem, qui verum Messiam secuti sunt, Paulus noster, et Iohannes magnifica illa sensa ubique persequentes caeteris altius scripsere. Sed ex his, qui commentaria aedidere (ut videre videor) nullus secretiora illa sacramenta olfecit nisi Dionysus et Origenes, sed hic, aut quia studebat cum Propheta abscondere eloquia Dei*

This passage from Zorzi is decisive: he explicitly suggests that Origen not only knows of the existence of the secret wisdom but also understands its “hidden core”, and that his doctrines resemble those of the Hebrews. For this reason, Zorzi regards Origen as a significant exponent of ancient esotericism.²⁹ He draws a line that, through Origen’s education under the teaching of Ammonius Sacca, connects the exegesis of the Church Father to the Jewish tradition. Origen thus would have learned from Ammonius, “or better from Hebrew rabbis”, the fourfold interpretation of Scripture:³⁰ he then refined the method, becoming the greatest master in this kind of exegesis. The need to move beyond the letter of the Holy texts arises from the common consciousness of the role of hidden doctrines in the structural esotericism of the divine mysteries. According to Zorzi, both Origen and the Kabbalists worked towards an “exegesis of a shadow” because they were both aware of the existence of curtains that veil the wisdom. The point has for him a double implication: it is a fundamental testimony to the truth of the Kabbalah, and a confirmation of the preeminent role of Origen among Christian theologians. This consideration does not come without effect. On the contrary, in Zorzi’s pages one frequently sees the duplex action (if not an actual overlap) of Hebrew hermeneutics and Origenian exegesis.

Along these lines, from the preface of *De Harmonia Mundi*, Origen is the guide who directs Zorzi’s hermeneutics, focused on grasping the meaning of the numerical proportions that permeate the world. He appears as the most significant example in the Christian tradition of the legitimacy of an allegorical interpretation of the text. The need to hunt for the deep sense contained in the composition and in the forms of the alphabetical character – a typical Kabbalistic preoccupation – is confirmed through the argument of the inevitable loss of *vis* in the translation of special names (by means of the aforementioned reference to the *Cratylus / Contra Celsum*). If the Kabbalah

sibi credita, ne peccaret, aut quia iuratos a praeceptore Ammonio non est ausus palam producere ea, quae bulliebant in mentem, ideo per corticem semper levius decurrit, ea tamen lege, ut secretiorem medullam innuat expertis, quamvis ex quibusdam verbis dictis contra Celsum nonnulli asserant ipsum ab huiusmodi schola declinasse, et tantummodo Platonica dogmata secutum penetrasse ad illa secretiora pabula. Sed (ni fallor) in multis eius doctrina, sicut et Platonica, redolet hebraicam Theologiam. The underlines correspond to the intervention of the censorship, [G.M. Guanzelli], *Indicis librorum prohibitorum et expurgandorum*, Rome 1607, which orders to cancel these lines.

29 Zorzi, 2010, 198. This passage was also censored.

30 Zorzi, 2010, 350: *Quo modo interpretandi saepius utitur omnium interpretum sacrarum literarum apud nostros facile princeps Origenes, prout ab Ammonio, immo a sapientibus Haebreis acceperat.*

could be considered his blueprint in these issues, Origen provided Zorzi with a justification for advancing some daring readings.³¹

Zorzi often follows Ficino and Pico step by step. However, concerning the genesis of the Kabbalah, by merging Pico's account with the information received from Reuchlin,³² Zorzi was fundamental in creating the patchwork destined to be influential in the following centuries. Zorzi's books were quite successful: *De Harmonia Mundi*, in particular, was published in Paris in 1546 and 1564, and then translated into French by Lefèvre de la Boderie in 1578. Furthermore, the role of Zorzi was not restricted to the editorial destiny of his main books. First, Zorzi also worked towards a close and systematic commentary of the *Conclusiones*, which survived tortuously in an exegetical tradition inside the Franciscan Observance, through the enlarged and revisioned version by Arcangelo of Borgonovo. In the version by Arcangelo of Borgonovo, Origen is, as expected, set to guarantee the transmission of the knowledge of the sublime things, protected by the veil of allegory, which is nothing more than the Kabbalah.³³ But in the Franciscan Order there were also understandable hostilities regarding this kabbalistic shadow over Christianity: one of the most important Franciscan preachers,

31 One of the examples is Zorzi, 2010, 1686: *Quae (ut Origenes ait) non sunt intelligenda secundum carnem, sicuti Ebioniti toto (aut aiunt) coelo aberrantes senserunt, qui re et nomine pauperrimi sunt, sed secundum spiritum, vel in sensu morali, de quo diximus, vel in sensu allegorico, ut nunc latius explicabimus*; *ibid.* 760, after a disquisition on the symbolic value of the tetragrammaton: *Si autem a sensu anagogico ad sensum moralem Origenem sequentes transcendere voluerimus arbores sunt virtutes plantae et infusae nobis a coelesti agricola a quo omne datum optimum et omne domum perfectum* and hereinafter: *Ad superiorem autem sensum redeundo, in quem alibi idem Origenes consentit, omnis arbor est omne genus personarum, sive rex fit, aut servus, civis, aut rusticus, artifex, aut et mulier.*

32 *Supra* n.27. In addition to the list of the Esdra's followers, it is possible to grasp the Reuchlin's influence, among the other topics, in the exposition of difference between Talmudists and Kabbalists, see Zorzi, 2010, 194 and Reuchlin, 2010, 122.

