



# “Fénix De Sus Tiempos”: Pico Della Mirandola in Abraham Cohen De Herrera’S Puerta Del Cielo

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## Abstract

In this paper I propose to reveal the influence of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) on the best known and studied work of the spanish kabbalist Abraham Cohen de Herrera (circa 1570-1635), namely, *Puerta del Cielo*. In our research we take into account, in a special way, the relationships between platonic philosophy and kabbalah, theorized in the texts of both authors.

**Keyword:** Kabbalah; Platonism; Puerta del Cielo; Cohen de Herrera; Pico della Mirandola

## Introduction

I propose to analyze the scope of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s influence in the most important work of the kabbalist Abraham Cohen de Herrera: *Puerta del Cielo*. Thus, this paper is structured in three parts: in the first one (1), I introduce *Puerta del Cielo* in general terms, attending to its specificity and originality at the light of the hebrew kabbalistic corpus; in the second (2), I show -and, as far as possible, defend- my point of view about Abraham Cohen’s interest in Pico’s works, making special reference to the hebraic studies of the prince of Mirandola; and in the third (3), I research Pico’s influence in *Puerta del Cielo* in a double sense, namely, by tracing the explicit mentions of this author in said work and suggesting, in addition, the implicit relevance of the “Fénix de sus tiempos”, as Herrera calls Pico.

## *Puerta del Cielo.*

Three works are known of Abraham Cohen de Herrera, the only kabbalist who wrote in spanish: an *Epitome y compendio de lógica o dialéctica*, *Casa de la divinidad*, a treatise on angels and demons, and, the most original and

the only one that I’ll address here, *Puerta del Cielo*<sup>1</sup>. Its

1 Herrera’s fame caused that *Puerta del Cielo* and *Casa de la divinidad* be translated into hebrew at the early date of 1655 by the famous Isaac Aboab da Fonseca under the titles of *Ša’ar ha šamayim* and *Beit Elohim*; these are, obviously, adaptations rather than literal translations. A little later, between 1677 and 1684, Aboab’s hebrew versions were poured into latin by the hebraist Christian Konrr von Rosenroth as *Porta Caelorum* and the extraordinary title of *Pneumatica cabbalistica seu doctrina hebraorum de spiritibus nempe angelis bonis et malis, itemque de anima*, respectively. These latin versions era a translation of Aboab’s hebrew versions. Both, Aboab’s and von Rosenroth’s, are not, strictly speaking, translations, but rather a kind of summaries of Herrera’s works. Be that as it may, Rosenroth’s edition was the most widely read, and to this is due the fame that Herrera’s name gained in intellectual circles outside Judaism; these translations were in the hands of Gottfried Leibniz, Henry Moore, Jacob Brucker, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo and Julio Caro Baroja, among others. Today we have a new edition, with a standardized text, of *Puerta del Cielo* by Miquel Beltrán (2015), a bilingual italian-spanish edition by Giuseppa Saccaro (2011), a French translation by Michel Attali (2010), an english one by Kenneth Krabbenhoft (2002), who had previously published a partial edition of the work in its original language (1987), the one we use here, and a partial german translation by Friedrich Häussermann, with an introduction by Gershom Scholem (1974). For more details about the first translations see Scholem’s Introduction to the german edition of *Puerta del Cielo*: G., *Das Buch רעש מיימשה* (Sha’ar ha-Shamayim) oder *Pforte des Himmels*, Franckfurt (Cohen de Herrera; 1974, pp: 33-40). For a balance of the importance and transcendence of Abraham Cohen’s work, see Miquel Beltrán’s introduction in *Puerta del Cielo* (Cohen de Herrera; 2015, pp: 9-40). For a study of

writing date is uncertain but with a probability close to the last years of the author's life, between 1620 and 1632. The objective of this text is none other than the reconciliation of the kabbalah of his time, that is, the lurianic one,<sup>2</sup> under the interpretative tendency of Israel Sarug, with the medieval kabbalah, on the one hand, and with philosophy, on the other, and in that order. Herrera did know that the path that goes from kabbalah to philosophy is quicker if one started from medieval kabbalah than from lurianic kabbalah. He faces, thus, the task with a genuine desire for knowledge, since reintroducing philosophy in this discipline implied, in his words, "entrar en la capacidad e inteligencia de la Cabala"<sup>3</sup> [enter in the capacity and intelligence of kabbalah].

