

Abstract

The manuscript Kassel, Landes- und Murhardsche Bibliothek, 2 ms. Theol. 67, transmitting the Latin translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, contains numerous marginal notes by the hand of Pico della Mirandola, as well as a new translation of part of *Guide* III, 29. The topic of this passage, which treats magical practices in use among idolatrous populations, reflects the peculiar interest that Pico had in magic. The presence of this alternative translation in the codex raises the important question of its authorship, since the detailed work of revision and the new translation show a direct access to the Hebrew text as well as the direct involvement of Pico.

Introduction

According to the inventories of his manuscript collection, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola owned two copies of the Latin translation of Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*.¹ In the past, one copy has already been identified with the codex Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 4274,² while the fate of the second manuscript was unknown until recently. A fifteenth-century codex transmitting the *Dux neutrorum* – 2 ms. Theol. 67, preserved in the Landes- und Murhardsche Bibliothek in Kassel – is annotated, in the margins and between the lines, by a scholarly hand quite difficult to decipher.³ The comparison between these annotations and those transmitted in manuscripts already attributed to Pico della Mirandola's library allowed the identification with Pico's own handwriting.⁴

The annotations mainly consist of corrections of the medieval Latin translation, at times resulting from a direct comparison with the *Guide*'s Hebrew text, at other times deriving from a specific interpretation

* I wish to thank Loris Sturlese for his insightful suggestions concerning the topic of this paper. Moreover, I am very thankful to Sebastiano Gentile, Roland Hissette and Guy Guldentops for their helpful advice.

¹ Cf. P. KIBRE, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola*, Morningside Heights (NY) 1936, n. 235 p. 152; n. 694 p. 213; F. CALORI CESIS, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola detto la Fenice degli Ingegneri. Cenni biografici con documenti e appendice*, Mirandola 1897, p. 54, n. 312; p. 69, n. 294. Moreover, on Pico della Mirandola's library, see G. MURANO, "La biblioteca di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: un primo censimento," in: *Scriptorium* 72 (2018), pp. 213-250.

² Cf. G. MERCATI, *Codici Latini Pico Grimani Pio e di altra biblioteca ignota del secolo XVI esistenti nell'Ottoboniana e i codici greci Pio di Modena con una digressione per la storia dei codici di S. Pietro in Vaticano*, Città del Vaticano 1938, pp. 21-22, n. 72. The reproductions of the manuscript are now available online: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.4274.

³ For the history and a detailed description of the codex, cf. MOSES MAIMONIDES, *Dux neutrorum vel dubiorum*, ed. D. DI SEGNI, Leuven-Paris-Bristol (CT) 2019, pp. 94*-97*. The reproductions of the manuscript are now available online: https://orka.bibliothek.uni-kassel.de/viewer/image/1522149416689/1/LOG_0000/.

⁴ I am very thankful to Sebastiano Gentile who has helped me identify the handwriting. The hypothesis of a possible attribution to Pico was evoked by G. K. Hasselhoff, but it was not supported by any argument or proof; cf. G. K. HASSELHOFF, *Dicit Rabbi Moyses. Studien zum Bild von Moses Maimonides im lateinischen Westen vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg 2004, p. 128; ID., "Las traducciones latinas medievales de la obra maimonidiana," in: C. DEL VALLE RODRÍGUEZ – S. GARCÍA-JALÓN DE LA LAMA – J. P. MONFERRER SALA (coord.), *Maimónides y su época*, Madrid 2007, pp. 485-490, p. 489. For a similar case, see G. MURANO, "Il manoscritto della *Destructio destructionum* di Averroè appartenuto a Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale, VIII E 31)," in: *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 60 (2018), pp. 67-80.

suggested by Pico himself. These corrections are found especially in parts II and III, probably testifying to Pico's interest in these sections, and they stop after *Dux* III, 29. The corrections, written in black ink, often correspond to the Hebrew translation made by Shmuel Ibn Tibbon, while the main Latin text is mostly based on Yehuda Al-Ḥarizi's version.⁵ The presence of transliterated Hebrew terms further confirms that the revision work is presumably the result of a confrontation with the Hebrew text. Further, throughout the entire codex, one finds marginal annotations by Pico's hand that do not transmit any corrections, but can rather be considered reading notes, since they summarize the topic treated in the corresponding paragraph. These reading notes are written in reddish ink and in a more readable handwriting. Without any doubt, these notes were written before the corrections in black ink, since the latter occasionally correct the former.⁶ The codex is furthermore characterized by the presence of numerous reddish signs underlining biblical verses and Hebrew words, and it features a characteristic sign of manuscripts that once belonged to Pico della Mirandola, namely a vertical slash with two dots on the top.⁷

The different kinds of annotations seem to have been written at different times. Although the handwritings seem to differ with regard to certain peculiarities – above all their readability –, it cannot be excluded that they may all be ascribed to Pico, who, as is well known, used more than one handwriting.⁸ In sum, the manuscript seems to be the result of a work prepared over a longer period of time – possibly involving an assistant –, as the numerous notes testify.

