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Kabbala, Christians, and Jews: An Examination of the Rise and Fall of Peculiar Relationships that Developed Between Christian Elites and Jewish Scholars in Renaissance Italy

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Kabbala, Christians, and Jews: An Examination of the Rise and Fall of Peculiar Relationships that Developed Between Christian Elites and Jewish Scholars in Renaissance Italy

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by

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Abstract

The Italian Renaissance was to many of its contemporaries a golden age. It was unarguably a phenomenal time in European history. The sharing of intellectual ideas and innovations during this period permanently changed the world. Knowledge was spread across Europe at an unprecedented pace and intellectual minds were greatly expanded from both new and old discoveries. During this period, classical works were fortuitously unearthed and swiftly consumed for their hoary wisdom and guidance. Among these works were found ancient productions related to various occult ideas and practices such as alchemy and magic. A subset of the prominent group of Italian Renaissance Humanists that arose during this period became interested in these esoteric ideas and were inspired by their discovery to search for other extant ancient works that may help lead them to their spiritual goal of Higher Knowledge. In this search, some Christian scholars encountered what they believed to be ancient works belonging to a mystical branch of Judaism. The vast majority of these works were written primarily in the Hebrew language which meant that in order for Christians to have access to these compositions, they had to engage with and rely on Jews as exegetes, language tutors, and translators. This led to an unprecedented phenomenon in European history: small groups of Jewish and Christian scholars developed unusual intellectual relations and mutual dependencies as a result of a quest for spiritual knowledge through a Jewish mystical tradition called Kabbala. This phenomenon of non-Jews engaging Jewish Kabbalists for study and direction in the practice of Kabbala became an unbroken historical thread that has lasted from the period of the Italian Renaissance to today.

Acknowledgements

The culmination of this project represents decades of research and a pursuit of knowledge that has taken me across various types of learning programs, educational systems, and even some uncommon storehouses of information. This quest, which first began many years ago as a goal to achieve a successful business career through the obtainment of educational credentials, has taken many twists and turns over the decades and will, at long last, conclude in a very dissimilar way with my final degree, a Master of Arts in history from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. When contemplating the conclusion of this quest, I came to realize that the underlying goal of this long and meandering pursuit was really, more than anything else, a desire for inner growth. It is my firm belief that any pursuit for improvement whether it be educational, career-related, or financial, inherently leads to personal growth if the means are pursued from a place of inner integrity. Yet, to effectively operate from this inner place necessitates an environment that cultivates and encourages such attributes. To this end, I am indebted to the outstanding members of the University of Arkansas History Department, especially Dr. Freddy Dominguez, Dr. Jim Gigantino, Dr. Richard Sonn, and Dr. Laurence Hare, who deserve much praise and have earned my unremitting respect for standing as exemplary figures of integrity while acting as my professors, advisors, and mentors throughout my time in the graduate program.

Furthermore, I owe an unspeakable debt of gratitude to the man in my life who has stood by me all these years as I went out in search of myself: My lifelong partner, husband, and true love, Todd Dannenfelser. Thank you, my Bear!

Dedication

The completion of this project, which concurrently completes the requirements for a Master of Arts degree from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas, symbolizes for me and for my descendants, a break from the past and the blazing of a new familial trail. Much more than a graduate degree has been attained during this lifelong pursuit. As such, my hope is that my hard work and subsequent achievements during this quest, that have influenced all aspects of my life in extraordinary ways, will serve to inspire my children, grandchildren, and all future lineal generations, to never stop seeking your own greatness, to achieve your greatness with gusto, and to offer your greatness, in your own way, to the world. To each of you, I dedicate this work as a symbol, not only of my own lifelong pursuit for betterment, but also as a symbol of my love for you.

Contents

Introduction

http://www.kabbalah-jewelry.com/red-string-celebrities.php

Famous celebrities such as Madonna, Demi Moore, and Britney Spears have made the "red string" bracelet a popular religious cult item. Yet few people know about the history of the mystical branch of Judaism called Kabbala that made the "red string" bracelet popular.[1] Nor do many people realize that most of the celebrities who practice this mystical branch of Judaism that emerged during the Middle Ages are, in fact, not Jewish. Many celebrity Kabbalists (those who practice Kabbala) were born in the Christian tradition and still identify with some form of Christianity. The musical artist, Madonna, for example, was born Roman Catholic and has publicized this fact in her music. The phenomenon of non-Jews adopting Kabbala to augment their spiritual practice seems rather unusual. Yet it turns out that this ostensibly peculiar custom

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[1] Kabbalah Jewelry; "Red String Celebrities," accessed December 9, 2015, http://www.Kabbalah-jewelry.com/red-string-celebrities.php.

www.manaraa.com

of Christians practicing a form of mystical Judaism has a very long history with its roots traceable back to Italy during the Middle Ages.[2] By the time of the Italian Renaissance, this movement had become widespread among an elect subculture of Christian elites.

To understand how this phenomenon emerged and eventually became a popular movement in twenty-first century society, this research project, *Kabbala, Christians, and Jews: An Examination of the Rise and Fall of Peculiar Relationships that Developed between Christian Elites and Jewish Scholars in Renaissance Italy,* will explore the anomalous intellectual relations that began to emerge as early as the thirteenth century in Italy between Christian and Jewish thinkers.[3] The objectives of this work are twofold: To critique traditional scholarship that tends to focus on Christian elites of this period as key intellectual figures in the development of the Renaissance while often downplaying or ignoring the rich intellectual contributions of Jewish scholars who served as teachers and tutors to these figures. To explore the various possible reasons these interactions developed in Italy and the role of Kabbala in these peculiar associations.

Various factors conflated in Italy during the late Middle Ages that created the cultural, social, and political milieus ripe for the development of Jewish-Christian interactions and the events that came to define the period that became known as the Renaissance. Many changes and developments of this period will be explored for their possible contribution to these relations.[4] This work will look at social, economic and political circumstances in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that led to the development of the Humanist movement, as well as an

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[2] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy: 1280-1510* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 156, 306-307 (hereafter cited in text as KII).
[3] Ibid, 29, 156.
[4] Eugene F. Rice, Jr. & Anthony Grafton, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, 1460-1559* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994).

evaluation of the ostensive links between the Humanist movement and the development of Jewish-Christian interactions. Additionally, the role and impact of the printing press on the developments of this period will be surveyed.[5] And finally, Spanish influences on the Renaissance mindset will be addressed and will include an examination of Jewish and *Converso* exiles from the Iberian Peninsula who emigrated to Italy and their possible influence on the unusual cultural developments, as well as the collapse of these developments, during this period.

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[5] Marsilio Ficino states, "In Germany in our times have been invented the instruments for printing books…" James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds., *The Portable Renaissance Reader* (New York: Penguin Group, 1981), 79; Moshe Idel states printing "contributed substantially to the propagation of cultural developments in northern Italy beyond the small circle around the Medicis. Printing also ensured continuity." Idel, *KII*, 234; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 1-10.

Chapter One: Florence: The Wellspring of the Italian Renaissance

Although some scholars argue over whether the Italian Renaissance was the progenitor of capitalism and modernity, or whether Italy should be considered the birthplace of the first Renaissance, most scholars nonetheless agree that the Italian Renaissance holds many titles of distinction.[6] It could be argued that one theme of this period was paradox: It was a time of discovery and innovation while also being a time of rebirth of antiquity, and buried within that grand paradox can be found many smaller ones. A rebirth of all things classical became vogue: classical visual arts and architecture, classical languages, ancient Greek and Latin texts, and classical education, to name only a few. In retrospect, "classical scholarship…turned out to be capable of producing radical changes in the world of learning"…yet another paradox.[7] The use of maps and instruments for nautical navigation, the unearthing of ancient Greek mathematics and the development of experimentation, and the invention of the movable-type printing press prompted their own European revolutions during this period: Maps and navigational instruments made possible trans-Atlantic voyages and the discovery of a New World, which awakened literary imaginations and vastly expanded merchant markets, while experiments and mathematics brought about the scientific revolution, and the printing press augmented the spread of

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[6] Peter Burke argues that if the Italian Renaissance wasn't the first Renaissance, it was still "the Big One." Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 12 (hereafter cited in text as IR); Eugene Rice states the "shift from old to new" during this period was a qualified shift from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period. Rice also argues it is more difficult for contemporary historians to see the Renaissance and Reformation as precursors of modernity "if by modern we mean contemporary" than it was for nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars looking through the lens of their own period. Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, xiii-xiv; Capitalism is defined by Rice & Grafton (hereafter referenced as R&G) as being associated primarily with industrial production: "Capitalism is the form of industrial organization in which [a] split between the owners of capital and the owners of labor dominates the productive process;" "the [Renaissance] merchant was becoming an industrial capitalist." Ibid, 53-54; R&G call Italy "the literary and artistic center of European culture in the fifteenth century." Ibid, 5.

[7] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 22.

knowledge and information exponentially.[8] These developments generated many significant and profound consequences during the Italian Renaissance. Yet this array of very important changes and developments that occurred during this period don't adequately explain why "In Italy all roads were leading to the Renaissance" during the late Middle Ages.[9] According to some Italian Renaissance scholars, there was something inimitable about a group of Italians that were located in Florence, a city-state located in the region of Tuscany in the late Middle Ages. This group of Florentines are believed to have been the first of their European peers to see the world in new and old ways concurrently. They are credited with igniting the Renaissance spark that spread like wildfire throughout Europe from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries. But what made the geographical city-state of Florence so extraordinary that it became the birthplace of that legendary Renaissance spark?

Many scholars agree that Florence was the locus of the advent of the Italian Renaissance. It's the place where Humanism – a distinguishing characteristic of the Renaissance - first emerged. Florence was the Bohemian Paris of the late Middle Ages: It was the place where thinkers and artists from all over Europe congregated to philosophize about humanist ideals and their "golden age."[10] As the Florentine Humanist movement spread, Florence became the prototype for emulation for the rest of Italy, and eventually, the rest of Europe.[11]

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[8] A sixteenth century figure named Loys Le Roy wrote in 1575 about the invention of the compass and how it made possible the discovery of "the new world" by two Italians: "Cristoforo Colombo the Genoese," and "Amerigo Vespucci the Florentine." Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 99; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 1-10, 18-25, 29-31; The famous work by Thomas More titled *Utopia* was inspired by the trans-Atlantic voyages to the New World, as well as Plato's *Republic.* Ibid, 86, 140-145.

[9] Will Durant, *The Renaissance: A History of Civilization in Italy from 1304-1576 A.D.* (New York: MJF Books, 1953), 48; Gene A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1969), 56; Burke, *IR,* 249.

[10] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 69, 110-111, 120, 229.

[11] Durant states, "The Renaissance was not a period in time but a mode of life and thought moving from Italy through Europe with the course of commerce, war, and ideas." Durant, *The Renaissance*, 69; Ibid, 81, 86.

Florence was blessed with several unique characteristics in the late Middle Ages. In 1338, one Florentine chronicler estimated the population of Florence to be 100,000 strong, making Florence the fifth largest city in Europe at that time.[12] As might be expected of a large city, it had many cosmopolitan features.[13] It was the home to many prominent individuals who were either native Florentines or relocated there: Marsilio Ficino, Leonardo da Vinci, Dante Alighieri, Niccolo Machiavelli, Giovanni Boccaccio, and many others. It was also the place where the notable Italian Humanist and "Father of Christian Kabbala," Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, (henceforth, "Pico") relocated and lived until his death in 1494.[14]

During the Middle Ages, Florence was located on a main route frequented by merchants and travelers coming from the north across the Apennine mountains, heading to Rome and other locales.[15] As a result of its advantageous location, Florence became an important tourist site and hub for various sorts of travelers including merchants, artists, and religious pilgrims on their way to Rome. Italian Renaissance scholar, Peter Burke, states that during this period, the economy and culture reflected one another and that artists, artwork, and ideas "followed the trade routes."[16]

Florence launched itself with its cloth industry in the thirteenth century which created both economic and population explosions, and became, according to Burke, "the industrial town *par*

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[12] Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 25, 51; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 70. Another Florentine called 'Villani' estimated the population in 1343 to be 91,500.

[13] Durant states "by common consent," Florence was "the cultural capital of Italy" during the Renaissance. Durant, *The Renaissance*, 69; Idel, *KII*, 234. Idel states the open-mindeness of the Florentine intellectual circle made possible the study of ancient Pagan occult and Jewish mystical works that emerged during the Italian Renaissance.

[14] Burke, *IR*, 51, 64, 77; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 29; Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah,* trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), vii; Idel, *KII*, 234. Idel locates the emergence of Christian Kabbala in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century; cf. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987), 196-197.

[15] Gene A. Brucker, *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study*, (New York: Harper & Row, Inc., 1971), 3.

[16] Burke, *IR*, 239.

excellence."[17] New business models that developed in Italy were "unusually well developed…particularly in large cities such as Florence, Rome and Venice, where so much of what we call the Renaissance was taking place."[18] As a result of this industrial development, many Florentines became excessively wealthy and numerous jobs were created, leading to an influx of immigrants that effectively quadrupled Florence's population. Florence also became top ranked for its financial banking services. Many Florentine entrepreneurs amassed large fortunes in the banking industry. A group of merchants connected with the papacy inherited the tax collection arm of the Holy See and used this connection to create a monopoly in international banking and trade. These activities generated much prosperity for Florence in the first half of the fourteenth century.[19] But a chain of events in the mid-fourteenth century deeply impacted Florence's economy. One major economic crisis was the loss of revenue from Florence's two largest mercantile companies that went bankrupt. Another was a string of plagues.

Plagues made their way to Florence in 1340 and reoccurred in approximate ten-year intervals throughout the remainder of the fourteenth century, killing thousands each time and causing tremendous political, social, and economic consequences. The most momentous plague, called the Black Death, hit Florence in 1348 and is estimated alone to have killed somewhere between 40,000 and 100,000 people. The plagues effectively wiped out half the Florentine population and spawned manifold repercussions. Wars and famines ensued. Families and businesses were decimated. Unemployment was rampant and wages were low.[20] It has been estimated that approximately one-third of the market was lost during this time. Yet through

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[17] Burke, *IR* 235; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 58.
[18] Burke, *IR* 239.
[19] Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 53-54, 85; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 70; Burke, *IR* 236, 238; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 48.
[20] Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 26, 48-50, 55; Rosemary Horrox, ed. and transl., *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 26-34; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 45-46.

decades of loss and suffering, Florentines still managed to remain resilient. They strongly relied on their faith and their entrepreneurial spirit to pick up the pieces and rebuild their economy. By the mid-fifteenth century, Florence was back to having a leading role in the commercial and industrial markets and was considered a wealthy city by contemporaneous standards.[21] Renaissance scholar, Will Durant states, "The amazing growth and zest of Italian trade and industry had gathered the wealth that financed the [Renaissance] movement, and the passage from rural peace and stagnation to urban vitality and stimulus had begotten the mood that nourished it."[22] During the Renaissance period, (circa fourteenth century to mid-sixteenth century) travelers visiting Florence would have encountered a complex society that comprised a cosmopolitan vibe juxtaposed with a parochial mindset. Florentine aristocracy of this period found themselves grappling with clinging to the conventional corporate social structure while simultaneously embracing an emerging capitalistic economy. The Italian Renaissance scholar, Gene Brucker, calls this dilemma "fundamentally irreconcilable" since a corporate structure is inherently a group social structure while a capitalistic structure relies on individualism and, based on the degree of success, leads to changes to individual circumstances, including changes to social class that were largely unobtainable within the corporate structure.[23] According to Brucker, the Florentine patriciate entrepreneurs who survived the catastrophes of the 1340s were "a hardy group" who were astute and intelligent, and their endeavors laid the foundation for the "brilliant cultural achievement of the fifteenth century."[24]

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[21] Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 56, 87, 203; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 69.
[22] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 48.
[23] Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 90.
[24] Ibid, 56.

Chapter Two: The Renaissance Makers

In spite of all the economic achievements of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Florence still faced some serious challenges. Florentine banking and mercantile markets were shrinking as a result of European competitors.[25] These economic changes had a deflating effect on the entrepreneurial spirit of many Florentines, but at the same time that the economy was seemingly taking a downward turn, new and inimitable social and cultural trends were developing in Florence, especially among the patriciate class. These new trends are now considered by scholars to be the defining features of the Italian Renaissance. According to Brucker, it was the patriciate class of Florentine society that literally created the Renaissance.[26] Italian Renaissance scholar, Peter Burke, concurs with Brucker that the Renaissance movement began with a small group of extraordinarily competitive and ambitious Florentines who were innovators and attacked many traditional ideals.[27] But what made these trend-setting individuals so unique and why are they bestowed with the distinguishing title of 'Renaissance-makers' by both Brucker and Burke? To answer these questions, the demarcating elements must first be determined that would qualify one as a member of the fifteenth century Italian Patriciate. According to Brucker's assessment, those elements are pedigree, wealth, and prestige. But beyond these standard Patriciate qualifications, Brucker argues that Florence's aristocracy also possessed some qualities that were distinct from their fellow Italian citizens. Florentine patricians transmuted their idiosyncratic traits into distinct values, ideologies, and lifestyles that eventually became the prototype for the 'Renaissance Man' and the Renaissance ethos.

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[25] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 116; Durant states British textile trade caused "economic depression" in Florence. Ibid, 143.

[26] Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 88, 90.

[27] Burke, *IR*, 249; cf., Idel, *KII*, 234. Idel assigns the emergence of the Renaissance to the small intellectual circle surrounding the Medicis.

Brucker's work suggests that the conflation of the geographical and circumstantial milieus (i.e., disasters, crises, and triumphs) up to the last half of the fourteenth century laid the foundation for the unique Renaissance ethos and ideology that emerged among the patriciate class in Florence, although it certainly did not remain contained within this class. Wealthy members of the middle-class began to compete with the 'old nobility' and used Humanistic endeavors and ideals to support their cause.[28] Durant counters Brucker and argues bourgeois money funded the Renaissance: Bankers, sea-faring merchants, traders, and artisans who earned enough money to buy offices, art, and fashionable consumer goods. "The funds of merchants, bankers, and the Church paid for the manuscripts that revived antiquity."[29] Rice and Grafton state Humanist scholarship "provided many members of the elite with a middle way."[30] By this, they mean the revision of the traditional perception of the bourgeois lifestyle of the merchant. Status and prestige had long been reserved only for those with suitable familial affiliations. The Patriciate class was a closed-society. But with the rise of the wealthy merchant, upward mobility of class appeared achievable, as long as other societal expectations were met.[31] The Humanists laid out these measures in their writings. Virtue became a noble trait that anyone could cultivate: It was no longer an inherited trait. The fifteenth century Florentine Humanist, Leon Battista Alberti, captured the essence of this Humanist ideology in his writings. He emphasized the need for a humanist education in order to cultivate virtue. He also defended the occupation of the merchant that had the reputation of being tainted and a fraud. He argued a merchant could use his wealth to earn fame, esteem, nobility, and dignity.[32] In a letter to his children titled *On Virtu and Fortune,*

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[28] Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 90; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 48.
[29] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 68.
[30] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 62.
[31] Ibid, 67, 69.
[32] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 107; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 62, 64.