Already in the prologue of that extraordinary book the author gives an outline of his program that could well consider as the story of an unpublished "*translatio studiorum cabalisticorum*". Announcing the content of the beginning text, he writes:

"Breve introducción y compendio de alguna parte de la divina sabiduría q(ue) por tradición vocal y sucesiva vino de Mosseh nuestro preceptor y maestro de los ancianos, a los profetas y sapientes del pueblo israelítico por merced del autor della y de todos los bienes de mí Ab(raham) Coen de Herrera, hijo del honrado y prudente viejo Rabí David Cohen de Herrera, coligida de la ordinaria doctrina de R. Simeon ben Yohay, R. Mosseh Barnahman, R. Azariel, R. Iossef Chequitilia, תּוֹהֲלִיָהּ תּוֹהֲלִיָהּ and su expositor R. Iuda Hayat, R. Mosseh de León, R. Mehir Gabay, R. Menah(e)m Recanati, Rabí Menahem Azaria de Fano y de otros cabalistas de loable memoria y principalmente del eminente Rabí Mosseh Cordovero, que está en paz resebida, y platicada de la viva voz del Haham Rabí Israel Sarug de felice memoria, mi preceptor y maestro"<sup>4</sup>.

[Brief introduction and compendium of some part of the divine wisdom that (by vocal and successive tradition) came from Mosseh our preceptor and teacher of the elders, to the prophets and wisemen of the Israelite people at the mercy of the author of it and all goods of my own, Ab(raham) Coen de Herrera, son of the honest and prudent old Rabbi

David Cohen de Herrera, collected by the ordinary doctrine of R. Simeon ben Yohay, R. Mosseh Barnahman, R. Azariel, R. Iossef Chequitilia, תּוֹהֲלִיָהּ תּוֹהֲלִיָהּ and its exhibitor R. Iuda Hayat, R. Mosseh de León, R. Mehir Gabay, R. Menah(e)m Recanati, Rabbi Menahem Azaria de Fano and other Kabbalists of praiseworthy memory and mainly of the eminent Rabbi Mosseh Cordovero, in peace received, and expressed to by the lively voice of Haham Rabbi Israel Sarug of happy memory, my preceptor and teacher].

It is noteworthy that in this passage, which shows the project of concordance, Herrera does not mention any non-jewish author. Indeed, he does allude to a series of authorities and texts that belong to all ages and kabbalistic tendencies. It's possible find to, for example, Moses (Mosseh) de León, the most illustrious of the medieval kabbalists, the תּוֹהֲלִיָהּ תּוֹהֲלִיָהּ or book of the *Hierarchy of divinity*, a text of transition between the XIIIth and XVth centuries's kabbalah, whose author's nominalist tendency is completely clear, and Israel Sarug, his own teacher, who is counted among those who followed, in judaic key, Pico's thesis of the concordance of all doctrines. Also, if the lack of allusion to non-jewish authors draws attention by virtue of the eclectic method of composition of the work, it's especially striking the absence of Isaac Luria among these names. I think that Herrera does not mention pagan, christian or muslim authors in the prologue because seeks to emphasize the judaic element and, therefore, the paradoxical "orthodox heterodoxy" of his whole work. Be that as it may, turning to the case of Luria, it must point out that although he does not mention him in the prologue, does mention him on the cover of the book. It is read there that learned the kabbalistic doctrine from "...Israel Sarucco, discípulo del H. H. R. Ishack de Loria..."<sup>5</sup>. Following, then, all the references conjugates there, is possible to assume that the kind of kabbalah that he is about to make known -obviously- is not an antiphilosophical one like Luria's, but philosophical like Sarug's.