Yet, the high historical relevance of the Kassel codex relies, above all, on a unique document transmitted on fol. 221r-v and in the margins of the first line on fol. 222r, namely an original translation of part of *Dux* III, 29. The last 6 lines of fol. 221r and fol. 221v, initially left blank by the main copyist,⁹ were later filled with a new translation produced directly from the *Guide*'s Hebrew text and written by the hand of Pico. As it will be shown, the new translation does not have any relationship with any of the other testimonies of the *Dux neutrorum*'s manuscript tradition, and it is therefore fully original. It is also interesting to note that the topic of this passage, which treats magical practices in use among idolatrous

⁵ The *Guide of the Perplexed* was originally composed in Judeo-Arabic between 1180 and 1191, and was then translated into Hebrew twice: the Provençal translator Shmuel ibn Tibbon composed a first Hebrew translation between 1198 and 1204 (and revised it until 1214), while the poet Yehuda al-Ḥarizi completed his own version at an uncertain date. For an overview of the *Guide*'s different translations, see M. ZONTA, "Traduzioni e commenti alla *Guida dei perplessi* nell'Europa del secolo XIII: a proposito di alcuni studi recenti," in: G. CERCHIAI – G. ROTA (ed.), *Maimonide e il suo tempo*, Milano 2007, pp. 51-60. For the relationship between the main Latin text and Al-Ḥarizi's translation, cf. J. PERLES, "Die in einer Münchener Handschrift aufgefundenen erste lateinische Übersetzung des Maimonidischen 'Führers'," in: *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 24 (1875), pp. 65-75; MAIMONIDES, *Dux neutrorum*, pp. 174*-183*.

⁶ See, for instance, fol. 38v; 62r.

⁷ See, for instance, fol. 171v. On this sign, see S. GENTILE, "Pico e Ficino," in: P. VITI (a cura di), *Pico, Poliziano e l'Umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, Firenze 1994, pp. 127-147, p. 131. On the use of this sign to identify texts once belonged to Pico, cf. also MURANO, "La biblioteca di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," pp. 244-246.

⁸ Cf. S. GENTILE, "Questioni di autografia nel Quattrocento fiorentino," in: G. BALDASSARRI – M. MOTOLESE – P. PROCACCIOLI – E. RUSSO (a cura di), "Di mano propria". *Gli autografi di letterati italiani*. Atti del Convegno di Forlì, 24-27 novembre 2008, Roma 2010, pp. 185-210, pp. 203-204. At fol. 63r, a note written by a different hand – maybe Domenico Grimani's – is detectable.

⁹ The hand can probably be identified with Bartolomeo Paoli's; on this scribe, who worked for Pico, see S. GENTILE, "Nuove considerazioni sullo 'scrittoio' di Marsilio Ficino: tra paleografia e filologia," in: R. BLACK – J. KRAYE – L. NUVOLONI (eds.), *Palaeography, Manuscript Illumination and Humanism in Renaissance Italy: Studies in Memory of A. C. de la Mare*, London 2016, pp. 385-422.

populations, reflects the peculiar interest that Pico, and Renaissance humanism in general, had in magic.¹⁰ It is therefore tempting to assume that the blank pages were not the result of a mechanical mistake or of a corruption in the *Vorlage*, but that they were left empty on purpose, allowing Pico to work directly on the Hebrew source, considering his inclination to the topic.

The presence of this alternative translation in the codex certainly raises the important question of its authorship. Investigations into whether Pico's knowledge of the Hebrew language would allow him to have autonomous access to Hebrew texts never led to a conclusive answer.¹¹ The evidence found in the manuscript kept in Kassel indubitably shows a direct recourse to the Hebrew text, and it also displays the involvement of Pico himself, as is testified by the presence of his handwriting. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that he might have worked with an assistant supporting him.

The careful reading of the *Dux neutrorum*, demonstrated by the numerous corrections to the medieval Latin version and, above all, by the new translation of *Dux III*, 29, also leads to the more general question of Pico's interest in and understanding of Maimonides. By intercrossing textual evidence of the detailed philological work conducted on this copy of the Latin *Guide* and references to Maimonides in Pico's original texts, it is not surprising that a kabbalistic interpretation of the Jewish philosopher can be ascertained. The link between natural magic and kabbalah was strongly asserted by Pico in his *Conclusiones magicae*.¹² From this perspective, it is possible to contextualize, on the one hand, the special attention devoted to passages from the *Dux neutrorum* dealing with magic and, on the other, the identification of Maimonides as a kabbalist.

The alternative translation of *Guide III*, 29

The passage from *Guide III*, 29 that drew Pico's attention deals with the doctrines attributed to the Sabians, and particularly refers to the pseudo-hermetic work entitled the *Book of Nabatean agriculture*, whose Arabic translation was ascribed to Ibn Waḥshiyya.¹³ Maimonides associates this work to the pagan

¹⁰ There is a vast amount of literature on Pico della Mirandola and magic; see the very recent F. BUZZETTA, *Magia naturalis e scientia cabalae in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, Firenze 2019.

¹¹ On Pico and Jewish sources, see I. ZATELLI – F. LELLI – M. VENTURA AVANZINELLI, "Pico: la cultura ebraica e la tradizione rabbinica," in: VITI, *Pico, Poliziano e l'Umanesimo*, pp. 157-191; G. TAMANI, "I libri ebraici di Pico della Mirandola," in: G. C. GARFAGNINI (a cura di), *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494-1994)*, vol. II, Firenze 1997, pp. 491-530.

¹² Cf. S. A. FARMER (ed.), *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, Tempe 1998, "Conclusio magica XV", p. 498.. Cf. F. BACCHELLI, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto. Tra filosofia dell'amore e tradizione cabalistica*, Città di Castello 2001, pp. 48-51; 72-73; S. J. RABIN, "Whither Kabbalah? Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Kabbalah, and the *Disputations against Judicial Astrology*," in: I. ZINGUER – A. MELAMED – Z. SHALEV (eds.), *Hebraic Aspects of the Renaissance: Sources and Encounters*, Leiden 2011, pp. 43-52; B. P. COPENHAVER, *Magic and the Dignity of Man: Pico della Mirandola and His Oration in Modern Memory*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2019, pp. 420-449.

