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**CONTROVERSIES ON ASTROLOGY IN RENAISSANCE ITALY**  
**(LATE FIFTEENTH – EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURIES)**

**BY**

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for the degree of  
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## Abstract

This thesis is devoted to the astrological debates in Renaissance Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These debates are often considered to be important for the reconsideration of the status of astrology in the Renaissance. Yet, the texts that form the basis for these debates have not received the attention they deserve. I argue that in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* the Italian scholar Giovanni Pico della Mirandola questioned the compatibility of astrology with religion and philosophy, on the one hand, and astronomy as astrology's theoretical basis, on the other. Without going into reforming astronomy or modifying obsolete mathematical calculations, Pico put forward radically new ideas about the problem of astrology within the context of the Renaissance revival of ancient culture. My thesis also provides for the first time a comprehensive study of the immediate reception of Pico's *Disputationes*. Thus, I show that Girolamo Savonarola and Giovanni Pico's nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, both close to Giovanni Pico at the late stage of his career, drew upon Pico's attack on astrology to develop their own interpretation of astrology. I also establish that Giovanni Pico's ideas received support beyond Italy: Maximus the Greek, an Orthodox monk who in the late fifteenth century had become a novice of the Dominican order at San Marco in Florence and served as Gianfrancesco Pico's secretary, appropriated Savonarola's and Giovanni Pico's arguments and criticised astrology in his *Epistles against Astrology*, which he composed upon his arrival in Muscovy. Finally, my thesis explores how, at the same time, several scholars such as Lucio Bellanti and Giovanni Pontano opposed Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes* in order to defend the positive value of astrology.



## Introduction

### Astrology before Astrological Controversies of the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries

Scholarly research on the Renaissance has devoted considerable time to astrology. Already Jacob Burckhardt discussed the influence of occult knowledge on the formation of Renaissance culture.<sup>1</sup> Over the following decades, it has become obvious that magic, hermetism and astrology served as important sources for both philosophical inquiries and artistic inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, astrology was not considered a pseudo-science. According to its theorists, astrology was a useful practical instrument to prove some general theories. That is why during several centuries, astrology and astronomy were not divided either technically or essentially. This relation to theoretical (or ‘high’) knowledge definitely enhanced the authority of astrology among medieval and Renaissance intellectuals. Astrological speculation was involved in philosophical, scientific and even theological discourse. Nevertheless, by the seventeenth century, as a result of the so-called scientific revolution, astrology was distinguished from astronomy and mathematics and progressively became a marginal discipline, even if notable scientists such as Kepler, Brahe, and Cardano continued to rely on astrology in some of their works.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 323–44. On Giovanni Pico and astrological controversies in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: *ibid.*, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> Along with significant contributions by Aby Warburg and scholars of his circle, it is worth mentioning some recent studies: *L’art de la Renaissance: entre science et magie*, ed. Philippe Morel (Paris: Somogy éditions d’art, 2006); Philippe Morel, Méliissa. *Magie, astres et démons dans l’art italien de la Renaissance* (Paris: Hazan, 2008); Mary Quinlan-McGrath, *Influences. Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Boner, *Kepler's Cosmological Synthesis: Astrology, Mechanism and the Soul* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013); Victor E. Thoren, *The Lord of Uraniborg: A Biography of Tycho Brahe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

This research is devoted to the astrological debates in Renaissance Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These episodes are often considered to be important for the reconsideration of the status of astrology in the Renaissance. And yet the texts that form the basis for these debates have not received the attention they deserve. By providing for the first time a close and detailed textual and contextual analysis, I argue that in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* the Italian scholar Giovanni Pico della Mirandola questioned the compatibility of astrology with religion and philosophy, on the one hand, and astronomy as astrology's theoretical basis, on the other. Without going into reforming astronomy or modifying obsolete mathematical calculations, Pico put forward new and persuasive arguments to discuss the problem of astrology within the context of the Renaissance revival of ancient philosophy and science. Thus, in Parts I and II of my thesis I focus on the development of Pico's astrological views from his earlier writings to the *Disputationes*.

In Part III of my study, I analyse the reception of the *Disputationes*. Girolamo Savonarola and Giovanni Pico's nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, both close to Giovanni Pico at the late stage of his career, subsequently drew upon Pico's attack on astrology to develop their own intellectual agenda, which aimed at rejecting the possibility that ancient culture could play a role in religious matters (Chapters I and II). Giovanni Pico's ideas also received support beyond Italy: Maximus the Greek, an Orthodox monk who in the late fifteenth-century had become a novice of the Dominican order at San Marco in Florence and served as Gianfrancesco Pico's secretary, criticised astrology in his *Epistles against Astrology* composed already in Muscovy (Chapter III). At the same time, several scholars opposed Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes*. These include Lucio Bellanti and Giovanni Pontano (Chapters IV and V). Thus, my thesis will provide for the first time a comprehensive study of Pico's *Disputationes* and its immediate reception.

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1990); Anthony Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos. The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

It is not my task to explore the history of Western astrology in this thesis. However, without a very general introduction to the question, it is hard to understand Pico's and his contemporaries' attitude towards astrology. Putting Giovanni Pico's astrological views into a larger philosophical context allows us to understand the transformation of the status of astrology in fifteenth-century thought. In the introduction, I will focus on two major points in the history of Western astrology, both crucial for Pico himself and other Renaissance scholars. The first deals with the compatibility of astrology, as a clear deterministic idea, with the notions of free will and human freedom. First developed first in the ancient philosophical texts largely revived in the Renaissance period, and supplemented with Christian teaching, this problem remained essential for fifteenth-century thinkers. The second point concerns the question of authoritative astrological and philosophical sources. After multiple translations of astrological treatises in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Toledo and Sicily regions, astrology was associated with numerous texts falsely attributed to Aristotle, Proclus, Ptolemy, and other authorities. Finally, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, medieval thinkers developed two major ways of interpreting astrology: as either a discipline useful for proving Christian dogmas or a part of natural philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Pico and his associates had to respond to these issues.

Although the origins of astrology are traditionally supposed to be diverse, its European branch derived from Mesopotamia and the Middle East region. In these cultural contexts, the observation of the stars played a crucial role in everyday life, including weather predictions, which had important implications for agriculture or traveling. Moreover, the prerogative to forecast the weather and hence to predict future changes in people's lives belonged to the Chaldean priests in Persia.<sup>5</sup> The status of astrological observation was, therefore, high. By the third century BC,

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<sup>4</sup> These two approaches to medieval magic were analysed in: Graziella Federici Vescovini, *Medioevo magico: la magia tra religione e scienza nei secoli XIII e XIV* (Turin: UTET, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> On the history of the term, see Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans* (New York; London: Putnam's Sons, 1912), pp. 26–27.

astrology spread throughout Greece. According to a legend, the occult knowledge was brought to Greece by Berosus the Astrologer.<sup>6</sup> Although the legend cannot be accepted uncritically, it nonetheless indicates that after the third century BC astrology was a well-established field in Greek culture.

In Greece, there were conditions for astrology to be accepted. As is well known, by that time the Greeks were successful in the observation of stars and prepared a theoretical and practical apparatus that underpinned their astrological investigations; it is there that the main astrological doctrines received their first mathematical interpretation.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Franz Cumont has shown, the anthropomorphism of Greek gods was an idealised reflection of human personalities and thus fit well with an astrological vision of the universe.<sup>8</sup> Finally, astrological techniques were used in philosophical discussions of *heimarméne* (destiny, fate).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, astrology was not supported by all philosophical schools. Thus, Aristotle does not mention astrology in his works, a fact that would later on be interpreted as a sign that Aristotle was against astrology. However, some philosophers, and more specifically the Stoics, developed the notion of determinism, which is close to astrological predestination.<sup>10</sup> Evidently the discovery of the East by the Romans, who invaded Greece in the second century BC, and the development of philosophical thought in the Empire gave rise to further astrological speculation.

In Rome, astrology, however, faced serious opposition. The most severe critics of astrology and *ars divinatoria* in general included Cicero, who dedicated to the subject his *De divinatione*

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<sup>6</sup> Cumont, *Astrology and Religion*, pp. 30–31; Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri: l'astrologia nella cultura dell'Occidente* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), pp. 53–55.

<sup>7</sup> Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1899).

<sup>8</sup> Cumont, *Astrology and Religion*, p. XXIV.

<sup>9</sup> Pompeo Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri*, pp. 56–59.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51–79.

and some related treatises.<sup>11</sup> Sextus Empiricus later expressed a critical vision of the problem in the *Adversos mathematicos* with the use of another philosophical (sceptical) argumentation.<sup>12</sup> However, despite these attacks, the *ars divinatoria* remained very popular during the whole history of the Roman Empire. First, emperors and nobles are vividly interested in astrology. The fascination for astrology of the emperor Septimius Severus and his heirs led Alexander of Aphrodisias to write an anti-astrological treatise.<sup>13</sup> Alexander opposed the Stoic idea of determinism claiming that some events did not have pre-determined causes. He insisted that man is responsible for his own decisions, and that chance is a source for human freedom since it allows to break the casual chain. It is also worth noting that Alexander's *De fato* was well known in the Middle Ages due to the translation by William of Moerbeke.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the important role of astrology in Rome is attested by the appearance of particular genres of astrological literature and by the diffusion of oriental theurgical practices within the Hellenistic philosophy, especially Neoplatonism.

Although Plotinus generally opposed some aspects of astrology, such as the idea of fatalistic astrological predictions,<sup>15</sup> his followers, especially Porphyry and Iamblichus, made more use of astrology in their works. Porphyry wrote a special treatise on astrology entitled the *Introduction to Astronomy in Three Books* (now lost) and promulgated it together with the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*. The latter text was a compendium of texts by Antiochus of Athens, an astrologer of the second century BC. In his treatise, Porphyry attempted to justify the

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<sup>11</sup> Cicero, 'De divinatione', in idem, *De senectute. De amicitia. De divinatione*, ed. William A. Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 222–539.

<sup>12</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors*, ed. Robert G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Fato*, ed. Robert W. Sharples (London: Duckworth, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *De fato ad imperatores. Version de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, ed. Pierre Thillet (Paris: Vrin, 1963).

<sup>15</sup> On Plotinus' astrology in general, see: Peter Adamson, 'Plotinus on Astrology', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 35 (2008), 265–91. On the refutation of fatalistic astrology and Plotinus' idea that the stars are signs rather than causes, see: Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 55, 81.

use of astrological techniques and underline their compatibility with Neoplatonic beliefs in a free and exalted soul. As Tamsyn Barton claims, beginning with Porphyry's *Introduction*, it was a standard doctrine that the soul's astral body came from planetary spheres and returned to them at death. The Neoplatonists developed an account of the soul's ascent after death, with some of them suggesting that the stars purified the soul as it went up, others that the stars assisted in its progress.<sup>16</sup> Porphyry insisted that the gods might use observations of celestial movements to predict the events decreed by the fate. Porphyry did not oppose this concept originating with the Stoics. He assumes that astrologers can make erroneous predictions, but he is certain that the principles of astrology themselves are not false. He shows an extensive knowledge of practical astrology by using several techniques criticised by his main astrological authority, Ptolemy. Following the Neoplatonic tradition, Porphyry places the Sun in the centre of the planets, calling it the heart of the universe.<sup>17</sup> So in general, there is a widespread belief in the possibility of planetary influences, but a rejection that this might imply determinism. Also, both Plotinus and Porphyry developed the idea that on the whole astrology was an honourable science, while due to the lack of expertise astrologers could provide false calculations. Claudius Ptolemy expressed the same idea in the influential fragment of the *Tetrabiblos*. According to him, there was a distinction between astrology as a judicial form of magic and astrology/astronomy as a science related to mathematical calculations.<sup>18</sup> Ptolemy claims that people who lack scientific knowledge sometimes try to predict future events on the basis of simplest or the most powerful causes, disregarding other influences.<sup>19</sup> Instead of this superficial predictive method, Ptolemy advances a theory of

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<sup>16</sup> Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, p. 110.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> Claudio Tolomeo, *Le previsioni astrologiche (Tetrabiblos)*, ed. Simonetta Feraboli (Milan: Mondadori, 1985), I, 2, pp. 10–20.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 2, pp. 8–9.

mathematical astrology, which deals with all possible celestial figures, and which would prove crucial to subsequent discussions on astrology.

Thus, in Antiquity, there was no consensus about the status of astrology. Its complete refutation, for instance, in the aforementioned writings by Sextus Empiricus or Cicero, went together with its approval and even its glorification. The authors mentioned above often defined their attitude to astrology according to their philosophical interests. After the fall of the Empire, ancient astrological texts were all but forgotten for a long time. Some of them, such as the treatises of Ptolemy, were rediscovered in the thirteenth century, while the rest, like Manilius' *Astronomica*, remained unknown until the fifteenth century. Perhaps the most successful among ancient astrological sources was the *Mathesis* written by Julius Firmicus Maternus, a fourth-century AC Roman astrologer. As the Italian scholar Michele Rinaldi suggests, the first evidence of the dissemination of the treatise might be found in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in France and England.<sup>20</sup> Thus, medieval English historian William of Malmesbury mentioned that Gerbert of Aurillac, who would later become Pope under the name of Silvester II, had studied the *Mathesis* of Firmicus.<sup>21</sup> Though William of Malmesbury is often referred to as one the most accurate historians in medieval England, his comments raise some questions. As is well known, Gerbert of Aurillac had a doubtful reputation and was accused of practicing black magic. Such an image of the magician was widespread not only in medieval literature but even in at least two literary masterpieces of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> One wonders whether William of Malmesbury's

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<sup>20</sup> Michele Rinaldi, 'Sic itur ad astra': *Giovanni Pontano e la sua opera astrologica nel quadro della tradizione manoscritta della Mathesis di Giulio Firmico Materno* (Naples: Loffredo, 2002), pp. 31–37.

<sup>21</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, eds Roger A. B. Mynors et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), I, p. 280.

<sup>22</sup> On Gerbert himself see: Oscar Darlington, 'Gerbert, the Teacher', *The American Historical Review*, 52, 3 (1947), 456–76; Elly R. Truitt, 'Celestial Divination and Arabic Science in Twelfth-Century England: The History of Gerbert of Aurillac's Talking Head', *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73, 2 (2012), 201–22. The image of Gerbert was

supposition about Gerbert's astrological studies was caused by any firm evidence or merely by the legendary status of the future Pope. Be that as it may, in the mid-eleventh century the *Mathesis* was known in both England and France. References to Firmicus are found in the writings of the English astronomer Daniel of Morley, while in France several scholastics from the School of Chartres obviously knew and even used the *Mathesis*. However, the further diffusion of Arabic astrological treatises in the West had a negative impact on the popularity of the *Mathesis* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Only four manuscripts of Firmicus from the thirteenth century and one manuscript from the fourteenth century are extant.<sup>23</sup> Hence, it appears that the *Mathesis* lost its position of an important astrological 'manual'. On the other hand, it probably influenced Pietro d'Abano, whose astrological writings became a source for the iconographic program of frescoes in the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua.<sup>24</sup> What is more, Francesco Petrarca was familiar with the *Mathesis* and referred to it in some of his texts.<sup>25</sup> In 1429, the famous humanist and tireless manuscript collector Poggio Bracciolini found a manuscript of the *Mathesis* in the library of the monastery of Monte Cassino. He reported about this discovery in a letter to his friend Niccolò Niccoli.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the codex found by Poggio and containing the *Mathesis* was incomplete; the part including Firmicus' text is lost. The rest of the manuscript contains a piece of Sextus Julius Frontinus entitled the *De aquaeductu*, apparently rewritten by Peter the Deacon from the Monte

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used in Thomas Mann's masterpiece *The Holy Sinner* completed in 1951. In *The Master and Margarita* of Mikhail Bulgakov, Woland came to Moscow to study the manuscripts of Gerbert.

<sup>23</sup> Rinaldi, 'Sic itur ad astra', p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Graziella Federici Vescovini, 'Pietro d'Abano e gli affreschi astrologici del Palazzo della Ragione di Padova', *Labyrinthos. Studi e ricerche sulle arti dal Medioevo al Barocco*, 9 (1986), 50–75; Darrelyn Gunzburg, 'Giotto's Sky: The fresco paintings of the first floor Salone of the Palazzo della Ragione, Padua, Italy', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 7, 4 (2013), 407–33.

<sup>25</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Le familiari*, 4 vols, ed. Vittorio Rossi (Florence: Sansoni, 1933-1942), vol. II, pp. 168–69. Petrarca possessed a manuscript, which contained the text of Firmicus: Rinaldi, 'Sic itur ad astra', pp. 42-49.

<sup>26</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, *Lettere*, vol. I. *Lettere a Niccolò Niccoli*, ed. Helene Harth (Florence: Olschki, 1984), p. 210.



Cassino Abbey. This led some scholars to suggest that Peter the Deacon might also be a copyist of the *Mathesis*. An additional argument in favour of such a supposition is that in his autobiography Peter the Deacon mentioned a text on astronomy among the list of books he had copied. Contemporary scholars, however, are sceptical in regard to such a hypothesis.<sup>27</sup> Though the destiny of the Monte Cassino manuscript is uncertain, other manuscripts of the *Mathesis* are extant and were known to a number of prominent Renaissance humanists and scientists, including Guarino da Verona, Vittorino da Feltre, Regiomontanus, Antonio Beccadelli (Panormita). Finally, the text of the *Mathesis* became one of main sources for the astrological speculation of the Neapolitan humanist Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, who annotated a manuscript from his personal library, now kept in the National Library of Naples (Ms. V A 17), and referred to Firmicus Maternus in his subsequent astrological works, including in the *Commentationes in Ptolemaeum* and the *De rebus coelestibus*.<sup>28</sup> In 1499, the *Mathesis* was finally printed by Aldus Manutius together with other texts about the stars (known as the *Aldina*);<sup>29</sup> this resulted in the growth of its popularity among European intellectuals.

The destiny of another important astrological text of Antiquity, Manilius' *Astronomica*, was different. Unknown in the Middle Ages, it was only discovered in 1416, in the library of the monastery of St. Gallen in Switzerland, by Poggio Bracciolini. The *Astronomica* became one of the most well-known astrology textbooks in the Renaissance; it inspired and formed the iconographic program of the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes cycle in Ferrara.<sup>30</sup> The dissemination of the *Astronomica*, specifically after the invention of the printing press, contributed to the

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Meyvaert, 'The Autographs of Peter the Deacon', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 38 (1955), 114–38 (p.125); Rinaldi, 'Sic itur ad astra', pp. 60–62.

<sup>28</sup> Rinaldi, 'Sic itur ad astra', pp. 109ff.

<sup>29</sup> Wolfgang Hübner, 'The Culture of Astrology from Ancient to Renaissance', in *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, ed. Brendan Dooley (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 21–22.

<sup>30</sup> On astrology in Palazzo Schifanoia see: Marco Bertozzi, *La tirannia degli astri. Gli affreschi astrologici di Palazzo Schifanoia* (Livorno: Sillabe, 1999).

development of astrological literature in various humanistic and intellectual circles in Italy. The Italian poet and astrologer Lorenzo Bonincontri from San Miniato played an important role in popularising Manilius and his poem. Though Benedetto Soldati qualifies Bonincontri as ‘a humanist of the second level’,<sup>31</sup> the latter was a friend of many prominent thinkers of his time, including Giovanni Pontano, Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. While in Naples, he was involved in cultural movements at the court of Neapolitan kings. After moving to Florence, Bonincontri, already recognised as an expert in Antiquity, ancient poetry and literature, met Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano.<sup>32</sup> In the second half of the 1470s, Bonincontri taught the *Astronomica* at the Studio Fiorentino and left his commentary on Manilius’ astrological masterpiece.<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that, apart from the *Astronomica*, in several cases, Bonincontri referred to the *Mathesis* of Firmicus Maternus trying to expand the use of various astrological ideas. It is also important that due to Bonincontri’s initiative, astrology was integrated into the education process, not as a part of the quadrivium, but within humanist scholarship. Thereafter, Bonincontri wrote his masterpiece *De rebus coelestibus* – an astrological poem in the style of ancient prototypes.<sup>34</sup> Several years later, Bonincontri’s friend and colleague Giovanni Pontano would write a text with the same title, though this time in prose.

However, until the twelfth century, elements of ancient Greek and Roman heritage in astrology played a secondary role. Despite the significance of the texts by Firmicus and Manilius, especially in the Renaissance, Western medieval astrology was formed first of all under the

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<sup>31</sup> Benedetto Soldati, *La poesia astrologica nel Quattrocento. Ricerche e studi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1906), p. 218.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 126–27.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Field, ‘Lorenzo Bonincontri and the First Public Lectures on Manilius (Florence, ca. 1475–1478)’, *Rinascimento*, 36 (1996), 207–25.

<sup>34</sup> On this poem and Bonincontri’s astrological poetry in general, see: Soldati, *La poesia astrologica nel Quattrocento*, pp. 154–98.

influence of the Islamic tradition. Within a large corpus of texts, distributed in Europe since the twelfth century, several sources, both philosophical and astrological were of Greco-Roman origin.

In the twelfth century, a number of previously unknown manuscripts were translated in Spain and Sicily.<sup>35</sup> These manuscripts included writings of Arabic philosophers, scientists, and astrologers, as well as works by ancient thinkers translated into Latin from Arabic. The main rediscovered source was Aristotle. However, many texts circulated in the West under the name of the Stagirite even if we know they were not written by Aristotle. This opened the door to the legitimisation of occult sciences in medieval Europe. Astrologers adopted in their occult speculation a distorted philosophy, which had almost nothing in common with ‘pure’ Aristotelianism. As Alain de Libera has shown, astrologers were able to capture the metaphysics of Aristotle, which Arab thinkers had sought to adapt in a modified way, and then managed to misinterpret the rest of Aristotle’s legacy.<sup>36</sup> Astrologers created a phantom of Aristotelianism because along with the corpus of his original texts, including *Physics*, *De caelo* and *Meteorologica*, three-quarters of the writings attributed at the time to Aristotle were not by him. The most important texts of this list were the *Liber de causis* and the *Secretum Secretorum*, both very popular in the Middle Ages in the West. Thus, through these translations, mainly of Pseudo-Aristotelian texts, astrologers legitimised their discipline.

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<sup>35</sup> The literature on the transmission of Islamic knowledge to the West is immense. The classical study is: Charles Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927). For the history of astrological and magical texts see: David Pingree, ‘The Diffusion of Arabic Magical Texts in Western Europe’, in *La diffusione delle scienze islamiche nel Medio evo europeo*, ed. Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 1987), pp. 57–98; Charles Burnett, *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996); Marie-Thérèse D’Alverny, *La connaissance de l’Islam dans l’occident médiéval*, ed. Charles Burnett (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994); Hübner, ‘The Culture of Astrology from Ancient to Renaissance’, pp. 17–58; Liana Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Philosophy* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Age* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1991), pp. 253–62.