Alberti conveyed the quintessential views of the self-aware and assertive Italian Renaissance Man.[33] Seeking to explain to his children the keys to honor and success, Alberti states, "But if anyone wishes to investigate carefully what it is that exalts and increases families and also maintains them at a high peak of honor and felicity, he will clearly see that men are themselves the source of their own fortune and misfortune, nor indeed will he ever conclude that the power of gaining praise, wealth, and reputation should be attributed to fortune rather than to ability."[34] He goes on to say that after his sons have read "the sayings and examples of these good men of antiquity, and noted the fine customs of our ancestors, the Alberti, will be of the same mind, and will decide for yourselves that as ability goes, so goes our fortune."[35] The keys were hard work and no time wasted.[36]

Burke argues that it's necessary to understand the geographical milieu of Italy prior to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in order to understand the developments of these centuries since geography impacts society and culture.[37] One way in which geography influenced Italian society and culture during the Middle Ages is the central location of the Italian peninsula which gave Italian merchants a trade advantage. Venice was especially notable as one of the top merchant cities of this period. It served as a central port between Europe and large merchant cities of the east. Italian merchants served as middlemen between the eastern and western shores. As a result of the upsurge of the commercial trade industry in the early part of the fourteenth century, there was also a population upsurge in numerous Italian cities. Another consequence of these commercial developments was an increase in the number of educated laypeople. Education and

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[33] Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 328.
[34] Ibid, 329-330.
[35] Ibid, 331.
[36] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 63, 65.
[37] Burke, *IR*, 17.

literacy were necessities in urban environments among the middle classes where merchants and businessmen had to run their businesses and manage their financial affairs. Although the mid-1300s were filled with hardships such as plagues and political turmoil across the peninsula, the tradition of education combined with urbanism fueled the Renaissance period.[38] Nonetheless, Burke and Durant conclude that during this period - contrary to Jacob Burckhardt's assessment - Italy was not unified politically, socially or culturally, although Italians did share a concept of *Italia* simply more-or-less as a 'geographical expression.'[39] According to Durant, "The fragmentation of Italy favored the Renaissance."[40] But Burke argues that the changes and innovations that developed in Florence and spread across the Tuscan region during this period helped to close the social and cultural gaps and bring more national unification to Italy as Tuscany became the Renaissance model for emulation across Italy and beyond.[41] Burke cites some compelling statistics to buttress his argument for Tuscany as the Renaissance epicenter. According to one study, Tuscany, while comprising only ten percent of the total population of Italy during this period, produced twenty-six percent of the creative elite males.[42] To put this into perspective, the Veneto (northeastern region that includes Venice) had the second highest amount of creative elite males at twenty-three percent but the Veneto had twenty percent of the total Italian population. That's twice the size of Tuscany's population, yet Tuscany nonetheless produced more creative elites per capita. In Burke's view, "It is also clear that, on these criteria, Tuscany is well ahead of the others."[43] As interest in the new ideas that became known as the

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[38] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 6, 133; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 282. Burke, *IR*, 17, 235.

[39] Burke, *IR*, 18; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 44; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 132-135. Italy was divided into three regional spheres in the high Middle Ages.

[40] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 46.

[41] Ibid, 46, 229; Burke, *IR*, 31.

[42] Burke, *IR*, 49; Burke includes various groups in his use of the term, 'creative elite,' e.g., painters, sculptors, writers, scientists, humanists, et al. Ibid, 47.

[43] Burke, *IR*, 49.

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Humanist movement spread, other social changes began to occur as well. Some areas saw a decrease in diversities that had formerly been delineated by regions. With the immeasurable help of the new printing technology, new ideas crossed borders and boundaries and were replacing many distinctive traditional ideas with the popularization of a new common culture and *lingua franca*.[44] Rice and Grafton state, "We call such attitudes cultural nationalism."[45]

The cultural changes in the areas of literature and art styles during this period became more unique, challenging, and complex. The status of arts and artists rose, as did the study of humanities and liberal arts. Artists, for the first time, began to develop reputations for their individual artistic styles and skills. Burke suggests that another plausible reason Italy became the epicenter for the emergence of the Renaissance is because innovation is more welcome in places where dominant traditions haven't solidified. He uses the gothic style of architecture as an example. The gothic style had penetrated deeply in other areas such as France and Germany, but not in Italy.[46] This allowed Italians to more easily shed medieval styles for ancient architectural styles and to fuse these with contemporary forms without a sense of betrayal to specific traditions. Yet Burke states his assertion does not mean to imply that Italians had no respect for traditions. He argues instead that Renaissance Italians expressed their rejection of medieval traditions for styles and traditions of the classical period.[47] However, although contemporary artists of the Renaissance period saw themselves as reproducing ancient art styles, in reality, they were simply borrowing certain stylistic features and aspects from both the ancient and medieval periods while not actually adhering completely to either one. Burke uses examples found in both

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[44] Burke, *IR*, 17, 249-250; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 119. The first printing press in Florence was in 1471.

[45] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 135.

[46] Burke, *IR* 21, 249-252; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 24, 28, 87.

[47] See Rice & Grafton, *Foundations*, xiv. R&G argue medieval Gothic architecture was deemed outmoded in Rome during the sixteenth century; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 67.

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art and literature. Botticelli's paintings of the ancient Pagan goddess, Venus, for example, are hardly discernable from his paintings of the Madonna. Literature follows a similar pattern: Many Humanists who criticized Scholastics and endorsed classical philosophy were nonetheless well-read in medieval scholastic philosophy.[48] Burke calls this renaissance trend "cultural hybridity" and credits Florentines with creating a "tradition of innovation."[49] Nevertheless, a fervor for all things classical became a defining element of the Renaissance movement while innovations were downplayed. Burke calls this tendency toward innovation while also downplaying innovation, a paradox. In Florence, for example, changes were considered bad because they impacted the reputation of the city.[50] A 'rebirth' movement would not be authentic if it were concurrently promoting change and innovation.

During the Renaissance, most writers and artists tended to be from either Florence or Venice. In Burke's view, artists flourished in Italy during the Renaissance because they experienced less frustrations and social obstacles. In other words, more freedoms equate to more successes. Italy and the Netherlands were the two regions in fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe that had the highest concentration of urban centers. Similar to Bohemian Paris that developed in the nineteenth century, Burke argues that artists flourish when they gather in urban environments. This made the craft-industrial city-state of Renaissance Florence an especially ideal environment for artists. Once Venice moved its economy from trade to industry in the late fifteenth century, it too became a favorable environment for artists. Burke correlates this trend with the competitive nature of republics, which they both were. Burke suggests this competitive nature catalyzed

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[48] Burke, *IR*, 22-23.
[49] Burke, *IR* 4, 22; See Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, xi, xiii. R&G argue this was a period of tradition and innovation flourishing concurrently and as counterpoints to one another "in every sphere of life."
[50] Burke, *IR* 21, 202.

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ambitions thus providing the right milieu for writers and artists to hone their skills.[51] Florence was also favorable for social mobility since it was a city run by shopkeepers and artisans.[52] Burke describes the atmosphere of Florence as a shopkeepers' village that welcomed artists and where artists were often acquainted with one another. He also theorizes that the reason Florence stood out as a city that embraced artists was because "It was probably easier for achievement-oriented merchant cultures to recognize the worth of artists and writers than it was for birth-oriented military cultures such as France, Spain and Naples."[53]

Burke calls Florence and Venice "Renaissance cities *par excellence*."[54] Both of these cities managed to maintain their independence during a time when other city-states in Italy had not. Yet while Venice was largely stable politically, Florence was prone to political turmoil and leadership upheavals.[55] Burke states in Florence, "change was the norm."[56] It seems easy to suggest that being accustomed to change could have much to do with the reason Florentines were more open to the paradoxical novelty of the Renaissance movement than the Venetians who took longer to embrace it. Renaissance Italy tended to be more wealthy and more advanced than the rest of Europe in scholarly, artistic, and political realms. Burke suggests a possible parallel exists between artistic and political innovative tendencies during this period.[57] To buttress his argument, he cites sociologist Norbert Elias' conclusion that the Italian Renaissance "illustrates the links between 'state formation' and 'civilization'."[58]

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[51] Burke, *IR*, 53-54, 228; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 133.
[52] Burke, *IR* 231, 234; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 50; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 143.
[53] Burke, *IR,* 229, 234.
[54] Ibid, 220.
[55] Ibid, 220-222.
[56] Ibid, 221.
[57] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 69, Burke, *IR*, 221, 227.
[58] Burke, *IR*, 227.

The work of scholar, Hans Baron, suggests a similar link between political turmoil and cultural formation. In his tome, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance,* Baron cites a major political event that occurred in Florence in the year 1402 that he asserts contributed to the development of that generation. The Visconti duke of Milan had led his army to capture numerous cities on the periphery of Florence and was closing in on Florence when he died suddenly in 1402.[59] According to Baron, Leonardo Bruni, the chancellor of Florence, played a pivotal role in the development of this new Florentine generation through his published writings. During the Milan crisis, Bruni referenced parallels between classical antiquity and the war with Milan. When addressing the threat to loss of liberty, Bruni recalls the ancient past during the glorious period of the Roman Republic, then describes the aftermath of that period: "After the Republic had been subjected to the power of a single head (paralleling Roman emperors and the Visconti duke), those outstanding minds vanished" (implying the great minds of Florence will disappear under the despotism of Visconti).[60] Burke argues that around the same time of Bruni's published writings, Florentine visual arts experienced an abrupt shift toward a rebirth of ancient art styles. He also asserts that the artists of this period were of "an impressionable age."[61] Moreover, the development of the Humanist movement also appears to be linked to this Florentine generational crisis.[62] This can be seen in the form Humanism took that parallels Bruni's reminiscence of the ancient period and his call for a return to that incomparable time for study and emulation in an attempt to restore Florence to its greatness by recreating Florentines in the image and ideals of their nonpareil ancestors. Rice and Grafton argue that the end of the

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[59] Burke, *IR*, 243; See Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 132-135.

[60] Burke, *IR*, 32, 243; Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 128; R&G state humanists had a better understanding of the classics due, in part, to the parallels between the challenges of their time and those of the ancients which "made many ancient solutions relevant to contemporary needs." Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 87.

[61] Burke, *IR* 243.

[62] Burke, *IR* 243.

medieval "priestly feudal society" that was controlled by a small impenetrable group had much to do with the emergence of the Humanist tendency to look beyond that period - in which they felt no connection with - to the time of the ancients.[63] As Bruni's work suggests, Humanists saw many parallels between the challenges they faced and those of their ancient ancestors, therefore, they relied on classical works for inspiration and instruction.

In the early part of the Renaissance period, in the urban environs, aside from the disadvantaged poor day laborers who had few opportunities for advancement, there were two distinct cultures. Artists and craftsmen received their training in apprenticeship roles through workshops and, along with professionals and skilled workers, went on to join guilds. Intellectuals and elites, on the other hand, attended universities where an educational method called Scholasticism was taught. Scholasticism was a theologically-centered method of teaching and study developed in the Middle Ages and taught by clerics who were also known as Scholastics. But with the emergence of Humanism, a second educational path became available. The inspiration for this new educational and cultural training is often attributed to two fourteenth century Tuscan figures, Francesco Petrarch of the Florentine territory of Arezzo and Giovanni Boccaccio of Florence.[64] Durant calls Petrarch "the Father of the Renaissance" and "the first Humanist."[65] A sixteenth century figure named Loys Le Roy wrote in 1575 that Petrarch was the first person to work on restoring the ancient Latin language.[66] Petrarch, "the most famous poet of his age," was obsessed with the recovery of classical poetry and literature, and with the

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[63] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 87.

[64] Burke, *IR*, 56, 62; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 55, 78; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 46, 71.

[65] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 3, 9, 48; Bruni states, "Petrarca was the first who had such grace of talent, and who recognized and restored to light the ancient elegance of style which was lost and dead…" Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 128.

[66] Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 93.

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illustrious authors of Roman antiquity including Cicero, Seneca, and Virgil.[67] His unceasing

search for, and encouragement of, ancient Latin and Greek works inspired a "revival of interest

in antiquity."[68] Durant states classical Pagan works contained liberal ideology that influenced

Humanists by "undermining medieval dogmas and morality."[69]

The term 'Humanism' implied the study of a virtuous humanist curriculum, called *studia*

humanitatis, that included physical training, rhetoric (the study of eloquent speaking and

writing), grammar (classical Latin and Greek), mathematics, moral philosophy (especially Plato),

classical literature, history, and other liberal arts subjects. Humanists were expected to attend a

Humanist school or academy. The study of classical Latin was central to the Humanist education.

Knowledge of Latin was also a cultural symbol used to distinguish the educated elite from all

others.[70] Humanists were outspoken in distinguishing themselves from Scholastics. With *dignitas*

as the emergent Humanist ideal, Humanists charged Scholastics with corrupting the pristine

Latin language and Christian piety, and their Scholastic teaching style with being an outmoded

method.[71] The goals of the Humanist education were: To train *man* to be the best possible

version of himself (*dignitas*) through an understanding of his free will and intermediary status

between heaven and earth; To amend the Latin language to its uncorrupted classical form prior to

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[67] Durant, *The Renaissance,* 5, 7.

[68] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 8-9, 78-79; Loys Le Roy noted in 1575 that the West had recovered the excellence of the ancients in various arts and languages. He states, "The sustained industry of many learned men has led to such success that today this our age can be compared to the most learned times that ever were." Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 91.

[69] Durant, *The Renaissance,* 48.

[70] Lorenzo Valla argued ancient Latin language "made it possible for them to no longer be barbarians" and was the key to thriving studies and disciplines. Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 131, 134; Burke, *IR*, 58, 61; Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), xiv.

[71] Burke, *IR*, 60; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 20, 22-24, 77-89, 104-107; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 80, 85, 121; In his letter to Pope Leo X in 1517, Erasmus of Rotterdam predicted that in "this our age-which bids fair to be an age of gold…" Christian piety, intellectual learning, and "public and lasting concord of Christendom" would be restored. Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 83.

the time of the Scholastics; To bring about a rebirth, or re-emergence of a virtuous civil society patterned after the ancients through the study of the glorious classical period.[72] According to Rice and Grafton, "Humanism was the most important single intellectual movement of the Renaissance" and the cultural ideals of the Humanists held sway over "all educated men."[73] Humanists expressed this sentiment by calling their era a "golden age."[74] Marsilio Ficino stated in 1492, "For this century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts, which were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre, and all this in Florence."[75]

   Durant agrees that Humanists maintained intellectual dominance for at least a century and turned "the mind of Italy…from religion to philosophy, from heaven to earth," and made man the central focus of study.[76] Durant also asserts that while many Humanists remained pious Christians, some Humanists no longer believed in Christian theology but saw it as yet another mythical tale, some rejected it outright, and at least one figure named Marsuppini became an atheist.[77] Scholasticism, on the other hand, focused on the study of theology, law, medicine, Aristotelian and medieval philosophy. The empiricist, Leonardo da Vinci, duly charged the

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[72] Ficino composed a work in the last half of the fifteenth century in which he describes the role of man as the intermediary between nature and God: "a vicar of God" and "a kind of God," if man had the right materials, he too could create the heavens. Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 387-389; Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 88-89, 104-109; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 77-78, 85.

[73] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 24, 78.

[74] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 81.

[75] Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 79.

[76] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 77-78.

[77] Ibid, 80-85; "For a time [Ficino] lost his religious faith; Platonism seemed superior," Ibid, 121; cf., Lucien Febvre's *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1982), 336, for a counter-argument in which he states, "Christianity was the very air one breathed in what we call Europe and what was then Christendom."

Scholastics with having "too much theory" and relying solely on logical methods to derive at truth in lieu of sound mathematics and experimentation.[78]

When studying Renaissance society and culture, it's important to keep in mind that terms used during that period such as 'individual,' 'science,' 'literature,' and 'art,' had different meanings than they do in our period. Burke asserts that even the term 'Rebirth' used by Renaissance Italians was not synonymous with the modern idea of the term 'Renaissance' now used to describe this period.[79] Durant states contemporaries of this period "were too near the event to see the Rebirth" and that their definition of 'Rebirth' (*'Rinascita'*) was "a triumphant resurrection of the classic spirit after a barbarous interruption of a thousand years."[80] Burke also argues that Jacob Burckhardt explained much of the cultural and social aspects of the Italian Renaissance according to posterity. Burke's work is intended to revise some of Burckhardt's social and cultural assumptions in his magnum opus, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* which is now more than one hundred and fifty years old. Burke states that based on scholarly work that has been done since that time, Burckhardt's view of the Italian Renaissance as a modern movement now appears anachronistic. [81] Durant, also a nineteenth century scholar, concurs with Burckhardt's view of the Renaissance as a modern movement and asserts that the fourteenth century Italian poet, Franceso Petrarch, could be called the first man of modernity because he inspired a turn toward classical culture and a shift in emphasis from the supernatural to the mortal pleasure and glory of man while the new cultural movement of the Humanists moved Europe from "medievalism to modernity."[82]

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[78] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 18-23, 88.
[79] Burke, *IR*, 1, 6, 18; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 115.
[80] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 67.
[81] Burke, *IR*, 1, 18, 35-36.
[82] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 9, 86.

Another term often used by scholars to describe the Renaissance period that Burke finds problematic is 'secularism.'[83] When comparing the Middle Ages to the Renaissance period, the Renaissance culture is sometimes perceived as secular by scholars. Burke argues that the term 'secularism' is at risk of being overstated with regard to Renaissance culture because "secularization means only that the minority of secular pictures grew somewhat larger."[84] Secular artwork produced in the early sixteenth century was about twenty percent of all artwork produced for this period, whereas in the previous century, the amount of secular artwork produced was only around five percent.[85] Burke argues that contemporaries of the Renaissance did not clearly distinguish between sacred and secular arts but Durant argues although art was still used primarily to explain biblical Christianity to the illiterate masses, the Humanists "gave art a secret secular leaning."[86] Burke states evidence shows that those who purchased art during this period did so for "piety, pride, or pleasure:" They collected art for personal enjoyment and as a status symbol, but they also purchased art, i.e., sacred images, to convey their piety.[87]

Based on a post-modern worldview, the cultural arts of the Renaissance period may *appear* more secular, but it's unclear if that would have been their viewpoint. Burke states they were "…continually sanctifying the profane and profaning the sacred."[88] Thus to assert that their cultural "rebirth" was a secularized movement based on their cultural productions could be seen as fundamentally incongruous with their own viewpoints and their evident Christian convictions.

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[83] Durant, *The Renaissance,* 68. Durant argues secularism occurred as a result of the enhanced status of the bourgeoisie who augmented the Humanist ideal of education and knowledge.
[84] Burke, *IR*, 27.
[85] Burke, *IR*, 27.
[86] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 86.
[87] Burke, *IR*, 239-240; See Burke, *IR*, 133 where Burke states "The most obvious use of paintings and statues in Renaissance Italy was religious;" p. 151, Burke argues that art as an increasingly important mode of pleasure was "one of the most significant changes in the period."
[88] Burke, *IR*, 27-28.

