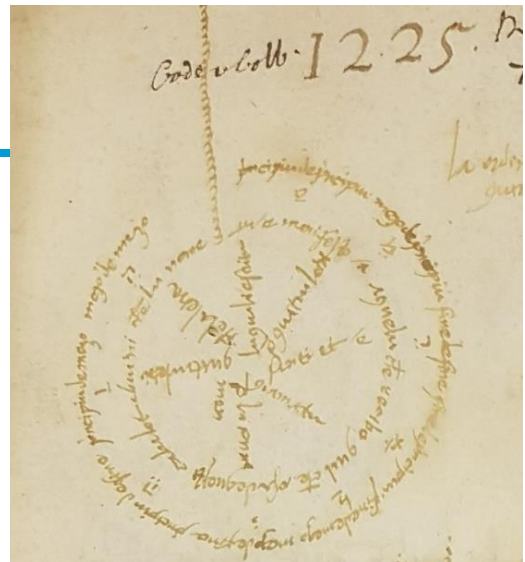


Workshop

Beyond Doubt: Prophetic Language and Esoteric Knowledge in Renaissance Kabbalah

Date

14–15 June 2022



Abstract

At the end of the fifteenth century, a horrified preacher from Santa Maria Novella claimed that Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino had been trying to achieve mystical union with God, perform miracles, and prophesise using magic and Kabbalah. His fears were directed towards unknown and sulphurous forms of knowledge that were part of an ancient divine wisdom and manifestations of a unique and universal truth. Did they constitute stages along a path leading to a knowledge that was certain and free from doubt for the humanists of the time? Of what does this “knowledge beyond doubt” mainly consist?

This workshop aims to answer these questions by examining this knowledge in Jewish and Christian thought in the early modern period. This is set against the backdrop of the importance accorded by various Renaissance thinkers to “esoteric” Kabbalistic and prophetic wisdom, which, by activating the highest human cognitive faculties, can penetrate the divine mysteries and grasp the most hidden aspects of the Truth and its unquestionable and incontrovertible manifestations. Particular attention will be paid to prophecy and Kabbalah as “esoteric knowledges” capable of interpreting the most hidden, mysterious, and occult dimension of nature and the Godhead.

Convenors

- Flavia Buzzetta (Universität Hamburg)
- Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento, Lecce/Universität Hamburg)

Venue

Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies

Jungiusstraße 11 (Entrance C)/Room C319

20355 Hamburg

Please contact MCAS for registration and further information.

Zoom

Please contact MCAS for registration and further information.

Programme

Tuesday 14 June 2022

11:00–11:10	Welcoming Remarks <i>Flavia Buzzetta (Universität Hamburg) and Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento, Lecce/Universität Hamburg)</i>
11:10–13:10	Panel 1 <i>Chair: Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg)</i>
11:10–11:40	Supernal Wisdom and the Coincidence of the Two “Matters” with Giordano Bruno [online] <i>Cristina Ciucu (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris)</i>
11:40–12:10	When Does Philosophy Not Suffice? Remarks on Yoḥanan Alemanno and His Sources <i>Hanna Gentili (University of Haifa)</i>
12:10–13:10	Prophecy in Pico’s Kabbalist Conclusions [online] <i>Brian Copenhaver (University of California, Los Angeles)</i>
13:10–14:15	Lunch Break
14:15–15:15	Panel 2 <i>Chair: Mafalda Toniazzi (Università di Pisa/Universität Hamburg)</i>
14:15–14:45	Looking for Hidden Truth and Secret Knowledge: Pierleone da Spoleto as a Reader of Prophetic Kabbalah between Certainty and Doubt <i>Flavia Buzzetta (Universität Hamburg)</i>
14.45–15.15	Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Yoḥanan Alemanno as Readers of ibn Tufail <i>Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento, Lecce/Universität Hamburg)</i>
15.15–15.45	Coffee Break
15:45–16:45	Panel 3 <i>Chair: Mafalda Toniazzi (Università di Pisa/Universität Hamburg)</i>
15.45–16.15	Prophecy and εὐδαιμονία in Paolo Ricci’s Writings <i>Margherita Mantovani (Universität Hamburg)</i>
16.15–16.45	“And These Are the Beginning of the World of Prophecy”: On Prophecy, Magic, and Kabbalah in Yohanan Alemanno’s Works <i>Gal Sofer (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva)</i>