¹³ For the Arabic text, see IBN WAḤSHIYYA, *Kitāb al-filāḥa l-nabaṭiyya. L'agriculture nabatéenne*, ed. T. FAHD, Damas 1993-1998. For an overview, see T. FAHD, "Matériaux pour l'histoire de l'agriculture en Irak: 'al-filāḥa l-nabaṭiyya'," in: B. SPULER (Hg.), *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Vorderen Orients in islamischer Zeit*, Teil 1, Leiden/Köln 1977, pp. 276-378; J. HÄMEEN-ANTTILA, *The Last Pagans of Iraq. Ibn Waḥshiyya and his Nabatean Agriculture*, Leiden 2006. On the reception of the *Book of Nabatean Agriculture* in Maimonides, cf. P. FENTON, "Maïmonide et *L'agriculture nabatéenne*," in: T. LÉVY – R. RASHED (éd.), *Maïmonide philosophe et savant*, Leuven 2004, pp. 303-333.

tradition of the Sabians.¹⁴ The opinions and practices of the Sabians are described, such as the belief in the power of the sun and the stars, the notion of the heavens as a divinity, and ritual sacrifices. The general aim of the references to idolatrous practices throughout the *Guide* is to account for biblical precepts that apparently seem to lack a rational explanation but actually have the function of rejecting idolatry. According to this perspective, the causes and reasons for some biblical rules are to be traced back to the opinions and actions of the Sabians.

Maimonides' account yields some information transmitted by the *Book of Nabatean agriculture* concerning magic, talismans, spirits, and demons. In particular, the passage deals with pagan beliefs regarding plants and trees, such as the althaea and the mandragora.¹⁵ Some examples of plants' magical properties are mentioned, such as the branches of a specific tree moving like snakes or some human-shaped roots that can talk. Exactly at this point, the main copyist of the Kassel codex suspends the transcription, and the translation written by Pico starts. In the following lines, a plant is mentioned whose leaves can make one invisible and, if burnt, produce voices. Further on, after treating magical and prophetic characters of the althaea tree, the text reports a discussion that took place between the althaea and the mandragora, since the latter wanted to replace the former. During the altercation, the tree was not transmitting any revelation more, but when the revelation started again, the althaea related that it had been busy in a fight with the mandragora.¹⁶ For this reason, the tree asked the Chaldeans to decide which of the two was the most important and the one used most in magic. Finally, the text mentions the prophet Tammuz, who invited a king to worship the seven stars and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, but was killed by the same king. As a consequence, the idols gathered in the temple of Babylon in front of the golden idol depicting the sun and cried for the death of Tammuz. At this point, the alternative translation ends, and from fol. 222r on, the handwriting of the main copyist appears again, following the standard Latin version of the *Dux neutrorum*.

As it is evident from the following chart, there is absolutely no correspondence between the translation written by the hand of Pico and that transmitted by the rest of the manuscript tradition; the text will be compared with the one testified by the codex Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 4274, since it also belonged to Pico della Mirandola, and in brackets variants from the manuscript tradition will be registered¹⁷:

¹⁴ It seems that Maimonides did not refer to the Sabians as a specific population, but rather as any kind of idolatrous belief based on astrology; cf. S. STROUMSA, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, Princeton 2009, pp. 84-105. Especially for the later reception of Maimonides' reference to the Sabians, see also J. ELUKIN, "Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians: Explaining Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship," in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002), pp. 619-637.

¹⁵ For the magical use of this plant in the Renaissance, cf. J.-C. MARGOLIN, "Sur les vertus magiques de quelques plantes et leur réception dans l'Europe de la Renaissance: Moly, Baaras-Mandragore, Boramets et Pantagruélium," in: F. MEROI – E. SCAPPARONE (a cura di), *La magia nell'Europa moderna. Tra antica sapienza e filosofia naturale*, Firenze 2007, pp. 213-246.

¹⁶ Maimonides' account is slightly different than the original text of the *Book of the Nabatean agriculture*; cf. FENTON, "Maïmonide et *L'agriculture nabatéenne*," pp. 314-315.

¹⁷ The *siglae* correspond to the following manuscripts: A: Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ottoboniano Latino 644; B: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 15973 (Sorbonne 173); C: Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque de l'agglomération, ms. 608; E: Paris, Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, ms. 601; G: Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, ms. II 482; K: Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano Latino 1124.