The *Liber de causis* was originally compiled in Arabic rather than in Greek. Its original title was *The Book of Aristotle's Interpretation of Pure Good*. In the twelfth century, one of the greatest medieval translators Gerard of Cremona translated it into Latin under the title *Liber de causis*. The latter is currently regarded as a compilation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. Similarities between these two texts were revealed in the thirteenth century when William of Moerbeke translated Proclus' *Elements* for Saint Thomas Aquinas. However, medieval philosophers did not reconsider the authorship of the *Liber de causis* even despite multiple disagreements with other texts of Aristotle. During the Middle Ages, as well as in the Renaissance, the *Liber de causis* was unequivocally attributed to Aristotle, and therefore had a great impact on scholastic philosophy.<sup>37</sup> A similar effect was produced by another pseudo-Aristotelian treatise, the *Theologia Aristotelis* – a compilation from the Arabic translation of Plotinus, which was not translated into Latin until the sixteenth century and known through al-Kindi and Avicenna.<sup>38</sup> Devoted not specifically to astrology, they contributed to the transmission of Neoplatonic doctrines under the name of Aristotle.

The origin of the *Secretum Secretorum* is still unknown. The Greek original is not extant, although there are some indications that the *Secretum* was first translated from Greek into Syriac, and only then into Arabic. In the twelfth century, the *Secretum* was translated into Latin twice, by John of Seville and Philip of Tripoli. It was widespread in the Middle Ages (several hundred manuscripts have survived). The *Secretum* was considered as an important compendium of principal occult sciences. Its anonymous author even included in it the letter allegedly written by

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<sup>37</sup> *La demeure de l'être. Autour d'un anonyme. Etude et traduction du Liber de Causis*, eds Pierre Magnard, Olivier Boulnois et al. (Paris: Vrin, 1990). On the reception of the *Liber de causis* in the Middle Ages, especially in the works of Albert the Great, see: Andreas Bächli-Hinz, *Monotheismus und neuplatonische Philosophie. Eine Untersuchung zum pseudo-aristotelischen Liber de causis und dessen Rezeption durch Albert den Großen* (Frankfurt: Academia, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Peter Adamson, *Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the 'Theology of Aristotle'* (London: Duckworth, 2002).

Aristotle himself and addressed to his pupil Alexander the Great. Hence, it is not surprising that the *Secretum* played a crucial role in the formation of medieval literary tradition related to the life and deeds of Alexander the Great. At the same time, this influential apocryphal letter legitimised the rest of the treatise, including its magical content.<sup>39</sup>

Alongside these spurious Aristotelian works, many other texts translated into Latin during that period influenced the dissemination of astrological ideas in the medieval West. Particularly important are Ptolemy's writings. While in the *Almagest* Ptolemy laid the basis of his geocentric system,<sup>40</sup> two other texts influenced the astrological discussions from the Middle Ages onwards: the *Quadripartitum*, also known as *Tetrabiblos*, translated by Plato of Tivoli in the twelfth century,<sup>41</sup> and the *Centiloquium*.<sup>42</sup>

Along with the texts mentioned above, it is important to pay attention to the principal Islamic astrological authors: al-Kindi and his disciple Abu Ma'shar. Though we do not know much about the extent of al-Kindi's astrological treatises, his most important text on the subject, the *De radiis stellarum*, has come down to us, albeit only in the Latin translation of the twelfth century.<sup>43</sup> In this treatise, al-Kindi focused on a philosophical, primarily Neoplatonic, interpretation of rays as 'transmitters' of celestial influences upon the sublunary world. The very question of visible rays was closely related to optics. Along with the *De radiis stellarum*, two other treatises by al-Kindi,

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<sup>39</sup> Steven Williams, *The Secret of Secrets: The Scholarly Career of a Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> The most influential medieval translation of the *Almagest* was that of Gerard of Cremona: Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, p. 286; idem, 'The Sicilian Translators of the Twelfth Century and the First Latin Version of Ptolemy's *Almagest*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 21 (1910), 75–102.

<sup>41</sup> Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (London: Boydell & Brewer 1999), p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> On the *Centiloquium*, see below.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Kindi, 'De radiis', eds Marie-Thérèse D'Alverny and François Hudry, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 41 (1974), 139–260.

the *De aspectibus* and the *De gradibus*, were an important contribution to optics.<sup>44</sup> Over the centuries, both texts remained known only in Latin translations; the Arabic original of the *De gradibus* was only discovered in the State Library of Munich in the early twentieth century.<sup>45</sup>

The texts of Abu Ma'shar, known in the West as Albumazar, were the earliest astrological 'manuals' of any importance in medieval Europe. The first episode of their reception is related to the activity of Adelard of Bath, who translated into Latin Abu Ma'shar's *Short Introduction* in 1120.<sup>46</sup> This epitome might be regarded as the preface to Abu Ma'shar's fundamental *Great Introduction to Astrology*, translated in the twelfth century twice: by Hermann of Carinthia and by John of Seville.<sup>47</sup> Another treatise of Abu Ma'shar, *On Great Conjunctions*, informed his European readers about new astrological techniques; they would be extensively discussed in subsequent astrological writings. As for the translation of the *De magnis conjunctionibus*, we do not know much about the translator. The only evidence is that he worked in the circle of John of Seville and

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<sup>44</sup> On medieval optics, see an important book, which explores the influence of al-Kindi on medieval and Renaissance philosophers: David Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>45</sup> The most important study on al-Kindi and his theory of rays is: Pinella Travaglia, *Magic, Causality and Intentionality. The Doctrine of Rays in al-Kindi* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1999). The most comprehensive book on al-Kindi and his philosophy is: Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindi* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Abu Ma'shar, *The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology, together with the Medieval Latin translation of Adelard of Bath*, eds Charles Burnett, Michio Yano and Keiji Yamamoto (Leiden: Brill, 1994). On Adelard of Bath: Charles Burnett, *Adelard of Bath: An English Scientist and Arabist of the Early Twelfth Century* (London: Warburg Institute, 1987). On Abu Ma'shar's influence upon medieval philosophy: Richard Lemay, *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century: The Recovery of Aristotle's Natural Philosophy through Arabic Astrology* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1962).

<sup>47</sup> Abū Ma'Šar al-Balhī [Albumasar], *Liber introductorii maioris ad scientiam iudiciorum astrorum*, 9 vols, ed. Richard Lemay (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1995–1996).

apparently belonged to the same group of translators from Toledo.<sup>48</sup> In any case, this large corpus of astrological texts formed the basis for astrological speculation in medieval Europe. Those who followed al-Kindi, Abu Ma'shar, and others, did not limit themselves to the reception only but tried their best to deepen the occult knowledge in their writings.

Most medieval astrologers worked at the courts of kings and other rulers and drawing up their horoscopes. The astrological knowledge was quite widespread in the late Middle Ages, as is shown by a significant number of manuscripts of astrological writings. Astrology and astrological texts were taught in medieval universities as a part of the quadrivium.<sup>49</sup> Hence, from the fourteenth century onwards, astrology belonged to the same group as philosophy, medicine, and even theology, and was a substantial part of medieval intellectual culture. Its status was not reduced to superstition, as it is often perceived nowadays. Although there was always much suspicion on the part of the Church and over-reliance on astrology was always condemned, it was considered a science. This also explains why there was the distinction between divinatory astrology, seen with suspicion, and a more 'natural' astrology, which was close to natural philosophy. Studying the latter form of astrology was extremely prestigious. Not surprisingly, many prominent scholars of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Pierre d'Ailly, and Pietro d'Abano (to name but a few), placed astrology within the scope of their intellectual

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<sup>48</sup> Abū Ma'Šar, *On Historical Astrology, The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, 2 vols, eds Keiji Yamamoto and Charles Burnett (Leiden; Boston; Cologne: Brill, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> Graziella Federici Vescovini, 'I programmi degli insegnamenti del Collegio di medicina, filosofia e astrologia, dello statuto dell'Università di Bologna', in *Roma, magistra mundi: itineraria culturae medievalis. Mélanges offerts au Père L. E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75<sup>e</sup> anniversaire*, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse (Leuven: Brepols, 1998), pp. 193–223. The most important university 'manual' was Sacrobosco's *De sphaera mundi*: Lynn Thorndike, *The Sphere of Sacrobosco and its Commentators* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

investigations. Certain astrological techniques were adapted in medicine and attracted the interest of such leading physicians of the Middle Ages as Arnau of Villanova.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, in the thirteenth century, two principal approaches to the reception of astrology could be discerned. On the one hand, astrological studies were frequently used to prove certain Christian dogmas.<sup>51</sup> Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon sought to legitimise astrology in their writings, while the influential cardinal Pierre d'Ailly compiled several treatises to confirm the compatibility of astrology with Church history and theology.<sup>52</sup> Thus, astrology, not unlike philosophy, was actually regarded as a suitable 'handmaid' of theology.

Nevertheless, many theologians categorically denied the value of astrological speculation. The most influential adversary to astrology was Thomas Aquinas, who opposed it from both theological and philosophical points of view. However, Thomas Aquinas did not deny that the stars could influence the terrestrial world through natural effects.<sup>53</sup> An important attack on astrology and related magical speculations was launched in the famous Paris condemnation of 1277.<sup>54</sup> Though the bishop Etienne Tempier's decree was directed against the *magistri artium* of

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<sup>50</sup> Nicolas Weill-Parot, 'Astrology, Astral Influences, and Occult Properties in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Traditio*, 65 (2010), 201–30.

<sup>51</sup> For some examples, see below.

<sup>52</sup> Laura Ackermann Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly (1350–1420)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). The theory of horoscopes of Christ will be analysed in detail in the sections dedicated to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's critique of Ptolemy and astrological techniques.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Litt, *Les corps célestes dans l'univers de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain; Publication Universitaires, 1963).

<sup>54</sup> *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, eds Heinrich Denifle and Emile Châtelain, vol. I (Paris: ex typis fratrum Delalain, 1889), pp. 543–58; Pierre Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols (Leuven: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université, 1911), II, pp. 174–91. A modern critical edition: *La condamnation parisienne de 1277*, ed. David Piché (Paris: Vrin, 1999). On the term 'Latin Averroism', which is not currently accepted in scholarly studies, and debates at the University of Paris: Luca Bianchi, *Il vescovo e i filosofi. La condanna parigina del 1277 e l'evoluzione dell'aristotelismo scolastico* (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1990).



the circle of Siger of Brabant, sometimes called the ‘Latin Averroists’, magic and astrology were explicitly mentioned in the condemnation. Etienne Tempier denied the possibility of an alternative philosophical interpretation of theological questions, which had been introduced in the University of Paris through the reading of Aristotle and his commentators. Several decrees with the refutation of Aristotle at the University had not succeeded to undermine the new philosophical movement at the Faculty of Arts, and Tempier had to propose a more radical decision. As the corpus of Aristotelian texts included the spurious magical texts mentioned above, astrology was also under attack. But even such a decree could not stop the dissemination of a philosophical interpretation of the universe. Thus, astrology got its second form in medieval thought: it was considered as an important part of an alternative, i. e. philosophical, mode of cognising the nature and the universe.<sup>55</sup>

The fascination for astrology continued in the Renaissance. Almost no one among the most famous Renaissance rulers renounced the desire to know the future of his own or of his state. Astrologers surrounded the family of Montefeltro, including its most significant member Federico da Montefeltro.<sup>56</sup> In Ferrara, astrology was among the most prestigious disciplines at the court of the d’Este family and left its marks not only in literature but also in several paintings and manuscripts – the examples include *Salone dei Mesi* at the Palazzo Schifanoia and the *De sphaera Estense*.<sup>57</sup> Astrological calculations were used also in Renaissance Florence, specifically in some rituals and civil ceremonies. The tradition to arrange feasts according to stars was observed also during the Medici era, which to an extent contradicts the prevalent image of the enlightened

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<sup>55</sup> Graziella Federici Vescovini, *Astrologia e scienza. La crisi dell’aristotelismo sul cadere del Trecento e Biagio Pelacani da Parma* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979).

<sup>56</sup> Patrizia Castelli, ‘Gli astri e i Montefeltro’, *Studi umanistici piceni*, 3 (1983), 75–89.

<sup>57</sup> Antonio Rotondò, ‘Pellegrino Prisciani (1435 ca.–1518)’, *Rinascimento*, 11, 1 (1960), 69–110; Cesare Vasoli, ‘L’astrologia a Ferrara tra la metà del Quattrocento e la metà del Cinquecento’, in *Il Rinascimento nelle corti padane: società e cultura*, ed. Paolo Rossi (Bari: De Donato, 1977), pp. 469–94.

family.<sup>58</sup> In her recent study, Monica Azzolini has shown the importance of astrology in politics at the Milanese court.<sup>59</sup> Finally, even popes turned to the astrologers' services and were interested in this field of knowledge.<sup>60</sup>

Though many influential patrons supported occult studies, astrology also faced some opposition. One important opposing force was early humanism (also known as 'civic humanism'),<sup>61</sup> that enriched European culture with a renewed knowledge of Latin and Greek. Most of them were not involved in astrological controversies and focused more on political, rhetorical or philological investigations, although there are some examples of astrological or, more exactly, anti-astrological polemics. In 1396, Coluccio Salutati started working on his *De fato et fortuna*, which was probably completed in 1399.<sup>62</sup> In the *De fato et fortuna*, Salutati explored the concepts of fate and necessity in their relation to astrology. At that moment, Salutati was not familiar with the Platonic corpus and the more recent commentaries on Aristotle, so his arguments were mostly based on Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and a 'Christianised' reading of Aristotle and Stoic philosophical texts. Salutati established a distinction between astrological necessity and divine predestination. According to him, all effects, traditionally perceived as accidental or fateful, actually originate in the 'absolute necessity', that is, in God and divine predestination. Moreover,

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 45–84.

<sup>59</sup> Monica Azzolini, *The Duke and the Stars: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Milan* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> On magical iconography of the appartamento of Borgia see: Franz Saxl, 'The Appartamento Borgia', in idem, *Lectures* (London: Warburg Institute, 1957), pp. 174–88.

<sup>61</sup> The term was first used in the famous book: Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955). On the reception of Baron's theory: *Renaissance Civic Humanism. Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>62</sup> Coluccio Salutati, *De fato et fortuna*, ed. Concetta Bianca (Florence: Olschki, 1985); Charles Trinkaus, 'Coluccio Salutati's Critique of Astrology in the Context of His Natural Philosophy', *Speculum*, 64, 1 (1989), 46–68.

such ‘absolute necessity’ does not contradict human free will. The distinctions between divine predestination and astrological necessity and between free will and divine thus placed Salutati’s arguments within a long theological tradition, which goes back to Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*.

Until the second half of the fifteenth century, astrologers remained faithful to the Islamic and Western medieval tradition. After the rediscovery of several ancient sources, some authors attempted to relate the new knowledge to the medieval tradition. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino significantly enlarged the astrological discourse with new sources, which he ascribed to the *prisca theologia* tradition.

Much has been written on the *prisca theologia* and its impact on Italian Renaissance scholars. The pioneering studies by Charles Schmitt, Cesare Vasoli, D. P. Walker and more recently Amos Edelheit have shed light on the place of *prisca theologia* in Renaissance philosophy including Marsilio Ficino’s and Giovanni Pico’s thought.<sup>63</sup> The *prisca theologia* concept, the doctrine that claims that a single, true, wisdom was transmitted over times through various ancient theologians, spreading from Egypt and Persia to Greece and Rome, owes its success in the West to Georgius Gemistus, also known as Plethon. He was among the most successful Byzantine

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<sup>63</sup> Charles Schmitt, ‘Perennial Philosophy from Agostino Steuco to Leibniz’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27 (1966), 505–32; idem, ‘*Prisca Theologia e Philosophia Perennis*: due temi del Rinascimento italiano e la loro fortuna’, in *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro*, ed. Giovannangiola Tarugi (Florence: Olschki, 1970), pp. 211–36; Daniel P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972); Cesare Vasoli, ‘Dalla pace religiosa alla ‘prisca theologia’’, in *Firenze e il Concilio del 1439*, ed. Paolo Viti (Florence: Olschki, 1994), pp. 3–25; idem, ‘*Prisca theologia* e scienze occulte nell’umanesimo fiorentino’, in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 25: Esoterismo*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), pp. 175–205; Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis. Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004); Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico, and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology. 1461/2–1498* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).

*émigrés*.<sup>64</sup> In his fundamental treatise, the *Book of the Laws*, Plethon insisted on the restoration of the cult of the ancient Greek gods.<sup>65</sup> As a result, he focused on the chronology of the pagan period of *prisca theologia*, particularly on the legacy of Zoroaster and other *prisci theologi*. During the Council of Florence, he attracted the attention of many prominent thinkers and humanists. According to the idealized account, described in Ficino's commentary on Plotinus, it was Plethon who had advised Cosimo de' Medici to restore the Platonic Academy in Florence.<sup>66</sup> Though the authenticity of the legend and the existence of the Platonic Academy in Florence are subject to dispute by modern scholars, the passage clearly indicates that Plethon influenced Italian humanists and philosophers, and that this influence had an impact on the younger generation. Marsilio Ficino studied Plethon's works in a manuscript now kept in the Riccardiana Library in Florence.<sup>67</sup> The most important difference between Plethon and Ficino is that Ficino's interpretation of *prisca theologia* is supplemented by a direct knowledge of Plethon's sources, and that it includes

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<sup>64</sup> On Plethon: François Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956); Christopher Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Игорь Медведев, *Византийский гуманизм XIV - XV вв.* (Saint Petersburg: Aleteia, 1997); Voytěch Hladký, *The Philosophy of Gemistos Plethon: Platonism in Late Byzantium, between Hellenism and Orthodoxy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> Pléthon, *Traité des lois*, eds Charles Alexandre and Augustin Pellissier (Paris: Vrin, 1982).

<sup>66</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Opera ... omnia* (Basle: ex officina Henricpetrina, 1576), p. 1537; James Hankins, 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44, 3 (1991), 429–75; Arthur Field, 'The Platonic Academy of Florence', in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, eds Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees (Leiden; Boston; Cologne: Brill, 2002), pp. 359–76.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and his Work after Five Hundred Years', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, 2 vols, ed. Giancarlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olschki, 1986), I, pp. 97–98; Ilana Klutstein, *Marsile Ficin et la théologie ancienne. Oracles Chaldaïques, Hymnes Orphiques, Hymnes de Proclus* (Florence: Olschki, 1987); *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, eds Sebastiano Gentile et al. (Florence: Le Lettere, 1984), pp. 25–27. On the influence of Plethon on Ficino's thought: Brigitte Tambrun, *Pléthon. Le retour de Platon* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), pp. 241–59.

Christian elements. Ficino also intended to prove the transformation of ‘ancient theology’ into Christianity.

Marsilio Ficino claims in the introduction to his *De religione christiana* that divine knowledge is often found in people who have little in common with Christianity.<sup>68</sup> According to Ficino, the ideas expressed by such prominent *prisci theologi* as Zoroaster,<sup>69</sup> Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus,<sup>70</sup> Aglaophemus and Pythagoras<sup>71</sup> are in complete agreement. Ficino ascribed to Plato, whose writings he believed contained a full description of the whole *prisca theologia* doctrine, the central position of ‘mediator’ between pagan Antiquity and Christian theology. Ficino asserts that after the advent of Christianity, Platonic mysteries, the meaning of which had been unclear to his

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<sup>68</sup> Ficino, *Opera*, I, p. 1: ‘Aeterna Dei sapientia statuit divina mysteria, saltem in ipsis religionis exordiis, ab illis duntaxat tractari: qui veri essent verae sapientiae amatores. Quo factum est, ut idem apud priscos rerum causas indagarent et sacrificia summae ipsius rerum causae diligenter administrarent, atque idem apud omnes gentes philosophi et sacerdotes existerent ... Prophetiae igitur Hebraeorum atque Essaei sapientiae simul et sacerdotio incumbabant. Philosophi a Persis, quia sacris praeerant, magi, hoc est, sacerdotes, sunt appellati. Indi Brachmanas de rerum natura simul, atque animorum expiationibus consulebant. Apud Aegyptios Mathematici et Metaphysici sacerdotio fungebantur et regno. Apud Aethiopas gymnosophistae philosophiae simul magistri erant ac religionis antistites. Eadem in Graecia consuetudo fuit sub Lino, Orphaeo, Musaeo, Eumolpo, Melampo, Trophimo, Aglaophemo atque Pythagora. Eadem in Gallia sub Druidum gubernaculis. Quantum apud Romanos Numae Pompilio, Valerio Sorano, Marco Varroni multisque aliis sapientiae simul, sacrorumque studium fuerit, quis ignoret?’

<sup>69</sup> On the Pseudo-Zoroastrian oracles in general see: Karl Dannenfeldt, ‘The Pseudo-Zoroastrian Oracles in the Renaissance’, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 4 (1957), 7–30. On Ficino’s use of this text see above of all: Brigitte Tambrun, ‘Marsile Ficin et le Commentaire de Pléthon sur les ‘Oracles Chaldaïques’’, *Accademia (Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin)*, 1 (1999), 9–48; Eadem, ‘Ficin, Pléthon et les mages disciples de Zoroastre’, in *Marsile Ficin: les platonismes à la Renaissance*, ed. Pierre Magnard (Paris: Vrin, 2001), pp. 169–80.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Walker, ‘Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16, 1–2 (1953), 100–20.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Celenza, ‘Pythagoras in the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 52, 3 (1999), 667–711.

followers, along with the mysteries of other *prisci theologi*, were illuminated through the Christian revelation.<sup>72</sup>

Ficino insists that most *prisci theologi*, including the most significant one, Plato, were rediscovered by Christians, after not being properly understood during their lifetimes and completely forgotten after their death. His intention was to revive the legacy of *prisci theologi* and supplement it with Christian teaching. Given that most of these texts abound in magical elements, it opened the door to magical speculation in Ficino's and his contemporaries' thought. Thus, when exploring celestial influences upon the terrestrial world Ficino generally combined traditional medieval astrological texts with new, mainly Neoplatonic, sources.<sup>73</sup> This novel reading of astrology formed the basis for late fifteenth-century disputes on the status of astrology. The *prisca theologia* concept in its relation with astrology and magic can be observed throughout the entire body of Ficino's writings. His younger contemporary, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, became the most important recipient of the Ficinian doctrine by enriching it with new Kabbalistic sources. At the first stage of his *itinéraire philosophique*, Pico's astrological views were highly influenced by the *prisca doctrine* concept. Later, as we will see in Part II of this thesis, his position towards astrology and the doctrine in question changed. This research will show the evolution of Pico's views with regard to astrology in his writings.

## Literature Review

This thesis offers the first comprehensive analysis of Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes*. By providing a textual reading of the treatise, it provides some new answers to the role of astrology in Pico's thought. This is a delicate problem that has not been satisfactorily solved in previous modern scholarship: Pico seems to endorse astrology in some of his earlier writings and to reject

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<sup>72</sup> Ficino, *Opera*, I, p. 25.

<sup>73</sup> For Ficino's astrology see below.

it in the *Disputationes*. Modern scholars have been trying to explain this as the result of an evolution of Pico's thought, but, as this thesis will demonstrate, this explanation is not sufficient to understand what Pico tried to do in the *Disputationes*. By adopting a new approach, which includes a close analysis of the text and compares it with Pico's earlier writings, I will show that Pico's method in the *Disputationes* is exactly the same as the one he develops in his *De ente et uno*, where he tries to 'purify' the thought of Plato and Aristotle from the interpretation of their successors. In Pico's opinion, just as medieval philosophers had distorted Aristotle, the Neoplatonists had corrupted the thought of Plato. By focusing on the method Pico applied in the *Disputationes*, my research underlines the continuity rather than the rupture in Pico's thought. It also suggests that Pico was particularly preoccupied with trying to put some order into a tradition that had become corrupted over centuries of misinterpretation. Another important aspect of my thesis is to show Pico's natural philosophical arguments against astrology. I argue that in proving that astrology has no natural philosophical grounds, probably under the influence of Iamblichus' *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* and Marsilio Ficino's commentary on Iamblichus' treatise, Pico proposed a compromise between the Platonic and Aristotelian theories of celestial light.