Eugene Rice states that during this period, "every man took religion seriously."[89] Case in point: A principal objective of Humanists was to restore Christian piety that Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam charged the Scholastics with corrupting.[90] Rice and Grafton call Humanists "good Christians."[91] Nevertheless, although there were many more images of the Virgin than Pagan images produced during this period, Rice and Grafton argue that Renaissance artists gave classical images classical meaning in contrast with their medieval predecessors who gave classical images Christian meaning. In addition to the apparent increase in secularization of the visual arts, new secular attitudes toward economic wealth, literature, and history developed during this period.[92]

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[89] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, xiv; For further discussion, see Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief*, 336; John Edwards, *The Jews In Christian Europe: 1400-1700,* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 7. Edwards debates whether it is possible to create a secular history study of the Early Modern period and concludes that religion is too intertwined with society during this period to produce such a study.

[90] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 80-81.

[91] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 94.

[92] Ibid, 60-61, 82-85. Renaissance historians secularized the writing of history in contrast to medieval historians who wrote history in theological terms; the classics were approached as either historical works or works meant to be read for pleasure whereas in the Middle Ages, they were allegorized with Christian meaning; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 81.

Chapter Three: Good Christian Occultists

Contrary to the ostensive trend toward secularization, evidence that Renaissance Italians still largely saw their world through a Christian lens exists in many types of extant documents, including secular commercial documents and private letters. God dictated the outcome of all events – both good and bad. When things went well, God provided protection. When disasters occurred, God punished His children.[93] Another area of cultural development that occurred during this period where the trend toward secularism seems to have reversed itself is within the Christian Humanist occult movement which encompassed the study of Kabbala, magic, alchemy, and other esoteric modalities. Scholarly analysis of secularism in the Renaissance needs to be expanded to explore the perceptions and ideas of this group. To be sure, not all Humanists were Occultists (e.g., Erasmus of Rotterdam) but for those who were, this trend betrays yet another paradox of this time: the transmutation of heretical Pagan occult works (e.g., magic and alchemy) into sacred Christian works.[94] The Renaissance Christian Occultists, such as Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Johann Reuchlin, variously support Burke's conservative view of secularism during this period since this group (with the questionable exception of Giordano Bruno) likely did not consciously believe their interest in, and production of, occult works were secular. They did not approach the Platonic, Hermetic, Orphic, or Kabbalistic works that they studied and/or created as secular works. Rice and Grafton state, "Some Renaissance philosophers defended the divine illumination of the ancients and used as much ingenuity Christianizing Plato

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[93] Burke, *IR*, 191; Horrox, *The Black Death*, 100, 193-194.

[94] Erasmus stated in 1517, "I am afraid that, under cover of a revival of ancient literature, Paganism may attempt to rear its head-as there are some among Christians that acknowledge Christ in name but breathe inwardly a heathen spirit-or, on the other hand, that the restoration of Hebrew learning may give occasion to a revival of Judaism...and I am aware that some persons are secretly sliding in that direction." Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 82-83.

as St. Thomas Aquinas had used harmonizing Christianity and Aristotelianism."[95] According to the extant writings of Occultists, they tended to approach non-Christian or pre-Christian occult works through a Christian lens. In their view, ancient Pagan and Jewish works presaged Christianity thus they were merely tools to be used to confirm Christianity, and once Christianity had been confirmed, the works could then serve as conversion tools.[96] Although it should be assumed that their claims of Christian piety were authentic, another plausible reason Christian Occultists argued so forcefully that classical Pagan and Jewish occult works – especially Platonic works - anticipated Christianity might have been to stay on the right side of ecclesiastical authorities.

Marsilio Ficino, a fifteenth century (1433-1499) early Renaissance Florentine Humanist, studied medicine and Aristotelian philosophy at the University of Florence. He was also a Platonist, a Catholic priest, and an Occultist.[97] His specific occult interest was the use of music in astral magic and one of his writings on magic and astrology titled *De vita coelitus comparanda* ("On Obtaining Life From the Heavens") which was the third book in his three-volume work titled, *Three Books on Life*, was censored by the Church.[98] In a preface to "On Obtaining Life from the Heavens," Marsilio writes, "In all things which I discuss here or elsewhere, I intend to assert only so much as is approved by the Church."[99] Ficino attempted to avoid trouble with the Roman Curia by claiming his composition was merely an interpretation of the works of the classical Greek philosopher, Plotinus: "After this, you too rise, O mighty Guicciardini, and reply

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[95] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 85; cf. Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. C.G. Wallis (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1998), 32.
[96] Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 172.
[97] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life,* trans. Carol V. Kaske & John R. Clark (Binghamton: State University of New York, 1989), 18, 395.
[98] Ibid, 18, 56; D.P. Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic: from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 3.
[99] Ficino, *Three Books*, 241.

to intellectual busybodies that Marsilio is not approving magic and images but recounting them in the course of an interpretation of Plotinus. And my writings make this quite clear, if they are read impartially."[100] He goes on to claim that he only affirms natural magic that seeks the service of celestial beings, not profane magic that includes daemon worship.[101] Clearly, he was trying to avoid a visit from Holy See-appointed Inquisitors. Nonetheless, Ficino's actions do not suggest that he was not a pious Christian. On the contrary, just a brief review of a few of Ficino's beautiful missives reveals that he was a devout Christian priest who steadfastly taught that the way to know God was through divine love. Ficino saw it as his mission to teach others about divine love and believed the only way to truly know the Christian God was by loving Him. He exhorted others to refrain from materiality and to live a virtuous life. According to Ficino, earthly thoughts keep the soul bound to bodily desires which is the inverse to a knowledge of God.[102] It might be accurate to call Ficino a Christian "and then some," but according to Ficino, he was, first and foremost, a Christian.

The Renaissance occult movement emerged as a sub-group within the Florentine Humanist movement in the mid-fifteenth century. If Pico was the "Father of Christian Kabbala," then it could be said that Ficino was the "Father of the Renaissance-Occultist movement."[103] Ficino's efforts paved the way for a long lineage of Occultist successors from Pico, Agrippa, Campanella, Bruno, and many more.[104] This movement was essentially an offshoot of the larger Renaissance movement since the crux of the Renaissance was about reviving many aspects of the illustrious

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[100] Ficino, *Three Books*, 18, 27, 397.
[101] Ibid, 397; D.P. Walker refutes Ficino's claim and states Ficino's Orphic hymns were addressed to demons and "the Neoplatonic sources of his magic were demonic." Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*, x, 45-53.
[102] Marsilio Ficino, *Meditations on the Soul: Selected Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Language Dept. of the School of Economic Science, London, (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1997), ix, 35, 64-66, 128-129.
[103] Idel, *KII*, 234. Idel argues Ficino's synthetic Ancient Theology creation led to the emergence of Pico's Christian Kabbala movement in Italy.
[104] Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*, ix, x.

classical era, as was the occult movement, although Occultists utilized more distinctive ancient works in their revival efforts.

Opinions differ among scholars about specific dates or events that catalyzed the onset of the Renaissance. Some scholars point to the fall of Constantinople in 1453 as the stimulus for the Renaissance.[105] The argument goes that Greek scholars took their knowledge and many of their ancient works and fled Constantinople, making their way to Italy. This event roused interest in ancient works and the Greek language among Italians. Peter Burke refutes this argument by pointing out that Greek scholars were already in Italy prior to this period. The Renaissance figure, Loys Le Roy, notes in 1575 that a Greek scholar from Constantinople named "Manuel Chrysoloras" went to Venice in the fourteenth century and taught the Greek language while there. He also states other Greeks arrived later to continue the advancement of Greek in Italy.[106] In 1438-1439, Byzantine scholars named Gemistos Pletho, Bessarion, and others, attended the Council of Florence, which Durant calls the final stimulus of the Renaissance, that was organized by a key influential figure of the Renaissance, the "Pater Patriae" ("Father of his country") Cosimo de Medici.[107] At the council meeting, Pletho lectured on many ideas found in classical Greek literature, especially Platonic ideas, that had been preserved in Constantinople. Durant states Pletho's lectures during the council effectively replaced Aristotelean philosophy with Platonic philosophy. Shortly thereafter, Cosimo put Ficino in charge of translating works of

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[105] According to Durant, "Several of [the Byzantine Greeks] brought manuscripts of ancient texts [to Italy]…So, by the concourse of many streams of influence, the Renaissance took form in Florence, and made it the Athens of Italy." Durant, *The Renaissance*, 69.

[106] Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 93-94.

[107] Burke, *IR*, 244; Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, 16; Durant states that under Cosimo's rule, "the humanist movement flowered;" his balance of power policy between Milan, Florence, Venice and Naples created an atmosphere of peace for several decades (1450-1492) and allowed for a surplus of wealth that financed the early Renaissance. Durant, *The Renaissance*, 69, 76, 109; Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*, 61-62.

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Plato and Plotinus procured through the Byzantine scholars.[108] Burke affirms the impact of Greek scholars and their ancient works on Italian scholars after the fall of Constantinople but he states, "they satisfied a demand which already existed."[109] A century earlier (1342), the "Father of Humanism," Francesco Petrarch, studied Greek, as did his beloved disciple, Giovanni Boccaccio. Boccaccio also procured a position for a Greek language instructor, Leon Pilatus, at the University of Florence. Additionally, fifty years before Constantinople fell to the Turks, several Humanists traveled to Constantinople and returned with over two hundred Greek manuscripts.[110] Nonetheless, after Cosimo charged Ficino with translating the ancient texts from Greek to Latin in 1462, Ficino not only translated the texts over the next few years but also studied them and created his own occult works based on them. This corpus of ancient works compiled and translated by Ficino became known collectively as Ancient Theology. Thereafter, the popularity of these ancient works spread throughout Italy, as did Ficino's exegetical works on the use of magic and music to contact planetary spirits, as well as other occult concepts. Yet, Ficino's translations and works were not the first and only esoteric works available for study and practice at this time. Extant works by a thirteenth-century predecessor from Spain named Ramon Lull were also wildly popular and very influential during this period and it is alleged that Ficino had access to a well-stocked library owned by a figure named Pierleone Leoni of Spoleto that contained a collection of Lull's works.[111]

Ramon Lull was a notable thirteenth-century Majorcan Christian Missionary who felt called by God to create a great work of literary expression and symbolism that would reveal to

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[108] Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, 16; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 79-80; Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*, 62.
[109] Burke, *IR*, 245.
[110] Bruni states Petrarch's legacy was passed to Boccaccio "as if by hereditary succession." Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 124, 130; Petrarch and Boccaccio met in Florence in 1351 and Petrarch declared thereafter that they "shared a single heart." Durant, *The Renaissance*, 23; Ibid, 43, 78.
[111] Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*, 62; Burke, *IR*, 192-193; Ficino, *Three Books*, 19.

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believers, and especially to infidels, the universal truth of Christianity. Lull's mission began after he experienced spiritual visions around age thirty that compelled him to convert to Christianity. Lull felt his spiritual experience was a call to convert infidels to the one true religion, therefore, he developed a plan that included three action steps: missionary work, setting up schools to teach Arabic to missionaries, and writing a cogent work that would be at once a conversion tool and an irrefutable apology of Christianity. According to his biographers, some years after his conversion, Lull ascended a mountain called Mount Randa for solitude and contemplation of God and while there, God revealed the plan to him for his apologetic work variously known as *Ars major* or *Ars generalis ultima*, but after further formulation, was changed to *Ars compendiosa inveniendi veritatem (The Abbreviated Art of Discovering the Truth)* (henceforth collectively called "*Art*"). Lull also wrote a summarized replica of his *Ars generalis ultima* called *Ars brevis* that he stated was intended to better explain the *Art*. The revelatory experience was life-changing for Lull because he had now received the gift of revelation in the form of the written word. Seeing the revelation as a gift from God, and because divine revelation carries with it a mark of great distinction according to the Abrahamic religious traditions, Lull then became emboldened through God's blessings to use the revelations he had received in his missionary work.[112]

Lull created within his *Art* various mystical techniques called *ars combinatoria* (combinatory art) that strongly resemble Jewish Kabbalistic works.[113] These methods include a

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[112] Amador Vega, *Ramon Lull and the Secret of Life* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2003), 3-4, 11-13, 17, 229, 259-261; cf. Mark D. Johnston's translation of the title, *The Great Universal Art of Finding Truth*, 6, 12; Mark D. Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric of Ramon Lull* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5-7, 10, 13-14, 17, 24; Frances A. Yates, *Lull & Bruno: Collected Essays Vol. 1* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 9, 12; Chaim Wirszubski states, "Jewish traditionalism throve on the idea that all true tradition is ultimately revelation." Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 121.

[113] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 8, 14, 78-82; Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 12-14; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 6.

symbolic alphabet and grammar, the use of allegorical symbols, colors, and geometric shapes

such as a circle, triangle (Trinity symbol), ladder, and tree, as well as a technique using the

divine Names of God, all of which have striking parallels in various Kabbalistic works.[114]

Amador Vega states, "there are therefore grounds to consider these mixed techniques as the basis

for a relationship between Lull and the Cabalists, since they appear in the same temporal and

spatial context."[115] Renaissance occult scholar, Francis Yates states "Lull himself was almost

certainly influenced by Cabala which developed in Spain at about the same time as his *Art*."[116]

Moshe Idel notes that the thirteenth-century king of Castile ordered the procurement and

translation of all Kabbalistic and other Jewish texts which validates Kabbalistic texts existed in

Spain at this time, and it implies plausibility that Lull could have obtained translated copies of

these works.[117]

Yates believes that Lull's *Art* "is perhaps best understood as a medieval form of Christian

Cabala."[118] Lull intended for his *Art* to have universal appeal by including principles shared by

the three great Abrahamic religions. If Jews and Muslims studied and practiced his *Art,* they

would discover the "secret of life" and be convinced that the one true universal religion was

Christianity.[119] According to Vega's research, authors of the Middle Ages saw a deep connection

between reading and life. This connection represented a search for the meaning of life through

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[114] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 80-82. Vega cites the works of prominent Kabbala scholars, Moshe Idel and Gershom Scholem when noting several similarities between Lull's 'ars' and Cabala; Vega states Lull's wheel diagrams are "secured by the Cabalistic use of the attributes of God" and his symbolic use of letters, colors, and Names of God have parallels with Cabalistic works. Ibid, 128, n.8., 229-235; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 6, Ch. 1: 9-77, 89, 101.
[115] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 82.
[116] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 6; Note spelling variations of the term, Kabala/Kabbalah/Cabala, etc., are Anglicized versions of original Hebrew term, קַבָּלָה and vary in accordance with author usage in cited works.
[117] Idel, *KII*, 228.
[118] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 6; Robert Bonfil states the term, "cabala" became representative of the magical and occult version of the Kabbalah. Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), 230-231.
[119] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 14-17, 101-102; Yates states the most important aspect of Lull's Art in his view was its ability to "convert Jews and Moslems by proving to them the truth of the Christian Trinity," Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 4, 6.

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literary expression and symbolism. Using literary tools in the pursuit for self-understanding, this goal could be obtained when one's perception of life experience ascended to a perception of universal awareness. In this space, one would become aware that life is a mystery just waiting to be revealed to those who prove themselves worthy. For medieval Christians, an exemplary life of piety was the way to achieve worthiness.[120] This is the context in which Lull created his *Art*, filled with diagrams and tables, with instructions that would lead the practitioner to spiritual truth, which Vega calls "an art of encountering God."[121] Yates states Lull believed that through his *Art,* one could "ascend the ladder of being and understand the nature of God."[122] But the precondition to uncovering the universal truth is that the practitioner must become a pious and steadfast devotee of Catholicism.[123] Vega asserts, "The *ars luliana* (Lullian art) stands before us, therefore, as a linguistic labyrinth, and in much the same way as among adepts of the Cabal (Kabbala) only the pure of heart - as the Spanish cabbalist Abraham Abulafia advises - are able to master the art of combining the Names of God…" [124] As Vega suggests, Lull's symbolic techniques in his *ars combinatoria* are very similar to the work of Abraham Abulafia, the Sephardic Jew (Jew from Spain or greater Iberian Peninsula) and founder of ecstatic (aka 'prophetic') Kabbala, who happened to be a contemporary of Lull.[125]

Vega states, "Lull's *Dignities* (divine attributes of God found in his work titled *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved[126]*) seem to play a role similar to that of the *sefirah* in what Moshe Idel has called the theocentric-theurgical school of thirteenth-century Cabala (Menahem

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[120] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 1-2, 10.
[121] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 11-12.
[122] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 4.
[123] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 13-14.
[124] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 8, 14, 16.
[125] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 119, 123-125. Abulafia was born in Spain in 1240 (d. circa 1291).
[126] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 13, 180-190.

Recanati's school) in distinction to the ecstatic-anthropocentric school" (Abulafia's school).[127] Vega also mentions scholar Harvey Hames' suggestion that Lull used Abulafia's symbolism and techniques. This link between Lull's *Art* and Recanati's and Abulafia's Kabbala schools later became centrally important to the original works of the quintessential Italian Renaissance figure, Pico della Mirandola.[128]

Lullist Scholar, Mark Johnston states that those who studied and/or practiced Lull's *Art* during the Renaissance assumed his work to be related to Jewish Kabbala.[129] Johnston does not affirm or deny the possibility that Lull used Kabbalistic works as either a starting point or as inspiration when creating his own works, although it has been established that they have undeniable similarities. Johnston just simply states, "the use of diagrams and symbolic notation was commonplace in many branches of medieval Latin and Arabic learning."[130] Interestingly, Johnston does not mention Hebrew works, which would inherently imply Jewish Kabbalistic works. If Johnston had not disregarded medieval Hebrew Kabbalistic works, he would have had to concede the similarities that are difficult to refute. Johnston does mention similarities between Lull's work and Neoplatonic-themed works of the ninth century Irish theologian, John Scotus Eriugena, but states there's no real evidence that shows Lull had access to Scotus's works.[131] Contrasting Johnston's view, Yates is confident that Lull used Scotus's works as one of his main sources for the creation of his *Art*. Vega also points out the similarities between the two authors' works.[132] The Latin version of Lull's *Logic of Algazel* includes a section titled *Additions on*

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[127] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 81.
[128] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 81; In 1575, Loys Le Roy called Pico della Mirandola "the honor of this century." Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 107.
[129] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 14.
[130] Ibid, 16.
[131] Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 9; cf. Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 16.
[132] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 111-112; Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 9.