Kassel, Landes- und Murhardsche Bibliothek, 2 ms. Theol. 67	Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 4274
[221r] Acceperit ex eis et apposuerit in cervice eius, occultabitur ab hominibus nec videtur ab eis. Et cum faciunt suffumigationes ex illo sub celo, audiunt homines in aere propinquo sonos et voces mirabiles, dum ille fumus ascendit. Et similia his nugis multa, quę addunt [fol. 221v] in narrationibus de mirabilibus plantarum et proprietatibus agriculturę, et credunt alia, donec redarguantur [<i>dub.</i>] per demonstrationem, et appareat [<i>corr. ex</i> appareant], quod fiant per fraudem occultam. Et ex nugis illius libri est, quod arbor amaloi ex arboribus illis, quas plantabant ad idolatriam, sicut fecit thesire [<i>dub.</i>], est, quod stetit in Ninive XII millia annorum, et quod habuit litem cum alia arbore, quę dicitur iabrua, quia voluit accipere locum eius. Et quod homo, qui prophetizabat ex virtute amaloi, cessavit eius prophetia per aliquod tempus. Et quod postea, cum coeperit prophetizare dixit ei, quod fuit occupatus cum iabrua, et iussit ei scribere chaldeis, ut iudicent inter eas et dicerent, quę earum est melior et potentior in sonis magicis [<i>post corr.</i>], an amaloi an iabrua [<i>post corr.</i>]. Et tu potes cognoscere ex illis nugis longis opiniones hominum illius temporis. Et isti sunt sapientes Babyloņę [Babylonis <i>ante corr.</i>]. Et in illo libro narravit de uno prophetarum [ex <i>sed del.</i>] illius idolatrię, quod fuit nomen eius Thamuz [<i>add. Thamuth in marg.</i>], et convocavit quemdam regem sacrificare 7 planetis et XII signis, et ocisit [<i>post corr.:</i> ocidit <i>ante corr.</i>] illum rex morte extranea [<i>dub.</i>]. Et narrat, quod in [mo <i>sed del.</i>] nocte mortis eius congregata fuerunt [furant? <i>scr. sed corr.</i>] omnia idola ab extremitatibus terrę ad templum Babilonię, [222r] ubi fuit [<i>in marg.</i>]	[196r] Si quis ligaverit in veste sua, non videtur [videbitur <i>AE</i>] ab hominibus [<i>add. in A</i>] intrando vel exeundo, de quibus, etiam si fieret subfumigium sub [in <i>G</i>] cęlo, audirent homines [<i>add. in aere ABCEGK</i>] sonitus magnos et tonitrua fortia, dum fumus ille ascenderet, et multa talia derisoria, que ponunt in narrationibus [rationibus <i>C</i>] suis de virtutibus plantarum et instrumenta et modos [in celos <i>B</i>] cultus terrę, donec contendunt et contradicunt signis, quę miraculose acciderunt [accidunt <i>AC</i>], et inducunt [inducit <i>B</i>] in cogitationem, quę [quod <i>BCEG</i>] fuerint [fuerit <i>G</i>; sunt <i>K</i>] ingeniose facta. De illis autem derisoriis, que continentur in illo libro, est quod quędam [<i>add. assenet; assera in marg. G</i>] arbor [arborum <i>BCK</i>] illarum, quibus serviebant, sicut feci te [<i>lac. K</i>] scire, dixerunt, quod arbor illa [<i>inv. ABCEG</i>] fecit [facit <i>E</i>] moram [<i>inv. ABCEG</i>] in Ninive VII [XII <i>ABCEG</i>] annis [milibus annorum <i>A</i>; <i>add. vel XII annis in marg. A</i>; <i>add. aliter milibus annorum in marg. G</i>], et quod [<i>om. C</i>] rixata est [<i>add. cum ABE</i>] mandraggoris, que volebant occupare locum eius et gradum, et quod homo ille, qui solebat [volebat <i>G</i>] prophetizare cum spiritu illius [predictę <i>ABCEGK</i>] arboris, qui [quod <i>E</i>] super ipsam quiescebat [<i>add. sed K</i>], cessabat [cessavit <i>ABCE</i>] prophetizare longo tempore, post multos vero dies allocuta est eum arbor dicens, quod fuit [fuerat <i>BCE</i>] occupata [<i>inv. C</i>] in rixa, quam habuerat contra mandragoras et mandavit, quod [ut <i>ABCEG</i>] scriberet chartam spiritualibus, quod iudicarent inter illas, et discernent, quę arbor apud ipsos esset ho<no>rator [honoratior esset apud ipsos <i>C</i>], utrum mandragora [mandragore <i>BE</i>] vel illa alia arbor. Derisiones autem similes [<i>om. G</i>] istis [iste <i>G</i>] sunt multę, de quibus accipies probationem super defectum sapientie hominum illius temporis. Isti vero fuerunt sapientes Babilonis famosi in diebus illis. Iste siquidem erant leges eorum, in quibus [<i>add. numerati sed del.</i>] nutriti fuerunt [erant <i>A</i>; <i>om. E</i>], et nisi [non <i>G</i>] fuisset bonitas ista, quę revelata est iam [<i>om. AG</i>] [<i>add. in ABCEG</i>] gentibus in cognitione [cogitatione <i>E</i>] essentie Creatoris, essent dies nostri nunc magis obscuri [obscuri nunc magis <i>A</i>] quam dies [<i>add. alii sed del.</i>] illi. Aliis tamen modis revertar autem ad propositum. In predicto libro narratur de quodam propheta ydolorum, qui dictus est Tamut [Talmut <i>BG</i>; <i>add. Thamuth vel Thamuz in marg. A</i>], qui cum predicaret cuidam regi, ut serviret VII stellis, et signis [<i>om. BE</i>] XII, precepit rex eum [<i>inv. EG</i>] interfici gravi [196v] morte. Nocte [noctis <i>E</i>]

	vero mortis ipsius convenerunt omnes ymagine ab extremis terrę in palatio Babilonis ad
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The alternative translation transmitted by the Kassel codex, besides being original with respect to the rest of the manuscript tradition, presents some noteworthy peculiarities. First of all, it uses the word “nuge” to define the silly beliefs of the idolatrous populations, as opposed to “derisoria” appearing in the older translation. The choice of the word “nuge” is certainly ascribable to Pico’s Renaissance humanistic background, characterized by the special attention to a classical use of the Latin language and by Petrarca’s influence. Secondly, Hebrew terms are present in the text: in the older translation, the name of one tree is translated (“mandragora”), while the other one is called “alia arbor”; in the new translation, the trees are referred to by their Hebrew names “amaloï” and “iabrua”, corresponding to אמלוי and יברוה, testifying again to the Hebrew background of the text.