Finally, the thesis analyses the reception of Pico's anti-astrological treatise in the contexts that have not been sufficiently studied before. The legacy of some of the central figures of this thesis has not been studied in depth. Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola have attracted far more attention over the years, while Lucio Bellanti or Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola traditionally remain on the backstage of the Renaissance intellectual history. This has caused an imbalance in our knowledge about the astrological controversies in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In the thesis, I intend to present an analysis of the *Disputationes*, as well as an overview of the reception of Giovanni Pico's critique of astrology, taking into consideration its philosophical and cultural context.

The following section concerns various approaches to the astrological debates in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in Italy. Most of the studies mentioned below are important

for our understanding of this phenomenon. However, none of these studies provided a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the *Disputationes*, but focused instead on a few passages, nor did they attempt to envisage the *Disputationes* from a methodological perspective, that is to explore how Pico used, selected and manipulated the ancient and medieval sources he had access to, and to what purpose. As we will see, my approach consists precisely in identifying Pico's sources and analysing how he used them and why. By showing the presence of clear similarities between the method in the *Disputationes* and his previous writings, especially the *De ente et uno*, I argue that the *Disputationes* was the result of Pico's attempt to put some order into a tradition that had become multiform rather than a one-sided attack against astrology motivated by a need to conform to Christian orthodoxy.

There are two main methodological approaches regarding the question of Renaissance astrology, both of which, in my opinion, have to be reconsidered. First, some scholars are evidently fascinated with astrological speculation, and their studies may be regarded as an attempt to re-legitimise astrology in contemporary society. Such an approach contradicts the very essence of historical and, more generally, scientific investigation as an example of 'false subjectivity' (to use Paul Ricoeur's term).

Secondly, as early as 1955 Lynn Thorndike published a short, but fundamental article on the place of astrology in the history of science. He insisted that astrology gave rise to the development of astronomy. This was also the central point of Thorndike's monumental *History of Magic and Experimental Science*.<sup>74</sup> Although Thorndike and his followers contributed to the recognition that astrology played a central role in the history of science, their approach somewhat distorts the significance of astrological speculation in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, in that astrology and magic are presented as a proto-scientific set of speculations, and thus considered

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<sup>74</sup> Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923–1958); idem, 'The True Place of Astrology in the History of Science', *Isis*, 46, 3 (1955), 273–78; idem, *The Place of Magic in the Intellectual History of Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1905).



only as superstitious adumbrations of more scientific methods and the scientific revolution. As a result, the views of medieval and Renaissance authors, who devoted their works to astrology, have been presented in a somewhat ‘progressist’ manner, while the medieval authors’ motivations for learning, using or, on the contrary, rejecting astrology, have remained largely neglected. Yet a quick glance at authors and texts such as Roger Bacon, Pierre d’Ailly, Tycho Brahe indicates that their views cannot be limited to such a ‘progressist’ cultural outlook.

The first valuable study on astrological disputes in Renaissance Italy was a book by the Italian scholar Benedetto Soldati published in Florence in 1906.<sup>75</sup> Soldati is the first to have studied Giovanni Pontano’s astrological works, rather than his poetry, and is the first to have shown Pontano’s indebtedness to ancient and medieval texts such as Manilius’ *Astronomica* and *Phaenomena* of Aratus of Soli, both widespread and influential during that period, and Pietro d’Abano. Among Pontano’s predecessors in the Renaissance, he singled out two astrological poets, Basinio of Parma and Lorenzo Bonincontri.

In this context, Soldati devotes a section to Giovanni Pico, arguing that Pico’s *Disputationes* were the result of a spiritual conversion linked to the advent of Savonarola. Soldati’s reading, from which my own analysis of the text greatly differs, was to determine all subsequent studies on the question and was strongly influenced by Pico’s nephew’s idealised account of his uncle’s progressive distancing from Neoplatonism and endorsement of Christianity as the sole valid source for knowledge. Yet Soldati’s account is based on a number of factual errors: for instance, he was not familiar with Giovanni Pico’s strong interest in Biblical studies before Savonarola’s arrival into Florence.

In 1937, the Italian scholar Eugenio Garin completed his monograph *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrina*.<sup>76</sup> Garin insists that during his whole life Giovanni Pico remained a strong opponent of astrology, although at an early stage of his activity he recognised the

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<sup>75</sup> Benedetto Soldati, *La poesia astrologica nel Quattrocento. Ricerche e studi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1906).

<sup>76</sup> Eugenio Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrina* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1937).

importance of the Kabbalah, which was closely related to astrology. Garin explains the term *vera astrologia*, used in Giovanni Pico's *900 Conclusiones*, as astronomy, which has nothing in common with astrology. Following Cassirer, Garin highlights the anthropological motivations in Pico's attack on astrology, especially the problem of free will and the determination of human destiny, neither of which contradict the doctrine of *magia naturalis*. Moreover, he supposes that the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* must be regarded as one of the first significant attempts to reconsider ancient astronomical notions.

In his subsequent studies, including an article on magic and astrology in the Renaissance culture and a monograph entitled *Lo zodiaco della vita. La polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento*,<sup>77</sup> Garin considers the *Disputationes* in a wider context. He identifies the humanist, medical and philosophical background of the anti-astrological polemics of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and indicates the ways in which Marsilio Ficino's and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's legacy influenced the debates on magic and astrology in the Cinquecento. In *Lo zodiaco della vita*, Garin explores the development of Renaissance culture through the gradual change of the status of astrology. According to him, Ficino and Giovanni Pico had transformed the status of the magician, as a enlightened philosopher who had received the high mission to apprehend and control celestial influences, and use them for the benefit of the terrestrial world. Garin supposes that such an interpretation of *magus* as a *vinculum mundi* in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* opened the door to a new understanding of magic and astrology. From that moment on, Giovanni Pico, in Garin's opinion, rejected the prohibited 'black' elements of magical and astrological speculation and insisted that they had to be used within natural philosophy.

Garin was the first scholar who acknowledged the philosophical significance of astrology in the works of Giovanni Pico. His conclusion is that Giovanni Pico did not change his mind on the status of astrology, refusing to recognise its importance during his whole life and opposing it

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<sup>77</sup> Eugenio Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita. La polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2007).

to the ‘real’ astrology, i. e. astronomy. Thus, for Garin, Pico distinguished two types of astrology and accepted its licit, ‘astronomical’ form and completely rejected predictions. Two British scholars, D. P. Walker and Frances Yates, both from the Warburg Institute, were of the same opinion about Giovanni Pico’s constancy, though they tried to prove just the contrary: that he was a staunch supporter of astrology as a legitimate form of predictions. Both scholars presented a large-scale analysis of the context of astrological and magical debates in the Renaissance.<sup>78</sup>

The approach of the two scholars from the Warburg Institute gave rise to the concept that Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in general, reproduced Ficino’s doctrine of natural magic, while his influence on the magic of his time was limited to some borrowings from the Kabbalah. Thus, in his short article on Marsilio Ficino and astrology published in 1986, Walker presumes that even Giovanni Pico’s attack on astrology in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* was conditioned by a Ficinian text with an almost identical title, the *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*.<sup>79</sup>

The studies of Thorndike, Garin and Walker–Yates, dealing with astrology and astrological controversies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, have formed three main approaches to the problem. Depending on the approach chosen, scholars concentrate on the links between astrology and science, on astrology within the humanistic culture, or on the magical tradition of the Renaissance.

The studies by the American scholar Charles Trinkaus and some of his pupils perfectly fit the second part of this scheme. In 1970, Trinkaus published his monumental book on humanity

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<sup>78</sup> Daniel Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964).

<sup>79</sup> Daniel Walker, ‘Ficino and Astrology’, in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, vol. 2, pp. 341–49.

and divinity in Italian humanist thought,<sup>80</sup> and subsequently developed some aspects of the book in several articles.<sup>81</sup> Trinkaus interprets the astrological texts of Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico, and Giovanni Pontano in accordance with his view of Renaissance culture. According to him, all these figures were interested in astrology, but nonetheless defended the idea of free will in their doctrines. Trinkaus' aim was to make these thinkers fit into an idealised vision of Renaissance culture, which he saw was dominated to the centrality of man and the celebration of his freedom from the chains of medieval obscurantism. In doing so, Trinkaus largely ignored important medieval sources on human free and the role they played in Renaissance discussions on philosophy, theology and astrology. Despite the shortcomings of Trinkaus' approach, some of his ideas have been supported by more recent studies. For instance, Melissa Bullard has dealt with the evolution of Ficino's astrological views from his earlier texts on the subject until the *De vita*, the *De Sole* and the *De lumine*.<sup>82</sup> Bullard claims that during at least fifteen years Ficino's views modified; but the most significant element of his doctrine, namely the compatibility of astrology with free will, remained unchanged. Bullard does not work through other aspects of Ficino's thought during that period and seems to overlook the fact that Ficinian astrology cannot be separated from the rest of his legacy.

The year 1972 saw the publication of Wayne Shumaker's book on the occult sciences in the Renaissance, which provided an overview of major magical or occult conceptions in early

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<sup>80</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>81</sup> Along with the article on Salutati (see n. 62) cf. also: idem, 'The Astrological Cosmos and Rhetorical Culture of Giovanni Gioviano Pontano', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38, 3 (1985), 446–72; idem, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Ideal of Human Autonomy', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, vol. 1, pp. 197–210.

<sup>82</sup> Melissa Bullard, 'The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino's Thought on Astrology', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43, 4 (1990), 687–708.

modern Europe.<sup>83</sup> Following Walker and Yates, he defined several areas of occult knowledge, which had become extremely popular in the Renaissance, and sought to show their development and transformations. He repeated Thorndike's idea on Renaissance magic and astrology as forerunners of the so-called scientific revolution. But he limited himself to a general summary of the conclusions made by his predecessors.

In the 1970s, following the works of Eugenio Garin, a renewed interest in Renaissance astrology and magic occurred in Italy. The most important contribution was that of Paola Zambelli, who focused on the problem of the duality of magic in the Renaissance and its development during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Among her articles and books on the subject, the publication of 1974 is especially important. Two books, one in Italian, another in English, have summarised the results of her research.<sup>84</sup> In these monographs, Zambelli sought to represent an overview of magical speculation in the Renaissance, especially pointing out the dichotomy between 'black' and 'white' forms of magic. She confirmed the innovative character of Ficinian doctrine of natural magic and explored Giovanni Pico's influence on several Renaissance proponents and adversaries of astrology.<sup>85</sup> Her study on Giovanni Pico's Lullism in the *900 Conclusiones* and its aftermath has opened a new field for original research.<sup>86</sup>

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the American scholar Brian Copenhaver has published several articles on the Renaissance magic. His thesis was on the reception of Italian magical

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<sup>83</sup> Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual patterns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>84</sup> Paola Zambelli, 'Le problème de la magie naturelle à la Renaissance', in *Magia, astrologia e religione nel Rinascimento* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1974), pp. 48–82; eadem, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).

<sup>85</sup> Eadem, 'Giovanni Mainardi e la polemica sull'astrologia', in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'Umanesimo*, 2 vols (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1965), II, pp. 205–79.

<sup>86</sup> Eadem, *L'apprendista stregone. Astrologia, cabala e arte lulliana in Pico della Mirandola e seguaci* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995).

doctrines in France<sup>87</sup>; then he switched over from Symphorien Champier and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples to Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the Renaissance hermetism, and Kabbalah.<sup>88</sup> His new translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is also worth noting.<sup>89</sup>

Copenhaver's main methodological approach is conditioned by his intention to disprove several 'stereotypes' related to the Renaissance magic. Opposing the obsolete views of Ficinian natural magic and/or Piconian Kabbalistic magic, Copenhaver severely criticises Frances Yates' contention that astrology and magic were linked to the Renaissance revival of Hermetism. He shows that Ficinian doctrine was strongly influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition, especially Iamblichus, and included medieval, scholastic elements. As for Giovanni Pico, Copenhaver has criticised the 'humanistic' reading of the *Oratio* emphasising that *De hominis dignitate* was added to the title later, after Giovanni Pico's death. He argues that in his most famous text Pico did not have in mind to praise human creativity, but focused on a new, that is Kabbalistic, interpretation of magic.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Brian Copenhaver, *Symphorien Champier and the Reception of the Occultist Tradition in Renaissance France* (The Hague: De Gruyter, 1978).

<sup>88</sup> Idem, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles in Marsilio Ficino's *De vita libri tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?', in *Supplementum Festivum. Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, eds James Hankins, John Monfasani and Frank Purnell, Jr. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), pp. 441–55; idem, 'Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science', in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, eds David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 261–301; idem, 'Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De vita* of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37, 4 (1984), 523–54.

<sup>89</sup> *Hermetica: the Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius*, ed. Brian Copenhaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>90</sup> Brian Copenhaver, 'Secret of Pico's *Oratio*: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 26 (2002), 56–81.

Another approach deals with comparative studies of prominent Renaissance figures, such as in the thesis of the American scholar Sheila Rabin.<sup>91</sup> Rabin studies and compares the astrological views of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Johann Kepler. Kepler was familiar with Giovanni Pico's text, commented on it and opposed some of Pico's anti-astrological conclusions. The link between Pico and Kepler forms the methodological basis for Rabin's research. In the section on Giovanni Pico, she states that his attitude towards astrology was dual. On the one hand, his position, especially in his early writings, was close to Ficino's doctrine of natural magic. On the other hand, he obviously opposed judicial astrology in the *Disputationes*. She repeated most of her conclusions in a paper published in 2008.<sup>92</sup>

In his article published in 1992, Brian Vickers focuses on scientific and philosophical bases of the Renaissance rejection of astrology.<sup>93</sup> His analysis of Giovanni Pico's views is concise, but, as opposed to his colleagues, Vickers works through philosophical categories. He shows that interpreting such notions as light, heat, and motion, Giovanni Pico shifted from Neoplatonism to Aristotelianism. However, Vickers does not mention at all the use of these philosophical concepts in Giovanni Pico's earlier works. His important contribution includes also the very first, still rather superficial, analysis of Giovanni Pico's critique of astrological techniques, which takes more than a half of the text of *Disputationes*. Vickers convincingly shows that Giovanni Pico's main method to disprove astrology and its practice was to show disagreements between different texts and authors touching upon same subjects. He also adds that Giovanni Pico did not limit himself to judicial astrology, but his objective was to reject astrology completely, in all its forms.

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<sup>91</sup> Sheila Rabin, *Two Renaissance Views of Astrology: Pico and Kepler*, Ph.D. dissertation (New York, City University of New York, 1987).

<sup>92</sup> Eadem, 'Pico on Magic and Astrology', in *Pico della Mirandola. New Essays*, ed. Michael V. Dougherty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 152–78.

<sup>93</sup> Brian Vickers, 'Critical Reactions to the Occult Sciences During the Renaissance', in *The Scientific Enterprise. The Bar-Hillel Colloquium: Studies in History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Science*, ed. Edna Ullmann-Margalit, vol. 4 (Dordrecht: Springer, 1992), pp. 43–92.

Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, the author of the foundational study on Western astrology,<sup>94</sup> assumes that in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam* Giovanni Pico completely modified his arguments on celestial influence. This radical change of physical arguments, in her opinion, reveals Giovanni Pico's disappointment with Kabbalistic, hermetic and Neoplatonic studies of his youth. Pompeo Faracovi argues that Savonarola, through his impact on Giovanni Pico and his Florentine milieu, might provoke such a shift from occult knowledge to traditional authorities.

Studies by Brian Vickers and Ornella Pompeo Faracovi on the Aristotelian orientation and physical arguments in Giovanni Pico's treatise aroused a particular interest in the field of Renaissance philosophy, and astrology and magic. Thus, in his book on astrology and reception of the *Disputationes* at Leuven, Steven vanden Broecke supported the ideas of his colleagues,<sup>95</sup> while Sheila Rabin did the same in the article mentioned above. Pompeo Faracovi contributed also to the history of the reception of Piconian treatise after 1496. Unlike Thorndike, who as was noted above, just listed supporters and opponents of Giovanni Pico without going into detail, Pompeo Faracovi dedicated several essays to the subject. She wrote an important article on Bellanti's and Pontano's responses to Giovanni Pico, in which she explored, for the first time, the essence of their arguments against Piconian attack on astrology.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri: l'astrologia nella cultura dell'Occidente* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996).

<sup>95</sup> Steven Vanden Broecke, *The Limits of Influence: Pico, Louvain, and the Crisis of Renaissance Astrology* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 55–80.

<sup>96</sup> Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, 'In difesa dell'astrologia: risposte a Pico in Bellanti e Pontano', in *Nello specchio del cielo. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e le Disputationes contro l'astrologia divinatoria*, ed. Marco Bertozzi (Florence: Olschki, 2008), pp. 47–66; eadem, 'La polemica antiastrologica di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola', in *Il linguaggio dei cieli. Astri e simboli nel Rinascimento*, eds Germana Ernst and Guido Giglioni (Rome: Carocci, 2012), pp. 91–107.



It is necessary to mention the thesis and several articles by Darrel Rutkin.<sup>97</sup> An obvious merit of Rutkin's research is that he extensively examined the medieval, both European and Islamic, tradition of astrology, which Giovanni Pico dealt with in the *Disputationes*. This led Rutkin to identify the medieval background of *scientia naturalis* and elements of natural magic in scholastic philosophy. His main argument is that the traditional boundaries of the 'scientific revolution' have to be reconsidered, as medieval magic and astrology played a crucial role in the development of scientific methods in early modern Europe. In that context, he shows that at the early stage of his intellectual activity Giovanni Pico endorsed astrological speculation and connected it with Kabbalah within the doctrine of *scientia naturalis*, but then changed his mind. Rutkin argues that the main reason for this was the publication of Ficino's *De vita libri tres*, which caused, in Rutkin's words, the third Ficino–Pico controversy. According to Rutkin, Giovanni Pico's re-orientation towards Aristotle's physical model may be considered as an answer to the Ficinian doctrine of animated spheres and direct celestial influences on the terrestrial world. Though Rutkin's analysis of Giovanni Pico's text is rather interesting, he has overlooked some of Giovanni Pico's texts, including the *Expositiones in Psalmos*, as well as some Ficinian treatises including the *De Sole*, the *De lumine*, and several commentaries published after 1489, i. e. in the wake of the astrological arguments of the *De vita*. Finally, Rutkin's research is generally limited to the third book of the *Disputationes*, while other aspects of astrological polemics have remained in shadow.

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<sup>97</sup> Darrel Rutkin, *Astrology, Natural Philosophy and the History of Science, c. 1250–1700: Studies Toward an Interpretation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, Ph.D. dissertation (Indiana: Indiana University, 2002); idem, 'Magia, cabala, vera astrologia. Le prime considerazioni sull'astrologia di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola', in *Nello specchio del cielo*, pp. 31–45; idem, 'The Use and Abuse of Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe: Two Case Studies (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Filippo Fantoni)', in *Ptolemy in Perspective: Use and Criticism of his Work from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Alexander Jones (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), pp. 135–49.

Robert Westman's monograph is also of considerable importance.<sup>98</sup> In recent years, the number of studies on Nicolaus Copernicus has increased. Among them, worth mentioning is also the book of Andre Goddu, who refers to Westman as one of his teachers.<sup>99</sup> Unlike Goddu, whose interest lies above all in the philosophical grounds of Copernicus' activity, Westman focuses more specifically on the astrological and astronomical basis of the Copernican revolution. In his monograph, he considers one of Copernicus' possible predecessors to be Giovanni Pico, whose *Disputationes* was published in 1496 in Bologna, a year before Copernicus came to that city. Westman argues that Giovanni Pico questioned the usual stereotypes concerning astrology and therefore encouraged others to revise the celestial architecture. Westman's arguments on Copernicus' astronomical background have been widely disputed in secondary literature. As for the *Disputationes*, his analysis mostly concerns the technical aspects of the astrological polemics, such as the number of celestial spheres and related questions, which, in fact, were all but overlooked by earlier scholarship. As his study has another objective, Westman omits other aspects of astrological controversies. Among Giovanni Pico's opponents, he cites only Lucio Bellanti.

In recent years, several collections of essays on the subject were also published.<sup>100</sup> Some articles from these volumes have been mentioned above. In most cases, however, the authors have summarised the results of their or their colleagues' research. Such encyclopedic contributions are useful to understand the current condition of the Renaissance astrology studies. At the same time, in general, they do not improve our knowledge of the problem.

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Westman, *The Copernican Question: Prognostication, Skepticism, and Celestial Order* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>99</sup> André Goddu, *Copernicus and the Aristotelian Tradition. Education, Reading, and Philosophy in Copernicus's Path to Heliocentrism* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).

<sup>100</sup> The most important one is: *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, ed. Brendan Dooley (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014). See also: *Il linguaggio dei cieli. Astri e simboli nel Rinascimento*, eds Germana Ernst and Guido Giglioni (Rome: Carocci, 2012)

Within these main research approaches, the question of astrological controversies in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries has been put into large historical and scientific contexts. The legacy of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his followers has been often considered from two different standpoints. On the one hand, it has been regarded as an episode, however important, in the history of the Renaissance culture, astrology, and science. On the other hand, scholars have focused exclusively on the texts of particular authors, without exploring their motivations and cultural interests; as a result, the intention of the Renaissance writers on astrological matters often remain unclear. Meanwhile, the question of intentionality, as it has been described in phenomenology, seems to be critical for understanding the essence of astrological controversies in that period.

My research is based on two related methodological approaches to the text. It is not possible to bypass the phenomenological grounds of the astrological disputes. They cannot be studied in isolation from the religious crisis, philosophical innovations, and the problems of mentality on the eve of the Reformation. This point of view has determined the chronology of the study: after 1517, astrology developed in a completely different cultural environment, with another philosophical and religious agenda.

On the other hand, the phenomenological approach has to be applied along with hermeneutics. It is important to take into consideration the hermeneutical maxim that ‘language is a man’. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur states that history in general or the history of philosophy are far from being considered a science.<sup>101</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein proved this by

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<sup>101</sup> Paul Ricoeur’s major contributions to the methodological grounds of history, intellectual history, and philosophy are: Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, ed. Charles Kelbley (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965); idem, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974). On Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, see: Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).

analysing the very language applied to the humanities.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, Ricoeur recognised that exploring intentionality by means of both phenomenology and hermeneutics is the only way to a ‘good subjectivity’, which is, according to him, the closest possible approaching to the object of the research. The object of the analysis is no longer the text as such, but its author. In that case, the text captures the intentions of its author in a form that is accessible for further comprehension. This notion regarding the method of research in the humanities is especially important in determining the central goal of my thesis. Along with re-creating various contexts, it is crucial to understand the motivation of the Renaissance authors observing their thought in its changes and progress. Looking for the first time at the *Disputationes* in its entirety and in its relation to other texts written at the same time will allow to reconstruct the essence of the astrological debates in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Thus, I intend to investigate these controversies not in the context of subsequent scientific discoveries but in their own right.