Although in the prologue he already presents some of his sources, it must be taken into account that Herrera had received a humanistic education, perhaps during his first youth in Italy. Thus, the imprint of the syncretic philosophers of the platonic school from Florence, also present in his teacher's thought, is perceptible from the first lines of *Puerta del Cielo*. Indeed, in the body of the text there are explicit mentions of authors as dissimilar as Plotinus, Proclus, Plato, Aristotle, Ficino, Leone Hebreo, Torcuato Tasso, Giulio Cesare Escaligero, Francisco Suárez, Domingo Bañez, Francesco Patrizzi, Benito Pereira, Ps. Dionisius, Priscianus, Athenagoras, Jamblicus, Porphirius, Psellos, Alcinoos, Espeusippus, Xenocrates, Pitagoras, Peter Lombard, Durand of Saint Porcianus and, of course, Pico, as well as works from

Epitome y compendio de lógica o dialéctica and Casa de la Divinidad, see the excellent Gerold Necker's work, *Humanistische Kabbala Im Barock. Leben und Werk des Abraham Cohen de Herrera* (Necker; 2011, chap. 3, "Das Erbe der Renaissance", pp: 95-137). For the influence of *Puerta de Cielo* see Beltrán (Beltrán; 2016, chap. 4) and Matzkevich (Matzkevich; 2015, pp: 345-379).

2 Lurian kabbalah consists of a mystical interpretation of Exile and Redemption that reflects the deepest feelings of the Jews of its time: its themes were symbols that pointed the divine being through a new morality culminated in the ticún doctrine with wich, then, all imperfections and, finally, all things would be restored to God.

3 *Puerta del Cielo*, p. 97.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions<sup>6</sup>. To the data of his readings is added an essential note of Herrera's mettle that arises from a famous work by Alexander Altmann. According to this scholar, Herrera was too authentic as a philosopher to believe in the possible fusion of the two disciplines (i.e., kabbalah and philosophy) and as a kabbalist, too authentic to desire it<sup>7</sup>.

Having said that, it is convenient that I roll call the topics that Herrera deals with in *Puerta del Cielo*. Bypassing the most distinctive topics of lurian kabbalah, that is, those of the *shebirot ha-kelim*, *ticun*,<sup>8</sup> and the theory of the *tsim-tsum*,<sup>9</sup> Herrera makes an extraordinary development of the theory of *Ensof* and the *sefirot*<sup>10</sup> that covers the entire book

6 Among others, there are quotes from Plato's *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*, *Phaedo* and *Symposium*, from the *Enneads* of Plotinus, from the Augustinian *De Trinitate*, from Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *De anima*, *De caelo* and *De generatione et corruptione*, from the Proclus's *Elements of theology*, Averroes's *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, Maimónides's *Guide for the Perplexed*, Boethius's *Consolation of the Philosophy*, a series of questions of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, Peter Lombardo's *Sentences*, and Ficino's *Platonic Theology*.

7 Cf. Altmann; 1982, p: 326.

8 The doctrines of the *shebirot ha-kelim* or "breaking of the vessels" and the *ticun* or "restoration" are intrinsically related to that of the *tsim-tsum*. The first, emphasizing the process of progressive degradation that the divine power undergoes or, to put it metaphorically, the "divine light", from the creation of the archetypic primordial man (Adam Qadmón) to the current state of the world, accounts for the cosmological drama to which faces the kabbalist and, as the term *shebirot* suggests, is called to amend. The second, described as the process of universal history, develops the importance of the man's actions or, better, kabbalist's actions to reach the final stage of the world, that is, restoration. The lurian kabbalah therefore belongs in general terms to the theosophical-theurgical model, although with a few important differences with respect to the kabbalistic systems of the XIIIth and XVth centuries identified within this model.