33 Arcangelo of Borgonovo, *Apologia*, Bologna 1564, 318, 330. For the most recent account on the history of the manuscripts of Arcangelo of Borgonovo, his dependence from Zorzi and his diffusion in the Observance see S. Campanini, *Il commento alle Conclusiones Cabalisticæ nel Cinquecento*, in: F. Lelli (ed.), *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, Florence 2010, 183–210. Arcangelo of Borgonovo assembled part of this material also in his vernacular Kabbalistic book, Arcangelo di Borgonovo, *In Decharatione sopra il nome di Giesu secondo gli Hebrei, Cabalisti, Greci, Caldei, Persi et Latini, intitolato Specchio di Salute*, Ferrara 1557, where he reports the issue of the ineffability of the name of Jesus before the proclamation of the Gospel according Origen (151), and moreover the topic of the power of the divine names as key to understanding the Kabbalah (1), following *Contra Celsum*.

Bernardino Ochino (who in 1542 would escape among the Protestants) delivered a homily “On the true Kabbalah” (*Della vera cabala*) in Venice in 1539, probably addressed against Zorzi’s *Problemata*.³⁴ Ochino reviewed the account of the reception from Ezra, clarifying that the true Kabbalah is the Pentateuch and the real knowledge of the hidden mysteries is the simple faith in Christ.³⁵

Second, because his works were subjected to a long inquisitorial process of expurgation in the second half of the century, the Catholic censors were indirectly pushed to face the connection between Origen and esotericism and kabbalism. Beginning with the first interventions, the hostilities of the censors were in fact directed against the syncretism of Zorzi, the special blend of Platonic and Kabbalistic doctrines that made the charge of correcting his texts “harder than cleaning stables”.³⁶ The final expurgation, published by Guanzelli, in 1606, tried to polish – with varying results – the connections between Christian doctrine, Platonism, and Jewish mysteries, advocating the complete eradication of Pico’s version on the origin of the Kabbalah.³⁷ As a consequence, the censor also attempted to brush the esoteric stains from the figure of Origen. Guanzelli erased the asserted resemblance between the doctrines of Origen and Plato with that of Jewish theology, and purged the entire passage about the education of Origen under Ammonius, the esoteric practice of those teachings, and especially the presence of truth in the Kabbalah.³⁸ It is interesting to note that, parallel

34 Terracciano, 2010, 291–297 (297)

35 *Sermones Bernardini Ochini Senensis*, [n.p. (Ochino)], Geneva 1543, *Sermone xiiii, Della vera Cabala*.

36 As an internal document of the Congregation for the Defence of Faith has denounced in 1583: see C. Vasoli, *Nuovi documenti sulla condanna all’Indice e la censura delle opere di Francesco Giorgio Veneto*, in: C. Stango (ed.) *Censura ecclesiastica e cultura politica in Italia tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, Florence 2001, 55–78 (76).

37 See the examples at n. 28. 29. 38. The expurgation of Zorzi’s work has been studied by A. Rotondò, *La censura ecclesiastica e la cultura: Storia d’Italia 5***. *I documenti*, Torino 1973, 1397–1456 (1428); Id., *Nuovi documenti per la storia dell’Indice dei libri proibiti (1527–1638)*, in: *Rinascimento* (1963) 145–211; Id., *Cultura umanistica e difficoltà di censori. Censura ecclesiastica e discussioni cinquecentesche sul platonismo*, in: J. Guidi (ed.), *La pouvoir et la plume. Incitation, contrôle et répression dans l’Italie du XVI siècle*, Paris 1982, 15–50 (22–23); E. Rebellato, *Il miraggio dell’espurgazione. L’Indice di Guanzelli del 1607*, in: *Società e Storia*, CXXII 2008, 715–742; S. Ricci, *Inquisitori, censori, filosofi sullo scenario della Controriforma*, Roma 2008.