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<sup>102</sup> On Wittgenstein and scientific epistemology, apart from his legendary *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, see: Victor Rodych, ‘Popper versus Wittgenstein on Truth, Necessity, and Scientific Hypotheses’, *Journal for General Philosophy of Science / Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, 34, 2 (2003), 323–36; Christiane Chauviré, ‘Wittgenstein, les sciences et l’épistémologie aujourd’hui’, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 2, *Wittgenstein et les sciences* (2005), 157–79.

## Part I

### Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Astrology (1486–1493):

#### From *Scientia Naturalis* to the Criticism of Predictions

##### Introduction

The development of the astrological ideas of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola still remains one of the most intriguing aspects of his legacy. Though Pico only analysed astrology in his last philosophical treatise, the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* (1493–94),<sup>103</sup> his views on the subject can be found in nearly all his texts. Pico's comments on astrology in his earlier works and the development of his astrological views since 1486 until 1493 have been extensively studied, but modern scholars have failed to provide a convincing explanation to the apparent paradoxes within Pico's work. It seems that Pico endorsed astrology in some of his writings and condemned it in others. Most of Pico's works were incomplete by the time of his death, and subsequently published by his nephew, who promoted his own intellectual agenda by constructing an idealised and somewhat distorted representation of his uncle's figure. Thus, it is hard to reconstruct the development of Pico's intellectual career. The present chapter's main task is to show the evolution of Pico's philosophical outlook from 1486 to 1493, the year when he started writing the *Disputationes*. The particular issue of Giovanni Pico's astrological views illustrates the development of his *itinéraire philosophique*, which started with an early interest in Neoplatonic writings and ambitious theological projects and ended with his later Biblical commentaries. This chapter argues that Pico's attack on astrology in the *Disputationes* was influenced not only by Girolamo Savonarola, who appeared in Florence thanks to Pico in 1490<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, 2 vols, ed. Eugenio Garin (Turin: Aragno, 2004). Originally published in 1946–1952, this is the sole modern edition of *Disputationes*.

<sup>104</sup> This fact was described even in some fiction. An interesting example is Thomas Mann's play *Fiorenza* (1905). The idea that Savonarola influenced Pico's anti-astrological attack was debated right after Pico's death. Among its

but also determined by a set of philosophical reasons. I demonstrate that around 1490, as he attempted to combine Aristotelian physics and Neoplatonic doctrine of light, Giovanni Pico found himself in a difficult position, which would later cause him to revise his natural philosophical views in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*.

Pico obtained an exceptional fame during his life. His legendary expertise in almost all philosophical and theological doctrines available in the Renaissance has caused some misunderstanding in secondary literature. In the first half of the twentieth century, Pico was associated with all philosophical schools he had been familiar with. Thus, Bruno Nardi and Avery Dulles variously stressed the Averroistic and scholastic dimension of his work,<sup>105</sup> whilst others described Pico's thought as syncretist, devoid of any original elements.<sup>106</sup> Besides, in several scholarly studies, Pico was sometimes referred to as a proponent of a new philosophy and reformer of Renaissance anthropology,<sup>107</sup> following Giovanni Gentile's representation of Italian Renaissance philosophy. These views on Pico's philosophy were radically reconsidered first in Eugenio Garin's pioneering *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrina*<sup>108</sup> and then in Fernand

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supporters were two most significant opponents of the *Disputationes*, Lucio Bellanti and Giovanni Pontano. See Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, 'In difesa dell'astrologia: risposte a Pico in Bellanti e Pontano'. See also : Giovanni Pontano, *De fortuna*, ed. Francesco Tateo (Naples: La scuola di Pitagora, 2012), pp. 290–94.

<sup>105</sup> Bruno Nardi, *Saggi sull'aristotelismo padovano dal secolo XIV a XVI* (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), pp. 127–47; Avery Dulles, *Princeps Concordiae: Pico della Mirandola and the Scholastic Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941).

<sup>106</sup> Eugenio Anagnine, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: sincretismo filosofico-religioso* (Bari: Laterza, 1937); William Craven, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of His Age: Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher* (Geneva: Droz, 1981).

<sup>107</sup> Ernst Cassirer, 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3, 2–3 (1942), 123–44, 319–44.

<sup>108</sup> Eugenio Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrina* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1937).

Roulier's *Jean Pic de la Mirandole. Humaniste, philosophe, théologien*.<sup>109</sup> These fundamental studies showed that Pico drew upon Kabbalistic, Hermetic, Neoplatonic and other sources to create his own philosophical doctrine, which appreciably evolved from 1486 to 1494. Astrology was apparently one of the most important elements of his legacy.

Giovanni was born in Mirandola to Francesco I, Count of Mirandola and Prince of Concordia, and his wife Giulia, the daughter of Feltrino Boiardo, Count of Scandiano. Giulia's brother was the famous Renaissance poet Matteo Maria Boiardo. Mirandola remained at the centre of political and military controversies of central Italian states, and Pico might have embarked on the path of a military career following his father and brothers.<sup>110</sup> His mother, however, destined her younger son to an ecclesiastical career. At the age of ten, he was promoted to a papal protonotary, and he was sent in 1477 to Bologna to study canon law.<sup>111</sup> After his mother's sudden death, Pico neglected his ecclesiastical education and embarked on university studies, which lasted around seven years.

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<sup>109</sup> Fernand Roulier, *Jean Pic de la Mirandole. Humaniste, philosophe, théologien* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1989). Around 1990, at least three books on Giovanni Pico including that of Roulier were published. Two other authors, Antonio Raspanti and Heinrich Reinhardt, considered Giovanni Pico primarily as a religious thinker. Theological aspects of Pico's thought were also in the centre of scholarly interests of Henri de Lubac. See: Henri De Lubac, *Pic de la Mirandole: études et discussions* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974); Heinrich Reinhardt, *Freiheit zu Gott: der Grundgedanke des Systematikers Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* (Weinheim: VCH, 1989); Antonio Raspanti, *Filosofia, teologia e religione: l'unità della visione in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* (Palermo: OFTES, 1991).

<sup>110</sup> Valcke, *Pic de la Mirandole*, pp. 86–87. On the destiny of small cities in Renaissance Italy see : Giovanni Tocci, 'Piccole e grandi città negli stati italiani', in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994)*, 2 vols, ed. Giancarlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olschki, 1997), I, pp. 53–94.

<sup>111</sup> Valcke, *Pic de la Mirandole*, pp. 88–89.

In 1479, Pico spent several months in Ferrara. It is quite probable that at the intellectually thriving court of d'Este he made his first acquaintance with astrology.<sup>112</sup> The same year, the most important Florentine intellectuals of the time, Ficino and Poliziano, probably made their acquaintance with Pico, as attested by a letter written in 1482 in which Ficino mentions his first meeting with Giovanni Pico.<sup>113</sup> The letter does not provide sufficient evidence that Pico actually met Ficino and Poliziano personally in Florence at that time, but it clearly suggests that by that time Pico had acquired some reputation and prestige among prominent humanistic circles.

Between 1480 and 1482 Pico studied in Padua, which was a recognised centre of Aristotelian philosophy, and this period was particularly important for his philosophical education. Here he studied under the guidance of Elia del Medigo.<sup>114</sup> Del Medigo's Jewish origin have led modern scholars to conclude that he became Pico's first teacher of Hebrew and Kabbalistic philosophy. The analysis of del Medigo's philosophical writings, however, indicates that Del Medigo's primary focus was Aristotle, specifically in his Averroistic interpretation, rather than the Kabbalah. It is, therefore, Peripatetic philosophy that Del Medigo taught Pico in the first instance, even if he might well have introduced him to some preliminary knowledge of Hebrew. Following his stay at Padua, Pico attended Georgius Merula's course on rhetoric in Pavia;<sup>115</sup> after a short

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<sup>112</sup> Gianfranco Fioravanti, 'Pico e l'ambiente ferrarese', in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte*, vol. 1, pp. 157–72.

<sup>113</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols (Florence: Olschki, 1937), II, p. 271; Arnaldo Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica di Florence* (Florence: Carnesecchi, 1902), pp. 750–51; Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficin (1433–1499)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1958), pp. 468–69; Walter Euler, *Pia philosophia et docta religio: Theologie und Religion bei Marsilio Ficino und Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* (Munich: Fink, 1998), pp. 31–32. On the date of the letter: Eugenio Garin, *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano* (Florence: Sansoni, 1979), p. 255.

<sup>114</sup> Edward Mahoney, 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Elia del Medigo, Nicoletto Vernia and Agostino Nifo', in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte*, vol. 1, pp. 127–56.

<sup>115</sup> Valcke, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 102–05.



sojourn in Florence, he settled in Paris where he studied Parisian scholasticism, which considerably influenced him.<sup>116</sup> By 1485, when Pico returned to Italy, he believed he was already familiar with all philosophical and theological doctrines of his time. Thus, from his very first steps, Pico demonstrated his passion for knowledge along with a tendency to take into account the whole variety of sources and philosophical traditions without limiting himself to particular ones. As we will see, Pico's omnivorous reading of sources and his idea that all philosophical and theological schools could be reconciled can also be found in his attitude towards astrology.

In this chapter, I will deal with six of Pico's treatises. Four are from the first period, that is before and during his failed dispute in Rome in 1486. Pico wrote the *Commento alla Canzona d'amore di Girolamo Benivieni*<sup>117</sup> in Italian before arriving in Rome. The *Conclusiones*,<sup>118</sup> together with the preface posthumously entitled *Oratio de hominis dignitate*,<sup>119</sup> often referred to as 'the great Renaissance proclamation of a modern ideal of human dignity and freedom',<sup>120</sup> and the *Apologia*<sup>121</sup> formed a single project, the Roman dispute.<sup>122</sup> Then I will turn to two exegetic works of the second period, written in Florence, namely the *Heptaplus* (1489) where Pico

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<sup>116</sup> Léon Dorez, Louis Thuasne, *Pico de la Mirandole en France (1485–1488)* (Paris: Leroux, 1897), pp. 28–50.

<sup>117</sup> Pico probably decided to write his *Commento* in Italian, as the original work by Benivieni was written in Italian as well.

<sup>118</sup> Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998).

<sup>119</sup> I have used the classical edition by Garin: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'De hominis dignitate', in idem, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Turin: Aragno, 2004), pp. 102–65 (first edition – 1942). See also: Idem, *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Parma: Guanda, 2003). For the recent English translation, see: Idem, *Oration on the Dignity of Man: a New Translation and Commentary*, eds Francesco Borghesi et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>120</sup> Copenhaver, 'The Secret of Pico's *Oration*: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy', 58.

<sup>121</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Apologia. L'autodifesa di Pico di fronte al Tribunale dell'Inquisizione*, ed. Paolo Edoardo Fornaciari (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2010).

<sup>122</sup> On the documents of Pico's process, see: Dorez, Thuasne, *Pico de la Mirandole en France*, pp. 114–46.

attempted to comment on the Genesis by using the Hebrew Kabbalistic interpretation rather than traditional exegesis,<sup>123</sup> and fragments of Pico's unfinished *Commentaries on Psalms* (1491–92), collected from various manuscripts into one book and published in 1997 by Antonio Raspanti.<sup>124</sup> My focus will be to explore Pico's treatment of astrological sources and ideas in these works.

### *The Commento alla Canzona d'amore*

The *Commento alla Canzona* is Pico's first attempt to interpret a love poem by his colleague Girolamo Benivieni through the lens of the Neoplatonic tradition, which he had learned through Ficino. Marginal annotations in various unpublished versions of the work, which were erased from the printed version by Pico's contemporaries, suggest that Pico had already formulated a number of attacks against Ficino's understanding of the Neoplatonic tradition. These attacks are often referred to as the first Pico–Ficino controversy.<sup>125</sup> Against his elder contemporary, Pico created his own Neoplatonic system of the world, strongly inspired by astrological interpretations. At the centre of mankind, Pico places God, the principle and cause of every divine being.<sup>126</sup> Pico

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<sup>123</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'Heptaplus', in *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, pp. 168–382. This text was first published by Garin in 1942. For the analysis of the *Heptaplus* see: Crofton Black, *Pico's Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).

<sup>124</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae expositiones in Psalmos*, ed. Antonio Raspanti (Florence: Olschki, 1997).

<sup>125</sup> On Pico-Ficino controversies see: Michael J. B. Allen, 'The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Poetry, Eristic and the One', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, vol. 2, pp. 418–55; Maude Vanhaelen, 'The Pico-Ficino Controversy: New Evidence in Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Parmenides', *Rinascimento*, 49 (2009), 1–39; Unn Aasdalen, 'The First Pico-Ficino Controversy', in *Laus Platonici Philosophi. Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, eds Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw and Valery Rees (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 67–88.

<sup>126</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*, I, III, p. 464: 'Come e' Platonici provono di non si potere multiplicare, ma essere uno solo Dio principio e causa d'ogni altra divinità'.

underlines, against Ficino, the ancient theologians' Creation (i. e. the one described by Hermes, Zoroaster and the 'Platonists') as 'the Son of God, the Wisdom, the Mind of God', which had nothing in common with the Christian Jesus. The first creation, also called the first intelligence in its turn, had created the rational soul.<sup>127</sup> Warning against Ficino's comparison between Neoplatonic Creation and Jesus Christ, Pico also attacked Ficino's interpretation of the creation of the human soul.<sup>128</sup> Thus, without rejecting Neoplatonism as such, Pico develops his own understanding of Neoplatonism, which leads him to reject Ficino's assimilation of Christian and Neoplatonic doctrines of Creation.

In Pico's doctrine, astrology is strongly related to three substances: as Pico claims, ancient theologians attributed to God, to the First Intelligence, and to the World Soul the virtues of Caelus, Saturn, and Jupiter respectively.<sup>129</sup> This structure corresponds to the traditional Neoplatonic triad. Pico's inclusion of Caelus in the triad may be explained by two reasons. First, he probably knew the legend described in Cicero's *De natura deorum* about Kronos (replaced by Saturn in Roman

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., I, V, p. 466: 'Questa prima creatura, da' Platonici e da antiqui filosofi Mercurio Trismegisto e Zoroastre è chiamata ora figliuolo di Dio, ora sapienzia, ora mente, ora ragione divina, il che alcuni interpretano ancora Verbo. Ed abbi ciascuno diligente avvertenzia di non intendere che questo sia quello che da' nostri Teologi è detto figliuolo di Dio, perchè noi intendiamo per il figliuolo una medesima essenza col padre, a lui in ognia cosa eguale, creatore finalmente e non creatura, ma debbesi comparare quello che e' Platonici chiamano figliuolo di Dio al primo e più nobile angelo da Dio creato'.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., I, IV, p. 466: 'Però mi maraviglio di Marsilio che tenga secondo Platone l'anima nostra essere immediatamente da Dio produtta; il che non meno alla setta di Proclo che a quella di Porfirio repugna'.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., I, VIII, p. 470: 'Come le tre predette nature, Dio, la natura angelica e la natura razionale, sono significate per questi tre nomi, Celio, Giove e Saturno, e quello che per loro s'intende. Queste tre prime nature, cioè Dio, quella prima mente e l'anima del mondo, dagli antiqui teologi, che sotto velamenti poetici coprivano e' loro mysterii, sono denotate per questi tre nomi: Celio, Saturno e Giove. Celio è esso Dio che produce la prima mente detta Saturno, e da Saturno è generato Giove, che è l'anima del mondo'.

tradition) castrating his father Caelus (or Uranus), from whose genitals, as from *semina rerum*,<sup>130</sup> Venus (Aphrodite) was born.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, in his *Divinarum institutionum libri* Lactantius referred to Plotinus' three divine hypostases Caelus (the First), Saturn (or Kronos, Intellect) and Jupiter (Soul).<sup>132</sup> In the *Commento*, however, only Saturn and Jupiter received astrological characteristics: Pico follows the tradition and identifies Jupiter, as the rational soul, with positive influence upon politicians and active people, while Saturn points towards meditative moods.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, following the Neoplatonic tradition, Pico regarded the eight celestial spheres as animated substances.<sup>134</sup> This idea means that each planet has a character of its own, and Pico specifies that Venus is situated near Mars to balance the destructive influence of her husband with her positive energy; almost the same effect takes place between 'positive' Jupiter and 'negative' Saturn.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> On Caelus' *semina rerum* see: Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, ed. Robert A. Kaster, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), I, I, VIII, 6–9. The concept of seeds or, according to Plotinus, *logoi spermatikoi*, in the Renaissance, especially in Marsilio Ficino's *De vita* was studied in: Brian Copenhaver, 'Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: 'Ennead' 4.3–5 in Ficino's 'De vita coelitus comparanda'', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, vol. 2, pp. 351–69; Hiro Hirai, 'Concepts of Seeds and Nature in the Work of Marsilio Ficino', in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, pp. 257–84; Idem, *Le concept de semence dans les théories de la matière à la Renaissance: de Marsile Ficin à Pierre Gassendi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

<sup>131</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum libri tres*, 3 vols, eds Joseph B. Mayor and J. H. Swainson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), II, XXV, 64.

<sup>132</sup> Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, 'Religion, Law and the Roman Polity: The Era of the Great Persecution', in *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome*, eds Clifford Ando and Jörg Rüpke (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), pp. 78–79.

<sup>133</sup> On this well-known astrological tradition see: Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (London: Nelson, 1964).

<sup>134</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*, I, XI, pp. 477–78.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., II, VIII, p. 496: 'Similmente appresso gli antichi astrologi, l'openione dei quali segue Platone e Aristotele, e, secondo che scrive Abenaza spano, ancora Moisè, Venere fu posta nel mezzo del cielo accanto a Marte, acciocchè avessi a domare l'impeto suo che di natura sua è distruttivo e corruttivo, sì come Giove la malizia Saturno. E se sempre Marte fussi sottoposto a Venere, cioè la contrarietà de' principii componenti al lor debito temperamento, niuna cosa mai si corromperebbe'.

Pico also shows how the animated spheres operate. According to him, apart from the eight spheres – the stars and the seven planets – there is a ninth (the rational soul) and a tenth sphere (the immovable first intelligence), which govern the sublunar world. This structure allowed Pico to combine classical astronomical techniques with the Neoplatonic triad, having placed the immovable Neoplatonic God, Creator of the First Intelligence only, beyond physical and even metaphysical reality. Pico uses ten spheres in his system.<sup>136</sup> What is important for the purpose of the present study is that in the later *Disputationes*, however, he did not express himself as a supporter of any planetary doctrine (that is, the doctrine of eight, nine, or ten spheres) and even cited contradictions among astrologers on this subject to show the incompatibility of astrology with physical data and, consequently, the falsity of predictions as such.<sup>137</sup> But in the early *Commento*, as a thinker leaning towards Neoplatonism, Pico explained that the divine light penetrates everything and can be found everywhere, though he did not offer further explanations as to how this light combines with the sublunar matter.<sup>138</sup> Although in general Pico went beyond traditional Neoplatonic interpretation, namely the Ficinian one, while interpreting astrology he linked it to well-known medieval astrological concepts, such as the significance of Jupiter and Saturn. Nor did he explain the process of the direct influence of heaven on earth. Thus, the *Commento* seems to be a very general introduction to the question of astrology. Pico devotes a long passage to the description of the planets and the structure of the Universe. Here he clearly draws upon Neoplatonic sources, which he knew either in the original or through patristic sources.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., II, XV, p. 506. On the history of the spheres, cf. the fundamental work: Michel-Pierre Lerner, *Le monde des sphères*, 2 vols (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996–1997). In the late Middle Ages it was quite common to admit the existence of more than eight spheres (seven planets and a sphere of stars) to explain motion associated not directly with planets or stars.

<sup>137</sup> On this subject: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, pp. 228–232. See also: Ovanes Akopyan, ‘Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Ptolemy and ‘Astrological Tradition’’, *Accademia (Revue de la Société Marsile Ficini)*, XII (2010), 43–45.

<sup>138</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Commento alla Canzona d’amore*, I, X, p. 476.

As we will see below, Pico's position in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam* is considerably different.

### The *Trilogy*

Pico started working on the *Trilogy* after having left Paris. As we know, his intention was to present at the papal court the conclusions taken from all existing philosophical and theological doctrines to prove their compatibility with each other. Pico first composed seven hundred conclusions.<sup>139</sup> When he returned to Italy he added further two hundred Kabbalistic theses, which were the result of his study of Hebrew with Flavius Mithridates, a converted Jew, known for his ardent and tendentious preaching against Jews.<sup>140</sup> Flavius Mithridates became Pico's personal tutor in Hebrew.<sup>141</sup> He translated for his patron several kabbalistic texts, which formed the so-called

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<sup>139</sup> Léon Dorez, 'Lettres inédites de Jean Pic de la Mirandole', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 25 (1895), 358.

<sup>140</sup> Flavius Mithridates, *Sermo de passione Domini*, ed. Chaim Wirszubski (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1963).

<sup>141</sup> On Pico's encounter with Jewish mysticism and Flavius, see first of all: Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). On Mithridates see also: François Secret, 'Nouvelles précisions sur Flavius Mithridates, maître de Pic de la Mirandole et traducteur de commentaires de Kabbale', in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'Umanesimo*, vol. 2, pp. 169–87.

Kabbalistic library of Giovanni Pico.<sup>142</sup> He also contributed to Pico's attempt to translate and comment on the Book of Job,<sup>143</sup> and believed to have taught Pico Arabic and Aramaic.<sup>144</sup>

Pico's interest in magic, astrology, and the Kabbalah was motivated by his desire to achieve a more profound understanding of Christian theology. However, the bold equivalences he drew between pagan, Jewish and Christian dogmas led the Church to condemn thirteen of his *Conclusiones*. To prove his innocence, Pico wrote the *Apologia*, which examined the thirteen prohibited conclusions in separate chapters. Pico's attempt to comment on the *900 Conclusiones* and to clarify all the condemned theses angered Innocent VIII, who declared the whole text heretical and pursued Pico. Pico fled to France, where he was arrested at the request of the papal nuncios and imprisoned at the Vincennes castle. After his extradition from France, Pico spent some time in prison in Rome until Lorenzo de' Medici saved him from inquisitorial process. In 1488, Pico was released and moved to Florence where he stayed, apart from short periods of leave, until his untimely death in 1494.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> An ambitious project on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Kabbalistic library is directed by professor Giulio Busi. The books published by now include: Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, *The Great Parchment: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English version*, eds Giulio Busi, Simonetta Bondoni and Saverio Campanini (Turin: Aragno, 2004); *The Book of Bahir: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English version*, ed. Saverio Campanini (Turin: Aragno, 2005); *The Gate of Heaven: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English version*, eds Susanne Jurgan and Saverio Campanini (Turin: Aragno, 2012). On the problem of Giovanni Pico's Kabbalistic library see: Giulio Busi, *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel Rinascimento* (Turin: Aragno, 2007), pp. 25–45.

<sup>143</sup> Chaim Wirszubski, 'Giovanni Pico's Book of Job', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32 (1969), 171–99.

<sup>144</sup> Angelo Michele Piemontese, 'Il Corano latino di Ficino e i Corani arabi di Pico e Monchates', *Rinascimento*, 36 (1996), 237.