9 The term *tsim-tsum* originally means "concentration" or "contraction", but in kabbalistic language it indicates "shrinkage". Luria's use of this expression answers the question of how God can create something out of nothing if it does not exist. Thus, in his description of the cosmic process, God, who is everywhere and occupies everything, would have been forced to make a place for this world, abandoning, as it were, a zone of himself, of his interiority, a species of mystical primordial space from which He withdrew to return in the act of Creation and revelation. Thus, unlike the emanation postulated by the previous and the later kabbalah, here Herrera shows that the first act of the infinite being or *Ensof*, would consist of a movement of retraction. The doctrine of the *tsim-tsum* has its origins in the Midrash, specifically in the proverbs of some teachers of the IIIth century. Among other things, it is read in these proverbs that God had concentrated his *Shekiná*, that is, his divine presence, in the holiest of holy places, where the *kerubim* live, as if all his power was concentrated and contracted in a single point.

10 "Ensof" (אֵנוֹף), "infinite", "unlimited", as is known, is a term that in Jewish mysticism designates God, considered infinite in all senses, i.e., infinite good, infinite presence, infinite power, etc. The *sefirot* (סְפִירוֹת), for their part, are almost identical with the *Ensof*: they are manifestations of their creative activity and receive different names, like epithets. Among others, "divine measures", "numbering", "effects", "means", "receptacles", "luminous, incorporeal and divine similarities", "stained glass, curtains and goggles that communicate and temper the pure light of the divine being", "Glasses", "images and transfers of His intelligence", "demonstrations of

I and parts of III and VII, out of a total of ten that make up the work. It also addresses the theory of the Primordial Man or *Adam Qadmón*, the division of the created worlds, the *šekináh* and all this intertwined with certain exegetical and numerological stunts<sup>11</sup>. It should be noted that, like every writer who faces divine mysteries, Herrera is dragged to an exacerbated use of metaphorical descriptions. The effort of the kabbalist, like that of the neoplatonic philosophers of all times, resides here in describing something that refuses to be described precisely because of its essential ineffability.

### Abraham Cohen de Herrera, reader of Giovanni Pico

It's must ask why Herrera might have been interested in reading Pico, whom he calls "Fénix de sus tiempos". And here it's must bear in mind that, although the Mirandolan's esteem for the kabbalah and the hebrew language does not openly contrast with the attitude of his contemporaries, his behavior does:<sup>12</sup> looked for, in effect, the most suitable

His will", etc. The root of the terms "Ensof" and "sefirah" is composed, as can be seen in its original spelling, by the letters *samaj* (ס) and *fei* (ף / פ). The expressions mentioned, when read together, should be understood as infinite and finite respectively.

11 The numerological procedures are typical of the kabbalistic systems previous to exile, in 1492. The ones Herrera uses are those of Abraham Abulafia. The Kabbalah of Abulafia comprises three basic techniques: *notaricon*, *gematria* and *temurah*. *Notaricon*, whose name comes from the Latin word "*notarius*", is based on the acrostic's technique, that is, it analyzes how with the initial or final letters of a group of words, others can be formed. The second, *gematria*, is supported by the fact that each letter of the Hebrew alphabet (or best, *alefbeth*) has a numerical value and consists of substituting the corresponding letters for the Hebrew letters. In this way each word or phrase will have a specific numerical value as a result of the relationship between the numbers with which each of the letters that compose it corresponds. Once the Kabbalist knows the numerical value of a word or phrase, he will be able to establish connections with words or phrases that have the same value and even know the secret meanings of them. The *temurah*, finally, is the art of the anagram, that is, of combining or exchanging letters. The latter implies that a word can be divided into its minimum components, and then form other words with them that reveal the full meaning of the first.