Natural magic and the *Book of Nabatean agriculture*

When considering Pico della Mirandola’s cultural and historical background as well as his range of interests, it is not surprising to find such a direct involvement in a new translation of a passage mentioning magical themes. As is well known, Pico fully embraced the general interest in magic that characterized the Italian Renaissance.¹⁸ Among magical theories and practices, natural magic became particularly central for his reflection. The fundament of natural magic is the idea that human beings can act upon nature and produce some effects through a hidden causality within the natural system.¹⁹ Therefore, natural magic operates through the actualization of this potentiality intrinsic to nature itself, on the basis of the Neoplatonic idea of a universal sympathy ruling the interconnections of natural phenomena, which are at times hidden.²⁰ What is concealed in nature can actually be revealed thanks to human intervention. This requires a profound knowledge of the laws ruling nature, in order to operate on its secret structure and powers. In this sense, natural magic is considered a science, particularly a practical science, which is effective only because it is intrinsically rational. Finally, by emphasizing the role of human action over nature, magic contributes to the realization of the human potentiality, which consists in Pico’s famous idea of human dignity.²¹

In order to support this interpretation of natural magic, Renaissance authors have adopted multiple sources that became available in Latin, in particular hermetic and Neoplatonic writings.²² Precisely due to its

¹⁸ Cf. C. VASOLI, *Magia e scienza nella civiltà umanistica*, Bologna 1976; P. ZAMBELLI, *L’ambigua natura della magia. Filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento*, Milano 1991; EAD., *Magia bianca e magia nera nel Rinascimento*, Ravenna 2004; MEROI – SCAPPARONE, *La magia nell’Europa moderna*; E. GARIN, “Magia e astrologia nella cultura del Rinascimento,” and ID., “Considerazioni sulla magia,” in: ID., *Interpretazioni del Rinascimento*, II, Roma 2009, pp. 15-28; pp. 29-44.

¹⁹ On Pico and natural magic, see BUZZETTA, *Magia naturalis*.

²⁰ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Conclusiones nongentae*, ed. FARMER, “Conclusiones Magicae numero XXVI, secundum opinionem propriam”, pp. 494-503.

²¹ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *De hominis dignitate*, a cura di E. GARIN, intr. M. CILIBERTO, Pisa 2012.

²² Cf. V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, “La magia ermetica tra Medioevo e Rinascimento,” in: MEROI – SCAPPARONE, *La magia nell’Europa moderna*, pp. 3-24.

link between agriculture – and therefore nature – and magic, the *Book of Nabatean agriculture*, known in Latin through the references found in the *Dux neutrorum*, but also in the *Picatrix*,²³ received considerable attention in the Middle Ages as well as in Pico's circle.²⁴ Especially due to the way it was presented by the *Picatrix*, which insisted in the magical character of the practices described rather than its function as a textbook on agriculture, the *Book* played a pivotal role in the shift towards a notion of magic as a practical and natural wisdom.²⁵ In both Latin sources – the *Picatrix* and the *Dux neutrorum* – the *Book of Nabatean agriculture* is presented as a handbook for talismans and idolatrous practices, which are attributed to the Sabians in the *Dux neutrorum*. In particular, the importance of fumigations for magic rituality is emphasized. The prerequisite for such practices is the fundamental knowledge of the hidden properties of natural entities, such as plants, flowers, roots, minerals, and parts of animals, creating the link between natural science and magic.

The topic of fumigations is present in the newly translated passage of *Dux neutrorum* III, 29, and again it does not seem a coincidence that Pico would be involved exactly on this point. As a proof for his peculiar interest in such practice, there is a letter by Girolamo Benivieni mentioning allegations against Pico and Marsilio Ficino who were accused of performing exactly such rituals.²⁶

Moreover, the effectiveness of natural magic based on plants – such as in the abovementioned passage from *Guide* III, 29 – is emphasized in the *Apologia*, for instance, by a quotation taken from William of Auvergne's *De universo corporali et spiritali* on illicit magical practices performed in Egypt, where demons and spirits were worshipped. Contrary to Egypt, in Ethiopia and India, the great dissemination of plants enabled the development of natural magic, which has always been performed since antiquity and therefore possesses an authoritative validity.²⁷ The curiosity concerning magic practices executed by ancient populations can be read together with the passage from *Dux neutrorum* III, 29, mentioning the Chaldeans, the Sabians, and the Babylonians, completing the picture of Pico's interest in ancient oriental wisdom.

²³ For the text, see D. PINGREE (ed.), *Picatrix. The Latin version of the Ghāyat Al-Ġakīm*, London 1986; cf. also V. PERRONE COMPAGNI, "Picatrix latinus. Concezioni filosofico-religiose e prassi magica," in: *Medioevo* 1 (1975), pp. 237-246.

²⁴ See P. TRAVAGLIA, "Considerazioni sulla magia nel medioevo. Il 'Libro dell'agricoltura nabatea'," in: A. MUSCO – C. COMPAGNO – S. I. D'AGOSTINO – G. MUSOTTO – L. PEPI – R. GAMBINO – P. SPALLINO – M. VASSALLO (a cura di), *Universalità della ragione. Pluralità delle filosofie nel Medioevo. Universalité de la raison. Pluralité des philosophies au Moyen Age. Universality of Reason. Plurality of Philosophies in the Middle Ages*. XII Congresso internazionale di filosofia medievale, Palermo, 17-22 settembre 2007, Palermo 2012, pp. 153-164. Moreover, The *Book of Nabatean agriculture* is mentioned among the sources used by Yohanan Alemanno; cf. M. IDEL, "The Study Program of R. Yohanan Alemanno," in: *Tarbiz* 48 (1979), pp. 303-330, pp. 326-327 [Hebrew]. The *Book* is also mentioned in ELIYYA ḤAYYIM BEN BINYAMIN DA GENAZZANO, *Iggeret ḥamudot. La lettera preziosa*, a cura di F. LELLI, Firenze/Nîmes 2002, p. 237.