<sup>145</sup> For instance, in 1492 Giovanni Pico went to Ferrara to attend the council of the Dominican order. From there he wrote his famous 'moral' letter to his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola: *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan; Naples: Ricciardi, 1952), pp. 824–33.

The *900 Conclusiones*<sup>146</sup> was preceded by a preface now known as the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* where Pico gives an early account of his views on magic and astrology. Drawing on the traditional division between good and bad magic, Pico opposed its illicit form based on demonic incantations – which is now commonly referred to as ‘black or demonic magic’ – to natural magic.<sup>147</sup> According to Pico, natural magic was founded by eastern *prisci theologi* and dated back to Zoroaster in Persia and Hermes Trismegistus in Egypt. Drawing on Ficino’s ideal of *magus cum sacerdos*, Pico defines the *prisci theologi*’s magic as the study of the divine world, i. e. theology.<sup>148</sup> In this context, Pico mentioned Porphyry who had asserted that magic was related to the study of the divine.<sup>149</sup> As we will see, this position is radically different from the one Pico adopts in his *Disputationes*: there he criticises the apologists of magical speculation, indicating that this magical

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<sup>146</sup> Apart from Farmer’s edition, already mentioned, two editions – in French and in Italian – have no commentary, while Bohdan Kieszkowski’s edition is full of errors: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones sive theses DCCCC Romee anno 1486 publice disputandae, sed non admissae. Texte établi d’après le MS. d’Erlangen (E) et l’editio princeps (P), collationné avec les manuscrits de Vienne (V et W) et de Munich (M)*, ed. Bohdan Kieszkowski (Geneva: Droz, 1973); Idem, *Conclusiones nongentae: le novecento tesi dell’anno 1486*, ed. Albano Biondi (Florence: Olschki, 1995); Jean Pic de la Mirandole, *900 conclusions philosophiques, cabalistiques et théologiques*, ed. Bernard Schefer (Paris: Allia, 2006). On Kieszkowski’s numerous textual and grammatical errors see: Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 104, 185–86.

<sup>147</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, p. 148: ‘Alter nihil est aliud, cum bene exploratur, quam naturalis philosophiae absoluta consumatio ... Proposui et magica theoremata, in quibus duplicem esse magiam significavimus, quarum altera demonum tota opere et auctoritate constat, res medius fidius execranda et portentosa’. This theory derives from Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>148</sup> Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, p. 131.

<sup>149</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, p. 148: ‘Idem enim, ut ait Porphyrius, Persarum lingua magus sonat quod apud nos divinarum interpret et cultor. Hanc omnes sapientes, omnes caelestium et divinarum rerum studiosae nationes, approbant et amplectuntur’.



doctrine could have been created only within the societies infected by superstitious beliefs, and he also rejects the legacy of Porphyry.<sup>150</sup>

Among those who supported magical speculations, in the *Oratio* Pico mentioned several ancient thinkers such as Pythagoras, Plato and especially Empedocles and Democritus. Pico added to the list two more recent philosophers, Al-Kindi and Roger Bacon, who would become Pico's *bêtes noires* in the *Disputationes*.<sup>151</sup> In the *Disputationes*, Al-Kindi, the author of the *De radiis stellarum*, one of the most influential medieval treatises on magic, astrology and optics, is deprived of his place as an adherent of 'true magic', while Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly are accused of distorting the essence of Christian dogmas by using astrological techniques.

In his *Conclusiones* (1486)<sup>152</sup> Giovanni Pico repeats several ideas already expressed in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. For instance, he develops his preliminary considerations on two forms of magic. He says:

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<sup>150</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, XII, p. 526: 'Utrumque auctoritas unius hominis semper mathematici, raro philosophi, tot contra in mathematicis philosophiaque hominum clarissimorum obstantibus praeiudiciis relabatur. Rapuit nomen Ptolemaei Graecos aliquos in errorem, alioquin ad superstitionem propensos, ut Porphyrium, cuius nimiam in cultu daemonum operam curamque superstitionum, et praeceptor Plotinus et discipulus Iamblichus damnaverunt'.

<sup>151</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, pp. 150–52: 'Illius nemo unquam studiosus fuit vir philosophus et cupidus discendi bonas artes; ad hanc Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato, descendam navigavere, hanc predicarunt reversi, et in archanis precipuam habuerunt...'Perstiterunt Eudoxus et Hermippus... Ex iunioribus autem, qui eam olfecerint tres reperio, Alchindum Arabem, Rogerium Baconem et Guilielmum Parisiensem'.

<sup>152</sup> Hereafter the text of *Conclusiones* will be reproduced according to the edition of Stephen Farmer (with some corrections). I will only indicate the section of the text and the ordinal number of the analysed conclusion.

All magic that is in use among the moderns, and which the Church justly suppresses, has no solidity, no foundation, no truth, because it depends on the enemies of the first truth, those powers of darkness that pour the darkness of falsehood over poorly disposed intellects.<sup>153</sup>

To this magical dark side, he opposes something more elevated:

Natural magic is permitted and not prohibited, and concerning the universal theoretical foundations of this science, I propose the following conclusions according to my own opinion.<sup>154</sup>

Pico admits that natural magic might be included as a ‘practical and the noblest part’ of the large philosophical doctrine of *scientia naturalis* (‘natural science’).<sup>155</sup> Proclaiming that the aim of *scientia naturalis* is to unveil the invisible and to unite what is separated,<sup>156</sup> Pico derives the origin of *scientia naturalis* from the wisdom of the *prisci theologi* and compares the harmony of the knowledge of the world with a marriage (probably by analogy with alchemical art).<sup>157</sup> According to him, some of the occult sciences can help a *magus* to find the hidden elements of

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<sup>153</sup> *Conclusiones Magicae*, 1: ‘Tota Magia, quae in usu est apud Modernos, et quam merito exterminat ecclesia, nullam habet firmitatem, nullum fundamentum, nullam ueritatem, quia pendet ex manu hostium primae ueritatis, potestatum harum tenebrarum, quae tenebras falsitatis male dispositis intellectibus obfundunt’.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: ‘Magia naturalis licita est, et non prohibita, et de huius scientiae uniuersalibus theoricis fundamentis pono infrascriptas conclusiones secundum propriam opinionem’.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4: ‘Magia est pars practica scientiae naturalis. Ex ista conclusione et conclusione paradoxa dogmatizante XLVII sequitur, quod magia sit nobilissima pars scientiae naturalis’.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: ‘Nulla est uirtus in coelo et in terra seminaliter et separata, quam et actuare et unire Magus non possit’; *ibid.*, 11: ‘Mirabilia artis Magicae non fiunt nisi per unionem et actuationem eorum, quae seminaliter et separatae sunt in natura’.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 13: ‘Magicam operari non est aliud quam maritare mundum’. This image of alchemical marriage was used by several alchemists and has become popular thanks to Karl Gustav Jung.

nature; and the study of numbers<sup>158</sup> and letters<sup>159</sup> in the Kabbalah with its mystical attitude to the figures has the most powerful effect.

Astrology is the highest disciplines in the whole hierarchy of occult sciences as, in Pico's point of view, it seems to be especially close to Kabbalah. In the seventy-second conclusion, Pico says:

According to my own opinion just as true astrology teaches us to read in the book of God, so the Kabbalah teaches us to read in the book of the Law.<sup>160</sup>

Pico not only establishes a close link between astrology and Jewish mysticism, but also justifies some Christian dogmas using Kabbalistic astrology. For example, Pico refers to the Arabic practice of using specific astrological images, known as *hylegh*,<sup>161</sup> and to the medieval doctrine of the so-called horoscopes of Christ, both within a Kabbalistic context, saying:

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 23–25: 'Quilibet numerus praeter ternarium et denarium sunt materiales in Magia, isti formales sunt, et in Magia Arithmetica sunt numeri numerorum. Ex secretioris philosophiae principiis necesse est confiteri, plus posse caracteres et figuras in opere Magico, quam possit, quaecunque qualitas materialis. Sicut caracteres sunt proprii operi Magico, ita numeri sunt proprii operi Cabalae, medio existente inter utrosque, et appropriabili per declinationem ad extrema usu literarum'.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 19–22: 'Ideo uoces et uerba in Magico opere efficaciam habent, quia illud in quo primum Magicam exercet natura, uox est Dei. Quaelibet uox uirtutem habet in Magia, in quantum Dei uoce formatur. Non significatiuae uoces plus possent in Magia, quam significatiuae, et rationem conclusionis intelligere potest, qui est profundus ex praecedenti conclusione. Nulla nomina ut significatiua, et in quantum nomina sunt, singula et per se sumpta, in Magico opere uirtutem habere possunt, nisi sint Hebraicam uel inde proxime deriuata'.

<sup>160</sup> *Conclusiones Cabalisticae*, 72: 'Sicut vera Astrologia docet nos legere in libro Dei, ita Cabala docet nos legere in libro legis'.

<sup>161</sup> According to astrologers, there are five so-called *hylegh* or specific astrological elements that determine human lives: the Sun and the Moon, the Horoscope, the Part of Fortune and the place of the full Moon or the new Moon immediately preceding the birth. Here the full Moon at the birth of Solomon and the full Sun at the birth of Jesus are

Just as the full Moon was in Solomon, so the full Sun was in the true Messiah, who was Jesus. And anyone can conjecture about the diminished correspondence in Zedekiah, if he is learned in the Kabbalah.<sup>162</sup>

Following the medieval tradition of the ‘horoscopes of Christ’, Pico found evidence of the divinity of Christ in astrology supplementing it with Kabbalistic element:

Because of the eclipse of the sun that occurred at the death of Christ, it can be known following the principles of the Kabbalah that the Son of God and the true Messiah suffered.<sup>163</sup>

Pico’s attempt to explain main Christian dogmas by means of the Kabbalistic art goes far beyond astrology. Thus, he finds an evidence for the Trinitarian dogma in ‘Kabbalistic science’ and finds proof of the divinity of Christ in the Tetragrammaton.<sup>164</sup> According to this theological doctrine, there is a secret and sacred name of God, which cannot be pronounced, as well as in Jewish religious texts, by the abbreviation of four holy letters – יהוה or YHWH. It is quite

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the examples of these *hylegh*. Pico will examine this theory in the *Disputationes*: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, pp. 146–48: ‘Super spacio vitae praecidendo quam nihil videant isti divinaculi paucis ostendam. Haly Abenragel, oraculum astrologorum huius aetatis, quarta parte operis sui ex sententia ait Ptolemaei quinque esse hylegh, ita enim ipsi loquuntur Solem, Lunam, Horoscopum, Partem Fortunae et locum plenilunii vel novilunii proxime antecedentis; praeter autem haec quinque planetas considerandos, in illis quinque locis et ius et auctoritatem obtinentes’. See also: Akopyan, ‘Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Ptolemy and ‘Astrological Tradition’’, 42–43.

<sup>162</sup> *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, 51: ‘Sicut fuit luna plena in Salomone, ita fuit plenus Sol in uero Messia qui fuit Iesus. Et de correspondencia ad diminutionem in Sedechia potest quis coniectare, si profundat in cabala’.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 46: ‘Per eclipsationem solis quae accidit in morte Christi sciri potest secundum fundamenta cabalae quod tunc passus est filius dei et uerus messias’.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6; 14–15.

understandable that Giovanni Pico and other Christian Kabbalists, such as Johann Reuchlin, Francesco Zorzi and Egidio of Viterbo, sought to use it in their Christological disputes.<sup>165</sup> Pico confirmed the useful aspects of Kabbalistic ideas by proving the truth of Christian dogmas in the *Apologia*, claiming that only due to the Kabbalah was it possible to explain the marvels produced by Jesus Christ.<sup>166</sup>

In the eighteenth Kabbalistic conclusion Pico mentions an astrological reason to celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday instead of Saturday as it is usually done in Jewish religious communities, though he does not make any further comments concerning this suggestion:

Whoever joins astrology to Kabbalah will see that following the era of Christ it is more appropriate to take the Sabbath and to rest on the Lord's day rather than on the day of the Sabbath.<sup>167</sup>

Finally, in two other theses, Pico combines the doctrine of ten sephirot with ten celestial spheres.<sup>168</sup> Here Pico follows some of the doctrines he had developed in the *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*. The same ideas are expressed three years later in the *Heptaplus* in a Kabbalistic rather than Neoplatonic version.<sup>169</sup> This suggests that at these stages of his philosophical career at

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<sup>165</sup> For a brief description of this idea, see: François Secret, *I cabbalisti cristiani del Rinascimento* (Rome: Arkeois, 2001), pp. 60, 77–78, 137–39.

<sup>166</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Apologia. L'autodifesa di Pico di fronte al Tribunale dell'Inquisizione*, pp. 155–93.

<sup>167</sup> *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, 18: 'Qui coniurixerit Astrologiam Cabale, videbit quod sabbatizare et quiescere conuenientius fit post Christum die dominico, quam die sabbati'.

<sup>168</sup> In the Kabbalah ten sephirot are considered revelations or emanations of the will of God.

<sup>169</sup> *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, 48–49: 'Quicquid dicant ceteri cabaliste, ego decem sphaeras sic decem numeracionibus correspondere dico, ut edificio incipiendo, Iupiter sit quarte, Mars quinte, Sol sexte, Saturnus septime, Venus octaue, Mercurius none, Luna decime, cum supra edificium firmamentum tertia, primum mobile secunda, celum Empyreum

least, Pico followed the same interpretation of celestial spheres, though with some important changes.

However, a further analysis of the *900 Conclusiones* suggests that Pico's early works, mainly the *Conclusiones*, do not contain the idea of astrological predestination.<sup>170</sup> For Pico, astrology was a tool to decipher the secrets of the Universe and did not limit the divine omnipotence with horoscopes or other means even if his Neoplatonic and Kabbalistic ideas leave some room for astrological speculation. Despite various parallels between those occult sciences in the *Commento* and the *Conclusiones*, Pico did not mention any practical and naturalistic aspect of celestial influence. The question of astral and divine influences in the sublunar world was only elucidated in detail in his subsequent works such as the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos*.

### *The Heptaplus and the Expositiones in Psalmos*

Now let us turn to Pico's post-Roman treatises, namely the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos*. Though these texts can be considered as perfect examples of new approaches in Renaissance Biblical exegesis, especially in the context of humanistic modes of textual criticism,<sup>171</sup> Pico developed in them his theory of celestial influence on the terrestrial world. It is important to note that both works abound in quotations from various Kabbalistic sources, and Pico's views on the emanation of light are still within the scope of Kabbalistic and Neoplatonic concepts. However, there were some important changes.

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prima. Qui sciverit correspondenciam decem preceptorum ad prohibencia per coniunctionem veritatis astrologice cum veritate theologica, videbit ex fundamento nostro precedentis conclusionis, quicquid alii dicant cabaliste, primum preceptum prime numeracioni correspondere, secundum secunde, tertius tercie, quartum septime, quintum quarte, sextum quinte, septimum none, octauum octaue, nonum sexte, decimum decime'.

<sup>170</sup> Vittoria Perrone Compagni, 'Pico sulla magia: Problemi di causalità', in *Nello specchio del cielo*, pp. 95–115.

<sup>171</sup> In both works Pico sought to make a reconstruction of an 'original' Biblical language using the Hebrew text of the Genesis and Psalms.

In the introduction to the *Heptaplus*, where he displays a fully developed knowledge of Kabbalistic literature and Hebrew language,<sup>172</sup> Pico claims that he intends to go beyond the numerous Christian commentaries on *Genesis*, including those of Augustine, Ambrose, Origen, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom and many others,<sup>173</sup> and focus on the Jewish tradition.<sup>174</sup> According to him, elements of Moses' doctrine derive from Egyptian wisdom, from which they were transferred to the most prominent Greek philosophers, including Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles and Democritus.<sup>175</sup> By this example, Pico obviously tried to confirm the existence of the *prisca theologia* and its transmission from Moses through ancient philosophers to his own time. An important aspect of this 'heritage' is the notion of celestial spheres.

As some years earlier in the *Commento*, Pico describes the universe which, according to him, consists of ten spheres – seven planets, the sphere of fixed stars, the ninth sphere that 'can be conceived by mind and not by sense and the first among moving bodies', and the tenth, immovable

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<sup>172</sup> As Chaim Wirszubski has shown, by 1486, i. e. the date of the Roman dispute, Pico's knowledge of Hebrew was rather superficial: Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 3–9.

<sup>173</sup> Pico includes Philo of Alexandria among Greek and Christian authors.

<sup>174</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, prooemium, pp. 178–80: 'Quae igitur super hoc libro viri sanctissimi, Ambrosius et Augustinus, Strabus item et Beda et Remigius et, ex iunioribus, Aegidius et Albertus; quae item apud Graecos Philon, Origenes, Basilus, Theodorus, Apollinarius, Didymus, Diodorus, Severus, Eusebius, Iosephus, Gennadius, Chrisostomus, scripserunt, intacta penitus a nobis relinquuntur, cum et temerarium et superfluum sit in ea se agri parte infirmum hominem exercere, ubi se pridem robustissimae mentes exercuerint. De his item quae vel Ionethes vel Anhelos vel Simeon antiquis chaldaice tradiderunt vel, ex Hebraeis, aut veteres: Eleazarus, Aba, Ioannes, Neonias, Isaac, Ioseph; aut iuniores: Gersonides, Sadias, Abraam, uterque Moses, Salomon et Manaem conscripserunt, nullam nos in praesentia mentionem habebimus'.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 170: 'Sunt item, quantum attinet ad nostros, et Lucas et Philon auctores gravissimi illum in universa Aegyptiorum doctrina fuisse eruditissimum. Aegyptiis autem usi sunt praeceptoribus Graeci omnes qui habiti fuere diviniore: Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles et Democritus'.

sphere, termed ‘empyrean’.<sup>176</sup> While in the *Commento*, he had proved the existence of this universe in Platonic terms, in the *Heptaplus*, however, Pico draws upon Hebrew sources, which he believes are in agreement with some Christian, thinkers.<sup>177</sup> But, apart from Bede and Strabo, he referred to ‘Abraham of Spain’ (most probably having in mind Abraham ibn Ezra) and to ‘Isaac the Philosopher’ who may be identified as Abraham ben Isaac of Narbonne, already mentioned in Pico’s Kabbalistic theses.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, Pico insists on the likeness of the universe structure with the menorah used for religious purposes in Jewish communities.<sup>179</sup> The notion of ten spheres in the context of Kabbalistic metaphorical images has something in common with the idea of ten sephirot, described and used by Pico in the *900 Conclusiones*.

In this context, Pico explains the structure of the Universe as an emanation of the highest sphere, which diffuses light down to the lower spheres. In Pico’s opinion, the highest (empyrean) sphere is the unique origin and source of the light and contains *in se* the potential to diffuse it through the ninth sphere, by which this light spreads to all other elements.<sup>180</sup> This vivifying, incorporeal light, emanating towards the terrestrial world, transmits an impulse to it and fills

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., II, 1, p. 224: ‘Supra novem caelorum orbes, idest septem planetas et sphaeram octavam, quam vocant inerrantem, nonumque orbem, qui ratione non sensu deprehensus est primusque est inter corpora quae moventur, creditum esse decimum caelum, fixum, manens et quietum, quod motu nullo participet’.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.: ‘Neque hoc tantum creditum a nostris maxime iunioribus, Strabo et Beda, sed a pluribus etiam Hebraeorum praeterea a philosophis et mathematicis quibusdam. E quibus satis duos sit attulisse, Abraam Hispanum, astrologum maximum, et Isaac philosophum, quorum uterque hoc attestatur’.

<sup>178</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, p. 272.

<sup>179</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, II, 1, p. 224: ‘Figuratas item intelligit decem sphaeras a Zacharia per candelabrum aureum distinctum septem lucernis et lampadem super caput eius, tum super lampadem olivas duas’.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 226: ‘Verum si non possunt eiusdem aquae duo primi fontes constitui, necesse est ex illis duabus supremis sphaeris alteram esse quae sit principium totius lucis. Quod si ad alteram, ad primam utique, idest ad decimam referendum est, ut sit ipsa quasi unitas luminum, tum proxime lumen tota essentia suae substantiae nona recipiat; inde tertio ad solem plena participatione proveniat, a sole autem quarto iam ideoque postremo gradu in omnes stellas partibiliter dividatur. Supra igitur novem caelos decimum statuamus, quem theologi vocant empyreum’.



mankind with its positive influence. It is symptomatic that looking for analogies Pico referred to the similar Neoplatonic notion of the Sun as Empyrean (and even quoted a fragment from the Emperor Julian's *Oratio de Sole*),<sup>181</sup> as well as to the Christian dogma of the indivisible Trinity.<sup>182</sup> Hence, Pico presented his basically Neoplatonic theory of light, with Kabbalistic supplements, which seems in some aspects close to the interpretation of Marsilio Ficino in the *De sole* and *De lumine* (both written in 1492).<sup>183</sup> This does not necessarily mean that any of these writers influenced the other, since the doctrine of emanation was central to Christian mysticism, itself influenced by Neoplatonism.

The most important conclusion we can take from Pico's representation of this divine light is that the celestial influence coming from the empyrean is immortal because of its divine nature; through the ninth sphere, it gives its power to the planets and the stars. Unfortunately, Pico does not describe in detail the whole structure of the heavenly images and figures in his exegetical treatise. However, one can find in the *Heptaplus* some interesting points concerning the planetary influences, which are key to understanding Pico's towards astrology. According to Pico, the first planet is Saturn.<sup>184</sup> It is quite probable that this opinion was caused by an analogy between this planet and the First Mind, described in the *Commento*. The second place is occupied by the Sun and the Moon, while Jupiter, almost almighty in the *Commento*, is removed from the top of this planetary hierarchy. According to Pico, other planets are less effective, though they also have to be taken into consideration.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.: 'Neque enim obstat si quis credere pertinacius quam verius velit, non esse illum natura vere corporea, quando in Phoenicum theologia est, ut scribit Iulianus Caesar in oratione de sole'.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., II, 2, p. 228: 'Absolute tamen cum Deum dicimus, non aliquem ex eis, sed individuum Trinitatem accipimus praesidentem illis, quemadmodum et empyreum caelum novem sibi subiectis orbibus praesidet'.

<sup>183</sup> On Ficino's doctrine of light see below.

<sup>184</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, II, 3, p. 232: 'Aquae quae sub caelo sunt, septem sidera sunt, quae sunt sub firmamento quod vocavit caelum, quorum primus Saturnus'.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp. 232–34.

Even more importantly, Pico confirms the existence of constellations between celestial images, which are able to complement the effects of each other. Thus, he admits that planets can produce opposite effects and a negative effect can be balanced by a positive one. The same applies to the position of celestial bodies in the Zodiac.<sup>186</sup> Without exploring the significance of astrological images, Pico simply recognises the doctrine of creators of this astronomical practice.

At the same time, however, Pico criticises astrology as a tool for foreknowledge. In Book V of the *Heptaplus*, he opposes the idea of the possibility of predicting future events.<sup>187</sup> It is quite probable that in this fragment Pico's attack is directed against the art of divination, described in Cicero's famous treatise. However, while mentioning that such astrological practices were condemned by most prominent philosophers and theologians, Pico does not provide any further arguments to his accusation of *divinatores*.