12 Among the Church Fathers, neither the knowledge of Hebrew thought nor the learning of the language in which the Old Testament had been written were considered priorities (except in the exceptional cases of Origen and Jerome, both admired and highly cited by Pico). It will take many years for a gradual interest in the Hebrew language to mediate between kabbalistic speculation and philosophy produced in Christian lands. The search for the mother tongue will become an imperative only during the Reformation when some of its leaders, including Luther himself, advocate the need for a more literal interpretation of the Bible. Meanwhile, among the most outstanding intellectuals, the interest in the language in which Adam would have spoken joined with the humanistic desire to read all the texts in their original language. Thus, at first there was no genuine interest in the Hebrew language, but rather in the language of the Old Testament; only in the middle of the XVIIth century Spinoza would write a grammar of the Hebrew language and not of the Scriptures: his *Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae* is not only the first grammar of the Hebrew language written in Latin by a Jew but also the first Hebrew grammar strictly speaking. Cf. *Compenium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*, 24 and 72. Also cf. D'Olivet, F.,

teachers to reach that knowledge that from the outset he figured “divine”. There’ll be, thus, three intellectuals who will take the young prince of Mirandola down these little traveled roads: Elia Del Medigo, Guillermo Raimundo de Moncada (also known as Flavius Mithridates) and Jochanan Alemanno<sup>13</sup>.

Del Medigo directed the Italian talmudic school, was hostile to kabbalistic thought and decidedly aristotelian and “averroist”. He made contact with Pico in 1480 during his stay in Padova and not only carried him to the study of Maimonide’s *Guide for the Perplexed* and Arab philosophy, especially through the comments of Averroes, but wrote two texts on the unity of the active intellect dedicated to him. His distance from kabbalah, it is convenient to insist on this point, was based more on his peripatetism, which was opposed -at least in appearance-<sup>14</sup> to the Platonic orientation of that discipline, rather than in opposition to its techniques or procedures. Nevertheless, Pico’s first approach to kabbalah came undoubtedly through the averroist master, as it follows from a letter that Elia himself sent to his disciple, probably in late 1484 or early 1485<sup>15</sup>.

The second, also known as Guilelmus Siculus and Willelmus Ramundus Monchates,<sup>16</sup> although his real name seems to have been Samuel ben Nissim Abu’l-Faradi (from Agrigento),<sup>17</sup> was a Jewish convert with a rough personality, difficult treatment and suspicious intellectual solvency. Mithridates would have entered to the service of Pico around 1486 and translated for him some relevant kabbalistic works, among them the famous *Séfer ha-Bahir*. The set of translations, to put it briefly, constitutes a heterogeneous corpus that significantly omits some of the most important texts of the medieval kabbalistic tradition, e.g., the *Séfer Yetsiráh* and the *Zohar*. The Mithridates’s versions, moreover, contain some elements absent from the original texts and

present in most translations of Hebrew works carried out by converts, in which is glimpsed a sort of Christianization of kabbalah. The association between Pico and Mithridates would have been broken around 1489, by unclear reasons<sup>18</sup>.

It will be, finally, through the contact with Jochanan Alemanno, whom he met personally in 1488, that Pico will take his kabbalistic philosophy to the highest point. Alemanno was a courtly intellectual, more close to Ficino’s circle and Lorenzo the Magnificent<sup>19</sup>. The encounter could not have been more timely: both authors were working on a new exegesis of the Genesis. Pico, indeed, was writing the *Heptaplus. De septiforme sex dierum Geneseos enarratione* and Alemanno, the *Eineiha-edah (The eyes of the Community)*, a text of little importance but, in Crofton Black’s opinion, of surprising similarity to Pico’s *Heptaplus*<sup>20</sup>. In short, although Alemanno did not make translations for Pico, there were many affinities between his works, his thought, and a greater cultural closeness between them than with the previous Hebrew teachers<sup>21</sup>.

Thanks to Del Medigo, Mithridates and Alemanno, the prince of Concord would not only have acquired a certain, though not exhaustive, use of the Hebrew language,<sup>22</sup> but he also provided himself with a unique material in his time and of the better quality<sup>23</sup>. Indeed, towards the beginning of the XVIth century will be three pillars of the kabbalah in Italy: Abraham Abulafia, Menahem Recanati, some of whose works were already known to Pico, and the anonymous *Séfer Maaréjet ha-Elohut*, which, in a Latin version, the first, was also in the Mirandolan library<sup>24</sup>.