²⁵ TRAVAGLIA, "Considerazioni sulla magia," draws attention to some interventions made by the Latin translator and compiler of the *Picatrix* to present the *Book of Nabatean agriculture* as a purely magical text dealing mostly with talismans.

²⁶ Cf. S. GENTILE – S. NICCOLI – P. VITI (a cura di), *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, Mostra di manoscritti, stampe e documenti, premessa di E. GARIN, Firenze 1984, pp. 140-141.

²⁷ GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Apologia. L'autodifesa di Pico di fronte al Tribunale dell'Inquisizione*, a cura di P. E. FORNACIARI, Firenze 2010, p. 160.

According to the *Conclusio magica* XV, any magical practice is effective only because it relies on a kabbalistic principle, and both – magic and kabbalah – are necessary to demonstrate the divinity of Christ.²⁸ A special bond between these two disciplines is therefore established, with the practical side of kabbalah blending with Hermetic magic.²⁹

The reception of Maimonides' *Guide* seems to have passed through the lens of the kabbalistic interpretation as well.³⁰ First, Pico was introduced to Maimonides by Elia del Medigo,³¹ then, between 1486 and 1487, Flavius Mithridates translated Abraham Abulafia's commentaries to the *Guide*, the *Sefer Sitre Torah*, and the *Sefer ha-Geulah* for him.³² On the one hand, Pico shared an interest in the Aristotelian tradition with Maimonides; on the other, he was interested in the philosophical exegesis of the biblical text.³³ Influenced by Abulafia's commentaries, Pico read the *Guide* as an exoteric and mystical work. Maimonides is then considered a mystical figure disguised as a philosopher.³⁴

²⁸ GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Conclusiones nongentae*, ed. FARMER, p. 496. Moreover, see BUZZETTA, *Magia naturalis*, pp. 46-47, who mentions some common elements of magic and kabbalah, such as the fact that both are secret wisdoms, as well as the tension between manifestation and concealment characterizing the two disciplines.

²⁹ See M. IDEL, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in: B. D. COOPERMAN (ed.), *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1983, pp. 186-242; C. WIRSZUBSKI, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1989; F. LELLI (a cura di), *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, Firenze 2014; BUZZETTA, *Magia naturalis*.

³⁰ Cf. B. P. COPENHAVER, "Maimonides, Abulafia and Pico: A Secret Aristotle for the Renaissance," in: *Rinascimento* 46 (2006), pp. 23-51. Besides the *Guide*, Pico knew the *Shemoneh perakim*, the *Aphorismi medici*, and the *Treatise on the resurrection of the deaths*.

³¹ In a letter preserved in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 6508, fols. 71r-76v, Del Medigo suggests to Pico a list of mystical texts; cf. B. Kieszowsky, "Les rapports entre Elie del Medigo et Pico de la Mirandole (d'après le ms. lat. 6508 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France)," in: *Rinascimento* 15 (1964), pp. 41-91; G. LICATA, "Magno in secta peripatetica. Una nuova edizione commentata della lettera di Elia del Medigo a Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Paris, BnF, ms. lat. 6508)," in: *Schede Medievali. Rassegna dell'Officina di Studi Medievali* 55 (2017), pp. 103-143. According to F. LELLI, "Pico tra filosofia ebraica e Qabbalah," in: *Pico, Poliziano e l'Umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, pp. 193-223, pp. 194-195, it was probably Pico's growing interest in kabbalah that led to the separation of the two scholars, as it seems that Del Medigo did not favor a mystical interpretation of Maimonides.

³² See S. CAMPANINI, "Pico Mirandulensis Bibliotheca Cabbalistica Latina. Sulle traduzioni latine di opere cabbalistiche eseguite da Mitridate per Pico della Mirandola," in: *Materia Giudaica* 8/1 (2002), pp. 90-95; G. BUSI, "Who Does Not Wonder at This Chameleon? The Kabbalistic Library of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," in: ID. (ed.), *Hebrew to Latin, Latin to Hebrew. The Mirroring of Two Cultures in the Age of Humanism*, Torino 2006, pp. 167-196; S. CAMPANINI, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada (alias Mitridate) traduttore di opere cabbalistiche," in: M. PERANI (a cura di), *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Mitridate. Un ebreo converso siciliano*. Atti del convegno internazionale, Caltabellotta (Agrigento) 23-24 ottobre 2004, Palermo 2008, pp. 49-88. Cf. also M. ANDREATTA – S. CAMPANINI, "Bibliografia Mithridatica," in: *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Mitridate*, pp. 241-257; ID., "Bibliografia Mithridatica II," in: M. PERANI – G. CORAZZOL, *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell'ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*. Atti del II Congresso internazionale, Caltabellotta (Agrigento), 30 giugno-1 luglio 2008, Palermo 2012, pp. 289-317.

³³ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Apologia*, p. 186, in which Maimonides' exegetical method is associated with the tropological. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 190, where Maimonides is considered to be the first to have interpreted the Bible according to philosophy: "Isti qui scilicet secundum philosophiam exponere coeperunt Bibliam, coeperunt a modico tempore. Primus enim fuit rabi Moyses de Egypto quo adhuc vivente floruit Averrois Cordubensis, nondum autem fluxerunt trecenti anni a morte Averrois".

³⁴ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Conclusiones nongentae*, ed. FARMER, p. 546. Cf. WIRSZUBSKI, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter*, pp. 84-99.