Although at first sight Pico's astrological views remain very similar to the ideas expressed in the *Commento* and the *Trilogy*, the *Heptaplus* is the first treatise where Pico mentions the question on the process of celestial influence and the communication of light with matter,<sup>188</sup> a problem to which he returns in the *Expositiones in Psalmos*.

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 234: 'Altius credo latere mysterium veteris Hebraeorum disciplinae, inter cuius de caelo dogmata hoc est praecipuum: concludi a Sole Iovem et Martem, a Luna vero Venerem et Mercurium... Iuppiter felix, Mars infaustus, Sol partim quidem bonus partim est malus; radiatione bonus, copula malus. Est Aries Martis domus; Cancer dignitas Iovis; Sol, in Cancro sublimitatem, in Ariete dignitatem adeptus, manifestam cum utroque sidere cognationem ostendit'.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., V, 4, pp. 296–98: 'Congressum hic item locus cum genethliacis sibi exposceret, divinandi per astra et praeoscendi futuros eventus scientiam hinc confirmantibus, quod Moses sidera in signa posita a Deo dixerit, scientiam non modo a nostris, ut a Basilio, qui recte eam occupatissimam vanitatem vocavit, et ab Apollinario et a Cyrillo et Diodoro acriter taxatam, sed quam et boni Peripatetici respuunt, et Aristoteles contempsit et, quod est maius, et a Pythagora et a Platone et ab omnibus Stoicis repudiatam fuisse, auctor est Theodoritus'.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., I, 5, p. 218.

Pico's commentary on Psalm 18, *Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei* is probably the most important text for understanding Pico's views on astrology. This is not the first time exegetes used this Psalm to legitimise the study of astrology, as indicated by Pierre d'Ailly's *Vigintiloquium de concordia astronomice veritatis cum theologia*, and then his *Elucidarium astronomice concordie cum theologica et historica veritate*, as a source helping to legitimise astrological studies.<sup>189</sup>

In the *expositio* of Psalm 18, Giovanni Pico develops his views on astrology, replacing the empyrean mentioned in the *Heptaplus* with two Suns: the intellectual Sun or the Good, and the simple Sun, which receives impulses from the intellectual one. Pico claims that they diffuse rays, which penetrate everything and influence every terrestrial thing without losing their divinity.<sup>190</sup> Around the same time, Marsilio Ficino developed the same doctrine in his *De Sole* using identical categories. According to Ficino, by analogy with the light of the Sun that has to be considered as 'the purest and most sublime phenomenon among all sensible things', which penetrates everything and gives birth to all material effects, the intelligible light of the Good spreads its vital influence on the world.<sup>191</sup> Pico thus follows the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Sun,<sup>192</sup> and underlines its agreement with the Jewish tradition, mentioning Abraham ibn Ezra as a supporter of the concept of an intelligible Sun.<sup>193</sup> In this context, Ibn Ezra is referred to as a representative of Jewish philosophy. Two years later in the *Disputationes* Pico describes him only as an astrologer. Thus,

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<sup>189</sup> See n. 52. I have to add we still need a thorough research on how Biblical passages, particularly of *Genesis* and of the *Book of Job*, were used to legitimise astrology in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

<sup>190</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, pp. 178, 182.

<sup>191</sup> Ficino, *Opera*, I, p. 966.

<sup>192</sup> In the *De Sole*, Ficino also added an excerpt from the *De mysteriis* by Iamblichus: Ibid., p. 966: 'Quam obrem Iamblichus Platonius huc postremo confugit, ut lumen, actum quendam et imaginem perspicuam divinae intelligentiae nominaret'. See also: Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, eds Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), I, 9.

<sup>193</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, p. 178.

the major philosophical issue Pico tries to resolve concerns the way in which intelligible light can enter into contact with matter, a question crucial for Neoplatonic tradition. As we will see, in the *Disputationes* it forms the basis of Pico's natural philosophical arguments against astrology.

To answer this question in the *Expositiones*, he presumes the existence of the natural Sun as an *imago* of the intellectual Sun/Good.<sup>194</sup> By this supposition, Pico seeks to explain the essence of natural influence on the terrestrial world. In his opinion the physical Sun, which derives its virtues from its intelligible model, must be regarded as the *mediator* between the divinity and the physical world, which Pico associates with the agent intellect (*intellectus agens*) of the scholastics.<sup>195</sup> Pico strives to clarify the mechanism of heavenly dominance over the material world, the way celestial rays come into contact matter without losing the impulse received from the divine and thus remain unchangeable. But he finds himself in a difficult situation since he had to combine the Neoplatonic doctrine of light with Aristotelian physics, which postulated the transformation of celestial influence received by matter. In both the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos* to explain the process of light emanation, he admits that intelligible light represents the pure form and penetrates every corporeal thing without affecting its own incorporeal essence.<sup>196</sup> It remains incorporeal even when in the emanation process after accepting divine impulses it is substituted with its corporeal analogue – the natural Sun.<sup>197</sup> Following Julian the Apostate, he concludes that with giving its power to the natural light the celestial one operates alike form, which transforms matter. Here Pico reaches a paradoxical position: referring to Julian and the 'Phoenician theology' as his main sources,<sup>198</sup> he accepts the idea that the corporeal Sun

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp. 178, 182.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 180: 'Quam quidem opinionem sequutus Albertus id ipsum de intellectu, qui dicitur agens, decernit, si ei qui recipit et phantasmati componatur'.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., pp. 178–80.

<sup>197</sup> Idem, *Heptaplus*, II, 1, p. 226.

<sup>198</sup> Idem, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, p. 180.

penetrates the corporeal with incorporeal effects. Introducing the concept of matter, however, he could not go beyond some preliminary notes on the naturalistic aspects of heavenly impulses because of the incompatibility of Neoplatonic light with physical ‘materialism’. As we will see, for Pico the Neoplatonic doctrine left room for further astrological speculation even without determinist elements.<sup>199</sup> Yet, it is precisely this question – the compatibility, or not, of Neoplatonic light with Aristotle’s physics, that Pico will focus on in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*. As I will show, it is one of the reasons Pico revised his theory of astrology in the *Disputationes*, and expressed opinions that contradict the opinions he held in his previous treatises.

Pico’s attitude towards astrology illustrates the development of his *itinéraire philosophique*. In the *Commento alla Canzona d’amore*, completed in 1486, Giovanni Pico combines astrological elements with Neoplatonic notions. In the *Conclusiones* and related treatises, he underlines the agreement between astrology and magic and the Kabbalah, which culminates in the *Heptaplus*, published in 1489. In the *Heptaplus* and in the *Expositiones in Psalmos*, however, he faced an important problem when trying to reconcile the Neoplatonic doctrine of light with Aristotelian physics. This caused a radical transformation of his natural philosophical views expressed in the *Disputationes*.

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<sup>199</sup> Marsilio Ficino tried to combine non-determinism with astrology. On the anti-deterministic aspects of his astrology, see: Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, ‘Destino e fato nelle pagine astrologiche di Marsilio Ficino’, in *Nella luce degli astri: l’astrologia nella cultura del Rinascimento*, ed. Ornella Pompeo Faracovi (Sarzana: Agorà, 2004), pp. 1–24.

## Part II

### Chapter I

#### **The *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*:**

#### **Introductory Remarks**

##### Text and its Structure

Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* has been referred to as 'the most extensive and incisive attack on astrology that the world had yet seen'.<sup>200</sup> The text was never completed due to Giovanni Pico's sudden death in 1494 and was published posthumously by his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola in 1496.<sup>201</sup> The treatise consists of twelve stylistically heterogeneous books.<sup>202</sup> Even a cursory analysis of the language and structure of the *Disputationes* indicates that Giovanni Pico had no time to edit his text. There is a lack of cohesion between the two halves of the work: the first six books are well-structured and uniform in terms of both stylistic features and content. The rest of the treatise, from the seventh to the twelfth book, consists primarily of notes on practical aspects of astrology. Nonetheless, Giovanni Pico's line of argument against astrology as a dangerous superstition is clearly reflected through the whole work.<sup>203</sup>

Another difficulty modern scholars face in studying this text stems from the way it refers to various astrological, philosophical and theological texts, which are not always acknowledged. As a consequence, different parts of the *Disputationes* aroused disproportionate amounts of

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<sup>200</sup> Vanden Broecke, *The Limits of Influence*, p. 55.

<sup>201</sup> In Bologna by Benedictus Hectoris.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. the following analyses of the treatise's structure: Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. IV (1934), pp. 529–43; Giancarlo Zanier, 'Struttura e significato delle *Disputationes* picchiane', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 1, 1 (1981), 54–86.

<sup>203</sup> Akopyan, 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Ptolemy and 'Astrological Tradition'', 38.

scholarly interest. Most studies are focused on the third book in which Giovanni Pico explored natural and philosophical arguments against astrology. Only a few studies were devoted to the question of Giovanni Pico's sources.<sup>204</sup> Other aspects of his astrological polemics, including his criticism of astrological practices and techniques, usually remain outside of scholarly interest despite the fact that they take up two thirds of the whole text. The total number of articles on this topic is surprisingly small.<sup>205</sup>

Giovanni Pico dedicates Books I and XII of the *Disputationes* to the history of astrology. In these books, he discusses the textual and historiographic criticism of astrology: Pico shows that no great philosopher or theologian had ever supported the idea of astrological predictions. Since Giovanni Pico suddenly died in 1494 and had no opportunity to polish the text, Book XII contains unnecessary repetitions and overlaps with some important passages of the first book. The last book also presents a severe critique of the *prisca theologia* doctrine, atypical for Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. This critique casts additional doubt regarding the authenticity of the book, since it contradicts Giovanni Pico's position in the earlier works and is close to the ideas formulated by Giovanni Pico's nephew Gianfrancesco Pico in his *De rerum praenotione*.

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<sup>204</sup> Antonio Polichetti, 'La cultura tardoantica nelle *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* di Pico della Mirandola', in *Giovanni e Gianfrancesco Pico: l'opera e la fortuna dei due studenti ferraresi*, ed. Patrizia Castelli (Florence: Olschki, 1998), pp. 121–36; Stefano Caroti, 'Note sulle fonti medievali di Pico della Mirandola', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 84 (2005), 60–92; Idem, 'Le fonti medievali delle *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*', in *Nello specchio del cielo*, pp. 67–93.

<sup>205</sup> Marco Bertozzi, 'Astri d'Oriente: fato, divina Provvidenza e oroscopo delle religioni nelle *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola', in *Nello specchio del cielo*, pp. 143–60; Concetta Pennuto, 'The Debate on Critical Days in Renaissance Italy', in *Astro-Medicine: Astrology and Medicine, East and West*, eds Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008), pp. 75–98; Glen Cooper, 'Approaches to the Critical Days in Late Medieval and Renaissance Thinkers', *Early Science and Medicine*, 18, 6 (2013), 536–65.

Another important point in Giovanni Pico's argument is the incompatibility of astrological influences with material reality. This point is discussed in Book III of the *Disputationes*, where Pico makes an important revision of his philosophical ideas.<sup>206</sup> By trying to eliminate the possibility of all astrological influences, which he endorsed in his earlier works, he chose Aristotle as his main authority. As we have seen, the Neoplatonic philosophical matrix, with its very specific interpretation of light, left ample room for magical speculations. Pico's change of paradigm is understandable: using the Aristotelian philosophical matrix, he tried to prove the falsehood of every celestial influence by natural reasons. This became one of the most important theses of the third book of the *Disputationes*. Therein Pico scrutinises the main philosophical points related to this topic, such as light, motion, and warmth in Aristotelian terms, referring to the *Metaphysics*, *Physics* and *De caelo*. Significantly, he enriches his philosophical discourse with a comprehensive analysis of the notion of 'matter', excluding any possibility of direct astral influence, although he made allowance for the influence producing certain physical phenomena (such as high and low tide). This shift from Neoplatonism towards Aristotelianism can be regarded as proof of Pico's deviation from Hermetic, Kabbalistic, Neoplatonic and other occult sources and of his return to traditional philosophical and naturalistic views.

The rest of the treatise, i. e. from Books V to XI, concerns astrological techniques and practices. One of the most interesting chapters deals with the refutation of the theory of great conjunctions, first described in Eastern astrology (al-Kindi, Abu Ma'shar and Masha'allah) and then adopted by European astrologers. This theory formed the basis of the 'horoscopes of Christ' and other well-known astrological practices in the West. In other chapters, Pico consequently describes and refutes horoscopic astrology, the theory of decans, the doctrine of the 'great year' and other astrological techniques. His aim is to find contradictions between astrologers on various practical aspects of their science, as well as to point to their mistakes in mathematical calculations

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<sup>206</sup> Vickers, 'Critical Reactions to the Occult Sciences During the Renaissance', pp. 43–92; Pompeo Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri*, pp. 224–33; vanden Broecke, *The Limits of Influence*, pp. 55–80.



and in the use of some particular techniques. Because of his death, Pico did not manage to present a systematic criticism of practical astrology in this part of the *Disputationes*, but the section testifies to his detailed knowledge of the problem and his intention to disprove astrology in all its aspects, both theoretical and practical. The analysis of texts provides further evidence of Pico's expertise in astrology and contradicts the assertion of Lucio Bellanti and other astrologers that Giovanni Pico was ignorant in astrological matters.

The structure of the *Disputationes* determines the sequence of sections and arguments presented in this part of the thesis. First, I will work through Pico's analysis of pro- and anti-astrological authorities and texts. The first and the last books of the *Disputationes* form my primary focus. Secondly, I intend to present the analysis of astrological practices and techniques, which might shed light on Pico's knowledge of the subject. The third paragraph will deal with the natural arguments against astrology united in Book III of the treatise.

### Edition and Authorship

Another problem with the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* concerns its authorship and edition. Since its publication in 1496 the *Disputationes* has been suspected to be a forgery; even Pico's contemporaries and, in particular, his opponents believed that Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and his collaborator Giovanni Mainardi had altered the original text to serve the interest of their spiritual mentor Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>207</sup> Some documents, such as Gianfrancesco's letter to Mainardi, seem to support this suspicion, although most probably the alterations only consisted in linguistic corrections of some obscure sections.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Charles Schmitt, 'Gianfrancesco Pico's Attitude toward his Uncle', in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'Umanesimo*, vol. 2, pp. 305–13.

<sup>208</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, pp. 17–18; Zambelli, 'Giovanni Mainardi e la polemica sull'astrologia', pp. 205–79.

Unfortunately, Giovanni Pico's autograph has been lost, making it difficult to determine the extent of Gianfrancesco's editorial interventions. A recent article by Brian Copenhaver clearly reveals the current *status quaestionis*.<sup>209</sup> The arguments against Pico's authorship summarised in Stephen Farmer's *Syncretism in the West* are considered doubtful.<sup>210</sup> Neither the *Disputationes*' style nor the history of its publication are enough to accuse Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola of distorting his uncle's treatise. For Copenhaver, this question as well as the dispute about continuity or discontinuity in Pico's brief career is still open.<sup>211</sup>

It is important to note that despite the apparent respect for his illustrious relative, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola attempted to minimise his uncle's passion for theurgic and Kabbalistic writings in the *Vita*, an idealised account of Giovanni Pico's life, which introduced the idea of Giovanni Pico's 're-conversion' back to Catholic dogma from the heretical ideas of reforming the traditional Christian religion through a return to pagan Antiquity. For Gianfrancesco, the main reason of his uncle's error was his conflict with the Holy See. Recognising the elegance of Giovanni Pico's Latin style, as well as the depth and width of his knowledge, Gianfrancesco points out that his uncle supported magic and astrology in the *Apologia* and *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. Remarkably, he does not mention the 'heretical' *900 Conclusiones*, which he did not include in Giovanni Pico's *Opera Omnia* due to its standing publication prohibition.<sup>212</sup> Nor does

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<sup>209</sup> Brian Copenhaver, 'Studied as an Oration: Readers of Pico's letters, Ancient and Modern', in *Laus Platonici Philosophi. Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, pp. 155–98.

<sup>210</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 151–76.

<sup>211</sup> Copenhaver, 'Studied as an Oration', pp. 190–91. On how the *Disputationes* may fit in the story of Pico's career, see: Anthony Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 93–134.

<sup>212</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem* (Strasbourg: Ioannes Knoblochus imprimebat, 1507), pp. 100–1: 'In primis autem queque non moveat Picum ipsum patrum et quaestionum apologia et in eleganti illa oratione quam Romae fuerat habiturus

he mention his uncle's other ambitious Biblical project, the *Heptaplus*, which was a Kabbalistic reading of Genesis, evidently because this work did not fit with his narrative. It is difficult to determine whether Gianfrancesco Pico 'forgave' his uncle for his interest in occult sciences, but he nonetheless remained loyal to him in Giovanni Pico's biography, in which he deemed there was no place for the radical and magical *900 Conclusiones* and the Kabbalistic *Heptaplus*. According to the nephew, after the Roman dispute Giovanni Pico eventually turned onto the right path and turned towards Christianity as the main source for knowledge. Gianfrancesco admits that the turning point for his uncle's return to religious dogma was his work on commenting on the Psalms, and underlines that Girolamo Savonarola's spiritual message of renovation played a crucial role in Giovanni Pico's re-conversion and inspired him to compose the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*.<sup>213</sup> Thus, Gianfrancesco's attitude towards the legacy of his uncle was two-sided: severely disapproving of Giovanni Pico's early views, while glorifying his philosophical re-orientation in the late 1480s and early 1490s. The duality of Gianfrancesco's attitude towards his famous uncle and the opportunity to change the text of the *Disputationes* according to his own views cast doubt on the authorship of Giovanni Pico's last treatise.

Following the execution of Savonarola in 1498, the physician Lucio Bellanti accused Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola of distorting the *Disputationes* in order to obtain certain results.<sup>214</sup> On the basis of Giovanni Pico's philosophical achievements in his other works, Bellanti claimed that the *Disputationes* could only have been written by someone who was ignorant in matters of astrology. In his *Responsiones in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos* published in 1498 Bellanti questioned the authenticity of Pico's last treatise, and some

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Astrologiam non confutasse atque etiam quandoque testimoniis usum quoniam valde diversum est si aliud agens quispiam alienum dogma proferat in medium'.

<sup>213</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, p. 100: 'Iterum conversurus operam ad illius cum in Psalmos commentaria'.

<sup>214</sup> Westman, *The Copernican Question*, pp. 83–84.

later historians also refused to accept the Pico as the author of the text, while others insisted on the need to subject it to statistical analysis.<sup>215</sup> It must be said, however, that just as Gianfrancesco Pico's project was to celebrate Savonarola's legacy, Bellanti's idea was to attack Savonarola's teaching and restore the high position of astrological science, the foundation of which had been significantly shaken by Pico's and Savonarola's criticisms. Bellanti's conjecture about the work's inauthenticity must be dismissed as an attempt to bring Pico back to Christianised astrology.

In the early sixteenth century, Giovanni Pico's text was occasionally accused of plagiarism. It is important to note that we do not have sufficient evidence that Pico had read Ficino's *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*, an unfinished summa that also refutes the validity of judicial astrology. Ficino's text was never published and remained unknown to Renaissance scholars. In addition, Pico's method is completely different from the one Ficino used in his *Disputatio*. While Ficino is drawing on the *prisci theologi* to demonstrate that judicial astrology cannot predict the future, Pico is deconstructing the very notion of tradition including the *prisca theologia* in order to show that alleged traces of truth in the *auctoritates* are in fact misinterpretations and mistranslations. Thus, it is quite probable that Ficino's *Disputatio* did not serve as Pico's source as Daniel Walker had unsuccessfully tried to show in his paper published in 1986.<sup>216</sup>

Moreover, we have one very interesting indication regarding the problem of the authorship of the *Disputationes*. In the 1504 edition of the *Disputationes* published in Strasbourg there is a marginal note mentioning that Johannes Schöner saw at the house of the bishop of Bamberg 'an ancient book from which this Giovanni Pico della Mirandola had copied everything and set up as his own writings. In fact, it was a book of an unknown ancient author. Johann Rheticus, a famous mathematician and physician, had heard about it from him' (that is, from Schöner himself).<sup>217</sup> This

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<sup>215</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, p. 172.

<sup>216</sup> Daniel Walker, 'Ficino and Astrology', in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, vol. 2, pp. 341–49.

<sup>217</sup> This marginal note was discovered by the Soviet scholar Alexander Gorfunkel: *Каталог палеотитов из собрания Научной библиотеки им. М. Горького Ленинградского университета*, ed. Александр Х. Горфункель

marginal note is of considerable interest in the context of the diffusion of Pico's anti-astrological views among early modern astronomers and the name of Rheticus, the sole follower and editor of Copernicus, is significant.<sup>218</sup>

Thus, through a close reading of the *Disputationes* and a detailed analysis of Pico's polemical strategy, this thesis will provide new evidence on the problem of the *Disputationes*' authorship. I will argue that Pico's general method, which deals with reviewing the history of tradition and showing the genesis of inaccuracies and inconsistencies within the 'astrological tradition' in order to dismiss traditional *auctoritates*, are similar to the method he uses in the *De ente et uno*. As will be shown below, it also applies to the last, twelfth book of the *Disputationes*, which can be regarded as the most doubtful in terms of Giovanni Pico's authorship. This suggests that in that respect at least the *Disputationes* was written by Giovanni Pico.

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(Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta, 1977), pp. 14–15. Eugenio Garin and Stefano Caroti cite this marginal note to show that this unknown author could be Nicolas Oresme: Stefano Caroti, 'La critica contro l'astrologia di Nicole Oresme e la sua influenza nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento', *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 23, 6 (1979), 659–60; Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita*, p. 97. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to accept this controversial hypothesis.

<sup>218</sup> Johann Rheticus was a student of Copernicus. He facilitated the publication of his master's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*. At the same time, Rheticus was also a well-known astrologer: Westman, *The Copernican Question*, p. 28.

## Chapter II

### Reading Texts: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his Sources

The leitmotif of the first book of the *Disputationes* is that no one great philosopher or theologian ever supported astrology. The book as a whole is structured according to this polemical strategy. It is divided into four main paragraphs. In the first and second paragraphs, Pico refers to the most remarkable philosophers and theologians trying to prove their negative attitude towards astrology. The third paragraph deals with supporters of astrology and those ‘false’ thinkers who intended using astrology to confirm either philosophical ideas or religious dogmas. In the fourth paragraph, the shortest of all, Pico mentions that astrology was strictly forbidden by religious and civil laws. It is probably the only occasion when Pico refers to the brief and unsuccessful period when he studied law at the University of Bologna.