Philosophy and Theology that describes the secrets of nature in what Vega calls "four philosophical modes of abstraction."[133] This work, according to Vega, is similar to Scotus's four divisions of nature. Yates' research goes a step further and demonstrates, through new scholarly approaches, the previously unrecognized correspondences between Lull's *Art*, Scotus's works, and Kabbala.[134]

Lull had an unusual talent for creating and disseminating what some scholars presume to be original works since he rarely ever cited any sources for his ideas or to support or defend his arguments. However, Yates suggests that since one of Lull's main sources authored by Scotus was actually a forbidden work, this might be the reason he never cited this particular source. Alternatively, Yates states Lull may not have mentioned Scotus's work as a source because he believed the concepts in his *Art* had been revealed to him on Mount Randa, although as her work shows, there are countless similarities that are difficult, if not impossible, to discount between the two works.[135]

Yates lays out the parallels between Scotus's primordial causes (Divine Names that constitute the Word of God) and Lull's *Dignities* in her tome, *Lull & Bruno: Collected Essays Vol. 1*.[136] Then what follows is the surprising assertion that Scotus's ninth-century work *De divisione naturae* influenced Pico's fifteenth-century composition titled *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Scotus argues that the whole universe is within man and that his important position as being at once a divine and earthly creature is what bestows him with dignity.[137] Pico, in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* – in which the title alone betrays a similarity to Scotus' work -

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133 Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 9.
134 Ibid, 9; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 6.
135 Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric*, 5, 14; Vega, *Ramon Lull,* vii; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 114, 116-117.
136 Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 83-87.
137 Ibid, 81, 89.

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has God say to man, "Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have We made thee…Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine."[138]

Scotus wrote his *De divisione naturae* circa 867 to 879. In the twelfth century, interest in his work was renewed and a figure from this period named Honorius Augustodunensis cited Scotus's work and copied large excerpts from it into his own text called *Clavis physicae*. This text is a possible link between Scotus and Lull since it uses similar terminology and a diagrammatic system similar to Lull's system in his thirteenth-century *Art*. Yates states that although Lull had exposure to Neoplatonic influences from three possible sources (Arabic, Jewish, and Christian), evidence points to Scotus and his Pseudo-Dionysian and Augustinian-influenced works as Lull's most likely source since Lull's texts reveal many similar characteristics. Scotus was also influenced by Neoplatonic writings of the theologians of the Greek Christian tradition, especially Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. Lull's *Art* shares many affinities with Scotus's *De divisione naturae* and secondarily through Scotus's work, Pseudo-Dionysius.[139] Yates summarizes her comparisons between Lull's and Scotus's works by stating "…I hope that even from what I have said here the main point is established, namely that the philosophy behind the Arts of Ramon Lull is the Scotist philosophy."[140] Yates also points out that Scotus's philosophy which Lull adopted was already in Christian form. She says Scotus's goal was to "correlate the Greek Fathers and the Christian Neoplatonism of the Names of God which he derived from Pseudo-Dionysius, with the teaching of Augustine, and

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[138] Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 5.

[139] For further discussion on Honorius Augustodunensis, see Karl Kinsella and Lesley Smith, "Honorius Augustodunensis," Oxford Bibliographies, last modified April 28, 2016, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396584/obo-9780195396584-0201.xml; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 80-82, 88-100, 110-112.

[140] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 100.

particularly with Augustine's *De Trinitate*."[141] Pico also references Pseudo-Dionysius in his composition, *On the Dignity of Man* and states Dionysius confirmed that Kabbala was the secret teaching passed down from Moses to Jesus. He also asserts that Kabbala is imbued with Platonic and Pythagorean (Neoplatonic) influences.[142]

Yates states new scholarship shows that "the mysticism of the [Jewish] Cabala is a closely *parallel* phenomenon to the Scotist mysticism" since, in addition to other similarities, the names of the attributes of the sephiroth "are the same as those found in the Pseudo-Dionysian Names." [143] "Though I would not presume to have an opinion on a matter which only Hebrew scholars can decide, I would point out that Cabalism and Lulllism (which we now know to be a form of Scotism) are phenomena which arise in Spain at about the same time."[144] Gershom Scholem's research suggests a work central to Kabbala called the *Zohar* (written circa 1275) was a product of the Kabbala school located in Gerona (Northern Catalonia, Spain).[145] Lull's Mount Randa vision and revelation occurred in 1274. Yates argues the question that should be asked is not whether Lull was influenced by Cabala but if "Cabalism and Lullism, with its Scotist basis, are not phenomena of a similar type, the one arising in the Jewish and the other in the Christian tradition, which both appear in Spain at about the same time, and which might, so to speak, have encouraged one another by engendering similar atmospheres, or perhaps by actively permeating one another."[146] Yates appears to be hinting at that old unanswerable adage, "which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

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[141] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 101.
[142] Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 29ff.
[143] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 111.
[144] Ibid, 112; Idel, *KII*, 300. Idel locates the development of the sefirot concept in early 13th century Spain.
[145] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 112; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 153, 170.
[146] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 112.

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The thirteenth century German theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart, was another figure of this period who was "profoundly influenced" by the works of Scotus and Pseudo-Dionysius.[147] Yates calls Eckhart's form of Scotism "Northern" and Lull's form of Scotism "Southern."[148] Lull transformed Scotus' composition into "geometric forms" and "dry abstractions" in his *Art*, whereas Meister Eckhart's works reflect the mystical and religious aspects of Scotus' oeuvre.[149]

A fifteenth-century German Renaissance Humanist named Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa ('Cusanus'), who was a disciple of the works of both Scotus and Meister Eckhart, was well acquainted with Scotus's *De divisione naturae* as well as Honorius' *Clavis physicae* (based on Scotus' *De divisione naturae*). Cusanus wrote a text called *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* in which he argued that only a few supremely intelligent individuals should have access to these dangerous works.[150] Cusanus was also deeply interested in Lull's works and collected copies of his manuscripts.[151] Yates suggests his interest in Lull was almost certainly due to recognizing Lull's work as another strain of Scotism, the "Southern" form. Cusanus' own work fused both Eckhart's Northern (German) form of Scotism together with Lull's Southern (Spanish) form to develop his *De docta ignorantia*.[152]

An Inquisitor named Nicholas Eymeric went after Lull's works for heresy in 1366, and in the same century, Scotus's *De divisione naturae* was condemned as a result of a professor at the University of Paris named Amalric of Bena whose teachings were based on Scotus' philosophy.

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[147] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 117.
[148] Ibid, 117.
[149] Ibid, 117.
[150] Ibid, 115, 118.
[151] Vega, *Ramon Lull*, 125-128.
[152] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 118-119.

Bena's teachings were apparently too radical so he was charged with heresy and all copies of *De divisione* were ordered to be burned. It is also rumored that this work was a favorite among the heretical Albigensians.[153] Yates latches onto this information and takes it a step further by suggesting this might have been the clandestine mode of transport for Scotus' banned work to enter Spain. Interestingly, Yates tells the story of a prince named James of Mallorca who resided in the same court Lull was raised. Prince James married a woman who was a member of the Esclarmonde family and was the Count of Foix's sister. Another member of this family, Princess of Foix, was a well-known Albigensian 'Perfect' (a membership title). Princess of Foix's castle was the famous castle of Montsegur, the bastion of the Albigensians before their final destruction in 1244. It is believed that just prior to the attack, a few members escaped with some of their sacred texts and headed for the Pyrenees mountains located on the border between France and Spain. Yates asks the question, "may we fancy that amongst the books thus travelling Spain-wards in strange company there were copies of the *De divsione naturae*?"[154] Yates speculates that Scotus' work could have made its way to Lull either through the connection between the Mallorcan court and the French Languedoc courts or during Lull's visits to Montpellier near the Pyrenees. Either way, Yates points out that "It is strange that Lull should not have known that he was basing his *Art* on a banned book."[155]

Lull wrote works in Arabic and Catalan but, according to Johnston, hired translators and secretaries to translate some of his works in Latin so it is uncertain whether he knew Latin well enough to write works on his own in that language, although Vega suggests he did.[156] Lull focused much energy on learning languages and facilitating the teaching of languages to others

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[153] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 114, 117.
[154] Ibid, 115.
[155] Ibid, 116.
[156] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric*, 5-6; Vega, *Ramon Lull,* 136.

because he believed it was the key to winning converts to Christianity. He stated in one of his early works that he planned to "educate laypeople ignorant of Latin or Arabic and to seek knowledge of God above all else."[157] But he also advocated for Latin as a universal *lingua franca* to deal with the problem of diversity in languages that he saw as an impediment to his missionary goals which suggests his knowledge of this language.[158]

Lull expanded his missionary efforts by compiling a number of exegetical sermons in a book that was intended to refute Jewish interpretations of Old Testament scripture and give a corrected Christian interpretation of the scripture to prove "the Jews are wrong."[159] The thirteenth-century king of Castile, Alfonso Sabio, ordered all Jewish texts, including Kabbalistic texts, translated so Christian authorities could explain the correct Christian interpretation of Jewish texts to Jews since "they, like the Moors (Muslims), are in grave error and in peril of losing their souls."[160] Jews were accused of heresy for not interpreting *their* scriptures according to Christian doctrine. In other words, Jews did not acknowledge the Trinity and Incarnation that Christians claimed were prophesied in the Jewish Bible, or 'Old Testament,' according to Christians. Lull felt he could cure Jews of this problem by preaching the correct and true Word to them. To support his mission, in 1299, James II of Aragon granted Lull the right to forcibly preach his prepared sermons to Jews and Saracens (Muslims).[161] These efforts further expanded the accessibility of Jewish mystical works by Christians.

Lull made numerous missionary trips throughout northern Italy. As a consequence, Yates' research shows that Lull's works later became very popular with many notable figures of

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[157] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 7, 9.
[158] Ibid, 9.
[159] Ibid, 167.
[160] Idel, *KII*, 228.
[161] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 168; Vega, *Ramon Lull*, 28.

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the Italian Renaissance. Her findings prompted the following questions: "Why was Lullism so prominent in the Renaissance? Why was Lull so mysteriously important to Pico della Mirandola or to Giordano Bruno? May it not have been because Lullism, and its Jewish relative Cabalism, were medieval traditions to which the modern interest in Neoplatonism could be attached? Hidden within Lullism was Scotus Erigena, the Neoplatonist of the ninth century."[162]

It can be assumed that during his travels, Lull brought his *Art* and his missionary ideas with him to Italy since "manuscripts of his works were early disseminated there" and he had taught his *Art* while in Montpellier around 1275.[163] It is also known that Lull gained a disciple while in Genoa and left this person copies of his works in his will. These events are the likely precursors to the phenomenon that occurred in Renaissance Italy when prominent Occultists of this period and beyond such as Giordano Bruno, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, and John Dee became Lullists: Agrippa used Lull's works in his tome titled *De occulta philosophia*. Bruno used Lull's combinatory circles (wheels) in his work published in 1582 titled *De umbris idearum* (On the Shadows of Ideas). Nicolas of Cusa amassed Lull's manuscripts. And Pico stated Lull's *Ars combinatoria* contributed much to his own works.[164] Yates states "it is perhaps hardly an exaggeration to say that Lullism is one of the major forces in the Renaissance."[165] There are traces of Lullism running all the way through from the works of Pico in fifteenth-century Italy to the works of Gottfried Leibniz in eighteenth-century Germany.[166] Vega calls these figures "Lull's successors in the renaissance and later."[167] One reason Renaissance Occultists linked Lull's works to their newly discovered occult works is because they believed Lull's

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[162] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 119.
[163] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 7, 9; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 67.
[164] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric,* 9; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 7, 67, 129-130, 144.
[165] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 67.
[166] Ibid, 67.
[167] Vega, *Ramon Lull*, 128, n. 8.

compositions contained a key that revealed secret insight into Kabbala, Hermeticism, and other occult traditions. This is because Lull claimed his Universal *Art* was a key that led to Truth.[168] Historian Edward Goldberg makes the notable claim that Lull was "the thirteenth-century founder of Christian Kabbala."[169] But this claim is untenable because if Lull did study and/or use Kabbalistic texts in the creation of his own works - as evidence strongly suggests he did – it begs the question: Why did Lull not leave any traceable evidence or cite any Kabbalistic texts as either sources or merely as inspiration for his works? It seems apparent the reason he never cited any Jewish works is because if he had, it would have contradicted his claim that his works were developed solely from revelations given directly to him by God. This supposition implies that Lull would likely not have seen himself as the "founder of Christian Kabbala," nor would he have wanted to be associated with such a title. Moreover, unlike Pico, Lull did not create any such work that he claimed or even suggested was a form of Jewish Kabbala. Instead, Lull viewed himself as a pious Catholic whose divinely revealed works were intended solely for the purpose of converting Jews and Saracens to the one true religion: Catholicism. It is also presumable, and simultaneously ironic, that Lull would likely not have been pleased to know his works were, in fact, later integrated into Pico's syncretic form of Christian Kabbala that also included magical elements.

In Edward Goldberg's book, *Jews and Magic in Medici Florence*, the main figure, Benedetto Blanis, was a Jew who lived in Florence during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[170] Blanis worked for Don Giovanni de Medici, the son of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de Medici. Blanis was the overseer of Giovanni's library and was charged

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[168] Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric*, 185; Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 7, 11.
[169] Edward Goldberg, *Jews and Magic in Medici Florence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 70.
[170] Ibid.

with the acquisition of, and when necessary, translation of books and manuscripts germane to Giovanni's interests. While Giovanni was living in Venice, Blanis wrote to him several extant letters.[171] In one of his letters to Giovanni, Blanis mentions Ramon Lull's work titled *Book of Raimondo, Regarding the Secrets of the Lapis* (The Philosopher's Stone).[172] Blanis states this book contains an esoteric coded language and appears to be a key to a separate work by Lull.[173] Notably, Blanis also states that the manuscript is in Hebrew rabbinical script. This is problematic because Goldberg cites a tome by scholar, Harvey Hames, titled *Jewish Magic with a Christian Text: A Hebrew Translation of Ramon Lull's Ars Brevis,* in which Hames states Lull did not write any works in Hebrew.[174] This claim coincides with the studies of Johnston and Vega who both state Lull composed works in his native tongue, Catalan, as well as Arabic and possibly in Latin, but their research shows no evidence that he knew or composed any works in Hebrew.[175] Also, some of his Latin compositions were translated by hired assistants, therefore, his proficiency in the Latin language is uncertain, although Vega suggests Lull "probably translated" some works into Latin himself.[176] Nonetheless, Blanis mentions in his letters a priest named Ascanio Canacci whom he states discovered other works called *Chiave Raimondina* (Key to Ramon Lull) and *Quarta Parte di Cornelio* (The Fourth Part of Cornelius).[177] It is unclear precisely when the former work emerged in Italy but if it was available during Ficino's and Pico's generation, it could possibly explain the idea held by early Renaissance Occultists that Lull had - in accord with his own claim - created a "Key" that could reveal the Truth behind the

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[171] Edward Goldberg, *A Jew at the Medici Court: The Letters of Benedetto Blanis Hebreo (1615-1621)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).
[172] Goldberg, *Jews and Magic*, 119, 123,170.
[173] Ibid, 170; Goldberg, *A Jew at the Medici Court*, 179.
[174] Goldberg, *Jews and Magic*, 286-287, n. 28.
[175] Vega, *Ramon Lull*, vii.
[176] Ibid, vii, 8; Johnston, *The Evangelical Rhetoric*, 6.
[177] Goldberg, *Jews and Magic*, 170, 174.

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various esoteric works they had unearthed. The latter work, alleged to be the fourth book of

Cornelius Agrippa's three-volume set of Occult Philosophy, was denounced as spurious by one

of Agrippa's students, Johann Wierus, who stated the "Fourth Book" was published in 1567 and

ascribed to Agrippa, yet according to Wierus, Agrippa had died in 1535, "more than forty years"

(sic) before the publication date.[178] Scholars tend to agree that this work is 'apocryphal' which

supports the assumption that the former work found alongside it could also be fraudulent.[179]

Further support comes from Goldberg who states the alchemical 'philosopher's stone' text was

"a real or alleged work by Ramon Lull."[180] Vega calls alchemical and Kabbalistic works

attributed to Lull during the Renaissance "pseudo-Lullianism."[181] Yates states Lull was not an

alchemist but his successors, "the pseudo-Lullists" used his work "for alchemical purposes."[182]

She argues emphatically that Lull didn't believe in alchemical methods and references his anti-

alchemical views in his work, *Liber principiorum medicinae*. According to Yates, Lull did not

write any alchemical works but "pseudo-Lullian alchemists" used portions of Lull's *Art* in their

works and likely assumed it was also intended to be an esoteric alchemical work with its unique

alchemical-like ideas.[183] Yates mentions a fifteenth-century alchemical pseudo-Lullian

manuscript and states "…I think that there is much of the genuine Lull in such 'pseudo-Lullism'

as this." Yates traces signs of Honorius and Scotus in the manuscript and says, "We have here

what seems like a direct link between a fifteenth-century alchemical work, and the *De divisione*

naturae…" (Scotus's work). She argues that with a scholarly exploration of these links, the

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[178] Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. James Freake, ed., Donald Tyson (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2014), xxxiv; Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*, 96.
[179] See cover page, Agrippa, *Three Books*; Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy: The Companion to Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans., Robert Turner, ed., Donald Tyson (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2009), 1.
[180] Goldberg, *Jews and Magic*, 176.
[181] Vega, *Ramon Lull*, 103.
[182] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 110.
[183] Ibid, 29, 119.

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history of an alchemical lineage might be revealed.[184] So although in the thirteenth century, it is known that Lull made his way into Italy to teach and presumably leave behind many of his works, other occult works – especially those written in Hebrew - that appeared during the Renaissance and attributed to Lull were almost certainly fraudulent works. In addition to Lull's name and some of his works being attributed to alchemy, Yates states that – presumably much to his chagrin – Lull's *Art*, popularized by Renaissance Occultists seeking the esoteric "key" to universal Truth, inadvertently contributed to the re-emergence of magic during this period, especially in the hands of two prominent magi and Lullists, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Giordano Bruno.[185]

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[184] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 120.
[185] Ibid, 7.