*The Restored Hebrew Language*, I, 1-2 and Gesenius, F. W., *Gesenius’s Hebrew Grammar*, I § 2.2.

13 Cf. Fummagalli Beonio Brocchieri; 2011, pp: 33-38.

14 Abraham Abulafia declares to have founded his kabbalistic system basing on the philosophy of Maimonides - mainly on the *Guide for the Perplexed*- and that of Yehudá ha Levy. (Cf. Scholem; 1996<sup>2</sup>, pp: 106-133)

15 There is no definitive study about the knowledge of kabbalah that Pico may have obtained from Elia, the subject has not yet aroused the interest of any specialist. I’m inclined to believe that Del Medigo addresses the subject of the kabbalah at a time when the relationship with Pico is in frank decline and has sought other Hebrew teachers more related to this discipline. Thus, in my interpretation, Elia refers to kabbalah only to avoid losing contact with a patron who had treated him with extreme length. Leaving aside my own opinion, the truth is that, according to what is deduced from the text, Pico’s first knowledge of the kabbalah came to him through Elia’s letter. It is published by Garin (Pico della Mirandola; 2004, pp: 67-71)

16 Cf. Mithridates; 1963, pp: 48-49. Also cf. Campanini; 2005, intr.

17 Cf. Houfek; 2012, pp. 41ss.

18 Cf. Wirszubski; 1969, p: 173.

19 The study program proposed by Alemanno, realizes the importance that this philosopher gave to Pico’s discoveries, mainly regarding the relationship between Kabbalah and natural magic, as he exposes in his Theses. Moshé Idel has translated into English Alemanno’s short booklet on the Order of Studies in his work *Kaballah in Italy, 1280-1510, a survey (Idel; 2011, pp: 340-343)*.

20 Cf. Black; 2006, p. 19.

21 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

22 According to Crofton Black, it is clear that until 1487, at least, Pico was unable to read Hebrew texts without help. Even more, it would be necessary, continues Black, to wait until 1491 to find Pico reading Hebrew texts by himself. Indeed, in his comments to the psalms that began that same year, the Count is much more skillful, enough to notice the passages where the Greek and Latin translations depart from the original text. (Cf. Black; 2006, p. 22)

23 In the first inventory of the library of Pico, dating in 1498 (that year it was acquired by Cardinal Domenico Grimani), were identified fifty-eight manuscripts in Hebrew and Chaldean languages, without Latin translation. There are no doubts regarding Pico’s interest in Hebrew literature, although it has not been determined if he kept those books in his library thinking about future translations or if he intended to read them himself in their original language.

24 Cf. Garin; 1937, pp: 115-116.



Pico's effort to access hebrew thought was based on his conception of truth as an historical unfolding of the content of the *λόγος* and on the assurance that the hebrew language and the entire wisdom tradition of the jews was the oldest; to these language and knowledge, then, mother language and wisdom, one had to refer if want to prove the truth of christianity. In light of this perspective, he inaugurated a new intellectual category, that of "christian kabbalah", as reflected in works such as *Oratio de hominis dignitate*<sup>25</sup> and, the already mentioned, *Heptaplus*<sup>26</sup>.

With what has been said, then, I have enough reasons to think why a Jewish author, a kabbalist, of eclectic training and of renaissance taste like Abraham Cohen could be interested in pician thought.