38 [Guanzelli] *Indicis*, 1607, 512; on Zorzi, 2010, 196–198: *Sed ex his, qui commentaria aedidere (ut videre videor) nullus secretiora illa sacramenta olfecit nisi Dyonisus et Origenes. Sed hic, aut quia studebat cum Propheta abscondere eloquia*

to this process, at least one author engaged in restoring the orthodox body of Christianity had begun to highlight Origen's commitment to opposing the esoteric way of writing: this is the case of Giovan Battista Crispo in his *De caute Platone legendo* (who probably followed the French editor of the new *Opera Omnia* of Origen).³⁹

Returning to the reception of Zorzi's work, however, its influence might also be measured by the simple fact that the most authoritative book on magic in the sixteenth century, the *De Occulta Philosophia* of Cornelius Agrippa, was reviewed by the author after an attentive scanning of the *De Harmonia Mundi*.⁴⁰

3. In the third book of his *De Occulta Philosophia* (1533), in order to justify the idea that Christian truth could be better served in silence, Agrippa related a list of *prisci philosophi*, who had secretly revealed the deepest doctrines. The list included Origen, as a disciple of the secret teachings of Ammonius, and Jesus, who had divulged some truths only to his intimate followers.⁴¹ The presence of Origen in the enumeration of the masters of esoteric wisdom seems to have been secured during this time. In *De Occulta philosophia*, Agrippa further faced the position of Origen, "not inferior to the most magnificent philosophers", on the issue of the miraculous power of names,⁴² but he did not make any reference to Origen as a witness to the genetic process of the Kabbalah, something he certainly knew. The esoteric

Dei sibi credita, ne peccaret: aut quia iuratos a praeceptore Ammonio non est ausus palam producere ea, quae bulliebant in mentem. Ideo per corticem semper levius decurrit, ea tamen lege, ut secretiorem medullam innuat expertis: quamvis ex quibusdam verbis dictis contra Celsum nonnulli afferant ipsum ab huiusmodi schola declinasse, et tantummodo Platonica dogmata secutum penetrasse ad illa secretiora pabula. Sed (ni fallor) in multis eius doctrina /sicut et Platonical/ redolet hebraicam Theologiam. The underscore corresponds to the intervention of the censor.

39 Namely G. Genebrard in *Origenis Adamantii...Opera*, Paris 1574; G. B. Crispo, *De Ethnicis philosophis caute legendis disputationum*, Rome 1594, 1.

40 V. Perrone Compagni, *Una fonte di Cornelio Agrippa: il "De harmonia mundi" di Francesco Giorgio Veneto*, in: *Annali dell'Istituto di Filosofia* [Università di Firenze] IV (1982), 45–74.

41 P. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, Leiden 2007, 171.

42 H.C. Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De Occulta philosophia*, ed. by V. Perrone Compagni, Lib. I, LXXIV (*De proportione, correspondentia, reductione literarum ad signa coelestia et planetas secundum varias linguas cum tabella hoc indicante*) 242; Lib III, Cap. XI (*De divinis nominibus eorundemque potentia et virtute*), 430–434; in both places Agrippa subterraneously dialogues with Ficino, Pico and Zorzi.

revelation as presented to Moses, and affirmed by Paulus, Origen, Hylarius, and Ezra, is indeed completely outlined in *De Triplice ratione cognoscendi Deum*, with the details present in Pico and Zorzi.⁴³ It is furthermore reiterated in *De vanitate* in a drier form (without the mention of Origen). As is well-known, *De vanitate* is an attack on all the forms of human knowledge, including the unorthodox ones, among them magic and the Kabbalah. I will not dwell here on the interpretation of the meaning of *De vanitate* with respect to Agrippa's other texts: however, as expected – with respect to the aim of the book – the account of the genesis of the Kabbalah is harshly contested.⁴⁴ The Kabbalah is in fact divided into two parts: the so-called *Bresith* i.e. a cosmology, “which exposes with philosophical reasons the mysteries of the law and of the Bible” (ch. 47), and the part called *Mercantia*, which is “almost a certain symbolic theology of the most sublime contemplation of divine and angelic virtues, and of sacred names, and signs; in which the letters, numbers, shapes, things, the names of the characters lines, points and accents, all are significant of the deepest things and profound mysteries.”⁴⁵ The first one is the wisdom attainable through the anagogical sense, while the second is the technical kabbalistic method.⁴⁵

If Agrippa in truth agrees with the possibility of esoteric teaching, he nonetheless attests to having found in those Jewish texts nothing but a certain superstition. The passage dialogues with Pico's account of the *Apology*, showing its possible incongruities:

Nevertheless, I am sure that God reveals to Moses and other prophets many things that were covered under the skin of the words of the law; mysteries that can not be communicated to the ignorant common people. So, I know that this art of the Kabbalah - of which the Hebrews are so proud and with great difficulty I have

43 V. Perrone Compagni, *Ermetismo e cristianesimo in Agrippa. Il De triplice ratione cognoscendi Deum*, Florence 2005, IV. 122–123.

44 H.C. Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio invectiva*, Antwerp, 1530; the Italian vulgarisation is C. Agrippa, *Della vanità delle scienze tradotto per M. Ludovico Dominichi*, Venice 1549.