Chapter Four: Pico, the *Converso*, and Kabbala: How Ersatz History Was Made

Following Ficino's lead, Renaissance Occultists took classical Pagan occult works and found ways to weave them with Christian themes. According to the Church, the study of astronomy and astrology were permissible as long as they didn't conflict with Church doctrine. Regardless, Pico rejected astrology for religious reasons, but ironically, Pico, along with his friend, Marsilio Ficino, promoted the practice of magic, which the Church most certainly did not permit because "the Church has her own magic; there is no room for any other."[186] Although the Church banned magical practices and often burned books on magic, fascination with all things magical or occult persisted during this period. Pico thought the right kind of magical practice used in conjunction with Kabbala could boost the efforts of the Christian practitioner to experience God and control evil powers. Pico's access to magical works came primarily through Ficino's Latin translations, while his access to Jewish Kabbalistic works was a bit more complicated. Most extant Kabbalistic manuscripts of this period were written in Hebrew, therefore, by necessity, Pico had to hire teachers and translators who knew Hebrew and Latin in order to gain access to these works. Evidence suggests that one of Pico's tutors and translators was a prominent Jewish Kabbalist named Yohanan Alemanno who was also deeply interested in magic, tended toward a syncretic approach in his esoteric ideology, and may have tutored Pico in various occult practices.[187] Another of Pico's translators and tutors in Hebrew and other languages was also a historically noteworthy individual who arguably had the most influence

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[186] Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*, 36. Walker suggests the Catholic Mass produces the magical effect of transubstantiation; Burke, *IR*, 190-191, 195; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 121.
[187] Burke, *IR*, 194-195; Wirszubski, *Pico*, 256-257; Idel, *KII*, 294-295.

upon the beliefs and ideas that Pico formulated in his own original Kabbalistic works. This individual was a *Converso* named Flavius Mithridates.[188]

According to historian, John Edwards, thirteenth-century Catholic Friars in France and Spain successfully converted many Jews who later became known as *Conversos* or 'New Christians.'[189] More specifically, the term '*Converso*' refers primarily to Jews that converted to Christianity either voluntarily or by force in medieval Spain and Portugal. *Conversos* often found themselves in precarious positions in society because gentile Christians held deep suspicions of their New Christian brethren. *Conversos* were often accused of converting merely to gain access to Christian privileges not afforded to Jews or Saracens, or to avoid persecution. In many instances, these accusations were correct. Yet *Conversos* came to realize that conversion did not put an end to Christian suspicions or attacks. *Conversos* were oftentimes necessarily hyper-vigilant about proving their Christian convictions to avoid persecution or accusations by ecclesiastical authorities of apostasy punishable by death.[190] Some *Conversos*, seeking to prove their loyalty to the Church, turned on their former family members and religious cohorts with dangerous accusations of undermining Christianity and "proof" of their religious obstinacy. Undoubtedly, some *Conversos* whole-heartedly embraced their new religion and were sincere in their attacks, but it's also presumable that some *Conversos* used this tactic as a ploy to divert Christian misgivings away from themselves and onto Jews. There's no way to know for certain which *Conversos* were sincere in their attacks or which were merely seeking self-preservation, or possibly to elevate their own social status. Nonetheless, the role of several well-educated

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[188] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah,* (New York: Dorset Press, 1974), 196-197.
[189] Edwards, *The Jews*, 19.
[190] R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 7, 9-10. The Fourth Lateran Council wrote canons to combat *Converso* "false conversions" and Inquisitioners hunted *Converso* infidels for judgment.

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Conversos like Pico's tutor, Flavius Mithridates, are described by Jewish history scholar, David Ruderman, as 'mediators' in the unusual Jewish-Christian intellectual exchanges that took place in Renaissance Italy. [191]

Some *Conversos* maintained good relations with Jews while others became publicly hostile toward their former religious cohorts. During the Renaissance, many well-educated rabbis, Jewish Kabbalists, and *Conversos* were sought out by Christian elites for their tutoring and translation skills. Christians sought translations of a wide range of Jewish texts including the Talmud and Kabbalistic works. Those *Conversos* who were well educated in Hebrew and the interpretation of Jewish texts, but were antagonistic toward Jews, used their knowledge of Jewish doctrine and texts and their skills as translators and tutors as platforms upon which they could attack Jews and the Jewish religion. As tutors and translators, some hostile *Conversos* manipulated translations and interpretations of Jewish texts. In certain instances, they interpolated Christian themes into their translations in order to make the texts appear to reveal and support various Christian decrees.[192] They then used their 'evidence' to prove Jews knew the truth that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah but obstinately suppressed and denied this truth.

In Chaim Wirszubski's tome*, Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, Wirszubski closely analyzes four extant Latin manuscripts that were translated from Hebrew for Pico by his *Converso* tutor and translator, Flavius Mithridates. Wirszubski also examines Pico's Kabbalistic principles found within his own works called *Conclusiones* (aka 900 Theses), *Oration on the Dignity of Man* and *Heptaplus.[193]* The scholar, Paul Oskar Kristeller, who wrote

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[191] David B. Ruderman, ed., *Cultural Intermediaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 11; Edwards, *The Jews,* 20; Scholem, *Kabbalah,* 196-197; Bernard Dov Cooperman, ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 186.
[192] Idel, *KII*, 303-304; Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities*, 174, 187.
[193] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 121; Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 30-34.

the *Introduction* to Wirszubski's tome states that Pico - the legitimate founder of the Christian

Kabbala movement - along with the help of his Jewish and *Converso* tutors, became the first

Christian scholar to obtain a thorough understanding of Jewish Kabbalistic works.[194] Wirszubski

adds that Pico was "the first Christian by birth who is known to have read an impressive amount

of genuine Jewish Kabbala."[195] Pico took this knowledge and combined it with other works to

develop a new Kabbala that was grounded in Christian dogma since, like many of his Humanist-

Occultist cohorts, Pico tended to see non-Christian texts through a Christian lens.[196]

Pico's Christian Kabbala was an original creation that was comprised of Jewish

Kabbalistic sources, Lullian works, and a collection of works known as Ancient Theology that

included Platonic, Neoplatonic Hermetic, Chaldean/Zoroastrian, and Orphic works.[197] While

formulating his Christian Kabbala, Pico adopted the approach of his friend, Marsilio Ficino, who

was a "synthesizer" of a variety of Pagan and Christian sources.[198] Many of the Ancient

Theology works Pico used had been translated from Greek to Latin by Ficino at the behest of the

Florentine rulers Cosimo Medici, and subsequently his grandson, Lorenzo Medici.[199] Lull's

works were, according to Renaissance scholar, Francis Yates, "accepted by Pico della

Mirandola," and were "the natural accompaniment of the Hermetic-Cabalist philosophy which

underlies Renaissance Neoplatonism. In this atmosphere, Lullism took on the magical and occult

flavor of that philosophy."[200]

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[194] Wirszubski, *Pico*, x, xi, 185, 200.
[195] Ibid, 64.
[196] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 85; Also see above pp 20-21, p.21, n.124.
[197] Wirszubski, *Pico*, xi; Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 476.
[198] Ficino, *Three Books*, 39.
[199] Wirszubski, *Pico*, xi; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 109-110.
[200] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 7.

Although Wirszubski credits Pico with being a Christian pioneer in the study of Jewish Kabbala, he also makes clear that for as much as Pico's theses give the appearance that he was well-versed in Kabbalistic doctrines, his writings are actually based on distortions and a false perspective.[201] Even so, Pico's decision to study Hebrew in order to learn Kabbala was "a watershed in the history of Hebrew studies in Europe."[202] Pico was the first known Christian Hebraist to have studied both Hebrew and Chaldean in order to learn Kabbala.[203] Other Christian Hebraists who preceded Pico studied Hebrew but their interests were primarily in obtaining the ability to independently read and interpret sacred Jewish texts such as the Old Testament and the Talmud. But Pico became a pioneer in the sense that he believed Jews were in possession of divine knowledge in the form of ancient Kabbalistic works and, according to Wirszubski, this notion "was unheard of in the Christian world at that time, and, to judge by the history of Christian Kabbala, its effect was overpowering when it first burst upon an unsuspecting public" (i.e., when Pico published his *Conclusiones* intended for public debate).[204]

To be sure, a few Christians had already begun to use Kabbala to confirm Christianity prior to Pico's work. Wirszubski states this practice "may well have been gaining ground" prior to Pico's time.[205] However, Pico's innovation, encapsulated in his 900 Theses "started Kabbala on its long career in the Christian world."[206] Wirszubski assigns three "interwoven" themes to Pico's unique form of Christian Kabbala that distinguish it from its predecessors:[207]

- the relationship between Judaism and Christianity

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[201] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 53.
[202] Ibid, 3, 6.
[203] Ibid, 3.
[204] Ibid, 132.
[205] Ibid, 10.
[206] Ibid, 121.
[207] Ibid, 200.

- the relationship between Christianity and Platonism

- the relationship between mysticism and magic

These themes are directly related to the manifold translated works accessible to Pico, but not to his predecessors. As previously stated, Pico utilized Ficino's Ancient Theology translations, as well as some Lullian works in the formation of his new Kabbala. But more importantly, Pico had access to copious translated Kabbalistic works produced by Flavius Mithridates. Prior to this time, very few Kabbalistic texts translated from Hebrew to Latin or other vernaculars were available. But Mithridates was a prolific translator as is evidenced by the estimated 5,500 translated pages he created which Wirszubski calls "a remarkable feat."[208] Extant sources are around 3,500 pages with the remainder being lost.[209]

Although Mithridates was undeniably a prolific translator, many of his translations betray idiosyncrasies and ideological biases. After close analysis of Mithridates' translations, Wirszubski discovered decisive interpolations. Wirszubski's detailed textual critique shows that Mithridates interpolated verbiage into many of his translations which made the original Hebrew sources appear to be prophetic texts that validated Christianity. In some instances, it appears as though Mithridates included words in the Latin translations that did not exist in the original Hebrew texts, and in other instances, he changed or omitted the original Hebrew in the Latin translations. Although Mithridates had tutored Pico in Hebrew, Pico was not proficient enough to comprehend the symbolism and nuances in Hebrew Kabbalistic texts, which therefore necessitated his reliance upon Mithridates' corrupted translations.[210] According to Wirszubski, it would take years of studying Hebrew to develop the ability to grasp the nuances in the language

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[208] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 10-11.
[209] Ibid, 11.
[210] Ibid, ix, 4-5, 23, 36-37, 69, 76, 106.

which are crucial "for a serious study of Kabbala."[211] Based on the date Pico published his *Conclusiones*, he had not been studying Hebrew long enough to have obtained this degree of proficiency.[212] Wirszubski describes Pico as essentially an outsider striving to appropriate knowledge from a tradition he had not inherited. Pico's deficiency in Hebrew resulted in his inability to recognize changes and interpolations in Mithridates' translations.

In an act of impartiality, Wirszubski points out that Mithridates was not the first *Converso* to use the method of interpolation on Jewish texts to buttress their newfound beliefs. Yet the important difference between this instance and previous instances is that Mithridates' textual corruptions deceived Pico into believing that Jewish Kabbalistic texts did *factually* confirm Christianity, therefore, Pico enthusiastically included the corrupted text in the development of his Kabbalistic works and then went on to publicly pronounce his findings in his published *Conclusiones* and other works. The consequences of this seemingly innocuous action by Mithridates were, in fact, far reaching. Christians suddenly had newfound evidence to buttress and confirm their religious convictions and the proof that they had long claimed existed within the Old and New Testaments. Moreover, Jews could not dispute this evidence since it existed within their own ancient sacred Kabbalistic texts given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai, or so Christians believed.[213] Due to the deceitful actions of his *Converso* translator, Pico precipitously turned Jewish mystical texts into cogent Christian conversion tools. To be sure, Christians (e.g., Ramon Lull) had long forcibly disputed Jews in public debates over the correct interpretation of Jewish texts to prove to the obstinate Jews that they misinterpreted their own texts and should therefore convert to the one true religion. But now, they had even more evidence. Additionally,

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[211] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 3, 6.
[212] Ibid, 4.
[213] Ibid, 110, 121; Idel, *KII*, 230.

the ostensive "truth" discovered by Pico in Mithridates' translations and subsequently incorporated into his Kabbalistic program, were passed down to succeeding generations of Christian Kabbalists and Occultists including Johann Reuchlin, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, John Dee, and several contemporary Christian Kabbala practitioners.[214]

Although Pico's clarity on Kabbalistic doctrine was largely distorted as a result of corrupt translations, as well as texts that were of questionable sources, Wirszubski states Pico managed to obtain a wealth of Kabbalistic knowledge from a translation of the Jewish Kabbalist, Menahem Recanati's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*.[215] Wirszubski also credits Pico with what might be called a phenomenological approach when he states Pico read Recanati's works "with the eyes of Recanati."[216] This allowed Pico to understand certain authentic Kabbalistic texts accurately. Although Pico also included his own speculative views and a wide variety of other sources, a significant number of Pico's theses exhibit a heavy reliance on works by Menahem Recanati and Abraham Abulafia, which implies that an understanding of their works, as well as the other sources he used, is necessary to understanding Pico's version of Christian Kabbala.[217] Wirszubski states that Pico broke new ground by reading more Jewish Kabbalistic texts than any other known "Christian by birth."[218] Wirszubski's reference to "Christian by birth" is presumably pointing to his exclusion of *Converso* Christians since it is apparent based on extant evidence that Hebrew-literate *Conversos* had much more familiarity with, and access to, Kabbalistic texts than gentile-born Christians.

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[214] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 84, 105; Idel, *KII*, 234.
[215] Ibid, 55, 64.
[216] Ibid, 55.
[217] Ibid, 55-56, 59-61, 65, 70, 170.
[218] Ibid, 64.

Flavius Mithridates was responsible for all of the translated manuscripts used by Pico to develop his Kabbalistic *Conclusiones* and new evidence reveals that Mithridates foreshadowed Pico in his view that Jewish Kabbala validated Christianity. Some years before Mithridates produced translations for Pico, he gave a sermon in Rome in front of the pope and cardinals. In this sermon, Mithridates claimed there was ancient secret evidence in the Jewish "old Talmud" that verified the mysteries surrounding the Passion of Christ. But according to Wirszubski's vast knowledge and research, the Hebrew quotes Mithridates referenced in his Latin translations were fictitious. Wirszubski asserts that Mithridates' contrived "evidence" served as a prelude to the textual tinkering in his translations for Pico in which he linked Kabbala with Christianity.[219] This information is important because it betrays Mithridates' biases in his translated texts. Wirszubski calls Mithridates an "arbitrary translator" and states he was "rarely unobtrusive" in the translations he did for Pico.[220] Wirszubski makes the vital point that the translations Pico read were infiltrated with Mithridates' biases and beliefs: "There are significant differences of substance, emphasis, and presentation between the extant Latin translations and the Hebrew originals of Pico's Kabbalistic sources."[221] Many of these differences reveal their impact on Pico's Kabbalistic interpretations and resulting theses.

Mithridates, in Wirszubski's view, was very knowledgeable about Kabbala, including its symbolic language. Wirszubski even calls several of Mithridates' translations "impeccable" but reiterates that the Latin translations and original Hebrew manuscripts show significant variances.[222] As a former Jew who had a great deal of Kabbalistic knowledge, Mithridates would

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[219] Wirszubski, Pico, 61, 69, 106.
[220] Ibid, 69.
[221] Ibid, 69, 76.
[222] Ibid, 73, 76.

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have been well aware that Jewish Kabbala made no reference to Christianity, therefore, the odds that he encountered pre-existing interpolations and corruptions in Hebrew texts that were intended to validate Christianity and didn't recognize them as corruptions are extremely unlikely.

Wirszubski states Mithridates translated parts of scripture Kabbalistically, meaning the translations were intended to capture the symbolic interpretation of the text. Gershom Scholem's explanation of Kabbalistic symbolic language is that any word in scripture can be a mystical symbol. One of the more curious changes that Mithridates made in his translations is the substitution of Hebrew abbreviations with numbers, although he knew well what the abbreviations stood for in the Hebrew language. This is an interesting change because, as Wirszubski points out, language is paramount in Jewish mysticism and Mithridates showed his excellent capacity to comprehend the symbolically sublime nature of the Hebrew language according to Kabbalists.[223] Moshe Idel states Mithridates was possibly the last of Abulafia's disciples and that Abulafia, as well as other Italian Kabbalists, tended to "[emphasize] the special nature of the Hebrew language," which shows that Mithridates must have understood the significance of Hebrew in Kabbala.[224] Yet, it was as though Mithridates sought various ways to further obscure the original meaning of the Hebrew text in his translations: "Mithridates explicitly reverses the true order of things: he states that the numbers are indicated by letters, whereas in point of fact it is the numbers that are no more than numerical representations of letters.[225] Pico reveals his reliance on Mithridates' numerical interpolations in his Latin

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[223] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 74-75, 79-80.
[224] Idel, *KII*, 298, 300.
[225] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 80.

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translations when he states, "numeri sunt proprii operi cabalae" ("numbers are characteristic of Kabbalistic works").[226]

Wirszubski cites and provides sources for numerous Christian-themed changes and interpolations within the texts Mithridates translated. He shows how Mithridates added text referencing the Christian Trinity and linked the Hebrew text to the Trinity in his Latin translations by inserting text that was not in the original Hebrew sources. Mithridates noted scriptural verses from the New Testament in the margins and added them as interpolations within the translations. He also alluded to New Testament scriptures that, although obscure, still show Mithridates' attempt to link Jewish Kabbalistic texts to Christian scriptures. Wirszubski explains that as a result of Mithridates' corrupted translations, Pico and his succeeding lineage of Christian Kabbalists, came to believe that Christian Kabbala has ancient origins. Pico's assumption was that if allusions to Christ, St. John, or St. Paul can be found in the Jewish Kabbalistic texts, then the claim can be made that Kabbala foretold of the emergence of Christianity, among other Christian-themed claims since Mithridates had implied in one interpolation that the ancient Christian forefathers were Kabbalists. Wirszubski notes that Scholem's research shows Mithridates was not the first *Converso* to make this particular claim. In this instance, Mithridates was following a pattern developed by a few other *Conversos* who interpolated similar historical Christian-themed verbiage into certain Jewish Kabbalistic and other Jewish texts in order to assign the ancient origins of Christianity to the time of Moses through those works.[227] A few of these figures were notably Sephardic (i.e., Jews from the Iberian Peninsula) *Converso* Kabbalists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries named Abner

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[226] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 83-84; Pico states that "the secret doctrine of numbers" came through Orpheus to Pythagoras. Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 33.
[227] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 106, 109-112.

of Burgos, Paulus de Heredia, and Petro de la Cavalleria (aka Pedro Caballeria) who created both Christian apologetic works and polemical works against Jews. Because of these precedents, Wirszubski states that in certain specific texts that have a known history of similar Christian interpolations, he can't prove which changes and interpolations were created by Mithridates or by previous *Conversos,* or even less likely, by Christians. Nonetheless, these changes and interpolations translated and/or created by Mithridates directly contributed to Pico's misinterpretations of Kabbala.[228]

Pico's customized version of Kabbala is called 'unhistorical' by Wirszubski.[229] He also states Pico "transformed Kabbala to suit his own tastes" and that his theses were the beginning of the Christian Kabbala tradition that is still being handed down to Christian Kabbalists and Occultists.[230] Since Pico did not have an accurate understanding of the history of Kabbala, Wirszubski states, "From the standpoint of modern scholarship it is of course true that Pico, unaware of the true history of Jewish mysticism, launched Kabbala into the Christian world under a mythical flag."[231] Pico believed Kabbala was an ancient mystery of the Hebrews which he claimed to have "dug up"…and… "brought forward in order to confirm the holy and Catholic faith."[232] Pico declared Kabbala to be a "secret and true interpretation of the law" (Torah) that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai alongside the written Torah but commanded Moses to keep the oral law hidden from the masses. Moses was also instructed to reveal the oral law "under a great holy seal of silence to Jesus Nave alone" and then Jesus would pass it on to his high priest successors.[233] According to Pico, after King Cyrus liberated the Hebrews from Babylon and

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[228] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 84, 105, 110, 185-186.
[229] Ibid, 65.
[230] Ibid, 64-65, 121.
[231] Ibid, 121.
[232] Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 29.
[233] Ibid, 29-30.

permitted the restoration of the temple, Esdras, the high priest who had received "the secrets of the heavenly doctrine granted to him by God" assembled a group of scribes to write down these "mysteries of the law" so they would not be lost.[234] Then Esdras states the last seventy books written should be held from public knowledge as they are "the heart of understanding and the fountain of wisdom and the river of knowledge."[235] Pico declares, "these are the books of the knowledge of Cabala."[236] Then Pico cites a long lineage of "keepers of the mysteries" that he claims begins with Moses and continues through several subsequent figures including Esdras, Jesus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and finally, Pope Sixtus IV, who had possession of the books and had them translated into Latin "for the public advantage of our faith."[237] Pico then claims he was able to procure and diligently study three of the books, and he discovered within these books, "(God is my witness) a religion not so much Mosaic as Christian."[238] The books that Pico claimed were authentic Jewish Kabbalistic texts, that were cherished by Jews, and forbidden to be touched by any Jewish male younger than forty years old, were alleged by Pico to contain a multitude of Christological references (e.g., the Christian Trinity, incarnation of the Word, and the divinity of the [Christian] Messiah).[239] Then Pico makes a very damning claim against Jews: "In short, there is hardly any dispute between us and the Hebrews on this (the Christian claims in the texts) wherein they cannot be so disproved and refuted from the books of the Cabalists that there is no corner left in which they may hide."[240] Pico also claims the secret books are "necessary to us [Christians] for defending [Christianity] against the rude slanders of the Hebrews."[241]

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[234] Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 30-31; Wirszubski, *Pico*, 122-126.
[235] Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 31; Wirszubski, *Pico*, 122.
[236] Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 31.
[237] Ibid, 30, 32.
[238] Ibid, 32; Wirszubski, *Pico*, 122.
[239] Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 32.
[240] Ibid, 32.
[241] Ibid, 29.