18:00–19:00 **Maimonides Lecture on Scepticism** [online]
Chair: Flavia Buzzetta (Universität Hamburg) and Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento, Lecce/Universität Hamburg)

Abraham Abulafia's Prophetic Books
Moshe Idel (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

19:30 **Dinner (Restaurant "La Monella," Hallerplatz 12, 20146 Hamburg)**

After dinner: Taxi transfer from restaurant to hotel

Wednesday 15 June 2022

9:30 Taxi transfer from hotel to venue

10:15–11:15 **Panel 4**
Chair: Michael Engel (Universität Hamburg)

10:15–10:45 **Suspicion of Intoxication: Drunkenness, Prophecy, and Esoteric Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Mysticism**
Vadim Putzu (Missouri State University)

10:45–11:15 **Call Me by My Name: The Mystical Path of the Sefirot and the Reciprocity of Being in *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*** [online]
Andrea Gondos (Freie Universität Berlin)

11:15–11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:30–12:30 **Panel 5**
Chair: Michael Engel (Universität Hamburg)

11:30–12:00 **Lutheranism as the True Kabbalah of Old: The Reception of the Zohar in Late Lutheran Orthodoxy**
Niels Páll Eggerz (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

12:00–12:30 **Skepsis versus Dogma: On the Dogmatisation of Mystical Concepts in Christian Kabbalah**
Elke Morlok (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg/Universität Hamburg)

12:30–13:00 **Concluding Remarks**

13:00 **Lunch**

Abstracts

(in alphabetical order)

Looking for Hidden Truth and Secret Knowledge: Pierleone da Spoleto as a Reader of Prophetic Kabbalah between Certainty and Doubt

Flavia Buzzetta (Universität Hamburg)

The discovery of new forms of knowledge that were considered to be secret and prophetic attracted the attention of the humanists at the end of the fifteenth century, and in particular the Christian Kabbalists, who saw Kabbalah as serving the function of transfigurative and regenerative knowledge. This was the case, for example, for Pierleone da Spoleto, physician to Lorenzo the Magnificent, who considered the Kabbalah to be prophetic wisdom that was free from doubt and absolutely certain, capable of developing an individual's contemplative and spiritual powers. He developed his ideas based on the study of Abraham Abulafia's *Imrei Shefer* and ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, which he read in a Sicilian translation. In this lecture, I will examine these translations and Pierleone's interpretations of them. The study of the status and function of Kabbalah as a certain and prophetic secret knowledge that enables the regeneration of human nature fits into the broader framework of the interests of early Christian Kabbalah, the origin of which was due to a constant dialogue between humanists and Jewish intellectuals who together adapted and transformed Jewish Kabbalistic thought.

Supernal Wisdom and the Coincidence of the Two "Matters" with Giordano Bruno

Cristina Ciucu (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris)

The present paper addresses the Kabbalistic scheme(s) subtending Giordano Bruno's monistic articulation of an infinite universe. Rejecting the Platonist dualisms of an eternal matter and an active Mind or World-Soul (such as that developed by Girolamo Cardano's), Bruno's metaphysics had to readdress the question of unity-in-differentiation of matter, form, and spirit. Kabbalistic references became instrumental in this effort to envisage a nondual cosmology in which "material spiritual realities adhere to spiritual realities in material realities" (*De umbris idearum*). Thus, drawing upon Pico, Giles of Viterbo, and Agrippa, Bruno employs the hypostasis of *Hocma/hocmot* in order to redefine the Neoplatonic noetic principle as a dialectic coincidence not only of the divine and humane *sapientiae*, but also of the intelligible and sensible matter(s).

The Place of Prophecy in Pico's Conclusions

Brian Copenhaver (University of California, Los Angeles)

"Before Moses they all prophesied through the Deer with One Horn." Giovanni Pico planned to debate this statement before an audience of cardinals and other curial officials in the capital of Christendom in early 1487. Had his preposterous plan succeeded, the Roman clerisy would have been baffled and horrified by this enigmatic proposition and 118 others about Kabbalah that applied Jewish ideas to articles of Christian faith. Moses and other prophets of ancient Israel were sainted biblical figures,

revered by Pico's Church. What could the prince have been thinking when he decided to examine prophecy in the light of Jewish mysticism and theosophy?