45 Agrippa, 1549, 63–64. He referred to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* (Work of the Beginning, i.e. the physics) and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Work of the Chariot, the metaphysics). The distinction came to Pico from Maimonides and Abraham Abulafia: see C. Black, *Pico's Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics*, Leiden 2006, and B. Copenhaver, *Number, Shape and Meaning in Pico's Christian Cabala*, in: A. Grafton / N. Siraisi (eds.), *Natural Particulars: Nature and Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, Cambridge 1999, 35–36. In distinguishing the two kinds of Kabbalah, in the exposition of the *Apology*, Pico used the Hebrew name only for the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (however, he has referred to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* in his *Conclusiones*). So, it could be argued that the page of Agrippa also crosses Reichlin, 2010, 70.

investigated – is nothing but then a pure superstition, and a part theurgic magic. And if, as they boast the Jews, this art would come from God and it would be fruitful to the perfection of life, to the health of the man, to the worship of God, to understand the truth; but, for sure, the divine spirit - which, abandoned the synagogue came to teach us all truth – it would not have hidden to the Church until these times, because the Church really knew all the divine things. And the divine devotion, the baptism, and the other sacraments of health are revealed and perfect in every language. Each language has the same and equal virtue, and still has equal piety: nor there is another name in heaven, or in the earth, in which we have to save ourselves, and we will operate then the name of Jesus, in which it has summarized, and it will contain all things.⁴⁶

In order to attack the divine genesis of the esoteric Kabbalah, Agrippa questioned the supremacy of the Hebrew language, showing acute awareness of the interdependence of the two elements in Pico's line of reasoning. The promptness of the rhetorical transition – in a sentence, from the relationship between synagogue and Church to the nature of language in the sacrament – must be explained through the question of the magical power present in all the vocabularies, which involves the refusal of the philo-Hebrew position expressed in the crucial page of the *Contra Celsum*. There is no specificity of the Kabbalah as the expression of a sacred language because every language is valid for reaching God.

Reflecting on the status of the Kabbalah had, however, become common in texts approaching magic and witchcraft. In the index of the antiparacelsian book of Erastus, the *Disputationum de medicina nova Philippi Paracelsi*, issued in four parts from 1571 and 1573, Origen is expressly referred to as “Cabalae studiosus”. In demonstrating that Paracelsus had dabbled in demonic magic in his reference to the Kabbalah, Erastus notes the existence of two kinds of this science: the first one permissible but limited to investigating abstruse enigmas in the Scripture – of which Origen was the most compromised interpreter - and the second demonic and necromantic. In no way could Paracelus' speculation be considered an anagogical interpretation of the Scripture, and as such it had to be condemned.⁴⁷ In the last chapter of his books, he further clarifies his position on the Kabbalah. Erastus is resolute in confuting “Pico's version” of the genesis of the Kabbalah, by denouncing the absence of evidence and the nonexistence of Esdra's books: furthermore, he is engaged in dismantling each one of his sources, including Origen. With an ironic undertone, he states that “to Origen great injury is not done”,

46 Agrippa, 1549, 63–64.

47 T. Lieber (Erastus), *Disputationum de medicina nova Philippi Paracelsi*, Basel 1573, 18: *abstrusos Scripturae sensus investiganti et enigmatate eiusdem explicanti: in qua nimius fuit Origenes*.

because his interpretation of Romans is not misunderstood, but rather is useless for the kabbalistic account.⁴⁸ Erastus sternly concludes that if the Cabala is nothing but a *theologia mystica* and an anagogical interpretation, the texts of this theology are nonetheless lacking unless the New Testament is considered the real Kabbalah, as a spiritual explanation of the old Law. If it is anything else, it must be considered a diabolic creation, and if Paracelsus followed it, he must have found his way to the Tartarean region, and not the Heavens.

4. When Friar Sixtus of Siena wrote the section on Ezra in the tome of his *Bibliotheca Sancta* devoted to the books of the Old Testament, he centered it on Pico's version of the genesis of the Kabbalah.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he considered it more profoundly in the third tome of the *Bibliotheca*, where he dealt with the different methods of explaining the Scripture. After the fourfold reading, he dedicated a section to a less usual tripartite technique, which insisted on explanations defined as *Elementaris, Physica and Prophetica*. The interpretation focused "on the elements" is divided in *Resolutoria* and *Componentem* (or arithmetical): the first deepens the significance of single letters, while the second inquires as to the position of the elements and the composition of a new order. Sixtus reports that according to the Jews this is a part of the Kabbalah, their most secret allegorical wisdom derived from the Mosaic revelation.⁵⁰ He admits his lack of expertise in the Jewish discipline, but adds that also the Ancient Greeks were *peritissimi* in this method: not only "Plato in Cratylum, where he has debated on a not dissimilar science on the true sense (*etymologia*) of the words", but also Esopus, Orpheus, and Linus amongst the others.⁵¹

48 Erastus, 1573: the confutation of the Kabbalah is at 275–282; of Origen at 281–282: *Origenis non fit summa iniura, si non fallor. Etenim verba Apost. ad Roman 3, Credita eis sint eloquia Dei, exponens, scribit, hoc modo. Considerandum est, quod non dixit literas, sed eloquia Dei ipsis credita fuisse. Et his concludunt. Origenis censuisse Iudaeis praeter legem scriptam, aliam datam fuisse: quod recte intellectum libenter concedimus. At Cabalam recta et Scripturae consentanea interpretatio nihil iuvabit.*

49 Sixtus Senensis, *Bibliotheca Sancta*, Köln 1576 (first edition, Venice 1566), 71. At the end he clarified the usual distinction between a licit and necromantic Kabbalah, adding that, however, according to the Inquisition all the books related with the Kabbalah have to be considered damned.