Pico conflated Jewish Oral Law and Kabbalistic oral tradition in his commentary. To be sure, according to Jewish Kabbalistic tradition, Kabbala emerged as an ancient arcane oral tradition that was transmitted to Moses at the same time that he received the Torah.[242] Yet, there is an Oral Law that is a supplement to - and interpretation of - the Torah that directs the daily lives of Jews. This Oral Law *was* recorded after the destruction of the second temple in a compilation called *Mishnah* that became part of the Talmud. But according to Jewish Kabbalistic tradition, Kabbala, which is a mystical interpretation of Torah, continued to be kept secret and passed on orally only through Rabbinic Kabbalist Masters to a select few individuals up until around the first century CE when written Kabbalistic works first began to appear, although much of Kabbala was still maintained as an oral tradition.[243] Yet Pico seems to have not understood the Oral Law that was later written down (*Mishnah*) and the mystical oral tradition of Kabbala were two separate things – one considered to be an elucidation of Torah, the other a mystical interpretation of Torah. The seemingly Christological work Pico possessed and claimed was an authentic Jewish Kabbalistic work was according to him, the *one* "divinely revealed tradition of the Jews."[244]

Wirszubski suggests Pico's reinterpretation of Kabbala also implied Moses had become the "Prince of the Kabbalists."[245] Pico's ideas correlate with a translated work he read by Abraham Abulafia titled *De Secretis Legis* (Hebrew: *Sefer Sitrey Torah* or *Book of the Mysteries of the Law*) which was a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*.[246] In this work, Abulafia asserts that divine mysteries were hidden by Moses in a coded language in the

[242] Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4; Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1985), 7.
[243] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 127; Kaplan, *Meditation*, 7.
[244] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 127.
[245] Ibid, 126-127.
[246] Ibid, 129-130.

characters of the Torah (written Law) within divine names, but they can be decoded through the art of letter combinations, similar to the technique found in Lull's *Ars combinatoria*. According to Gershom Scholem, Abulafia was part of the classical period of Kabbalism that lasted until 1300 C.E. Abulafia, like many other Kabbalistic leaders of this period, was not a rabbi, nor was he highly trained in rabbinic education.[247] Kabbalists such as Abulafia were considered "prophetic and visionary mystics" who often produced innovative Kabbalistic works that were at the time considered rather unorthodox.[248] Additionally, revelatory (prophetic) themes can be found in Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed.*[249] This was the milieu Pico relied upon to develop his understanding of the esoteric and prophetic nature of Kabbala. Pico's assertion that Moses had received oral instruction on the Mysteries of the Law and that Jews had recorded it and were in possession of this Christological esoteric work was an extraordinary (albeit, incorrect) phenomenon that captured the interest of many Christians. Thus, it likely appeared to Pico that the lineage of Christian Kabbala passed from Moses to Maimonides, to Abulafia, and finally, to himself. But more importantly, Kabbala had confirmed Christianity from the time of its transmission to Moses. Pico's theses reflect Mithridates' Kabbalistic alterations of Abulafia's commentary in which Mithridates essentially turned Maimonides into a Kabbalist, although he was not. Wirszubski does concede that in this particular instance, he can't conclusively prove whether or not all of the interpolations and changes were created by Mithridates or if some of the corruptions were pre-existent.[250] One explanation for this ambiguity is the abundant copies of Abulafia's manuscripts that were widely available in Italian libraries during this period. Moshe Idel argues that this is the reason Abulafia's works had a more profound impact on Christian

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[247] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 129-131; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 125.
[248] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 125; Idel, *KII*, 294.
[249] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 121.
[250] Ibid, 105, 132-133; Durant, *The Renaissance*, 121; Idel, *KII*, 298.

Kabbalists than did works by Recanati or Alemanno, which were also quite popular in Italy during the Renaissance.[251]

Interpreting Jewish texts through a Christian lens was the pattern used by yet another thirteenth-century Spanish contemporary of Lull and Abulafia whose works also became integral to the Humanist-Occultist Renaissance ideology. This figure was a Dominican friar from Catalan named Raymundus Martini. Martini wrote a work titled *Pugio Fidei* in which he reinterpreted the Talmud and Midrash to use as a Christian missionizing tool against Jews. Some of Pico's Kabbalistic theses very closely followed Martini's pattern.[252] Wirszubski calls Pico's Christian Kabbala "the lineal descendant of the *Pugio Fidei*" and states "it inherited both a purpose and a method" from this work.[253] The purpose of Pico's Christian Kabbala was to confirm Christianity while the method he used was to take Jewish scriptural exegesis and Jewish Kabbalistic texts and symbols and reinterpret them with Christian motifs while conversely taking Christian biblical and doctrinal narratives and overlaying onto them Jewish Kabbalistic (mystical) symbolism. Wirszubski calls this method "innovative" and "a Trinitarian or Christological interpretation superimposed as a kind of super-commentary on carefully selected texts."[254] Wirszubski also argues that Pico's methodological approach is what demarcates his work from previous Christian Kabbalists and "it is for this very reason that Pico's theses, chronology notwithstanding, mark

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[251] Idel, *KII*, x, 294.

[252] See excerpt from Martini's work on p 163, cf. Pico's 21st thesis on p 164; Wirszubski states "the pattern of the [twenty-first] thesis is traditional: the texts are in part different; the theme and the method are the same." Wirszubski, *Pico*, 163-164.

[253] Ibid, 168.

[254] See e.g., 37th thesis on p 167 in which a Jewish Kabbalistic symbol called the *sefirah* of Wisdom, understood by Jewish Kabbalists to be Divine emanations (p 63), became in Pico's Christian Kabbala, the symbol for "the day of Christ." Wirszubski, *Pico*, 162-163, 167-169.

the beginning of truly Christian Kabbala" while his methodological use of Kabbala to confirm Christianity "marks a turning point in the history of Christian Kabbala."[255]

The ease in which Kabbala fit into the Christian Renaissance mindset is understandable if it also understood that Pythagoreanism and Platonism are an integral part of Jewish Kabbala.[256] Jewish Renaissance scholar, Robert Bonfil, argues "…the flowering of Neoplatonism coupled with the cult of Antiquity…determined the success of the Kabbalah."[257] Ficino caught the attention of his fellow Christians when he translated Platonic, Pythagorean, and Hermetic esoteric works. And Jewish Kabbalistic esoterica fit well within this group. Yet, prior to the pen of Mithridates, it did not become public knowledge that these texts ostensibly acknowledged the truth of the Christian narrative. But as with Ancient Theology, these works became Christianized. Or to state it differently, in the hands of Christians, they became instruments that could be used to confirm Christianity. Many Renaissance Christians habitually found confirmation of Christianity surrounding them. Whether they were conscious of it or not is uncertain. But most things that were pre-Christian or non-Christian (e.g., written works, art, and architecture) became tools of augmentation or confirmation of Christianity in the hands of Renaissance Christians. According to Wirszubski, "It stands to reason that Pico was first attracted to Kabbala by the belief that Jewish Kabbala confirmed Christianity."[258]

Pico's major innovation was fusing Kabbala with ancient Pagan works and creating a two-prong system of Christian Kabbala.[259] Wirszubski states Pico did this, not only because he sought confirmation of Christianity in the works he encountered, but also because of "his ardent

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[255] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 168-169.
[256] Ibid, 122, 187; Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 32.
[257] Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities*, 173.
[258] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 187; cf. Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 32.
[259] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 187.

desire to establish the unity of truth," which sounds eerily similar to Lull's assertions.[260] What is

new to Pico's Kabbala – yet similar to Lull's *ars* - is the Kabbalistic use of *ars combinandi* (the

art of letter combining). Although Wirszubski states there is no extant precedent of this nature in

Christian texts prior to Pico's works (which implies Wirszubski believed Lull's use of letter

combining in his *ars* was not enough to make it an overtly Christian Kabbalistic innovation),

Pico himself compared his *ars combinandi* to Lull's *ars*. Coincidentally, one of Mithridates'

many translated works was a manuscript titled *Quaestiones super Decem Numerationibus*

created by yet another thirteenth-century Kabbalist named Rabbi Azriel of Gerona, Spain. This

work is significant because a specific phrase written by Azriel has an equivalent parallel in a

work by the ninth-century philosopher, John Scotus Eriugena, whose oeuvres – as previously

addressed - have been established by scholars to have inspired (or were plausibly plagiarized in)

Lull's *Arts*.[261] This additional evidence further validates Yates' point that "Cabalism and

Lullism, with its Scotist basis," appear to be "phenomena of a similar type, the one arising in the

Jewish and the other in the Christian tradition, which both appear in Spain at about the same

time, and which might, so to speak, have encouraged one another by engendering similar

atmospheres, or perhaps by actively permeating one another."[262] This evidence also further

validates the links between thirteenth-century Spain and Renaissance Italy that manifested

themselves in the form of Pico's Christian Kabbala.

Wirszubski states, "Christian Kabbala was exceptionally fortunate in its founder."[263] In

his view, even if all *Conversos* had banded together, they could not have accomplished what

Pico did for Christian Kabbala: "he made Kabbala respectable and desirable in the Christian

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[260] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 187.
[261] Ibid, 103, 167, 184, 260.
[262] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 112.
[263] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 185.

world."[264] Pico's innovations made Christian Kabbala a "mystical discipline" and expanded the preceding Christian Kabbalist culture that had maintained a narrow custom of creating little more than polemical and apologetic works.[265] The unique form of Christian Kabbala that Pico created established a new tradition of Christian Kabbala, but although most succeeding Christian Kabbalists followed Pico's tradition, there were a few who did not.[266]

Wirszubski calls Pico's use of Kabbala to confirm Christianity "the heart of Pico's Christian Kabbala."[267] To this, Pico added Neoplatonism and Hermeticism to create two strains of Christian Kabbala: Speculative (prophetic) Kabbala and Practical (natural magic) Kabbala.[268] Wirszubski states, "Pico viewed Kabbala from an entirely new standpoint: he is the first Christian who considered Kabbala to be simultaneously a witness for Christianity and an ally of natural magic."[269] Wirszubski attributes Pico's novel approach to Kabbala and magic to Mithridates' interpolations in the translations. Pico's natural magic Kabbala, which he called "Kabbala by transumption," was in his view, a science that proved Christ's divinity, whereas his prophetic Kabbala was intended for "the confirmation of Christianity against the Jews."[270] However, this bipartite concept was also not Pico's original idea. Abulafia's *De Secretis Legis* was yet again the inspiration for this concept and structure.[271] Abulafia had also distinguished

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[264] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 185.
[265] Ibid, 185.
[266] Wirszubski, *Pico,* 239-240. cf. Pico's form of Christian Kabbala expounded in his Kabbalistic theses (239-240) and the work titled *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* in which a Jewish form of Kabbala commonly referred to as Lurianic Kabbala, developed by Isaac Luria of Safed in the 15th century, was the key source used by the anonymous author of this work. This work reveals divergence from the Kabbalistic tradition established by Pico, yet the foundational pattern of using Jewish Kabbala to confirm Christianity remained the same (239); See Kabbala Denudata/Kabbalah Unveiled, transl., S.L. MacGregor Mathers, (Kshetra Books, 2017) in which the 17th century author of this work also deviated from the lineage of Pico.
[267] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 161.
[268] Ibid, 133.
[269] Ibid, 151.
[270] Ibid, 145.
[271] Ibid, 136-138.

between speculative and practical Kabbala.[272] This novel approach adopted by Pico set his work apart from previous Christian Kabbalists.

The sources Pico used to develop his Christian Kabbala were from various Kabbalistic traditions but his two main sources were Abulafia and Recanati. The orthodox Kabbalistic tradition was reflected in Recanati's works while the unorthodox strain was based on Abulafia's works. To these, Pico added his own perspective as well as the Ancient Theology works he obtained from Ficino. Yet what's unclear is if Pico had access to any authentic oral Jewish Kabbalistic traditions. In accordance with Jewish Kabbalist tradition, many Kabbalists, including Abraham Abulafia, stated they were forbidden from writing down certain elements of Kabbala. So, although some works existed in written form that explained *some* Kabbalistic elements, undoubtedly there were (and likely still are) esoteric teachings that Kabbalists 'kept close to their chests' out of loyalty to tradition.[273] Nonetheless, the possibility that Mithridates or Alemanno could have known and passed on to Pico some of these esoteric elements through oral tradition does exist. But if any Jewish Kabbalist Masters had recognized any esoteric oral teachings set to writing in Pico's works, in an effort to maintain their secrecy, the Kabbalists likely would have not acknowledged them, thus creating yet another paradox: The mystery teachings might have been revealed and yet at the same time, they would have not been revealed.

While it has been established that several Christians - such as the Spaniards, Arnaldus de Villanova and Ramon Lull, and the Italian, Joachim de Fiore - wrote about mystical practices in the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century, Christian Kabbala as an organized development did not begin until after the time of Pico. Moshe Idel identifies the intellectual

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[272] Wirszubski, *Pico*, 134-135; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 182-183.
[273] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 126-127; Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, 29; Idel, *KII*, 228-229; Kaplan, *Meditation*, 1-3, 7.

climate of Florence and the emergence of printing as two factors contributing to the diffusion of Kabbalistic thought in the fifteenth century and states that Kabbalistic ideas have endured from the fifteenth century to the present time due to printing.[274] Idel asks the question: "how and why did the early Christian intellectuals adopt Jewish esoterics (sic) as a domain of interest and even creativity?"[275] Yet as Idel points out, such a question necessitates a merging of various possible responses.

John Edwards, in his tome, *The Jews in Christian Europe: 1400-1700*, examines the development and impact of *Conversos* on the larger Jewish population. After mass conversions of Jews commenced in thirteenth-century France and Spain, some well-educated *Conversos* began a new trend of translating popular Jewish texts into vernaculars making them accessible to Christian leaders.[276] In thirteenth-century France, King Louis IX had the Talmud condemned and all available copies rounded up and burned. This was a direct result of the work of two *Conversos* named Nicholas Donin and Pablo Christiani.[277] This was a watershed moment in what would become far-reaching, and oftentimes, deleterious effects *Conversos* had on their former Jewish communities. It is difficult to determine the extent of the impact *Conversos* had on Jewish society throughout the Middle Ages but as the Renaissance emerged in Italy, David Ruderman's work reveals that *Conversos* contributed to the rise of the anomalous Jewish-Christian social interactions that developed there.[278] *Conversos*, in their roles as 'mediators,' created a new social environment that made "cross-cultural dialogue" possible between Christians and Jews, although

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[274] Reuchlin, *On the Art*, v-vii; Idel, *KII*, 228.
[275] Reuchlin, *On the Art,* vii.
[276] Edwards, *The Jews*, 20.
[277] Edwards, *The Jews*, 20; Leon Poliakov states this event led to an upheaval that "roused public opinion against the Jews" which then led to various myths and accusations against Jews (e.g., Jews were magicians and "poisoners of the body and mind"). Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Vol. 1*, trans., Richard Howard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 69-71.
[278] Ruderman, *Cultural Intermediaries,* 11.

this does not necessarily mean that the social status for Jews was markedly improved by this change.[279]

A passionate desire developed among many Renaissance Christian scholars to learn the Hebrew language. Their motivations were manifold. Some sought to study sacred Hebrew texts such as the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. Others were interested in studying esoteric Kabbalistic texts. Those who wanted to learn Kabbalah sought out Jewish Kabbalist Masters and begged for their instruction. Additionally, Christian scholars hired Jews and *Conversos* to translate Hebrew texts.[280] The willingness of Jews to teach Christians the Hebrew language, and especially their secret Kabbalistic teachings, reveals a change that occurred within Jewish society during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Prior to this time, exchanges of information between Christians and Jews occurred largely through sharing of written sources, not through social interaction. Business relations were acceptable under certain circumstances but close social interactions were forbidden for much of the Middle Ages.[281] In certain parts of Italy – primarily in the papal territories – the environment was slightly more tolerant toward Jews than in other parts of Europe, at least for a few decades prior to the Catholic Reformation.[282] Many Sephardic Kabbalists emigrated to Italy during the fifteenth century. Prior to this event, an internal struggle took place among this group over whether or not the teachings of Kabbala should be expanded to a larger realm of people, especially non-Jews. Traditionally, Kabbala was a restricted oral teaching that was transmitted between a master Kabbalist and his initiate. Kabbala was accessible only to an elite group of Jews who were selected based on certain attributes such as

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[279] Ruderman, *Cultural Intermediaries*, 11.
[280] Cooperman, *Jewish Thought*, 186-187.
[281] Laws were passed in Florence against Jews since they "are enemies of…all Christians." Brucker, *The Society*, 240-250.
[282] Ibid, 240.

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the need to be a male over the age of forty with above-average intelligence who had attained a high degree of education in Hebrew studies.[283] Some scholars argue that examining the reason a sect of Sephardic Kabbalists decided to break tradition and step outside the realm of their closed circle to seek initiates for the study of Kabbala highlights the impact these ideological changes had on Renaissance Italy after their arrival.[284]

Scholars Francis Yates and Gershom Scholem argue that the persecution and expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 spawned the associations that emerged in Italy between Christian and Jewish intellectuals.[285] Scholem asserts that while experiencing the duress of these dreadful events in Spain, many Sephardic Kabbalists developed certain ideological notions that, after their expulsion, they carried with them as they emigrated to Italy, as well as to other parts of Europe, Africa, and the Mediterranean.[286] Significantly, a messianic movement and an apocalyptic movement emerged among sects of Sephardic Kabbalists.[287] As a consequence of these movements, some Sephardic Kabbalists began to believe that disseminating the teachings of Kabbala would lead to redemption, or the "end of days," which would generate the arrival of the messiah. After the Spanish expulsion, a decree by an anonymous author (presumably a Sephardic Kabbalist) appeared that stated from 1540 and thereafter, a mitzvah (Jewish commandment) required all Jews to study and disseminate Kabbala to everyone – Jews and non-Jews alike. Adhering to this mitzvah would lead to "the coming of the messiah."[288] Not all

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[283] Idel, *KII*, 228-229; Kaplan, *Meditation*, 19-20.