When Does Philosophy Not Suffice? Remarks on Yohanan Alemanno and His Sources

Hanna Gentili (University of Haifa)

In Yohanan Alemanno's hierarchical view of the human disciplines, philosophical speculation guides the individual's path towards immortality only in its first stages and must be complemented by additional meditative and mystical techniques. Rather than focusing on the coexistence of philosophical and Kabbalistic thinking, this paper will focus on the breaking moments in the transition between them. My aim is to pinpoint the exact moments in the individual's path towards perfection where philosophical means become insufficient and, in Alemanno's view, where one must rely on a different set of theoretical and practical tools. This paper will focus on psychology and ethics as two areas where philosophy is overruled at a specific stage. In particular, we will look at the role of the faculty of imagination and its relationship with mystical practices and the role of philosophical ethics with respect to divine commandments.

Call Me by My Name: The Mystical Path of the Sefirot and the Reciprocity of Being in Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut

Andrea Gondos (Freie Universität Berlin)

My presentation will trace the *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut's* unique articulation of an ethos of Jewish intellectual perfection that is predicated equally on theoretical knowledge of God on the one hand and practical-theurgical activity through concentration, meditation, and the proper pronouncement of divine names on the other. I will therefore argue that esoteric knowledge in the *Ma'arekhet* is modelled on a reciprocal-relational rather than a linear ladder-like construct. Creation initiated by God through the emanation of the ten Sefirot is transformed into a relational and reciprocal paradigm as the Emanator and the emanated embrace in continuous dialogue. Human action serves to initiate and cement an unbroken connection to the divine. In this paradigm, the Sefirot serve not merely as intellectual conduits for the Kabbalists, but as nodules of unification between the mystic and the divine through the active deployment of language, prayer, and *kavanah* or concentration.

Abraham Abulafia's Prophetic Books

Moshe Idel (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

The prophetic Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (1240–c.1292) used a variety of literary genres in his writings: commentaries on *Sefer Yeşirah*, Maimonides's secrets, and the Pentateuch; poems; detailed handbooks with instructions on how to achieve prophetic experiences, especially *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* and *Or ha-Seḥel*; books on grammar, which are now probably lost; and a series of prophetic books, written from 1279 onwards in the Byzantine Empire, Rome, and Messina, which have survived in fragments. These books contain details of revelations he claimed to have received from the Agent

Intellect and commentaries on those revealed statements. The latter genre includes by far the most complex, obscure, and difficult treatises, which are extant in fewer manuscripts and have not yet attracted the due attention of most scholars in the field.

When compared to Abulafia's other writings or to the huge majority of other Kabbalistic writings in general, the prophetic books—as he designated them—are the most cryptic but nevertheless the most provocative treatises. To give two examples: one of these books is entitled *ha-Berit ha-Hadashah*, the New Covenant, while another, *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, was intended to be read after the reading of the weekly Pentateuch pericope as the chapters of the books of the biblical prophets were read in synagogues. The range of available texts belonging to this genre is not entirely clear, since it seems that Abulafia continued to write in this vein after completing his first series of prophetic books in 1282. So, for example, *Sefer ha-Ot* — the only critical edition of a book by Abulafia to have been published, with a Polish commentary and translation by Dr Arie J. Krawczyk—which was composed from 1284 to 1288, belongs to this genre. However, there are also anonymous fragments in manuscripts, some of which will hopefully be addressed in the future.

My point is that despite the difficulties of decoding those texts in their original Hebrew, they were preserved in manuscripts found in libraries that were connected in one way or another to Christian Kabbalists in the Renaissance period. The first series of booklets and their interpretations are extant in Ms. Roma, Angelica 38, and Ms. München, Bayerische Library 285, with further fragments in a few other manuscripts. The two codices mentioned here are probably related to two Christian Kabbalists, the former to the famous Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo, the latter copied on the initiative of Grimaldi, perhaps from the copy in the Angelica library. There is also an anonymous text, which is truncated at the beginning and which I have identified as belonging to Abulafia's prophetic books, that can be found in a unique manuscript in the Laurenziana library in Florence, at least one small passage of which was printed in 1516 in the polyglot of the Psalms produced by Agostino Giustiniani. Last but not least, a short text found anonymously in a few manuscripts, which is extremely complex, but has several evident affinities to Abulafia's prophetic books and has not been discussed in scholarship at all, was translated into Latin by Flavius Mithridates in a Vatican manuscript, and one of its Hebrew manuscripts may be found in a codex that was used by Johannes Reuchlin.