50 Sixtus Senensis, 1576, 150: *Hoc est eius Secretioris, et Anagogicae, vel Allegoricae sapientiae, quam partem eorum a maioribus per manus traditam paulo post tempore Mosis acceperunt.*

51 *Ibid.*, 150–151. As example of the method, he follows Pico's exposition of the letter of the word *Bereshit*, as exposed in *Heptaplus*.

If Sixtus – who dedicated several pages of examination of the doctrines of Zorzi – derived his report, as is probable, from the Venetian Franciscan or directly from Pico is not important. What is worth noting is that the *Bibliotheca Sancta* – a companion of supreme Catholic orthodoxy, per the intention of the author – was one of the most consulted sources by the authors committed to defending Tridentine spirituality, among them Possevino and Crispo; but it also affected, for example, the *Piazza Universale* of the polygraph Tommaso Garzoni, published in 1586, which would meet with great success.

Garzoni wrote an entire paragraph on the Kabbalists,⁵² partly summarising the Pichian tractate in the *Apology*, partly translating into vernacular the content of the second book of Sixtus of Siena, and partly using *De vanitate* of Agrippa (through the vernacular translation of Domenichi, which constitutes a source that innervates all the pages of Garzoni).⁵³ Throughout his ample discussion, he is primarily concerned with demonstrating that the Kabbalah is not commendable at all. In another of Garzoni's books, the *Serraglio de gli stupori del mondo*, published posthumously in 1613, he returned to the Kabbalah and the role of Origen with more extensive attention. Furthermore, with the aid of Aristotle, he challenged the aforementioned interpretation of the *Cratylus*, which provided an opening for the despicable belief in magic.⁵⁴ Garzoni reveals here all his sources on the Jewish doctrines: Pico, Garcia, Alessandro Farra,⁵⁵ Celio Rodigino (Ludovico Ricchieri),⁵⁶ and Arcangelo da Borgonovo.

The *Serraglio* was published posthumously in 1604. It ought to be called, per the author's original intent, the *Palagio of the Incanti*, but its name was changed when a Venetian nobleman, Strozzi Cicogna, edited a book of the same name in the meantime: *Palagio degli incanti e delle gran meraviglie de gli spiriti e di tutta la natura*. For a long time, Cicogna was charged with having plagiarized Garzoni. In reality, he did no such thing, though he certainly knew Garzoni's books. However, the coincidence in the intersection of the two books is surprisingly relevant to this discussion. Cicogna in fact entitled the paragraph of his *Palagio*, in which he discussed Pico's version,

52 T. Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, eds. P. Cherchi / B. Collina, Turin 1966, 424–455.

53 O. Niccoli, *Garzoni Tommaso*, in: DBI 52 (1999), accessed at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tomaso-garzoni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

54 Garzoni, 1966, 507 f.; on the language, 513.

55 A. Farra, *Settenario*, Casal Maggiore 1571, 161 f. Farra assembled doctrines contained in the *Heptaplus* and in the letter of Giulio Camillo to Giulia Martinenga.

56 C. L. Rodigino, *Lectioinum antiquarum libri 30*, Basel 1550 (first edition 1542), I. 10. 350–351 (a first draft, with 16 books, has been published in 1516).

“On the strange opinion of the Kabbalists and Origen, on the duration and restoration of this Palace, where it is shown what is the Kabbalah.”⁵⁷ After recalling the history of the reception of Moses, he adds that Origen and the Kabbalists have maintained the same idea of the creation and destruction of the worlds that follow precise cycles. God does indeed continuously create infinite worlds and decide to destroy them at his prerogative: divine activity shapes cycles of 7000 years (for the earthly words) and 49,000 (for the celestial ones) and then arranges a Great Jubilee, which allows the unity of all the blessed and the rest of matter for one thousand years. He states that the angels are not mentioned in the cycle, because they are considered still alive from the first creation. According to Cicogna, this doctrine explains why Solomon believed that matter preexists formless before the creation, which is the deeper meaning of his oracular worlds: *nihil sub sole novum*.⁵⁸

The author himself remains baffled by these strange and dangerous ideas (*strana opinione*). After all, Venice’s jail had played host just a few years earlier to a famous prisoner, who, in the wake of Salomon, had affirmed the cyclical revolution and the infinity of the worlds: Giordano Bruno. The *Palagio* is a cluster of other sources that brings us to wonder, from where did these doctrines arise, if Origen had never proposed this detailed cyclical arithmetic?