[284] See Idel, *KII*, 297. Attacks on existent Italian Kabbalistic works – especially the works of Abulafia - by newly arrived Sephardic Kabbalists after the expulsion.

[285] Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age,* (London: Routledge, 1979), 189; Scholem, *Kabbala,* 61, 67-68; Idel, *KII,* 29.

[286] Scholem, *Kabbala*, 68-70.

[287] Ibid, 68-70; Also note as an analogous historical example, Jerusalem during the first century prior to the expulsion of Jews by the Romans in which substantial messianic and apocalyptic movements occurred among the Jews who sought liberation from Roman oppression.

[288] Scholem, *Kabbala*, 68-70.

Kabbalists agreed with the decree written by the unknown author since from its inception, Kabbala had been an esoteric tradition which was acknowledged by the author when he stated that prior to 1540, Kabbalists were forbidden to publicly discuss Kabbala.[289] Also, the term 'Kabbala,' itself, can be loosely translated as "that which is handed down by tradition."[290] But although Kabbalist factions resulted from disagreement over the ostensive mitzvah, those that opposed it were unable to stop public dissemination of their formerly esoteric teachings.[291] Consequently, according to some scholars, as Sephardic Kabbalists migrated in various directions to new lands, some made it their mission to disseminate Kabbala to all receptive audiences. According to this theory, these events were central to the emergence of close interactions and information exchanges that took place between Christian elites and Jewish scholars in Renaissance Italy.

Moshe Idel's tome, *Kabbala in Italy: 1280-1510,* is a survey of primary writings and ideas that served as the basis for the emergence of Kabbala in Italy during this period. The majority of these works were either developed in, or brought to, Italy from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century by the Jewish Kabbalists, Abulafia, Recanati, and Alemanno, each of whom taught different ideological schools of Kabbala and also influenced Pico's Kabbalistic creations in varying ways and degrees.[292] Idel chooses the year 1280 as his starting point because Abulafia arrived in Italy in 1279 (for the second time) and this began "his Kabbalistic literary activity there."[293] The year 1510 is, according to Idel, "the end of the literary activities of the generation of Italian and Spanish Jews who were contemporaries of the Florentine intellectuals Marsilio

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[289] Scholem, *Kabbala*, 68.
[290] Ibid, 3.
[291] Ibid, 68.
[292] Idel, *KII*, x, 1-2, 296.
[293] Ibid, x.

Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and the arrival in Italy of the Kabbalists who were refugees from Spain."[294] Idel's work challenges Scholem's and Yates' argument that Christian Kabbala developed after the arrival of Sephardic Jews in Italy in the fifteenth century. Idel calls this an "anachronistic view" and points to specific Kabbalistic texts and ideas that existed in Italy prior to the arrival of Sephardic Kabbalists.[295] Idel also calls the idea that Pico founded a wholly new intellectual tradition that fused magic with mysticism and pagan ideology "unwarranted" and he argues that defining the emergence of Christian Kabbala should be approached from a question of "when a Christian thinker adopted a Kabbalistic type of thinking" instead of from a question of when a Christian adopted certain Kabbalistic traditions.[296] From this viewpoint, Idel argues that Ramon Lull should be considered a Christian Kabbalist. But Idel also acknowledges that Lull did not leave behind in any of his writings his explicit awareness that his *Art* was essentially of "a realm of esoteric Jewish lore."[297] Nonetheless, although evidence shows that, prior to Pico, Kabbala had been Christianized by *Conversos* such as the Spanish figures, Abner of Burgos (thirteenth century) and Paulus de Heredia of Aragon (early fifteenth century), Idel makes a partial concession to the works of Yates and Scholem by concurring with them that Christian Kabbala didn't really become a *movement* among Christians until Pico's writings emerged in fifteenth-century Renaissance Italy.[298]

Idel argues that the explosion in popularity of Kabbalistic thought in the latter part of the fifteenth century should be understood as being a part of two wider contexts, "that of the intellectual ambiance in Florence and, even more generally, that of the development of

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[294] Idel, *KII* x.
[295] Ibid, 296.
[296] Ibid, 306.
[297] Ibid, 228.
[298] Ibid, 228.

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printing."[299] David B. Ruderman argues in his text, *Cultural Intermediaries,* that many events during the early modern period point to an overall intensification of anti-Jewish sentiment, although in certain Italian venues, Christian elites and Jewish intellectuals closely interacted.[300] The crux of the essays included in his tome expresses how Jews had to create two identities in order to cultivate any degree of success for themselves: their private cultural/religious identity as Jews and their public identity as Jewish intellectuals and businessmen in association with greater European Christian society. The best example of this phenomenon is Jewish-Christian interactions that occurred in print shops.

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[299] Idel, *KII,* 234.
[300] Ruderman, *Cultural Intermediaries*, 2.

Chapter Five: Printing: The Consequential Invention

Several of Italy's cosmopolitan cities such as Venice, Mantua, and Florence served as intellectual hubs during the Renaissance. In addition to the private interactions that occurred between Jewish tutors and their Christian students, print shops and universities were centers for intellectual exchange.[301] In these locales, Jews, Christians, and *Conversos* encountered one another regularly in social and business settings and, according to David Ruderman, "were clearly stimulated and challenged by the intense circulation of knowledge." [302] Loys Le Roy stated in his writings in 1575 that among the numerous inventions of the period, "printing deserves to be put first…" and "the invention has greatly aided the advancement of all disciplines."[303] The new printing technology (aka typography) facilitated the dissemination and sharing of knowledge at an unprecedented rate and contributed to the profound interest in learning the Hebrew language and studying Kabbalistic and other Jewish texts that developed among many Christian Humanists. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Jewish authors in Italy wrote books and other materials for both Christian and Jewish audiences. More specifically, they wrote some books in Latin and some in Hebrew, and in some instances, they translated their own texts into both languages. Some Jewish authors allegedly used this approach in an attempt to influence public Christian opinion of Jews. Similar to the role of *Conversos,* print helped to dissolve the imaginary social and intellectual information boundaries that had previously existed between Christians and Jews. Jewish intellectuals read the same ancient esoteric manuscripts as their Christian counterparts while Christians read texts translated into Latin by Jews.[304]

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[301] Ruderman, *Cultural Intermediaries*, 12; Edwards, *The Jews,* 20; Scholem, *Kabbala,* 196-197.
[302] Ruderman, *Cultural Intermediaries*, 1; Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities*, 190-191. Bonfil states printing and publication were two of the limited few professional careers available to Jews outside Jewish communities.
[303] Ross and McLaughlin, *The Portable*, 98.
[304] Ruderman, *Cultural Intermediaries*, 1, 9-10, 12.

Additionally, Idel argues that only in Renaissance Italy was it possible for a Jew to write a book that would become a bestseller among Christians.[305]

Robert Bonfil's research shows that the printing trade became a "religious occupation" for Jews since rabbis and Jewish scholars took up the task of editing religious manuscripts and texts for printing.[306] According to Jacob Burckhardt, Florence was the consummate nucleus for intellectual activity which could be proven by the claims that all Florentines in the thirteenth century were literate and "were at that time respected and influential throughout the whole world."[307] Florentine achievement of cultural supremacy during this period was related to a high rate of literacy and an apparent profusion of written works. Burckhardt states that a fifteenth-century Florentine named Niccolo Niccoli "spent his whole fortune in buying books" and thereafter, a famous Medici patriarch continued to fund Niccoli's insatiable enterprise since Niccoli had created a privately-owned "public library" in which he allowed visitors to borrow books or come to his home library to study.[308]

Mark Johnston states a major change that occurred in the fourteenth century was the spread of literacy beyond elite groups such as clerics, aristocracy, and professionals.[309] Printing made its way to Italy in 1467 and to Spain between 1474 and 1476. Florence had its first printing press in the year 1471 and Venice became internationally famous for its print industry.[310] It is estimated that by 1500, around six million books had been printed which buttresses Burke's assertion that the invention of printing significantly increased the pace in which humanist ideals

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[305] See e.g., *Dialoghi d'Amore* authored by Judah Leon Abravanel. Idel, *KII*, 303.
[306] Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities*, 190-191.
[307] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 139.
[308] Burckhardt, *The Civilization,* 133.
[309] Johnston, *Evangelical Rhetoric*, 3.
[310] Burke, *IR*, 236.

were spread.[311] Rice and Grafton call typography "the greatest invention of the Renaissance" and argue the reason printing spread so rapidly between 1460 and 1600 was "the unsatisfied demand for books" among a wide variety of groups and classes of people across Europe.[312]

There are a number of corollaries that resulted from the emergence and spread of typography across Europe. The amount of errors at the hands of scribes that were often passed on from one copy to the next ended with the introduction of typography. Rice and Grafton state, "The fundamental contribution of printing to learning was that it halted this progressive corruption and made possible the long and continuing effort to restore the great texts of the past to something approaching their original integrity."[313] Additionally, identical texts in mass volumes were produced which made communications, amendments, textual criticism, cooperative problem-solving, sharing of ideas, and learning easier. But one of the greatest benefits of printing was that it made printed works widely available and affordable to the masses who hitherto had little access to printed information.[314]

The works of the erudite and prominent theologian, Erasmus of Rotterdam, rapidly made their way across Europe, as did Martin Luther's works. Rice and Grafton state "the spread of Lutheranism…made frighteningly and triumphantly clear the revolutionary significance of printing for the communication of ideas."[315] They argue additionally that the ideas of the Reformation could not have made their way across Europe at their unsurpassed pace if not for the invention of typography.[316] This is a significant point because it indicates the profound

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[311] Burke, *IR*, 249.
[312] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 5-6.
[313] Ibid, 7.
[314] Ibid, 7-8, 23-24.
[315] Ibid, 10.
[316] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 10; Peter Marshall, *The Reformation, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 17. Marshall discusses widespread dissemination of Luther's works; Marshall

impact print had on this pivotal period in history. The spread of printed materials produced a struggle between those involved in the production of printed materials and state and ecclesiastical authorities.[317] As a consequence, censorship emerged very shortly after the introduction of printing to combat the dissemination of unrestricted information, or as Rice and Grafton succinctly put it, reading had become "more democratic," thus the emergence of the censor.[318] The most effective way to control the masses was through control, manipulation, and censorship of printed information since print was the only means of mass dissemination of information. State and ecclesiastical authorities each established censor offices in an effort to control their own interests, be they political or religious. The pope published a bull (law) in 1501 that explained the Church's position on the need to censor and control the dissemination of printed works so as to protect the weak minds of the masses. The bull was subsequently followed by the establishment of the Congregation of the Holy Office (Office of the Inquisition) in 1542, then in 1559 and 1587, a list called the Roman Index of Prohibited Books and a Congregation of the Index were established respectively in an effort to control publications and curb the dissemination of Protestant ideas.[319] Peter Marshall calls the establishment of the Inquisition office, along with the Prohibition Index and Congregation of the Index "the most notorious examples of the 'Catholic Reformation'."[320]

These actions taken by state and ecclesiastical authorities to monitor and control the dissemination of information were accompanied by a multitude of other major events that

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states, "Unlike the writings of Wyclif or Hus, Luther's books were printed. The coincidence of Luther's protest and the new technology of the printing press seemed…a veritable providence of God."

[317] Marshall, *The Reformation*, 17; R&G call this struggle "the battle for intellectual liberty and freedom of conscience in an age of fundamental ideological conflict." Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 10.

[318] Rice & Grafton, *The Foundations*, 10.

[319] Ibid, 10; Marshall, *The Reformation*, 35.

[320] Marshall, *The Reformation*, 35.

occurred during this period. Italy experienced a tremendous amount of turmoil and instability throughout the 1500s. During this period, many Italian cities were attacked and besieged. Rome was sacked in 1527 by Charles V and lost its ranking as one of the chief cultural centers in the world.[321] Many of the great artists and writers who had gathered in Rome and had contributed to its reputation of cultural greatness, fled to other parts of Italy and Europe. These were times of famines and plagues. The economy took numerous hits due to a multitude of disasters and the development of trans-Atlantic trade. But Luther's disparagement of the Church when he published his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, thereby enflaming the antecedent Protestant Reformation movement, remained the most significant event of this period.[322] At the same time that these economic, political and cultural changes were occurring, Protestant movements were under way across Europe and challenging all aspects of ecclesiastical authority. The Church was losing power and control of large parts of its empire, thereby provoking a vehement response. In addition to the use of military force to stamp out scores of Protestants, and in response to recurrent reproaches and revolts, the Council of Trent was assembled and worked to resolve the Church's shortcomings by standardizing and unifying its various organizational elements through the establishment of many stringent policies. Some scholars argue the Catholic Reformation marks the beginning of the end of the Italian Renaissance.[323]

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[321] Burke, *IR*, 247-248; Martin Spahn, 1908, "Emperor Charles V," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed., Kevin Knight, accessed December 15, 2018, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03625a.htm.

[322] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 688; Burke, *IR*, 246-248; cf. Marshall, *The Reformation*, 3-5, 7ff. Marshall argues there were multiple religious and political reformations during this period.

[323] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 688; Marshall states that the augmentation of papal power that resulted from the Council of Trent meant "There was no going back to the louche atmosphere of Renaissance Rome." Marshall, *The Reformation*, 35; Ibid, 6, 32-37; Burke, *IR*, 248.

Chapter Six: Everything is Relative: The Golden Age and the Jewish Perspective

Robert Bonfil suggests that the Italian Renaissance shouldn't be seen entirely from the perspective of the Christian experience or as a wholly Christian innovation since such a view inevitably disregards the experiences and contributions of the only other group of people who lived among Christians in Renaissance Italy.[324] Bonfil's point is instructive, especially as it relates to a study of Jewish-Christian interactions and ensuing developments during this period. With regard to the Jewish experience during the Italian Renaissance, some scholars argue that Jews in Renaissance Italy experienced a respite from extreme persecutions and expulsions that frequently occurred throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. Compared to the Iberian Peninsula from the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries, it may seem, *prima facie*, that circumstances were much better for Jews in Italy during the Renaissance period. However, evidence suggests this argument is rather untenable. During the Renaissance, there were severe restrictions on the number of Jews allowed to settle in most territories across Italy. This is demonstrated by a quick glance at population estimates for the Italian peninsula (not including Sicily) between the end of the thirteenth century and the end of the fifteenth century. The total population of the peninsula was around eight-to-ten million while the Jewish population made up approximately twenty-five-to-thirty-thousand of that number. The vast majority of Jews in Italy were immigrants while only a small pocket of Jews had actually been established in Rome for many generations.[325] The miniscule size of the Jewish population in Italy during this period suggests that the presence of Jews was largely unwelcome among

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[324] Robert Bonfil states "…why claim that the Jews were *influenced* by the Renaissance, whereas Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, or Cosimo de' Medici were its typical *representatives*? Why not say that Messer Leon, Elijah del Medigo, or Johannan Alemanno were just as much men of the Renaissance as their Christian contemporaries?" Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 19, 168.
[325] Ibid, 19-21, 29, 50, 57.

Christian communities. Jews who sought to become residents had to be creative in convincing Italian overlords of their usefulness in order to be granted permission to live in their territories. Jews were afforded substantially fewer rights and opportunities than their Christian peers. As had been their fate across other parts of Europe, sporadic expulsions of Jews also occurred in many Italian territories during the Renaissance period (including Florence in 1494). Expulsions forced most Jews to resettle in the few territories left - such as Mantua, Venice, and Tuscany - that were willing to tolerate their presence for one reason or another. But even in many of these territories, Jews were relegated to ghettos, the development of which had been inspired by the laws requiring segregation between Christians and Jews in the Fourth Lateran Council (aka Lateran IV).[326] The Fourth Lateran Council held in Rome in 1215 was intended to legislate Christian life. But most importantly, it was intended to deal with enemies of the Church, with a major emphasis on Jews. Several of the canons laid out laws and prohibitions against Jews. Jews could not hold public office, they were required to wear distinguishing garments, and *Conversos* were henceforth prohibited from performing any Jewish rituals, to avoid being charged as infidels.[327] R.I. Moore states "Lateran IV laid down a machinery of persecution for Western Christendom…"[328]

Many Jews exiled from the Iberian Peninsula beginning in 1492 came to Italy. While some used Italy simply as a waystation, many settled primarily in papal territories that were more welcoming than other Italian territories.[329] Bonfil suggests that Sephardic Jews arriving in Italy likely saw there an atmosphere and attitude towards Jews not dissimilar from their previous

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[326] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 21-34, 45, 63; Edwards, *The Jews*, 12, 16.
[327] Moore, *The Formation*, 6-7.
[328] Ibid, 10.
[329] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 61; Edwards, *The Jews*, 66.

environs, thus some of their numbers opted to seek habitation elsewhere.[330] This assessment is not unwarranted. Anti-Jewish attitudes intensified with the emergence of the Catholic Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century. [331] Undoubtedly, the European Christian mindset had been conditioned toward anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish attitudes since the inception of the Roman Church in the fourth century under the Roman emperor, Constantine who adopted Christianity as the favored religion of the empire and sanctioned the Christian church through imperial laws.[332] A letter written by Constantine to church leaders and preserved by Eusebius, a bishop and the first historian of the Roman Catholic Church, is filled with anti-Jewish rhetoric. Constantine states the Jews "…sullied their own hands with a heinous crime, such bloodstained men are as one might expect, mentally blind." He goes on to direct the church leaders to have "…nothing in common between you [leaders] and the detestable mob of Jews!" He then repeatedly accuses the Jews of being "Lord-killers" and "murderers of the Lord."[333] This letter, along with numerous other anti-Jewish polemics attributed to Constantine, that have been preserved in the panegyric of Constantine written by Eusebius, largely contributed to the foundation upon which the ideology of the Catholic Church was created.[334] Even if it is presumed that Eusebius' works may have decreased in popularity over time, the tradition of anti-Judaism had already been woven deeply into the fibers of Christian ideology.

After the fall of the Roman Empire (fifth century) to the northern 'barbarians,' Jewish persecution declined slightly for several centuries. But by the beginning of the eleventh century,

[330] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 59-61.
[331] Edwards, *The Jews*, 67.
[332] Eusebius, *The History of the Church: from Christ to Constantine,* trans. G.A. Williamson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 401-403.
[333] Eusebius, *Life of Constantine,* trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 3.16.1-3.20.2.
[334] Ibid, 1-2 (Intro.); Eusebius, *The History of the Church*.

