

Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati. *Menahem Recanati, Commentary on the Daily Prayers Flavius Mithridates' Latin translation, the Hebrew text, and an English version.*

Kabbalistic Library of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola 3. 2 vols. Ed. and trans. Giacomo Corazzol. Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2008. 709 + 151 pp. index. bibl. €70. ISBN: 978-8884193827.

Michela Andreatta. *Gersonide: Commento al Cantico dei cantici nella traduzione ebraico-latina di Flavio Mitridate.*

Centro Internazionale di Cultura "Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola," Studi Pichiani 14. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009. xiii + 206 pp. index. tpls. bibl. €25. ISBN: 978-88-222-5905-9.

Things are changing in Pico Studies, a fact proven by two recent publications. The first, edited by Giacomo Corazzol, includes the edition of Menahem Recanati's *Commentary on the Daily Prayers* in its original Hebrew version; in the Latin translation prepared by the famous acolyte of Giovanni Pico, Flavius Mithridates; and also provides the reader with a very useful English translation. As stated by Giulio Busi in his preface to this two-volume study, "Menahem Recanati is widely considered the most influential Italian kabbalist ever and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola deserves the merit of having brought kabbalistic studies into the very heart of humanistic culture. No wonder if their intellectual meeting has proved to be very momentuous" (9). Giovanni Pico read and used some texts by Recanati (born in mid-thirteenth century and died before 1311) for his *Conclusiones Nongentae* (900 Theses) and used Flavius Mithridates' translations of Recanati's commentaries on both the Torah and the *Daily Prayers*. While the former seems to have been mostly lost, the Latin text of the latter is still preserved in manuscript (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 190) and was never closely studied.

Corazzol's edition fills this gap, bringing to scholars' attention a text that "most probably played a relevant role in Pico's understanding of Jewish mysticism" (9). In

his introduction, Corazzol reassesses Recanati's biography and provides the reader with an important window onto Recanati's intellectual laboratory, showing his use of sources and shedding new light on the transmission of Kabbalistic texts and doctrines to Italy. The reassessment of Recanati's cultural strategies becomes even more important when placed in the context of the *Conclusiones Nongentae*, as Corazzol shows that Pico's main source of knowledge of Kabbalistic texts, which he himself could not read, was Recanati. Given Pico's stress on reading skills, the importance of Recanati as his "Virgil . . . when he undertook the study of the kabbalah" (20) cannot be underestimated. Corazzol states that "no kabbalist of his time interpreted his role of a patient reader and gleaner of the texts that centuries had amassed so thoroughly as Recanati" and that "Recanati's *Commentary on the Torah* provided Pico with a portrait of the structure of the universe and the secrets inherent to the emanation and the celestial world, while the *Commentary on the Daily Prayers* contributed to the development of his theurgical speculations" (20). Corazzol explores a number of interesting parallels between Pico and Recanati and presents the *Commentary* as pursuing "the interest . . . to use kabbalah as a hermeneutic device demonstrating how the measure of halakic norms coincides with the measure of the creation itself . . . [and] aimed at restoring Judaism to its wholeness after the blows inflicted upon it by rationalistic philosophy" (34–35). This unfinished work, "mainly a complicated puzzle of quotations from other works" (37), was provided to Giovanni Pico in a Latin version by Flavius Mithridates that Corazzol describes as a word-by-word translation (99). This literalism is explained as a precise request on Pico's part motivated by a preference for "the stability of the translation" and for "the contents of a work rather than [for] its style" (100–01). The influence of Mithridates's translation of Recanati's *Commentary* and its significance for Pico's understanding of Jewish mysticism are well explained in the very detailed and notable introduction by Corazzol to the equally notable edition of Mithridates's translation that follows, completing the first volume of the edition. The second volume contains a very useful English version of Mithridates' Latin translation and a critical edition of the Hebrew text of Recanati's *Commentary on the Daily Prayers*, which any reader of Hebrew will undoubtedly find as valuable as the rest of the volume.

The second publication that evidences a change in Pico Studies is an edition of a work by Rabbi Levi Ben Gershom (Gersonides), a thinker well-versed in philosophy and logic, mathematics and astronomy, biblical exegesis and the study of Talmud, who lived between 1288 and 1344. His *Commentary on the Song of Songs* in the Hebrew-Latin translation by the same Mithridates has been edited by Michela Andreatta and divided in two sections. The first discusses, in chapter one, the issue of Pico as a student of Hebrew and his encounter with Flavius Mithridates; the diffusion of Gersonides' works between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century; and, more specifically, the presence of these in the library of Pico, who was familiar with his astronomical works and biblical commentaries. The second chapter provides an analysis of the contents and goals of Gersonides' *Commentary*; focuses on Pico's role as the patron of Mithridates' translation of the

*Commentary*, which was tended to in 1486; and finally takes a close look at its influence on Pico's works, specifically on the *Heptaplus*, the *Commento sopra una Canzona de Amore*, and the *Conclusiones Nongentae*. In this chapter, Andreatta convincingly shows both the relevance for Pico of philosophy in Mithridates' translations and the crucial importance of the *Commentary* as a fundamental source for Pico's understanding of Jewish thought. In the third and last chapter of section one, Mithridates' theory and practice in translating Gersonides' *Commentary* are placed under scrutiny, showing that Mithridates systematically employs the technique known as "double translation," which is geared toward the exposition of the various semantic options provided by the original version (46). This chapter also provides the reader with a very useful Hebrew-Latin glossary in which the most frequent philosophical terms used in the Jewish text of the *Commentary* are matched with their Latin translations adopted by Mithridates; with the explanatory glosses and Kabbalistic interpolations that are a typical trait of Mithridates' translations; with an analysis of Mithridates' Latin version of the original biblical texts of the *Song of Songs*; and, finally, with a synopsis of this latter translation by Mithridates compared with the version of the Vulgate, which shows both Mithridates' accurate knowledge of the Vulgate version and his autonomy as a translator. The second section of this excellent study contains the critical edition of Mithridates's Latin translation of Gersonides' *Commentary* preserved in manuscript (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 4273, fols. 5<sup>r</sup>–54<sup>r</sup>), the only known copy of this work, providing a specialized readership with a text of otherwise difficult availability.

The publication of these and other important works by Jewish intellectuals who were close to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola might not only modify our understanding of Pico's philosophy, but may also have an impact on the significance of Renaissance humanism as a whole and open new lines of research on the humanists' approach to other cultures. Since refined linguistic skills in Latin and Hebrew and a good knowledge of medieval and Renaissance philosophy as well as Jewish literature are required, editors who can produce and interpret comparable critical texts at such high levels are a rarity. Both Giacomo Corazzol and Michela Andreatta possess all these qualities, and make significant contributions to the changing face of Pico.

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