Pico’s approach to his sources marks a significant change in his philosophical outlook. At the early stage of his career, Pico clearly considered himself as a proponent of the reconciliation of all philosophical and theological schools within Christian religion; this attitude determined Pico’s nickname among his Florentine associates, the *princeps concordiae*, which referred not only to his intellectual interests but also to the official title of prince of Concordia.<sup>219</sup> After the failed dispute, there were only some traces revealing Pico’s attempts to reconcile the opposite: Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scot, on the other hand, and Avicenna with Averroes, on the other, were all left aside. The *De ente et uno* where Pico postulated his desire to reconcile Plato

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<sup>219</sup> Pico’s name was often subject to such intellectual games. Thus, in a letter to Salviati Cristoforo Landino called him *picus divinus* (‘divine woodpecker’) referring both to ancient poetry and mythology and Christian theology: Stéphane Toussaint, ‘Giovanni Pico e il Picus: un mito per la teologia poetica’, in *Giovanni e Gianfrancesco Pico: l’opera e la fortuna dei due studenti ferraresi*, pp. 3–15.

and Aristotle represents an important case for understanding the development of Pico's views.<sup>220</sup> While putting in the core of this short letter the concordance between Plato and Aristotle, at the same time Pico reconsiders the notion that there existed a unique philosophical tradition of Platonism. Pointing to the dissonance between Plato and the *Academici*, he indicates that Plato's followers misunderstood a number of crucial points expressed in Plato's *Parmenides* and *Sophist*.<sup>221</sup> By attacking the *Academici*, Pico was rejecting Marsilio Ficino's attempt to revive the Platonic tradition, which saw Plato's successors as the correct interpreters of both Plato and Aristotle. However, Pico's strategy goes well beyond the Pico–Ficino controversy. It reveals Pico's intention to 'purify' major figures such as Plato and Aristotle from later interpretations and to go back *ad fontes* approaching the original texts of Plato and Aristotle. Pico aims at reconciling Plato and Aristotle as two individual authors, leaving aside their interpreters. In other words, Pico tries to do with Plato what many humanists were trying to do with Aristotle. In this way, Pico deconstructed the very idea of philosophical tradition, or rather offered its alternative and radically new interpretation. In the context of the *De ente et uno*, Pico argued that the Neoplatonic notion of One and Being was based on a distortion of the Platonic dialogues (particularly the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*), and that Plato and Aristotle had in fact both agreed on the fact that God could be both One and Being. The implications of this thesis were that, according to Pico, if God could be both One and Being, negative theology ceased to be the only valid way of describing God. Thus, contrary to what Ficino had stated, the Neoplatonic and Christian mystical tradition was not the only valid tradition to deal with theological matters. The scholastic tradition of using affirmations about God was also valid.

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<sup>220</sup> A letter to Angelo Poliziano conceived as part of a more fundamental treatise on the concordance between Plato and Aristotle, was written in 1492: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Dell'Ente e dell'Uno*, eds Raphael Ebggi and Franco Bacchelli (Milan: Bompiani, 2010).

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 208–14. See also: *ibid.*, VII, p. 252.

Similarly, in the context of astrology, Pico provided a meticulous analysis of all astrological sources and argued that all these sources were based on a corrupt and distorted interpretation of the original *auctoritates*. This in turn led him to deny the validity of astrology, since it was not based on a correct understanding of the *auctoritates*. Thus, the same attitude and approach – a humanist, critical examination of the historical interpretations of canonical sources – can be found in both the *De ente et uno* and the *Disputationes*.

Throughout the whole *Disputationes*, like in the *De ente et uno*, Pico deconstructs the notion of tradition. It determines the way Pico explores the so-called ‘astrological tradition’, which, in his opinion, dates back to Ptolemy. The method in question also affects his arguments against the *prisca theologia* concept expressed in the last book of the *Disputationes*. But Giovanni Pico starts developing it in Book I while distinguishing his pro- and anti-astrological sources.

In the introduction and the first book of the *Disputationes* Pico explains two of his major methodological approaches to the problem of astrology. First, generally following ancient and medieval tradition, he differentiates astrology as a mathematical or astronomical tool from its judicial version. He declares that the astrologers, ‘like wolves in sheep’s clothing’, pretend to explore the motion of celestial spheres but seduce people with their superstitious beliefs.<sup>222</sup> Comparing it to astronomy, Pico denounces astrology as a dangerous discipline, the elements of which penetrate all fields of human activity, thus producing harmful effects.<sup>223</sup> Hence, under ‘judicial astrology’ Pico rejects the possibility of predicting the future by means of astrological techniques.

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<sup>222</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, prooemium, p. 36.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 38: ‘Est autem hoc observandum, cum in omni vita, tum in artibus maxime et disciplinis, quarum illae perniciosissimae quae, praestigia cum sint aut alio genere vanitates, ita tamen mendacio lenocinium aliquod praetenderunt, ut scientiae vel artis nomen sibi vendicaverint: sive illud captatum ab antiquitate fictis auctoribus lenocinium; sive a magnis promissis illecebra curiositatis et cupiditatis humanae’.



Secondly, Pico admits that ancient Eastern societies, namely the Chaldeans, are responsible for the formation and further diffusion of astrological beliefs. To prove this, he refers to a number of Biblical passages.<sup>224</sup> The second nation he accuses of introducing astrology is the Egyptians.<sup>225</sup> Thus, Giovanni Pico attacks the notion of *prisca theologia*: since he now considers that two of its representatives are corrupted by nefarious astrological beliefs. As we will see, the controversial status of the *prisca theologia* and ancient philosophy determined Pico's arguments on pro- and anti-astrological sources.

In the introduction to the *Disputationes*, Pico claims that from the ancient times philosophers and mathematicians denied the legitimacy of astrology as a 'false, useless, impossible discipline, which is not amicable to philosophy'.<sup>226</sup> The chronology of those 'ancient times' begins with Pythagoras, traditionally considered to be one of the *prisci theologi*.<sup>227</sup> However, Pico does not mention the magical texts ascribed to Pythagoras, some of which he could have been familiar through Marsilio Ficino's milieu. Moreover, Pico omits the whole *prisca theologia* tradition prior to Pythagoras including Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, and Orpheus, all of whom are associated with magical texts and beliefs. To prove Pythagoras' anti-astrological position he also refers to traditional authors, namely Diogenes of Laertius, Plutarch and Theodoret of Cyrus. From the beginning of the *Disputationes*, Pico almost exclusively refers to classical authors not associated with any novelties, either philosophical or astro-magical. It should be definitely considered as his

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 40; I, p. 80

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 46: 'Primum omnium scire lectorem volo, non hoc nostrum inventum audaciamque fuisse, reiciendi confutandique astrologiam, sed a prima antiquitate bonis ita iudiciis semper visum non esse professionem, quae tot homini incommoda, tot insanias undique sub praetextu scientiae et utilitatis inveheret ... hinc a philosophis et mathematicis, quicumque sapere ex libris et non loqui didicerint, quasi falsa, non utilis, non possibilis, non amica philosophiae, vel contemnitur fere, vel confutatur'.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.: 'Pythagoram astrologiae fidem non praestasse, tum auctor est Theodoretus, tum Laertius quoque Diogenes, et Plutarchus indicaverunt'.

major argumentative principle. Thus, mentioning other ancient opponents of astrology, Pico refers to Cicero's *De divinatione*, Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*, and Diogenes' *Lives*: he quotes them, usually word for word, in ascribing Panetius, Carneades, Epicurus, and Democritus to the camp of anti-astrologers.<sup>228</sup> Pico's aim seems to be dual. On the one hand, he intends to confirm that every influential school in ancient philosophy rejected astrology. This strategy explains why he mentions the name of Epicurus; Pico argues that those who believe in astrology are infinitely insane because even Epicurus, the most insane among philosophers, did not trust in it.<sup>229</sup> On the other hand, he excludes the *prisci theologi* from his discourse and generally works through traditional sources.

He also adopts the approach first developed in the *De ente et uno* when he declares that neither Plato nor Aristotle ever supported astrological predictions. In the *Disputationes*, Pico argues that both Greek philosophers, when they are interpreted independently from the Platonic and Aristotelian schools, transmit doctrines that are very different than what subsequent traditions made of them. This principle determines the structure of Book I, where Pico explicitly avoids any connection between Plato and Aristotle and their followers on the problem of astrology. In the case of Plato and Aristotle, Pico's polemical strategy is *contradictio in contrarium*: their total silence on astrology becomes an argument against it. Pico enumerates Aristotelian treatises and points to

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 48. Cf: Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 3 vols, ed. John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), III, XIV, 1; Cicero, 'De divinatione', II, 42: 'Panaetius, qui unus e Stoicis astrologorum praedicta reiecit...'; I, 4: 'Etenim nobismet ipsis quaerentibus quid sit de divinatione iudicandum, quod a Carneade multa acute et copiose contra Stoicos disputata sint, verentibusque ne temere vel falsae rei vel non satis cognitae assentiamur, faciendum videtur ut diligenter etiam atque etiam argumenta cum argumentis comparemus, ut fecimus in iis tribus libris quos de natura deorum scripsimus'; I, 3: 'Reliqui vero omnes, praeter Epicurum balbutientem de natura deorum, divinationem probaverunt, sed non uno modo'; II, 13: 'Democritus tamen non inscite nugatur, ut physicus, quo genere nihil adrogantius: «quod est ante pedes nemo spectat, caeli scrutantur plagas»'.

<sup>229</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 48: 'Quod si superat omnem insaniam cui nec insanus accedat Orestes, quantum insaniae continet astrologia, cui nec multa delirans assentiri potuit Epicurus!'

the lack of any mention of astrology<sup>230</sup>. He uses the same argument in Plato's case<sup>231</sup>. In this way, Pico comes to the conclusion that both Plato and Aristotle totally rejected astrology, geomancy, incantations, and all other forms of superstition.<sup>232</sup>

Pico establishes a strict distinction between the original philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and that of their interpreters. Rather than focusing on the way these interpreters analysed the work of their masters, he focuses on their respective treatment of astrology. For instance, when he analyses Alexander of Aphrodisias' work, he does not focus on how Alexander interpreted Aristotle, but rather on how Alexander considered astrology. This approach is strikingly different from the previous (and subsequent) Aristotelian tradition, which treated Alexander as an interpreter of Aristotle, to be followed or rejected. In his analysis of Alexander, Pico recognises that Alexander did not attack astrology in particular, but he nonetheless underlines that Alexander rejected the notion that human actions were governed by fate, which of course implied a rejection

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., pp. 48–50: 'Cur igitur Aristoteles libros suos *de caelo* tam, ieiunos reliquit, ubi tam multa, tam splendida dicere potuit et, si potuit, debuit de stellis, de planetis, eorum efficientiam, proprietates, conditionem indicans nobis? Cur in *meteorologicis* imbrium, cometarum, ventorum causas perscrutatus, astrologicarum rerum semper obliviscitur? Cur in libris *de animalium generatione* nec gemellos, nec partus portentosos atque monstrosos, nec sexus numerumve puerperii, nec formam, nec qualitates ad sidera aut refert, aut referri posse meminit in transcurso?'

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 50: 'Cur idem in Timaeo facit et Plato? Cur ante Platonem, Timaeus ipse Pythagoreus in libro *de natura*, summus, ut ait Plato, philosophus pariter et astronomus? Cur et Ocellus idem Leucanum in libro *de mundo*, testimonio etiam ipse Platonis, in philosophia eminentissimus?' Cf.: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. Tiziano Dorandi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), VIII, IV, 80.

<sup>232</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 50: 'Quidnam igitur aliud dici potest, quam in ea fuisse Platonem Aristotelemque sententia, non esse causas caelestia quorum dicunt astrologi... sed ex ludicris unam, sive fraudibus potius circulatorum, quo geomantiae, hydromantiae praestigia, incantationes, quarum veteres nulli philosophi inter scientias artesque meminerunt'.

of judicial astrology.<sup>233</sup> Here Pico uses the same polemical strategy as in the case of Plato and Aristotle: he considers that Alexander did not mention astrology throughout his treatise as an indication that Alexander was against it.

In Book I of the *Disputationes*, Pico analyses Plotinus in a similar way: he does not present him as an interpreter of Plato, but focuses exclusively on his views on astrology, which are in turn considered in the context of the debate between Porphyry and Firmicus Maternus.<sup>234</sup> Considering the arguments of Porphyry and Firmicus, he takes the side of Porphyry; following Porphyry, Pico claims that after a careful study of astrology Plotinus finally rejected it. Pico also denies Firmicus' supposition about the astrological prediction of Plotinus' death.<sup>235</sup>

Throughout the *Disputationes* Pico's references to Neoplatonic philosophers are rare. Porphyry is mentioned a number of times, mainly as Plotinus' biographer or as a proponent of astrological speculation: as we will see, in Book XII Pico criticises Porphyry's fascination with astrology. The name of Iamblichus appears in the *Disputationes* only once, although Pico adopted

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 54: 'Alexander ex Aphrodisiade, summus auctor in aristotelica philosophia, *de fato* librum ad Caesares Severum primum et Antonium filium scribens, et fati reiecit necessitatem et de astrologicis siluit. Ad quae fati tamen commemoratio trahit vel transversos'.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., pp. 52–54: 'Plotinus in platonica familia primae fere auctoritatis habetur: eum, scribit Porphyrius, cum diligentem astrologiae operam dedisset, comperissetque tandem artis vanitatem falsitatemque, praedictionum omnem astrologis fidem abrogasse, quare libro quoque dicato, cui titulus *de stellarum efficientia*, dogmata astrologorum asseverate risit et confutavit'. Cf.: Porphyry, 'Vita Plotini', in *Plotini opera*, 3 vols, eds Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer (Bruxelles; Paris; Leiden: Museum Lessianum, 1951–1973), I, XV: 'Προσεῖχε δὲ τοῖς μὲν περὶ τῶν ἀστέρων κανόσιν οὐ πάνυ τι μαθηματικῶς, τοῖς δὲ τῶν γενεθλιαλῶγων ἀποτελεσματικοῖς ἀκριβέστερον. Καὶ φωράσας τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀνεχέγγυον ἐλέγχειν πολλαχοῦ κατ' αὐτῶν ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασιν οὐκ ὤκνησε'.

<sup>235</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 54: 'Quod aegre ferens Maternus multa super eius morte mentitur, quasi de eo poenas sumpserit fatum: nam illa esse falsissima ex Porphyrio ipso, Plotini discipulo, facile intelligitur qui et genus morbi quo decessit et causam, et cur Roma discesserit, plane fideliterque describit'. Cf.: Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos libri VIII*, 2 vols, eds Wilhelm Kroll and Franz Skutsch (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1968), I, 7, 14–22.

Iamblichus' arguments in analysing the problem of celestial light without quoting his source. Pico's use of Plotinus is also limited. Thus, his attitude to the Neoplatonic tradition in the *Disputationes* seems to be equivocal: he follows his critical strategy to show that all major philosophical schools including the 'familia platonica' rejected astrology but does not explore, at least openly, Neoplatonic arguments against it. Plotinus' views becomes just an episode in the history of astrological debates, whilst the philosophical doctrine underpinning his views is not analysed.

In fact, Pico's aim is to prove the agreement among the leading *auctoritates* regarding the falsity of astrological predictions. This leads to a paradox: whilst questioning the very existence of 'tradition' in its various, philosophical and pro-astrological, forms, Pico uses the notion of an anti-astrological tradition to defend the idea that astrological predictions have no validity. Thus, he constructs a new, inverted tradition, which fits his purpose.

He consequently refers to two major Eastern authorities, namely Avicenna and Averroes,<sup>236</sup> as well as to Eudoxus of Cnidus, 'the one who heard Plato',<sup>237</sup> and Origen, the first Christian author

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<sup>236</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 56: 'Averrois, celeber in eadem familia philosophus et rerum naturalium gravis aestimator, ubique astrologiam lacerat, damnat, insectatur: nam, in prima quidem philosophia astrologorum opinionem de caelestibus imaginibus, quibus subesse terrena figurae similis animalia putant, fabulosam dicit, qua tamen sublata, ruit maxima pars astrologicae superstitionis. Idem, *Cantica* exponens Avicennae, alibi fere omnia falsa dogmata astrologorum, tum artem ipsam in universum vanam et infirmam. In libris item adversus Algazelen artificiosas imagines, in quas caeli virtutes derivare se posse putant astrologi, prorsus inefficaces asseveravit. Avicenna, vir magnus in omnibus disciplinis, ultimo suae primae philosophiae libro, multis rationibus comprobavit ab astrologis praevideri futura non posse, quare nec eorum praedictionibus ullam fidem adhibendam'.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 54: 'sed non fuit christianus Eudoxus, qui etiam Platonem audivit et in Aegypto versatus est et habitus princeps astronomorum sua tempestate, qui tamen nihil creden dum astrologis, ex hominum genituris eorum fata praedicentibus, scriptum reliquit'. Cf.: Cicero, *De divinatione*, II, 42: 'De quibus Eudoxus, Platonis auditori in astrologia iudicio doctissimorum hominum facile princeps, sic opinatur, id quod scriptum reliquit, Chaldaeis in praedictione et in notatione cuiusque vitae ex natali die minime esse credendum'; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, VIII, VIII, 86–88.

in Pico's anti-astrological list. This enumeration suggests that prominent figures from all religions (Christian, Islamic, or pagan) rejected astrology. At least, three of these names are reminiscent of the *Conclusiones*' stage of Pico's career. Connecting Averroes' and Avicenna's positions on astrology, he clearly refers to his reconciliation project, which with regard to both Islamic philosophers, he never initiated. Origen represents a more personal and complicated case. It is known that for Pico the figure of Origen was of great importance. In the 900 *Conclusiones*, he defended Origen, whose views the Church had officially accused of heresy. The thesis on Origen's innocence was one of the thirteen *conclusiones* banned by the papal commission. This caused Pico's extensive response, which formed the core of the *Apologia*: in comparison with all other chapters of the *Apologia*, for Pico himself, the one on Origen looks more ambitious and important. It is probable that by defending the thinker accused of heresy because of his innovative and radical thought, Pico actually defended his own views and pictured himself as a new Origen.<sup>238</sup> After the failure of his Roman project, Pico only mentions Origen twice in the *Heptaplus*: first, among the disciples of Ammonius, and then as one of the Greek authors who composed a commentary on the Genesis.<sup>239</sup> The passage in question is the sole fragment after the 900 *Conclusiones* and the *Apologia* where Pico labels Pico as a Christian author who 'succeeded in philosophy and many other disciplines', and focuses, still briefly though, on Origen's views.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> The chapter on Origen from the *Apologia* was entitled 'Quaestio VII de salute Origenis': Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Apologia. L'autodifesa di Pico di fronte al Tribunale dell'Inquisizione*, pp. 244–320. On the disputes between Pico and cardinal Pedro Garcia: Henri Crouzel, *Une controverse sur Origène à la Renaissance: Jean Pic de la Mirandole et Pierre Garcia* (Paris: Vrin, 1977). On Origen in the Renaissance see: Edgar Wind, 'The Revival of Origen', in *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, ed. Dorothy Miner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 412–24.

<sup>239</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, prooemium, pp. 172, 178.

<sup>240</sup> Idem, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 54: 'Origenes Adamantius, in philosophica secta sicut in omnibus disciplinis eminentissimus, saepe multisque rationibus astrologicam vanitatem fugillavit, nisi forsitan eius testimonium minus faciunt homines superstitiosi, quoniam fuit etiam christianus'.

Going back to the *Disputationes*, Pico then proceeds to provide an overview of the ‘modern’ adversaries of astrology. Here Pico mentions several *calculatores* from the University of Paris of the fourteenth century: Nicolas Oresme, Henry of Ghent, and other members of the ‘Paris Academy’. What is striking in the passage in question is that he had criticised these authors in his earlier writings.<sup>241</sup> The reason Pico treats these sources differently here, which is still debated today, is due to the polemical context in which he operates in the *Disputationes*: his intention was to focus specifically on the question of astrology rather than on how to interpret the philosophical doctrines; in doing so, he could argue for the continuity of the anti-astrological tradition, from the ancient times through medieval scholarship to his own era.

Pico then turns to the presence of anti-astrological works among his contemporaries. Here he mentions Giovanni Marliani, a leading Milanese natural philosopher, and Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli.<sup>242</sup> Both authors are used in order to show that natural philosophers rejected astrology.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., pp. 56–58: ‘Mitto Henricum ex Assia compluresque neotericos illustres in Accademia Parisiensi dicatis operibus hanc vanitatem persequentes, quamquam maxima pars philosophorum contempserunt eam potius quam confutaverunt, sicut artes alias circulatrices et aniles fabellas et deliria praestigatorum’. On this, see: Louis Valcke, ‘I Calcolatori, Ermolao Barbaro e Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’, in *L’educazione e la formazione intellettuale nell’età dell’Umanesimo*, ed. Luisa Rotondi Secchi Tarugi (Milan: Guerini, 1992), pp. 275–84.

<sup>242</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, pp. 58–60: ‘Ioannes Marlianus nostra aetate summus in mathematicis et erat et habebatur; is, non modo praedictionibus istis semper abstinuit, sed etiam de ipsarum falsitate postremis annis scribere instituerat, quamquam, erat enim longaevus, interceptus morte id non effecerit... Paulus Florentinus, in medicina quidem, sed praecipue in mathematicis graece latinesque doctissimus, quotiens de ista professione rogabatur, totiens eam incertam fallacemque asseverabat, afferens inter cetera se ipsum evidens experimentum qui, cum quinque et octuaginta iam implesset annos, in sua tamen genitura, quam examinarat diligentissime, vitalem nullam constellationem repperisset’. On Giovanni Marliani and his contribution to the scientific development of physics see: Marshall Clagett, *Giovanni Marliani and Late Medieval Physics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

Pico then mentions Nicolò Leonicensi, Angelo Poliziano, and Marsilio Ficino.<sup>243</sup> Although Leonicensi's interest in astrology or more likely in its refutation was marginal, he played a crucial role in the debates between two groups of the so-called medical humanists. Controversies on the dominance of either Latin or Greek tradition in teaching and practicing medicine marked sixteenth-century Renaissance thought.<sup>244</sup> Giovanni Pico himself was among those who applied a similar approach with regard to astrology and questioned the status of Greek and Latin-Arabic traditions in the *Disputationes*. Pico's approach determined the deconstruction of the so-called 'astrological tradition', according to Giovanni Pico, initiated with Ptolemy's writings and later misunderstood and distorted by his followers.

Giovanni Pico's mention of the two other scholars, Angelo Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino, represents an important case in the controversies on astrology.<sup>245</sup> Poliziano's astrological studies still need to be studied in depth. It is known that in 1490–91 Poliziano lectured on Aristotle's

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<sup>243</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 60: 'Forte vero nec Nicolai Leonicensi nostri iudicium super hac re dissimulandam; is, cum mathematicam, ut omnes liberales scientias, fideliter teneat, ita tamen hanc vanam iudicat prophetantem astrologiam, ut nec illos qui scripserunt, praesertim doctiores, fidem putet adhibuisse his quae scribebant'.

<sup>244</sup> Daniela Mugnai Carrara, *La biblioteca di Nicolò Leonicensi. Tra Aristotele e Galeno: cultura e libri di un medico umanista*, (Florence: Olschki, 1991), pp. 25–27; Hiro Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy. Renaissance Debates on Matter, Life, and the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>245</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 60: 'Porro noster Marsilius scripsit adversus eos aperte, Plotini vestigia secutus, in quo interpretando et enarrando magnopere rem platoniam iuvat, auxit et illustravit; quod si, valetudini consulens hominum, aliquando corrogat sibi de caelo quedam etiam auxilia, optat ille potius ita fieri posse quam credat. Testari hominis mentem fidelissime possum, quo familiariter utor, nec habui ad detegendam istam fallaciam qui me saepius et efficacius adhortaretur, nec quoniam una faciemur uberior nobis occasio segesque ridendi quam de vanitate astrologorum, praesertim si tertius interveniat Politianus; intervenit vero semper omnium superstitionum mirus exhibitor'.