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"Europe became a persecuting society" and arguably, from this time until the period of mass destruction of Jews in the twentieth century (aka "Shoah" (meaning destruction of the Jews), or "Holocaust"), Jews found themselves under repeated attacks for a multitude of offenses including usury, accusations of murdering Christians by poisoning wells (times of plagues), desecrating the host (defiling sacrament wafers), the infamous blood libel (murdering Christian children to use their blood in secret rituals during the Jewish Passover), and the ultimate inescapable offense of deicide.[335] Attacks and accusations of these types of offenses regularly escalated during the Christian Lent and Easter period since anti-Jewish ideology was central to Christian dogma and Christians were constantly reminded of this expectation through sermons and ecclesiastical laws when priests would take to pulpits and deliver callous addresses reminding congregants that Jews killed their God. During these holidays, violent pogroms often developed and Jews were warned to remain indoors as much as possible to avoid attacks. Perceiving Jews and Saracens as religious enemies became a social and religious expectation and if a Christian showed too much kindness or compassion toward Jews, they too risked public persecution and charges of apostasy or heresy. Johann Reuchlin, for example, was accused of being a 'Jew-lover' because he argued for the preservation of Jewish sacred texts when, yet again, the Talmud was declared blasphemous and ownership was henceforth forbidden by the Counter-Reformationist Pope Paul IV in 1553. This year became a marker for the decline of

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[335] The Gale Group, "Encyclopedia Judaica: Blood Libel," *Jewish Virtual Library*, August 7, 2018, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/blood-libel; Cecil Roth argues that after the Crusades ended in the thirteenth century, the justification for sustained Christian persecution of Jews was based on the assertion that the Christ-killing Jews knew the truth that Jesus was the Messiah yet they spitefully remained "deliberate miscreants[s]." Cecil Roth, "The Medieval Conception of the Jew: A New Interpretation," in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict,* ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 298-308; Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, 1, 41-53. The beginning of the eleventh century as the date for the re-emergence of Jewish persecution coincides with the crusades that began in 1096 and resulted in the murder and/or death (by suicide to escape slaughter) of thousands of Jews; Ibid, 99-113; Moore, *The Formation*, 5; Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 24-28.

Jewish communities across Italy. In 1553, burning of Jewish sacred texts took place across Italy. In 1555, a group of *Conversos* were sought by the Inquisition with many imprisoned and tortured while twenty-five were burned in Ancona. Also in 1555, inspired by the Jewish Quarter in Venice, Paul IV ordered the establishment of Jewish ghettos that soon began cropping up in numerous Italian territories. [336]

Prior to the consequential onset of the Catholic Reformation and the closing of the era of the Humanist 'Golden Age,' Kabbala served to "provide Jews with a mechanism to deny [their] exclusion [in greater Christian society] on a level of *imaginaire*."[337] Bonfil states scholarship often suggests that Jewish-Christian relations in Renaissance Italy were much more amiable than extant Jewish sources reveal. According to his research, dialogue between Jews and Christians was actually the exception rather than the rule. Also, these exchanges were largely kept on the intellectual level and they only occurred among a small group of people.[338] The reason, Bonfil suggests, is that "Jews were condemned to perpetual servitude [to Christians] because they had failed to recognize Christ's divinity."[339] From Bonfil's perspective, Kabbala performed similar paradoxical mediating functions between Jews and Christians, and between Jews and *Conversos*: First, between Jews and Christians, Kabbala played the role of mediator "between exclusion and participation…" although exclusion continued to be a Jewish reality regardless of the degree of cross-cultural interaction.[340] Second, between Jews and *Conversos*, Kabbala was a mediator "between the Christian and Jewish worlds by providing the catalyst for the reinsertion of the

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[336] Edwards, *The Jews*, 67.
[337] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 176.
[338] Ibid, 237-238.
[339] Bonfil argues "the chief purpose of every attitude taken [by Christians] with regard to the Jews was that of converting them to Christianity." Ibid, 25; Ibid, 175, 204; cf. Edwards, *The Jews*, 69. Medieval papal pronouncements urging conversion of Jews.
[340] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 176.

New Christian converts into the Jewish context." [341] In other words, Kabbala served to allow some *Conversos* access to their former traditions without risking persecution but as has previously been conveyed, this "reinsertion" did not always bode well for the Jewish community.

In conjunction with the popularization of Kabbala among Christians, the role of Kabbala was transformed within the Renaissance Jewish community as well. Its long tradition of secrecy was stripped away and it "…affected every field, from intellectual activity to everyday religious practice."[342] In the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, Kabbala moved from an esoteric teaching within a closed circle to a new exoteric place in Jewish life: "It laid claim to a place of honor in Jewish society."[343] The publication of the *Zohar* was followed by public teaching in Jewish communities and synagogues. Subsequently, rituals and prayer books underwent restructuring to include Kabbalistic ideas, and religious confraternities developed for practitioners. Although some Jews taught Kabbala to Christians – including Pico and Johann Reuchlin – Bonfil states, "This contact was not the result of a more favorable attitude toward the Jews."[344] As it became clearer to Jews that Christians interested in studying Jewish texts and learning their sacred language had an ulterior motive, which was to use Jewish religious works as conversion tools, many Jews vocalized their displeasure with their Jewish cohorts who offered their tutoring and translating skills to Christians.[345] By the end of the sixteenth century, Western Jewish Kabbala was abandoned and the Eastern Kabbala school was adopted (i.e., R. Isaac Luria's school developed in 16th century Safed).[346] This change affected Christian attitudes toward Kabbala and their interest in the mystical tradition began to wane. By the beginning of

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[341] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 176.
[342] Ibid, 170.
[343] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 170, 231; Dweck, *The Scandal*, 5.
[344] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 174-175.
[345] Ibid, 175; cf., Edwards, *The Jews*, 69. Medieval papal pronouncements urging conversion of Jews.
[346] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 175-176.

the seventeenth century, Christians had shifted their focus for learning in a different direction and had largely abandoned their Jewish studies.[347] Bonfil argues these changes caused Jewish society to turn in upon itself.

Another event that occurred in the seventeenth century that had a significant impact on Jewish society and its relationship to Kabbala was a work composed by a prominent rabbi. Kabbala scholar Yaacob Dweck, in his book, *The Scandal of Kabbala,* examines the work of a Venetian rabbi named Leon Modena.[348] Modena went against the grain of his contemporary Jewish community by penning a severe critique of Kabbala. Prior to this point, Kabbala had penetrated every aspect of Jewish society and, in Modena's view, was threatening to usurp ancient Jewish religious traditions.[349] As Dweck deftly reveals, after Modena's publication, the trajectory of Kabbala began to take a downward turn and remained on this course until, according to Dweck, the pre-eminent scholar of Kabbala, Gershom Scholem, saved it from Modena's wrath. Modena composed a textual critique of Kabbala in a work titled, *Ari Nohem* (The Roaring Lion).[350] His goal was to debunk the medieval Jewish legend that Kabbala was an ancient tradition transmitted to Moses alongside the Torah. Modena believed that by proving Kabbala's medieval origins, he could rescue his community from veering away from their long-held traditions. It turns out that Modena's claim that Kabbala was not an ancient creation now has much scholarly support.[351] Modena's work is important because of his use of textual critique

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[347] Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 175.
[348] Dweck, *The Scandal*.
[349] Ibid, 1-2.
[350] Ibid, 1.
[351] Ibid, 4, 11.

to prove Kabbala's medieval origins, and because it is one of the first counter-histories ever recorded. [352]

The highly respected scholar, Gershom Scholem, states in his work simply titled, *Kabbala,* that antecedent studies of Kabbala produced by Jews were intended to criticize Kabbala's influence on Jewish life. Mainstream Jews sought to distance themselves from Kabbala.[353] This coincides with Dweck's claim that early historians after the time of Modena saw Kabbala as "nonsense."[354] Nevertheless, although Modena's writings openly expressed his desire to rescue Jews from losing their ancient traditions, it seems theoretically plausible that, given the change in Jewish society as a result of a variety of reasons related primarily to the Catholic Reformation, Modena also sought through his writings to reduce the inventory of reasons Christians found for attacking Jews. If he could encourage Jews to abandon Kabbala and return to their traditions, Christians might also lose interest in using the "nonsense" of Kabbala as a Christian apologetic and conversion tool.

Indeed, no singular event is responsible for the trajectory of decline in Jewish-Christian relations that began in the latter half of the sixteenth century. As previously expressed, the Catholic Reformation had a significant impact on Jewish-Christian relations, as did the change in course with regard to Kabbala within Jewish society. In addition to, and as a consequence of these changes, the employment of Jewish tutors and translators by Christians began to decline. Christian elites learning Hebrew from *Conversos* or Jewish tutors were known as Christian Hebraists. Some Christian Hebraists achieved proficiency in Hebrew and were able to read Hebrew texts independently. Others, like Pico, relied on *Conversos* or their Jewish tutors to

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[352] Dweck, *The Scandal*, 11.
[353] Scholem, *Kabbala,* 202.
[354] Dweck, *The Scandal,* 1.

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translate Hebrew texts on their behalf. Once Christian Hebraists became proficient in the Hebrew language and began to interpret Kabbalistic and other Jewish texts independently, they tended to break ties with Jewish tutors and exegetes, which led to a deterioration in Christian-Jewish relations. Once this occurred, not only did Christian Hebraists conclude that they no longer needed the assistance of Jewish tutors or exegetes to interpret Jewish texts, they also began to challenge Jewish scholars on their interpretations of their own texts, just as they had long done with regard to the Talmud and Old Testament. Christian Hebraists also argued that Jewish texts were, in fact, prophetic Christian texts intended to reveal and confirm Christ's divinity.[355] This turn of events had a further devastating effect on Jewish society. As the demand for their knowledge and intellectual expertise began to wane, their tenuous social status and sources of income further deteriorated. They had also lost yet another reason for their 'usefulness.' These events, understood alongside the Catholic Reformation and the stance against Kabbala taken by Modena, help to explain the reasons Jews began to distance themselves from Kabbala in the seventeenth century.

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[355] Ruderman, *Cultural Intermediaries*, 12-13.

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Chapter Seven: One Man's Boon is Another Man's Burn

Although circumstances for Jews began a steady decline with the onset of the Catholic

Reformation, to be fair, they were not the only group to feel the heat of this period. Will Durant

notes an element that further contributed to the deterioration of the grand Renaissance period was

a Spanish pall that fell over Italy. When Christian Spaniards began a steady migration to Italy

after the installations of the Spanish pope, Alexander VI (1492-1503), and the Spanish Holy

Roman Emperor (1519-1556), Charles V, they brought with them a more restrictive and

oppressive patriarchy that made a dark imprint on the Italian Renaissance ethos.[356] Spanish rulers

had control of much of Italy by 1530.[357] Durant states Spanish rule "was a boon to Italy" because

it ended wars and invasions in Italy until 1796.[358] Yet it's questionable whether Sephardic Jews

who were given the choice of either death or exile from Spain in 1492 under the rule of King

Ferdinand and Queen Isabella would have agreed with this viewpoint. According to Durant's

assessment, "Authoritarianism triumphed, and a somber pessimism and resignation fell upon the

spirit of the once joyous and exuberant Italian people."[359] The thirteenth-century Spanish

Inquisition ideology was transported to Italy under Charles V's reign and, in collaboration with

the 'Catholic Reformation popes,' heavily influenced the restrictive trajectory taken by

ecclesiastical authority during the Catholic Reformation.[360] The Church's establishment of

censorship offices to suppress heretical, defiant, or disparaging publications had profoundly

negative effects on various intellectual sectors across Italy .[361] The publication market took a

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[356] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 579; Marshall, *The Reformation*, 16.
[357] Martin Spahn, 1908, "Emperor Charles V," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed., Kevin Knight, accessed December 15, 2018, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03625a.htm.
[358] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 687.
[359] Ibid, 689.
[360] Marshall, *The Reformation*, 35.
[361] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 689.

nosedive, intellectual academies closed, the study of Latin was replaced with the Italian vernacular, and classical pagan studies were suppressed, along with the former humanistic trend of nurturing the intellect. Durant states that suppression of the Humanist intellectual movement was met with an increase in morality. By the mid-sixteenth century, Italians were weary and crushed after decades of wars, invasions, and numerous other calamities. The dark cloud of oppression that hung over Italy manifested itself in a shift from a previously cheery and colorful attire to a dark sartorial expression adopted by the Italians from their Spanish interlopers.[362] Assuredly, the death knell was driven into the Renaissance with the commencement of the Catholic Reformation, but the event that could be said to have symbolized the crushing blow was the burning of Giordano Bruno in 1600.

Dame Frances Yates (1899-1981) was a leading scholar in the study of the Renaissance and the life of Giordano Bruno. In her tome, *Lull & Bruno: Collected Essays Vol. 1,* Yates argues the two major occult philosophers who descended from "the Hermetic-Cabalistic core of Renaissance Neoplatonism" (the works of Ficino and Pico) and heavily impacted Elizabethan England with their works were John Dee and Giordano Bruno.[363] Dee and Bruno were also influenced by the works of Ficino's and Pico's successors, the German Humanist-Occultists, Johann Reuchlin, and especially Cornelius Agrippa.

J.N. Hillgarth and J.B. Trapp wrote in the Preface to Yates' book, *Lull & Bruno,* "In order to understand the thought of Giordano Bruno, Dame Frances found it necessary to investigate the role of Lullism in the Renaissance and this led her back three centuries to the origins of the *Art* of Ramon Lull."[364] Because Lull's works included both the conventional

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[362] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 689, 695-696.
[363] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 210.
[364] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, xi.

Neoplatonic tradition as well as Scotus' mystical Neoplatonism, Bruno was drawn to his works. Like Pico, Bruno syncretized Lull's works with Hermeticism and Kabbala.[365] Hillgarth and Trapp state Yates' work changed the scholarly narrative about Bruno from a soul martyred for the cause of liberty and science to one of "a man who died for 'Renaissance occult philosophy and magic'."[366] Yates reframed the scholarship regarding Bruno from a "martyr for modern science" to a Renaissance magus trying to revive esoteric Egyptian religio-magical ideas.[367] Yates states Bruno was a "leading representative" of the Hermetic tradition and calls his esoteric ideas "Pythagoro-Copernican Truth."[368]

Bruno spent two years in England (1583-1585). Dee (1527-1608) was from Wales and was a part of the English court. Dee and Bruno were both voyagers and were connected with broader European philosophical and "politico-religious" circles, yet they never met.[369] Yates calls Bruno's and Dee's voyages "intense Occultist missionaries."[370] Yates states Bruno was tricked by a figure named Mocenigo to go to Rome and in 1600 he was burned at the stake for "["an objective treatment of"] Renaissance occult philosophy and magic."[371] Dee returned to England in 1589 and "was put under a cloud but not burned at the stake."[372] This contrast between the treatment of Dee in Anglican England and Bruno in Catholic Italy reveals the differences between the two religious, social, and political climates of this period. The austere atmosphere in Italy was a byproduct of the Catholic Reformation. Yates states that ecclesiastical opposition to the occult movement started by Ficino and Pico had existed from the beginning of

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[365] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, xi, 5.
[366] Ibid, xi.
[367] Ibid, 131.
[368] Ibid, 130-131, 152.
[369] Ibid, 211.
[370] Ibid, 212.
[371] Ibid, 212, 338ff.
[372] Ibid, 212.

the movement.[373] Durant asserts that the weakening of Christian piety and reinterpretation of Christianity by the Humanists after the popularization of Plato was tolerated by the Church in return for generous donations. But by 1534, in part due to the powerful and eminent Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola, who began a program of eroding the prominence and sway of the Humanists on Italian society with his exceptional oratory skills and religious charisma, and in part due to the Reformation movement, the Church began to exert its power.[374] According to Yates, the last few decades of the sixteenth century saw an intensification of the occult philosophy movement, and its counter-movement in response to the Catholic Reformation. During this period, the association of Kabbala with Platonism caused skepticism. Yates suggests "The burning of Bruno was a symbol of the reaction against the daring spiritual adventures of the Renaissance."[375] It could also be argued that Bruno's burning was a symbol of the Church attempting to publicly re-assert and re-establish its lost power. What better way for the Church to incite fear in its subjects and regain control over them than to publicly burn one of their own for subversive ("heretical") ideas?

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[373] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 212.
[374] Durant, *The Renaissance*, 121.
[375] Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, 213.

Conclusion

The hoary lineage of Ancient Theology that informed the works of medieval figures such as Abraham Abulafia, John Scotus Eriugena, and Ramon Lull, can be informally traced from its ancient origins, through the works of these figures, and then on to the works of the Renaissance Occultists/Kabbalists: Ficino, Pico, Reuchlin, Agrippa, Dee, Bruno, et al. At this point, although ecclesiastical backlash took various forms in an attempt to stamp out the occult movement (Inquisitions, witch trials, burnings, etc.), it turns out, persecutions only succeeded in driving the movement underground until it re-emerged in secularized modern society. Ancient works that had long been hidden and passed down surreptitiously, resurfaced at this time, as did numerous occult movements and secret societies. The most well-known figure to popularize occult works in the nineteenth century was Helena Blavatsky. Her society, that is still extant and still very popular, is the Theosophical Society which preserves and disseminates her teachings to its members.[376] Nowadays, exegetical works on the occult such as Blavatsky's are generally seen as 'interfaith' and 'informative' rather than heretical or dangerous. Countless other authors and/or teachers of the occult – including such figures as Manly P. Hall, S.L. MacGregor Mathers, A.E. Waite, Aleister Crowley, Eliphas Levi, and many others – also emerged in the same era as Blavatsky. To this day, organizations called mystery schools, occult schools, and secret societies, such as the Rosicrucian Order (AMORC), and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, are accessible to anyone with a computer and internet service.[377] Nearly all of the authors and

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[376] The Theosophical Society in America, 2018, https://www.theosophical.org/ December 16, 2018; See e.g., works by H.P. Blavatsky: *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*.

[377] See e.g., https://www.rosicrucian.org; https://www.golden-dawn.com/eu/index.aspx; https://mysteryschoolsinternational.org/ and countless others found by googling "mystery school."

societies mentioned offer occult teachings in one form or another, and most all of them include some form of Kabbala in their teachings.[378]

According to Moshe Idel, the varied schools of Kabbala that existed in Renaissance Italy "should be understood as threads in a much more complex constellation of intellectual processes that shaped both Jewish and Christian culture in Italy between the late thirteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century."[379] To this day, Jewish Kabbala schools are still offering lessons to non-Jews, hence, these schools can still be understood as threads that are shaping both Jewish and Christian culture (and beyond).[380] Paradoxically, one of the few things that has changed about this Jewish-Christian dynamic since the Italian Renaissance is that the Kabbalistic threads of the Renaissance are now red string bracelets.

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[378] See e.g., S.L. MacGregor Mathers: *Kabbalah Unveiled*; W. Wynn Wescott: *The Collectanea Hermetica*; Manly P, Hall: *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*; Aliester Crowley: *The Book of Thoth*; A.E. Waite: *The Holy Kabbalah*; Dion Fortune: *The Mystical Qabalah*, et al.
It's worth noting the likelihood of many of the 'forbidden' occult works mentioned above still being extant and easily procurable in the twenty-first century if not for the invention of printing. Admittedly, information technology has now made preservation and accessibility of works as easy as the click of a mouse. But many of these works, now widely available on the internet, would not be if they had not been preserved for centuries in printed form.
[379] Idel, *KII*, 313.
[380] See e.g., https://kabbalah.com/en; https://kabbalahmedia.info/lessons; http://edu.kabbalah.info/

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