5. From the second half of the century the routes through the established patchwork of the Christian Kabbalah became more intertwined and the knot more effectively tangled. The long comradeship between Origen and the Kabbalists could easily provoke confusion. Several doctrines present contents with dangerous similarity: the pre-existence of the soul and the transmigration, the ideas on angels and demons, and the doctrine of the infinite worlds are all elements which suggest that a unique doctrine was supported by the Church Father and the Kabbalists. Yet in 1548, for instance, Marco Montalbano della Fratta, in his *Discorsi de principii della nobiltà e del governo che ha da tenere il nobile et il principe nel reggere se medesimo* debated “the opinion of some theologians that the evil angels must be saved.” He concludes that “the Kabbalist believes that some Demons must be saved, a thing that Origen has clearly conceived.”⁵⁹ In the edition of *Epitome of the*

57 S. Cicogna, *Palagio de gli incanti*, Venice 1607, 124 f: “Della strana opinione de’ Cabalisti, et d’Origene circa la duratione, et ristabilizione di questo Palagio, ove si mostra che cosa sia la Cabala.”

58 Cicogna, 1607, 126–127.

59 Marco della Fratta et Montalbano, *Discorsi de principii della nobiltà e del governo che ha da tenere il nobile et il principe nel reggere se medesimo*, Venezia 1551, 91 “eglino per questo giudicano i Cabalisti, che alcuni Demoni debbano esser salvi,

Qur'an the orientalist Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter, in order to denounce Islamic errors, traced a line that connects Muhamed and Origen as scholars of the Kabbalistic doctrines, regarding their complex chronology of the Last Judgment.⁶⁰ The timing of the end of the worlds, in spite of the similar reference on the cycles of 7000 years, recalls what Cicogna will affirm, but it is not identical.

The solution is in France. It was the attentive reader of Origen, Jean Bodin, who wrote in his *Démonomanie* (1580) the passage in which, debating the divine creation of form and matter, he affirms that according to Origen and the people who believe like him:

God has continually created a succession of countless worlds, and when He wished He destroyed them: that is, the elemental world every seven thousand years, and the celestial world every forty-nine thousand years, uniting all the blessed spirits in Himself, and letting matter remain confused and formless for a thousand years. Then He renews by His power all things in their first condition and beauty. Because of this they say that no mention is made of the creation of Angels at the creation of the World, in order to show that they had to remain immortal after the corruption of the preceding worlds, which the Prince of Mirandola considered certain in his positions on the Kabbala. This is what the Hebrews maintain in their secret philosophy, as does Origen. This opinion, although is not accepted by some theologians, because it seems that one is entering too far into the profound secret of God, nonetheless cuts short the impiety of those who [...] say that it is a very strange thing that God after a hundred thousand years, indeed after an endless eternity, had decided three or four thousand years ago to make this world, which must soon perish [...]. This accords with the saying of Salomon, in which he imagines matter formless before the creation of this world, and also when he stated that there is nothing new under the sun. If, however, there had been countless worlds in succession which must not be preserved, still one must admit that the first matter was created by God.⁶¹

il che chiarissimamente Origene ha sentito”. The first edition is in 1548. I would like to thank Lucio Biasiori for his indication.

60 J.A. Widmanstetter, *Mahometis Abdallae filii theologia dialogo explicata*, Nuremberg 1543: *Annotatio XIII: Cabalistae, a quibus doctrinae suae ineptias acceperat Mahometes, scribunt extreme dii Iudici die, septem inferiores numerationes at triadem supremam redituras, quarum singuale denum milium annorum adpellatione continerentur. Quod si ex his duas medias tollas, reliquae erunt quinque numerationes, de quibus Iudaei perperam hereticos edocuerant. Ex harum perversa doctrina, multa hausit Origenes, quae postea a patribus damnata fuere.*

61 J. Bodin, *On the the Demon-Mania of Witches [De la démonomanie des sorciers]*, English translation by R.A. Scott, Toronto 1995, v. I, ch. 5, 73–74. According to the editors “Bodin’s remark reflects a common misunderstanding of Origen’s belief in “Apocatastasis””, 73 (n.123).

The allusions to the Origenian doctrine of the infinity of the world, also connected to his agreement with the mysteries of the Hebrews, are as frequent in Bodin's texts as they are in the *Universae Natura Theatrum* (1596)⁶² or in the *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* (published posthumously in 1857).⁶³ Bodin is without any doubt the source for Cicogna, who used exactly the same world of the *Démonomanie* translated into the vernacular by Ercole Cato (published in Venice, at the press of Manutius, in 1587).⁶⁴ Cicogna placed Bodin's opinion in the middle of the by then well-established account of Pico's Kabbalah. His "editing" was probably induced by Bodin's reference to the Pichian doctrine on angels and worlds contained in the *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, that Cicogna fastens – not without reasons – to the entire survey of the Kabbalah in the *Apology*,⁶⁵ adding another piece to this tradition.

Nevertheless, only a part of the puzzle is disclosed. The messianic time plan of divine activity is indeed not Origenian,⁶⁶ nor is it present in Pico in these terms (despite the enigmatic reference to the forty-nine "gates of understanding" and the fact that its *Heptaplus* is structured around the symbolism of seven and forty-nine).⁶⁷ The doctrine of the regeneration of the world every 7000 years, following the account of the creation, is in fact Talmudic. The annotation in the Italian version of the *Démonomanie* as well those contained in the *Universae Natura Theatrum* shed light on Bodin's source: the third book of *Dialoghi D'amore*,⁶⁸ (1535), in which Leone Ebreo

62 I have consulted J. Bodin, *Universae Naturae Theatrum*, Paris 1605, I. 21 and, in particular 36. On the book see A. Blair, *The Theater of Nature. Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science*, Princeton 1997.