### Pico in *Puerta del Cielo*

In *Puerta del Cielo* there are two explicit mentions of Giovanni Pico. One in chapter 2 of book IV and the other in chapter 7 of book VI. The latter is a blind reference, so to speak: Herrera lists Pico in the middle of a series of authors who support his same point of view on the active power and free will of *Ensof* and its causality<sup>27</sup>. The first reference is, therefore, the only one that has interest for the goal of this research. It is not, in effect, a simple mention or a vague reference, but it is possible to identify practically a whole folio of *Puerta del Cielo* (Ms. 131c10, from the Koninksljke Bibliothek (Royal Dutch Library) of The Hague (37r-37v)) as a mixture of translation and paraphrasing of some passages of a youthful Pico's work, namely, the "*Commento*", as Herrera calls it, whose full title is *Commento sopra una canzona d'amore composta da Hieronimo Benivieni*,<sup>28</sup> the only one of Pico's works written in his vulgar tongue. The passages Herrera uses here correspond to chapters 4 and 5 of *Commento's* book I. The text, which was not published until 1519,<sup>29</sup> consists of a series of notes that Pico possibly

compiled during his travels between Perugia and Rome, between 1485 and 1486. The *Commento* is divided into three Books of unequal length followed by a particular commentary of each one of the *stanze* from Benivieni's poem, eight in total. In a broad sense and in my opinion, the central theme of the *Commento* is applied poetic theology. Also, the text is displayed as a comment to Benivieni's *Canzona*, although it addresses, as in passing, Plato's *Symposium* and Ficino's *De Amore*, which is a comment to that Plato's work. Likewise, the first book of the *Commento*, which is the one that Herrera cites, is dedicated to exposing the metaphysics of the "*Platonici*" and the chapters that Herrera paraphrases and / or translates are grouped under the common title "Que Dios produjo *ab aeterno* una sola criatura incorporea e intelectual tan perfecta como podía ser"<sup>30</sup>. ["That God produced *ab aeterno* a single disembodied, intellectual creature as perfect as it could be."]

In this sense, the place where Herrera quotes Pico is remarkable: book IV of *Puerta del Cielo* is dedicated to demonstrate that from the first cause, *Ensof*, comes a single effect, about which he says, in the light of his project to reunite kabbalah of all times, that the *Zohar's* author calls it "*Adam Kadmon*", that is, according to his own translation, "hombre precedente" [preceding man] and the other kabbalists calls it "*keter hellion*",<sup>31</sup> that is, "sublime y primera corona" [sublime and first crown]. On the other hand, chapter 1 of that same book is entitled "Prueba con treze razones que de la causa primera procedió inmediatamente uno solo perfectísimo efecto" [Prove with thirteen reasons that only one very perfect effect immediately came from the first cause] and 2, "Confirma con autoridad de excelentes filósofos q(ue) de la causa primera inmediatamente procedió uno solo perfectísimo efecto y por medio del como de instrumento todos los demás." [Confirms with authority of excellent philosophers that from the first cause immediately came only one very perfect effect and by means of the instrument of all others].

Although I cannot make an exhaustive analysis of

25 Cf *Oratio*, § 39, 255, § 41, 267, § 43, 277-278 y § 44, 280.

26 Cf *Heptaplus*. *Expositio Beresit et passim*.

27 *Puerta del cielo*, p. 179.

28 Girolamo Benivieni had written a love poem in platonic key with the title of *Canzona dell'amor celeste e divino* in which he took up some passages from the comment to Plato's *Symposium* Ficino's *De amore*, written in 1469. Benivieni's poem was also modeled on the famous Guido Cavalcanti's *Donna me prega* mentioned by Ficino precisely in *De Amore*, in order to celebrate Giovanni Cavalcanti, a descendant of that poet friend of Dante. (Cf. Allen; 2008, p: 83)