Indeed, as a philosopher, Maimonides is presented in the *Nine-hundred Conclusions* together with other Arabic philosophers, such as Averroes, Avicenna, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Bagga.³⁵ In this context, Pico shows his interest in Maimonides' reading of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics;³⁶ the attention payed to the notion of the first mover and first principle becomes particularly evident in the first and third conclusion, while the second conclusion, namely that metaphysics is not one science, is probably to be traced back to the identification of metaphysics with the *ma'aseh merkavah*, formulated by Maimonides in the *Guide*.³⁷ Since in the *Conclusiones cabalisticæ* the doctrine of the *merkavah* is defined as being "triplex", it is possible that the second Maimonidean conclusion is a reference to that specific notion of the *ma'aseh merkavah*.³⁸

Moreover, Maimonides' name is mentioned in the section on the *Conclusiones cabalisticæ*. At this point, Pico exposes his exoteric interpretation of Maimonides, who would have concealed himself as a philosopher, while secretly embracing the kabbalistic tradition. Also, in the *Conclusiones cabalisticæ*, Maimonides is indeed acknowledged as a follower of Aristotle, but in a very peculiar way, namely by having hidden his truest intention, that is, the kabbalistic doctrine:

Sicut Aristoteles diuiniorem philosophiam, quam philosophi antiqui sub fabulis et apologis uelarent, ipse sub philosophicæ speculationis facie dissimulauit et uerborum breuitate obscurauit, ita Rabi Moyses aegyptius, in libro qui a latinis dicitur dux neutrorum, dum per superficiale uerborum corticem uidetur cum Philosophis ambulare, per latentes profundi sensus intelligentias, mysteria complectitur Cabalæ.³⁹

Besides this general assessment of Maimonides' doctrinal position, in the *Apologia*, the name of the Jewish philosopher occurs in the context of a very specific interpretation. In the fifth question, which is devoted to kabbalah, the opinion of Maimonides is again mentioned to support the identification of the "oral law" with kabbalah:

Est ergo sciendum opinionem esse non solum rabbi Eliazar, rabbi Moyses de Aegypto, rabi Simeon Benlagis, rabbi Ismael et rabbi Iodan et rabbi Nachman [...] præter legem quam Deus dedit Moysi in monte et quam ille quinque libris contentam scriptam reliquit, reuelatam quoque fuisse eidem Moysi ab ipso Deo veram legis expositionem cum manifestatione omnium misteriorum et secretorum [...] Denique duplicem accepisse legem Moysen in monte litteralem et spiritualem, illam scripsisse et ex præcepto Dei populo comunicasse, de hac vero mandatum ei a Deo ne ipsam scriberet, sed sapientibus solum qui erant LXX communicaret.⁴⁰

³⁵ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Conclusiones nongentæ*, ed. FARMER, p. 250: "Conclusiones secundum doctrinam Arabum qui ut plurimum peripateticos se profitentur: Auenroem, Auicennam, Alpharabium, Auempacem, Isaac, Abumaron, Moysen, et Mahumeth". For the association of Maimonides with Arabic philosophers, see also ID., *Heptaplus*, a cura di E. GARIN, Firenze 1942, IV, 2, p. 277; and ID., *Disputationes aduersus astrologiam diuinatricem*, a cura di E. GARIN, Firenze 1952, 10, 4, p. 375.

³⁶ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Conclusiones nongentæ*, ed. FARMER, p. 276: "12.1. Demonstratio octauum Physicorum, a Aristotele ad probandum primum motorem adducta, aliquid probat speciale primo. 12.2. Scientia metaphysicæ non est una scientia. 12.3. Simplicitas primi et omnimoda immaterialitas probari non potest per causalitatem efficientem motus, sed per finalem tantum".

³⁷ MOSES MAIMONIDES, *Guide of the Perplexed*, transl. S. PINES, Chicago 1963, vol. I, p. 6.

³⁸ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Conclusiones nongentæ*, ed. FARMER, p. 520: "Secunda, tertia et quarta pars est triplex merchiaua, correspondentes triplici philosophiæ particularis, de diuinis, de mediis, et sensibilibus naturis".

³⁹ GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Conclusiones nongentæ*, ed. FARMER, p. 546.

⁴⁰ GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Apologia*, pp. 176-178.

Pico attributes to Maimonides – among others – the notion of a double law that was revealed to Moses. At first sight, it seems that Pico is referring to the oral law, that is, to rabbinical and talmudic texts, as it defines it as “the true exposition of the law”; however, later on, this second law is called “spiritual”. In the following passage, the oral law is explicitly acknowledged as kabbalah:

Unde et apud Hebraeos quandoque vocatur תורה בעל פה quod idem est quod “lex de ore nata”, quae propter illam successivam receptionem deinde dicta fuit cabala.⁴¹

The kabbalistic secrets would have then been written in seventy books during the time of Ezra, and these books – Pico explains – were bought by him “at great cost”, as the Jews refuse to make them available to Christians.⁴² These seventy books were actually a compilation of various late-ancient and medieval commentaries that Mithridates translated between 1486 and 1487 for Pico and then sold to him.⁴³ Apparently, Mithridates made him believe that these texts were the books composed during the time of Ezra to establish the oral law given by God to Moses.

The attribution of the identification of the oral law and the kabbalistic tradition to Maimonides was probably mediated by Mithridates’ teachings. On many occasions, Mithridates intervened in his translations and adapt them to a mystical reading. More generally, it seems that the kabbalistic interpretation of Maimonides was conveyed by Abulafia’s commentaries that Mithridates translated for Pico;⁴⁴ as a matter of fact, Abulafia’s writings were predominant in the context of the translations made by Mithridates, who seemed to show a particular interest in his doctrines.⁴⁵ Certainly, this interpretation was favorable to Pico’s intellectual aspiration, which was to demonstrate the fundamental harmony between different wisdoms, such as the agreement between the Aristotelian tradition and mystical doctrines, as well as the strong link between magic and natural science.