63 J. Bodin, *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime [Colloquium Heptaplomeres]*, ed. M. Leathers Kuntz, University Park 2008, 109; the same doctrine of the seven thousand years will be referred both to Origen and the secret wisdom of the Jews.

64 J. Bodin, *La demonomania degli stregoni [De la démonomanie des sorciers]*, translated by E. Cato, Rome 2006, 66.

65 For the doctrine on the angels recalled by Bodin, cfr. Pico, *Heptaplus*, 1942, 8.3 and *Conclusiones* in Farmer, 1998, *Conclusiones* 29.2; 30.28.

66 Origen however sometimes mentioned the symbolism of the number 7, as in Or. Hom. Gen. 2.6, which is also mentioned in Zorzi, 2010, 646.

67 Furthermore, Pico reports that amongst the "decreta veteris hebraicae disciplina" it is revealed that the six days of the creation are to be understood as the six thousand years of the world Pico, *Heptaplus*, 1942, 348 f.; however, he explicitly refused the possibility of deducing the time of the end of the world, 352.

68 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. D. Giovannozzi, Rome 2008, III. 1: M. Granada, *Sobre algunos aspectos de la concordia entre prisca theologia y cristianismo en Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico y Leon Hebreo*, in: Daimòn. Revista de filosofia 6 (1993), 41–60 (53).

unpacked this Jewish doctrine, derived from Nachmanides, presenting it as Kabbalistic and considering it not very distant from the same Platonic tradition.⁶⁹ According to the “figurative” interpretation, in the Pentateuch the number of days must correspond to the number of years, and the celestial year to a millennium. Thus, the words of Lev. 25,⁷⁰ should be interpreted considering the rest of the seventh “day” – namely after 7000 years – an era called *scemit*’ (*schmittot*: remission): after seven *scemita* (49,000 years) there will be a great *Iobel* (*yovel*, *Iubileum*), which will be the perfect quiet, the return and restoration of all things, which will be followed by a renewal of the world. The fact that astrological theories concerning the revolution of the heavens concord with the chronologies of the theologians leads Leone to propose the common origin of these doctrines in the reception of the divine message through Adam and Moses. He furthermore adds that these theologians read the beginning of Genesis as “before that God creates and separates from the Chaos the Heavens and the Earth” (instead of “in the beginning God creates the Heavens and the Earth”); so, they had believed in a state before the Creation of primordial waters and primordial darkness, where the Chaos / matter was *in potentia* and confused.⁷¹

Bodin’s text is grounded in this cosmogony. The reappraisal of the *Dialoghi D’amore* was indeed made in the context of a reflection on the creation, facing the belief in the eternity of matter, existent before the intervention of divine activity. The doctrine of the successive worlds – erroneous, but toward which Bodin has a benevolent attitude in this context – could be indeed useful against the objection of those who impiously believe in a period of inactivity of God: according to Bodin, the belief in continuous successive worlds does not deny, in fact, the divine creation of the first matter. What is to be noted is that Leone doesn’t mention Origen. Despite the fact that Bodin’s attitude toward reading theological doctrines in Jewish terms is notorious – and was denounced soon enough by the censor Marcantonio Maffa at the end of the sixteenth century –⁷² the attribution of those doctrines to Origen is undeniably noteworthy. The introduction could possibly be explained by the relevant paragraphs on these issues present in *De*

69 Leone Ebreo, 2008, 238: “Mi piace vederti fare Platone Mosaico e del numero dei Cabalisti”. Leone Ebreo was the son of the famous Kabbalist Isaac Abrabanel.

70 Lev. 25:3–11.

71 Leone Ebreo, 2008, 236–237; As it seems, Leone interweaves his explanation with Pico’s interpretation around natural and supernatural water, contained in the *Heptaplus*.

72 M. Valente, *Bodin in Italia. La Démonomanie des sorciers e le vicende della sua traduzione*, Florence 1999, 42–43.

Principiis, and it was evidently affected by the knowledge of the precedent pattern of Pico and Zorzi and, possibly, by the words of Widmanstetter.