29 Gianfrancesco, nephew of Pico, did not publish the *Commeno* in his editio princeps of 1496, but in the index wrote "in platonis convivium lib. III", a title that could well be a reference to the *Commento*. Benivieni, who survived Pico 40 years, grappled with the marginal version, expunged from it all the allusions to Ficino's *De Amore* as wrong, and polished the work a bit, stylistically. Benivieni's works were published for the first time in France, in the 1500s, together with some parts of Pico's *Commento*, which he himself grouped under the title "*Commento di Hieronimo Benivieni*

sopra sue canzone et sonetti"; an undisguised plagiarism. After reading the purged version of Benivieni in 1518, the humanist Biagio Buonaccorsi published it in its full version in 1519 along with a version of the poems of the Florentine poet. In this edition the *Commento* received the pompous title with which is known: "*Commento dello illustrissimo signore conte Iohanni Pico Mirandolano sopra una canzona de Amore composta da Hyeronimo Benivieni ciptadino fiorentino secondo la mente e opinione de' platonici*". The text 1519 was reprinted in Venice in 1522, again in the edition of Benivieni's works and in three subsequent editions in Basel (1557, 1572, and 1601). In the index of the Basilian editions, the title given by Gianfrancesco remains, but the text itself bears the title given by Buonaccorsi. This, then, is the story of the *Commento's* standard version, the critical edition was published by Garin in 1942.

30 Che Dio produsse *ab aeterno* una sola creatura incorporea ed intellettuale, tanto perfetta quanto essere poteva. (*Commento*, I.4)

31 *Puerta del Cielo*, p. 155.

these chapters, it must be said that Herrera proceeds here earlier as a philosopher than as a mystic, such as kabbalists do. Only at the end of chapter 1 some authorities appear. Chapter 2, the one that contains Pico's quote, is just like a confirmation of his point of view. At this time, a question arises: Why does Herrera cite the *Commento* and not other works of the Mirandolan philosopher, e.g. *Oratio*, in which he makes the official presentation of kabbalah to christians, or in the *Heptaplus*, text where is perceived a major kabbalistic influence? I believe only one answer could be proposed: the *Commento* is the first work in which the Count of Concordia explicitly mentions kabbalah and its relationship with platonic philosophy. Towards the end of the work, after explaining his friend Benivieni's *canzona* in platonic terms, Pico writes:

*"Questo ordine appresso gli antiqui ebrei fu santissimamente osservato e per questo la loro scienza, nella quale la esposizione delli astrusi e asconditi misterii della legge si contiene, Cabala si chiama [...] scienza per certo divina e degna di non partecipare se non con pochi, grandissimo fundamento della fede nostra, el desiderio solo del quale mi mosse all'assiduo studio della ebraica e caldaica lingua, senza le quali alla cognizione di quella pervenire è al tutto impossibile"*<sup>32</sup>.

[This order <the poem's order> was most sacredly observed among the ancient Hebrews and for that reason, their <predilected> science, in whose exposition the abstruse and hidden mysteries of the Law are contained, is called "kabbalah" [...] science, certainly divine and worthy of not being taught but to a few, great foundation of our <christian> faith, whose sole desire has led me to the assiduous study of the Hebrew and Chaldean languages, without which it is completely impossible to achieve the knowledge of kabbalah.]

### An open conclusion

From what has been said I could affirm that Pico may have been for Abraham Cohen neither more nor less than a pioneer: someone who knew how to see and carry out the same task that he tried to perform, but from a christian perspective. Thus, the Count's works become a fulcrum for his demonstrations and purposes. But that's not all: Pico is the first christian author who links platonism with kabbalah. And this is the same that Herrera intends in *Puerta del Cielo*. Now, the only text of the mirandolan philosopher that explicitly accounts for this procedure is, precisely, *Commento*. It must be kept in mind, however, that when Pico refers to "*Platonici*"<sup>33</sup> in this text, he does not always have in mind those who today scholars calls "platonics" but sometimes "neoplatonists". It must to find out, among many other

things, if Herrera also notices this ambiguity under the term "Platonici", but that is part of another research...

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**Note:** All quotes from *Puerta del Cielo* come from Krabbenhoft's version. All quotes from *Commento* and *heptaplus* come from the Garin's version. All translations are mine. I have compared the quoted passages with the other editions cited here, especially that of Beltrán, which presents a standard version of the original text. References to Pico's *Oratio de hominis dignitate* follow the division into paragraphs established by the members of The Pico Project (see below).

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