⁴¹ GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Apologia*, p. 180.

⁴² GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Apologia*, p. 184: “Ex quibus omnibus satis patere potest non esse confictum a me quod praeter legem scriptam Moyses veram quoque legis expositionem a Deo acceperit, et quod illa deinceps per successionem a Moyse septuaginta senioribus et ab illis aliis suis successoribus fuerit revelata. Unde et nomen accepit, ut diceretur cabalistica et tempore Esdrae in plures libros fuerit redacta, qui dicuntur libri cabalae, quos ego libros summa impensa mihi conquisitos (neque enim eos Hebraei Latinis nostris communicare volunt) cum diligenter perlegerim, inveniens ibi multa, immo pene omnia consona fidei nostre, visum est mihi habere posse Christianos unde Iudeos suis telis confodiant, cum ab eis auctoritas cabalistarum, quos habent in magno honore et reverentia negari, non possit” (slightly modified).

⁴³ Cf. *supra*, n. 32. Concerning Mithridates’ attitude towards forgery in his translations for Pico, cf. BUSI “Who Does Not Wonder at This Chameleon?”, p. 181: “Mithridates translated only genuine kabbalah. We must admit that, despite his past inclination for pseudo-mystic texts and forgeries, he almost always worked in a very sound way for Pico. Notwithstanding a few Christianizing interpolations, his versions are surprisingly good, even by modern standards, and remain faithful to the Hebrew sources”.

⁴⁴ Mithridates had the tendency of attributing a mystical interpretation to rabbinical sources and philosophical works, which becomes obvious, for instance, in his interventions on the translation of Gersonides’ *Commentary to the Song of Songs*; cf. M. ANDREATTA, “Filosofia e cabbalà nel Commento al *Cantico dei cantici* di Lewi ben Gersom tradotto in latino per Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,” in: *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, pp. 69-92. For the role of Abulafia’s commentaries in Pico, see WIRSZUBSKI, *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter*, pp. 84-99.

⁴⁵ Cf. M. IDEL, “The kabbalistic background of the ‘Son of God’,” in: *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà*, pp. 24-25: “To the best of my knowledge, Mithridates never worked with a hierarchy of Kabbalistic writings or schools. However, the preponderance Abulafia’s writings has in the economy of his translations, two voluminous books and a shorter epistle, may reflect not only his acquaintance with them in Sicily, but also some form of special appreciation”.

Conclusion

Pico della Mirandola's reading and reception of Maimonides' *Guide* is characterized by two main fields of interest intercrossing each other: on the one hand, Maimonides is a source for the knowledge of ancient natural magic and, on the other, for kabbalistic secrets. The way in which Pico picked up these two topics – somehow marginal within the complex of the *Guide of the Perplexed* – emphasizes his working method and his very selective reading, which probably also explains the attitude he adopted regarding other sources he used to collect his monumental *Nine-hundred Conclusions*.

This approach reflects Pico's great project of a *pax philosophica*,⁴⁶ which should demonstrate the convergence between different philosophical traditions that may be traced back to one universal and coherent system. According to this perspective, natural magic and kabbalah coincide in one practical science, natural magic having a fundament in the kabbalistic tradition, and the practical side of kabbalah corresponding to magic. This unity of different wisdoms is contextualized in a harmonizing project aiming at a universal knowledge, in which kabbalistic doctrines harmonize not only with Aristotelian philosophy, but also and above all with Christian faith.

Finally, the unique document transmitted by the Kassel codex is an extraordinary example of the longevity of the Latin Maimonides. Two centuries after the finalization of the complete Latin translation of the *Guide*, the text was still intellectually appealing in that it challenged its readers to engage in a direct confrontation with the medieval translation by commenting on, correcting and partly retranslating it.

The most important question raised by the alternative translation certainly concerns its authorship. In the past, speculations concerning Pico's knowledge of the Hebrew language never led to a conclusive answer, and it has still not been possible to establish at which level Pico mastered Hebrew. The original translation of part of *Guide* III, 29, as well as the detailed work of revision and correction show a direct access to the Hebrew text and the involvement of Pico, as is testified by his handwriting. The evidence presented by the Kassel codex therefore again questions whether Pico could have had an autonomous access to Hebrew texts. Even more so does the fact that precisely those passages were missing that concern natural magic and fumigations. The special interest that Pico had in these topics leads to the hypothesis that the omission was intended, in order to allow him to work directly with the Hebrew source. Nonetheless, at this point, there is not enough evidence to completely exclude the possibility that an assistant took part in the revision work, even though in this specific case it would be necessary to explain why the assistant would have dictated such precise corrections to Pico instead of annotating them himself.⁴⁷ The nature of the revisions, their high number on some folios, and the way they are transcribed in the codex make it difficult to

⁴⁶ Cf. GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Lettere*, a cura di F. BORGHESI, Firenze 2018, letter to Girolamo Benivieni, 12 November 1486, p. 155.

⁴⁷ Pico worked on Mithridates' translations, for instance, in the mss. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. lat. 607; Vat. ebr. 190, cf. C. WIRSZUBSKI, "Pico's Book of Job," in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969), pp. 171-199.

imagine that someone had dictated them. A more thorough investigation into other manuscripts transmitting corrections by the hand of Pico and into translations made by Mithridates is necessary to provide a definitive answer to this question.

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