The above details, when taken together—especially with the translations of *Hayyei ha-Olam ha-Ba'* and *Imrei Shefer*, which describe techniques for achieving prophecy—may help us to understand the importance of one of several sources for what can be called the “prophetic turn” from the late fifteenth-century Renaissance, as discussed, for example, in Stéphane Toussaint, “L'individuo estatico. Tecniche profetiche in Ficino e Pico,” *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 6 (2000–2002): 351–79. Moreover, we may ask why these cryptic texts might have appealed to a Renaissance Christian reader. My answer is that they included a more universalistic approach, such as, for example, Abulafia's mention of his preaching to Christians in his *Sefer ha-Ot*. In my lecture, I will address this issue in more detail.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Yohanan Alemanno as Readers of ibn Tufayl

Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento/Universität Hamburg)

Doubts about the authority of traditional “internal” sources and an assessment of the role of “external sciences” in Jewish education were among the central issues that induced the fourteenth-century Provençal-born Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne to compose a Hebrew commentary on Abu Bakr ibn

Tufayl's twelfth-century Arabic treatise *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Moses of Narbonne wrote his work shortly after completing a commentary on Averroes's *Letter on (Mystical) Union* and another commentary on the anonymous Hebrew treatise entitled *The Measure of the (Divine) Stature*. Narbonne's special concern in this speculation, which merged Greek-Arabic thought and Kabbalah for mystical/prophetic purposes, may parallel the views of the fifteenth-century thinker Yohanan Alemanno. Born in Italy, Alemanno was a "universal scholar," known for his intellectual cooperation with the Christian Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Since the encounter between the two men of knowledge took place at exactly the time that saw the beginning of the latter's interest in ibn Tufayl's philosophical novel, modern researchers still hold Pico to be the first Westerner to circulate ibn Tufayl's and Narbonne's works in humanist milieus. However, recent scholarship has demonstrated that Latin and Italian versions of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and its commentary were already available in the years prior to Pico's alleged Latin translation and in the same Tuscan setting that triggered most of the intellectual endeavours of the young humanist from Mirandola. Is the myth of Pico's universal primacy to be reassessed? And should the interest in ibn Tufayl be read as a dramatic change in the categories animating the intellectual discourse in late fifteenth-century Italy? From this viewpoint, it is not surprising that the Arabic treatise in its Latin and Italian renderings mainly appears in manuscripts that contain Abraham Abulafia's prophetic works.

Prophecy and εὐδαιμονία in Paolo Ricci's Writings

Margherita Mantovani (Universität Hamburg)

In 1514, with the publication of his *Dialogue on the Apostolic Symbol* (*Dialogus in symbolum apostolorum*, 1514; *In Apostolorum symbolum elegantissimus iuxta peripateticorum dogma dialogus per plane. Et summo ingenij acumine lumini gratie lumen concilians nature*, Pavia: Bernardino Garaldi, 1516, reprint 1517), Paolo Ricci—a Jewish convert and humanist—proposed reading the Christian dogmas philosophically, constructing his argument on the authority of Aristotle and on Averroes's commentaries. In other words, the *Dialogue on the Apostolic Symbol* pays particular attention to the problem of the concordance between faith and reason, which led to a debate about the interplay between Christian dogmas and Aristotelian positions. Ricci mentions a passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that describes happiness (εὐδαιμονία) as the main goal of man. This paper aims to demonstrate the correlation between the Aristotelian notion of "happiness," prophetic knowledge, and Kabbalah in Ricci's writings.