The text of Bodin would be influential: after Strozzi Cicogna, it was taken up again by Valderrama in his *Teatro de las religiones* (1612), and then it returned to the forefront in France, in 1617, through the translation of De la Richarderie as *Histoire générale du monde et de la nature, ou Traictez théologiques de la fabrique, composition, et conduite générale de l'univers divisée en trois livres*. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the traces of Origen's presence as a Kabbalistic disciple were disseminated in several other books. Four years after the *Démonomanie*, the Franciscan Jean Benedecti used this notice in his *Somme des péchés et le remède d'iceux comprenant tous les cas de conscience*, a know-how book for confessors.⁷³ He advised against following Origen in his angelology, because he had placed the creation of the angels before that of the world: he was in fact a scholar of Pythagoras, Plato, and the Kabbalists. Scipion du Pleix would then entitle an entire section of his *Métaphysique ou science surnaturelle* (1620) "Erreur des Cabalistes et d'Origen", challenging their doctrine of the transmigration of souls.⁷⁴

It was maybe due to these images of Origen that Giordano Bruno made particular use of the doctrines of the Church Father. Actually, Bruno was familiar with Origen from his Neapolitan years in a monastery and was engaged in a continuous and deep confrontation with his exegetical solutions.⁷⁵ However, the doctrine that he referred to him in several of his pages seems influenced by this tradition. In his *Heroic Frenzies* of 1585, introducing the doctrine that states that every thousand years everything is turned upside down, including the souls, Bruno indeed affirms:

Among philosophers, I have only seen Plotinus declare expressly, like all the great theologians, that such a revolution is not for everyone, nor everlasting, but for one

73 J. Benedicti, *Somme des péchés et le remède d'iceux comprenant tous les cas de conscience*, Paris 1595, 7: "Origène, ou d'autres en son nom, qui ayas estudié a l'escole des Cabalistes, de Pythagore et de Platon, ont escrit les ames avoir esté créés avec les anges devant le monde".

74 S. du Pleix, *Métaphysique ou science surnaturelle*, Lyon 1620 (I ed. Paris 1617), 243. Also Jean de Croy presented a similar argument in his book devoted to the intersections between the patristic and the mysterious doctrine of the ancient theologies, the *Specimen conjecturarum et observationum in quaedam loca Origenis, Iraenaei, Tertulliani, et Epiphaniï, in quo varia scripturae sacrae Chaldeorum, Phoenicum, Pythagoreorum et Rabbinorum theologiae et philosophiae arcana indicantur et aperiantur* (s.l.) 1632.

75 P. Terracciano, *Origene*, in: M. Ciliberto (ed.) *Giordano Bruno. Parole, concetti, immagini*, Pisa 2014, 1385–1390.

time only. And among the theologians, only Origen, like all the great philosophers, has dared to say, following the Sadducees and many others censured sects, that the revolution is vicissitudinous and eternal.

The Nolan underscores the necessity that the last doctrine remains esoteric, and insists on its relation with Salomon's verset *nihil sub sole novi*.⁷⁶ Furthermore, writing about transmigration or on the infinity of worlds, he states a strong relation between Origen and the Jewish tradition (though apparently embodied by the Sadducees and not by the Kabbalistic).⁷⁷ The witness of Bruno testifies once again the strength of the nexus between Origen and the Hebrews in the second half of the sixteenth century; moreover, it could suggest his possible reading of the *Démonomanie*. Bruno's interpretation of Origen as the theologian of the eternal cyclicity is indeed in contrast with the traditional issue attributed to Origen, the *apocatastasis*, which is a final moment of rest. Despite the attitude of Bruno to overturn his sources, it has been noted that this doctrine is compatible with the ideas taken up by Bodin in those years. In the *Démonomanie*, Bruno could have detected Origen as an exponent of continual cycles of creation and destructions of the things; connected with (his beloved) Salomon's verset and tied with the Jewish tradition; settled in the philosophical debate on the issue of the infinity of the worlds; read on the edge of the contraposition of theologians and philosophers.

The verification of this hypothesis would have to be conducted through a systematic comparison of the two books, something that is not possible here. For our purposes, however, these last rings of the chain show the consolidation, at the end of the sixteenth century, of the *topos* of a kabbalistic Origen, diffused for apologetic, controversistic or philosophical motives; a *topos* that will continue for centuries in the European esoteric circles.⁷⁸

76 Eccl/Qoh 1:9; G. Bruno, *On the heroic frenzies [De gli Eroici furori]* trans. by I. Rowland, Toronto 2013, 27.

77 For instance, G. Bruno, *De Triplice Minimo*, 1591, in: F. Fiorentino [F. Tocco / H. Vitelli / V. Imbriani / C. M. Tallarigo] (eds.), *Bruni J. Nolani Opera latine conscripta, publicis sumptibus edita*, Naples [-Florence], 3 vols. in 8 tomes, 1879–1891, I, 1–2, 153. Bruno used the word “Saduchini”. Very probably it is not a reference to the Sadducees (whose typical idea is not the transmigration of souls, but its opposite: mortality and the absence of any kind of afterlife), but the vernacularisation of the Hebrew words *zaddiqim* (“the righteous ones”). It could be adding, however, that the principal apparition of the Sadducees in the Gospel is in Mc 12, 18–27, where they debated with Jesus on the levirate: the Kabbalistic interpretation of the levirate is exactly the basis for the doctrine of metempsychosis (the *gilgul*). I would like to thank Brian Ogren and Giacomo Corazzol for their suggestions.

78 See D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth-Century Discussion of Eternal Torment*, Chicago 1964; A. Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century. The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)*, Leiden 1999.