Skepsis versus Dogma: On the Dogmatisation of Mystical Concepts in Christian Kabbalah

Elke Morlok (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg/Universität Hamburg)

In the later phases of *cabbala christiana*, individual speculations were popularised and even institutionalised in the sense that they found their way into catechisms intended to familiarise potential Jewish converts with Christianity, and occasionally even into the voluminous compendia of Lutheran dogmatics. In short, arcane, elitist knowledge belonging to a social and religious minority was adapted by the Christian majority, which laid claim to it, reshaped it in accordance with its own perceptions, and made it available to a large audience, which then later reverberated it back at the

Jewish minority. Within this context, my paper will focus on the integration of Kabbalistic paradigms into dogmatic or pseudo-dogmatic treatises of the post-reformation era and their specific function within these texts. In which parts of these catechisms, *confessiones*, *concordiae*, or missionary treatises did the authors place their mystical ideas, and what other traditions were replaced by them? I will discuss various examples from different periods and their specific transformation of Kabbalistic notions into Christological and Mariological concepts. We have to ask whether such dynamic appropriation processes were part of a sceptical attitude towards either Jewish thought, diverging Protestant faiths, Catholic dogma, or a blend of several components. What was the aim of the literary and theological framings of these texts? Who were the intended readers? And what were the sceptical strategies of this unique pattern of dogmatisation, by which ancient truths that were claimed to be originally Christian were clothed in new garments?

Lutheranism as the True Kabbalah of Old: Zohar Reception in Late Lutheran Orthodoxy

Niels Páll Eggerz (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

This paper explores the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Lutheran debate on the nature of Kabbalah sparked by the publication of the *Kabbala Denudata*. It will show that this debate gave rise to a new Christian conception of Kabbalah that left basic tenets of the Reformation such as *sola scriptura* untouched: true or ancient Kabbalah was used as another designation for the primaeval tradition of ancient Israel as supposedly preserved or rediscovered among Lutherans; false or recent Kabbalah, by contrast, was defined as the distortion of the said primaeval tradition as practised by the Jews. Many Lutheran thinkers believed the allegedly true Kabbalah to have been preserved in the Zohar, albeit in veiled form. Consequently, they studied the Zohar by availing themselves of the same techniques that they used to interpret the Old Testament. On the one hand, their dual conception of Kabbalah and their way of reading the Zohar was thus a logical continuation of the basic claim of the Reformation project of returning not only to primaeval Christianity, but to the universal religion of old. On the other, it laid the foundations for the continued use of certain Kabbalistic texts such as the Zohar among Lutherans even after they had become aware of the actual nature of Kabbalistic theosophy.

Suspicion of Intoxication: Drunkenness, Prophecy, and Esoteric Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Mysticism

Vadim Putzu (Missouri State University)

The notion that the prophetic state can resemble—and be mistaken for—drunken intoxication may be found as early as the Hebrew Bible itself (see 1Sam 1:13–14; Jer 23:9). If this is the case, how can one tell real prophecy from beer talk? My contribution will survey a few medieval Jewish texts discussing mysticism and magic, such as *Sefer Hasidim*, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, *Shaarey Zedeq*, and *Sefer ha-Malakhim*, which seek to establish a difference between two kinds of inebriation (later appropriated by Pico della Mirandola), one of which is associated with truthful revelations of divine origin. Even when there is no suspicion about the reliability of this knowledge, some of the texts betray doubts about the dangers inherent in accessing or revealing it, using wine as a symbol for the Torah and its secrets. This ambivalence in Kabbalistic thought and practice carries over to sixteenth-century Safed, where one

can contrast the respective positions of Joseph Karo and Solomon Alqabez regarding their opposing views on the relationship between the effects of wine and the phenomenon of prophecy.

“And These Are the Beginning of the World of Prophecy”: On Prophecy, Magic, and Kabbalah in Yohanan Alemanno’s Works

Gal Sofer (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva)

The physician, philosopher, and Kabbalist Yohanan Alemanno (1435–1505?) was famous for his close friendship with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Alemanno is less famous for his messianic ambitions and his rather unique concept of prophecy. According to him, the prophet, who is also the saviour, can constrain demons, and the ability to rule them is “the beginning of the world of prophecy.” In this lecture, we will examine Alemanno’s approach to prophecy and the relationship between (demonic) contemporary magic and the idea of salvation. Through a close examination of both Jewish and Christian writings, I will argue that an innovative way of dealing with the messianic urge emerged in the fifteenth century. This new way saw a particular kind of dangerous magic as the ultimate method to gain prophecy and redeem the world.