*Ethics* and accompanied his work with an introduction to the *Ethics* entitled the *Panepistemon*.<sup>246</sup> There Poliziano intended to present a classification of all arts and knowledge.<sup>247</sup> This encyclopedia included a number of significant passages on divination, astrology and other forms of occult knowledge, which Poliziano rejected with the use of both philosophical and theological arguments.<sup>248</sup> In Pico's own words, Poliziano's lectures on Aristotle provoked his *De ente et uno*.<sup>249</sup> Considering Pico's close friendship with Poliziano, he must have been familiar with his friends' studies. It is hard to confirm whether Pico used some of Poliziano's arguments against astrology; however, by saying that he met with Poliziano for mocking astrology,<sup>250</sup> Pico clearly reveals that they jointly criticise astrology.

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<sup>246</sup> Christopher Celenza, 'Poliziano's *Lamia* in Context', in Angelo Poliziano, *Lamia*, ed. Christopher Celenza (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 9–10; David Lines, *Aristotle's Ethics in the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1300–1650): The Universities and the Problem of Moral Education* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 101–5. On the position of Poliziano among his fellow thinkers and the controversies at the court of Lorenzo de' Medici see: Anna De Pace, *La scepsi, il sapere e l'anima. Dissonanze nella cerchia laurenziana* (Milano: LED, 2002); Attilio Bettinzoli, *La lucerna di Cleante. Poliziano tra Ficino e Pico* (Firenze: Olschki, 2009).

<sup>247</sup> Jean-Marc Mandosio, 'Filosofia, arti e scienze: l'enciclopedismo di Angelo Poliziano', in *Poliziano nel suo tempo. Atti del VI convegno internazionale (Chianciano-Montepulciano, 18–21 luglio 1994)*, ed. Luisa Tarugi Secchi (Florence: Cesati, 1996), pp. 135–64; idem, 'Les sources antiques de la classification des sciences et des arts à la Renaissance', in *Les voies de la science grecque*, ed. Danielle Jacquart (Geneva: Droz, 1997), pp. 331–90.

<sup>248</sup> Daniela Marrone, 'Tassonomia umanistica nel *Panepistemon* di Angelo Poliziano: la *divinatio* nella classificazione delle discipline', in *Platonismus und Esoterik in byzantinischem Mittelalter und italienischer Renaissance*, ed. Helmut Seng (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013), pp. 129–48.

<sup>249</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Dell'Ente e dell'Uno*, prohemium, p. 202: 'Narrabas mihi superioribus diebus, quae tecum de ente et uno Laurentius Medices egerat, cum adversus Aristotelem, cuius tu *Ethica* hoc anno publice enarras'.

<sup>250</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 60: 'Nec quoniam una facetiamur uberius nobis occasio segesque ridendi quam de vanitate astrologorum, praesertim si tertius interveniat Politianus; intervenit vero semper omnium superstitionum mirus exsibilator'.

Poliziano was an addressee of Marsilio Ficino's famous letter on astrology written in 1494 after the *Disputationes* started to circulate among the Florentine intellectual elite.<sup>251</sup> In his last treatise, Pico admits that Ficino, despite his critical attitude towards astrology, practiced it for medical purposes without truly believing in it. He adds that Ficino's real intention was to help his patients. Thus, Pico obviously alludes to the astrological techniques described in detail in the *De vita*; on the other hand, Pico claims that Ficino fully supported his attempt to refute astrology. This passage, along with the parallelism between the titles of both writers' works (Ficino's *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum* and Pico's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*), encouraged D. P. Walker to presume that Ficino was a likely influence on Pico stimulating him to embark on his anti-astrological treatise. Chronology and the fact that the *Disputationes* represents a more focused and many-sided opposition to astrology contradict Walker's hypothesis;<sup>252</sup> more importantly, there is no evidence that Pico could ever read Ficino's *Disputatio* unknown until the twentieth century.<sup>253</sup> For some modern interpreters of astrological controversies in Renaissance Florence, the passage in question signifies Pico's attempt to direct his anti-astrological attack against Ficinian astral magic expressed in the *De vita*. However, this interpretation overlooks the

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<sup>251</sup> Marsilio Ficino, 'Quid de astrologia putet', in idem, *Opera*, I, p. 958. For Italian translation, see: Idem, *Scritti sull'astrologia*, ed. Ornella Pompeo Faracovi (Milan: BUR, 1999), pp. 251–53.

<sup>252</sup> Hans Baron, 'Willensfreiheit und Astrologie bei Marsilio Ficino und Pico della Mirandola', in *Kultur und Universalgeschichte. Festschrift für Walter Goetz* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), pp. 145–70. For the Latin edition, see: Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, vol. 2, pp. 11–76. For the Italian translation: idem, 'Disputa contro il giudizio degli astrologi, di Marsilio Ficino, fiorentino', in idem, *Scritti sull'astrologia*, pp. 49–174. Several fragments are also available in English: idem, 'Disputation Against the Judgement of the Astrologers', in *Marsilio Ficino*, ed. Angela Voss (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2006), pp. 71–81.

<sup>253</sup> The *Quaestio* seems to be Ficino's notebook (*zibaldone*) on astrology, not assigned for publication: Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, vol. 1, pp. CXXXIX–CXLI; Eugenio Garin, 'Introduzione', in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, pp. 11–12.

development of both Pico's and Ficino's views on astrology and, more general, the context of their philosophical outlook in the early 1490s.

It is probable that the passage on Ficino in the *Disputationes* should not be interpreted as a part of the polemics between Ficino and Pico. As is known, Ficino's late works on astrology, including the *De vita* and the *De sole*, caused a disagreement between him and ecclesiastical authorities and even forced Ficino to write two apologies to defend the 'orthodoxy' of his position on the subject.<sup>254</sup> Pico's statement that despite the use of astrology for medical purposes Ficino did not believe in it can also be regarded as an attempt to protect his elder colleague from the opponents' attacks. To support this interpretation, it is worth observing Pico's Latin expression in the passage: according to his words, he can 'witness' in favour of his friend that Ficino's thought contradicts astrology. In this context, the term 'witness' obviously receives a juridical dimension.

In 1494, Ficino wrote a letter to Angelo Poliziano trying to explain his 'real views' on astrology. In secondary literature, this letter is usually considered to be another apology for his astro-magical views. However, the form of expression Ficino chose for the letter left most of his arguments rather unclear. He admits the use of astrological images for medical purposes in the *De vita* but insists that he refuses the very essence of astrological predestination. In his own words, following Plotinus and other Platonic thinkers, he mocks astrology.<sup>255</sup> In general, with some literary variations, Ficino repeats Pico's words taken from the passage of the *Disputationes*. Ficino's attempt to clarify his attitude towards the celestial influence on the sublunar world did not receive a response from either Poliziano and Pico. A couple of months after Ficino sent the letter, both Poliziano and Pico suddenly died.

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<sup>254</sup> Marsilio Ficino, 'Apologia per il proprio libro del Sole e della luce', in idem, *Scritti sull'astrologia*, pp. 216–17; Idem, 'An Apologia Dealing with Medicine', in idem, *Three Books on Life*, eds Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), pp. 394–401.

<sup>255</sup> Idem, *Scritti sull'astrologia*, p. 252.

Thus, Pico constructs the anti-astrological tradition in philosophy, which consists of three major groups: ancient philosophers, medieval scholasticism, and his contemporaries. However, he does not limit his discourse against astrology to philosophical figures. The second group of Pico's anti-astrological sources are religious texts. Although throughout the *Disputationes* Pico reveals his excellent knowledge of the New Testament, the quotations from the Old Testament are full of inaccuracies. At the same time, despite failing to provide precise quotations, Pico never modifies the meaning of Biblical passages. A typical example is the Book of Deuteronomy 18.14.<sup>256</sup> In Pico, the passage is as follows: 'Gentes augures et divinos audiunt; tu autem a Domino Deo aliter es institutus', although the full quotation is 'Gentes istae, quarum possidebis terram, augures et divinos audiunt: tu autem a Domino Deo tuo aliter institutus es' (These nations, whose land thou shalt possess, hearken to soothsayers and diviners: but thou art otherwise instructed by the Lord thy God). Apparently, Pico quoted the fragment from memory without contradicting the meaning of the Biblical narrative. This approach was widespread in Pico's intellectual milieu: for instance, in the *De religione christiana* Marsilio Ficino refers to a significant range of Biblical allusions and passages, most of which are either indirect or incomplete.<sup>257</sup>

Apart from Biblical passages, Giovanni Pico also appeals to the legacy of the Church Fathers. Among the whole range of the Church Fathers, he puts Augustine on the first place. In Book I of the *Disputationes*, Augustine is the only Father who deserved a careful and detailed analysis as regards his anti-astrological views, with a list of his treatises against predictions attached. Instead of limiting himself to a couple of texts, Pico mentions at least six works where Augustine rejected astrology as a dangerous and bad superstition.<sup>258</sup> This is no coincidence:

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<sup>256</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 86.

<sup>257</sup> See, for instance, Ficino's references to the New Testament in: Ficino, *Opera*, I, V, pp. 4–5.

<sup>258</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, pp. 88, 90, 92; I, IV, III, p. 434: 'Idem in *Enchiridion* nonne ipsam solam temporum observationem, ut haec fausta, illa infausta putemus, ad magnum dixit pertinere peccatum, cum tamen in hac horarum dierumque electione libertatem potius nostram exerceamus quam auferamus? ... In libro

Augustine was the first to demonstrate that pagan religion and Neoplatonic theurgy were superstitious and evil. All other religious authors enumerated later in the same chapter are given almost without any particular details, and merely serve to confirm the position of the Church against astrology. Pico mentions but briefly Basilus of Caesarea, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, and Eusebius.<sup>259</sup> The names of less known religious writers, including the Syrian gnostic Bardaisan,<sup>260</sup> Didymus the Blind<sup>261</sup> and Sidonius Apollinaris, appear unexpectedly but for the same purpose. Thus, in the section on his religious sources, Pico singles out Augustine as the main authority in refuting astrology. The variety of Augustine's texts mentioned and analysed in Book I of the *Disputationes* clearly demonstrates Pico's theological orientation towards the bishop of Hippo. All other authors serve exclusively to prove the consonance among major Christian theologians on the question of astrological predictions. It is also worth noting that in Book I of the *Disputationes*, Pico virtually disregards scholastic philosophy and specifically Thomas Aquinas, whose authority, along with Augustine's, Pico used to support his attack on religious claims of astrology. In the *Disputationes*, Thomas Aquinas was considered a crucial

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*Confessionum*, de planetariis loquens, hoc est astrologis, quos christiana, inquit, et vera pietas expellit et damnat... Quare Augustinus, in libro *de doctrina christiana* ad perniciosam dixit superstitionem pertinere eos qui genethliaci dicuntur, non solum quia actiones nostras, sed quia et actionum eventus a stellis putent procedere... Illud Moseos exponens, «posita sidera in signa et tempora», non signa, inquit, dicit quae observare vanitatis est, sed vitae usibus necessaria, qualia nautae, agricolae, et id genus artifices observant... In libro vero de natura daemonum ait expresse nemini licere post Christum genituram alicuius de caelo interpretari... Hoc respiciens Aurelius Augustinus, quinto *de Civitate Dei* libro «non, inquit, causas quae dicuntur fortuitae, unde et fortuna nomen accipit, nullas esse dicimus, sed latentes; easque tribuimus vel veri Dei, vel quorumlibet spirituum voluntati»'.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., I, I, p. 90: 'Eodem loco Basilus eam occupatissimam dixit vanitatem; Ambrosius inutilem et impossibilem; Theodoretus a philosophis etiam confutatam; Chrisostomus vanam, falsam, ridiculam. Legamus Bardesanem, Eusebium, Didimum, Apollinarem, Tertullianum, et innumeros alios plures etiam apostolicos viros'.

<sup>260</sup> Giovanni Pico could not know the writings of Bardaisan. Most probably, he based his conclusions about Bardaisan's anti-astrological views on Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*.

<sup>261</sup> It is not possible to find the exact passages on astrology that Giovanni Pico used.

authority in the context of both the critique of medieval European astrologers, who tried to prove Christian dogmas with the use of astrological calculations and practices, and the refutation of pro-astrological arguments taken from natural philosophy and Aristotle. Thus, despite the significant number of religious writers that Pico takes on his side, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are given prominence in the *Disputationes*.

Finally, canon and civil law decrees form the third group of anti-astrological sources in Book I of the *Disputationes*. This is the only occasion when Pico reveals his expertise in both laws that he studied without much success at Bologna in 1478.<sup>262</sup> Canonical resolutions apparently taken from Gratian's *Concordia discordantium canonum*<sup>263</sup> are cited together with the Code of Justinian, according to which the work of astrologers was considered abominable, and at the emperor's court, it was prohibited to consult them under the threat of torture and death.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae viri omni disciplinarum genere consumatissimi vita per Ioannem Franciscum illustris principis Galeotti Pici filium conscripta* (Modena: Aedes Muratoriana, 1994), p. 34): 'Dum vero quartum et decimum aetatis annum ageret, matris iussu, quae sacris eum initiari vehementer optabat, discendi iuris pontificii gratia Bononiam se transtulit'.

<sup>263</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 92: 'Alexander tertius, pontifex maximus, sacerdotem nescio quem, integro anno a ministerio altaris voluerit abstinere, quod per astrolabium cuiusdam ecclesiae furto investigando aliquid esset perscrutatus, quamquam, ut idem Pontifex testatur, nullam ibi aut magicam aut aliam superstitionem admisisset, In Martini Pontificis synodo scriptum, non vere Christianos aut Lunae cursus, aut stellarum, aut inanem signorum fallaciam pro domo facienda vel sociandis coniugiis observare; sed sub nomine etiam aruspicum astrologus, decreto Gregorii iunioris, anathema pronunciat. Et in concilio toletano: «Si ipse presbyter aut diaconus fuerit, in monasteriis relegatur, sceleris ibi poenas perpetua damnatione daturus»'. Cf.: Gratianus, 'Concordia discordantium canonum', in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, CLXXXVII, XXVI, V, 5, col. 1347.

<sup>264</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 96–98: 'Ante Iustinianum etiam nonne legimus saepe expulsos urbe Roma omnes mathematicos? ... Illi igitur de astrologis quid putaverint nemo nescit, qui legales Iustiniani Caesaris codices legerit, in quibus ars mathematicorum — sic enim se vocabant astrologi — ut abominabilis interdicatur, mandante imperatore ne quis mathematicum consulat, sed omnibus sileat perpetuo curiositas iudicandi'. Cf.: 'Codex Iustinianus', in *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, 3 vols, eds Paul Krueger et al. (Berlin: apud Weidmannos, 1954), II,

To sum up, in the first book of the *Disputationes*, Pico intends to prove that no one among the best philosophers or theologians ever supported the very idea of predictions. The same intention underlies the structure of the whole treatise. Pico pays a special attention to the philosophical tradition of refutation of astrology, which, according to him, started from Pythagoras and lasted until his time. Among religious authorities, he mentioned two most important theologians, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who appeared in the context of Giovanni Pico's criticism of 'Christian astrology' as well as in the refutation of pro-astrological arguments taken from natural philosophy and Aristotle. Finally, the juridical solutions borrowed from both canon and civil law had to confirm the philosophical and theological arguments.

In Book I of the *Disputationes*, Pico develops a number of methodological approaches he widely uses throughout the whole treatise. In his brief history of anti-astrology, he reconstructs the 'anti-astrological tradition', which consists of three major groups, namely ancient philosophers, Christian theologians, and his contemporaries; he uses it as a polemical tool. At the same time, however, he explicitly questions the status of *traditio* in its philosophical, theological, or astrological dimension. In other words, by questioning the validity of the *prisca theologia* concept or the 'astrological tradition', he develops the method he first used in exploring the Plato-Aristotle reconciliation in the *De ente et uno*.

It should also be noted that the analysis of the texts presented above clearly indicates that Pico was not operating within the same context as Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico. His aim was not to show that pagan philosophy as a whole was to be rejected in favour of Christianity, nor was it to prove that paganism could not lead to true knowledge. In the *Disputationes*, his purpose was to demonstrate that the astrological tradition had become so distorted that one could no longer trust any of its representatives, and that the fundamental principles of astrology were based on

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IX, 18, 5: 'Nemo haruspicem consulat aut mathematicum, nemo hariolum. Augurum et vatum prava confessio conticescat. Chaldaei ac magi et ceteri, quos maleficos ob facinorum magnitudinem vulgus appellat, nec ad hanc partem aliquid moliantur. Sileat omnibus perpetuo divinandi curiositas'.

wrong mathematical premises. In doing so, he certainly provided elements that would be later exploited by Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico. However, it should be emphasised that the ideological framework within which he operated was markedly different in that he never rejected pagan culture *in toto*.



### Chapter III

#### ‘Me quoque adolescentem olim fallebat’:

#### Giovanni Pico della Mirandola versus *prisca theologia*

##### Introduction

As we have seen above, Pico’s polemical strategy in the *Disputationes* deals with the deconstruction of tradition in order to reconsider the legacy of traditional *auctoritates* and is similar to the method he uses in the *De ente et uno*. He develops his approach in Book XII of the *Disputationes*, where he dismisses a tradition that seemed central to his earlier works. This chapter is focused on one of the most intriguing aspects of his attack, one which concerns the *prisca theologia* doctrine. It is worth noting that the last book of the *Disputationes* has never been analysed from this perspective before. The second central topic that this chapter deals with is the question of the *Disputationes*’ authorship. I intend to explore possible intersections between Giovanni Pico’s and Gianfrancesco Pico’s works as regards the *prisca theologia* doctrine attacked in Book XII of the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam*.

The last book of the *Disputationes*, where Giovanni Pico considers the origin of astrological speculation, is the most questionable in terms of his original authorship. In this book, Giovanni Pico severely criticises the doctrine of *prisca theologia*, which he had been loyal to during all his previous *itinéraire philosophique*. It is worth noting that Giovanni Pico’s arguments against *prisca theologia* as the origin of astrology would be later repeated in Gianfrancesco Pico’s *De rerum praenotione* in an even more radical manner. According to Gianfrancesco, who closely followed his uncle, curiosity is particular to human beings, but it may have a negative impact on people who are far from objective knowledge. These people can easily fall under the malign influence of astrologers and magicians. Among those who are responsible for the development and diffusion of astrology, Gianfrancesco Pico names the Egyptians, the Chaldeans and the

Israelites.<sup>265</sup> While Gianfrancesco's attitude towards *prisca theologia* is well known from the rest of his legacy, Giovanni Pico's radicalism in this question appears unexpected. The following section will focus on Giovanni Pico's critique of *prisca theologia* within the context of his anti-astrological polemics.

*Prisca theologia* in Giovanni Pico's Writings before  
the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*

First developed in early patristics in order to demonstrate the compatibility of Christianity with pagan thought, the *prisca theologia* concept was popular among Renaissance thinkers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries who considerably renewed the meaning and significance of the term. The *prisca theologia* doctrine owes its success to Georgius Gemistus, also known as Plethon, and Marsilio Ficino. After Ficino, its influence spread across Europe. But the most influential recipient of the Ficinian doctrine was without a doubt Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who enriched it with new Kabbalistic sources.

The influence of the *prisca theologia* doctrine can be seen throughout the body of work of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. The only exception seems to be the *Disputationes*. Giovanni Pico was largely responsible for the formation of the 'Christian Kabbalah' during the Renaissance.<sup>266</sup> His interest in Kabbalistic texts and his fame as one of the most prominent intellectual of his time stimulated the learning of Hebrew in Italy and across Europe. Among those

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<sup>265</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, p. 16.

<sup>266</sup> Pico's predecessor, Marsilio Ficino did not know Hebrew himself, but tried to use Jewish sources in his philosophical doctrine. On this: Moshe Idel, 'Prisca theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments', in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, pp. 137–58.

who fell under his influence it is especially worth mentioning Johann Reuchlin,<sup>267</sup> Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples<sup>268</sup> and Francesco Zorzi.<sup>269</sup>

In the Kabbalah and other related 'ancient' doctrines, Giovanni Pico sought alternative sources to prove the essence of the Christian religion. The idea to reconcile all possible philosophical and theological schools under the only true doctrine, i.e. Christianity, occupied Giovanni Pico from the Roman dispute of 1486 up to his later theological writings. In Giovanni Pico's own words, 'the Hebrew wisemen's own principles' along with other *prisci theologi* should be taken into account for the benefit of Christian doctrine. One of the most remarkable examples of this can be found in the tenth Kabbalistic thesis in which Pico tried to find theological analogies to the Son of God by combining the views of at least six *prisci theologi*.<sup>270</sup> Giovanni Pico also

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<sup>267</sup> Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, eds G. Lloyd Jones et al. (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

<sup>268</sup> Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples wrote his own treatise on magic, entitled the *De magia naturali*, based on Ficino and Pico. This text remains unpublished; the most complete of the four extant manuscripts is kept at the Scientific Library of the University of Olomouc (M I 119). Although Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples later criticised Florentine platonists for their enthusiasm for Hermes Trismegistus, he was definitely influenced by them at an earlier stage of his career. On Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and his Italian relations: Daniel Walker, 'The *Prisca Theologia* in France', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 17, 3–4 (1954), 204–59; Eugene Rice, 'Humanist Aristotelianism in France. Jacques Lefevre d'Étaples and his Circle', in *Humanism in France at the End of the Middle Ages and in the Early Renaissance*, ed. Anthony Levi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), pp. 132–49; Brian Copenhaver, 'Lefèvre d'Étaples, Symphorien Champier and the Secret Names of God', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 40 (1977), 189–211.

<sup>269</sup> Chaim Wirszubski, 'Francesco Giorgio's Commentary on Giovanni Pico's Kabbalistic Theses', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 37 (1974), 145–56. Giovanni Pico's Kabbalistic interests clearly influenced Zorzi's *opus magnum*: Francesco Zorzi, *L'armonia del mondo*, ed. Saverio Campanini (Milan: Bompiani, 2010).

<sup>270</sup> *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, 10: 'Illud quod apud Cabalistas dicitur **וִירַטָטָמ**, illud est sine dubio quod ab Orpheo Pallas, a Zoroastre materna mens, a Mercurio Dei filium, a Pythagora sapiencia, a Parmenide sphaera intelligibilis nominatur'.

justifies some Christian dogmas using Kabbalistic astrology. For example, as we have seen above, Pico refers to the Arabic practice of using the horoscopes of Christ,<sup>271</sup> while in the eighteenth Kabbalistic thesis, Pico puts forward an astrological reason to celebrate Sabbath on Sunday, instead of Saturday as it is done in Jewish religious communities.<sup>272</sup>

At the beginning of the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, in commenting on the central place of man in the universe, Giovanni Pico states that the Arabs, the Persians, the Biblical prophets and even Hermes Trismegistus are in full accordance on this subject.<sup>273</sup> Unfortunately, the *Oratio* has become hostage of scholarly disputes on Renaissance humanism and is often regarded exclusively from that point of view.<sup>274</sup> The question of Giovanni Pico's use of sources is crucial for understanding the philosophical significance of the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. Giovanni Pico remains loyal to the medieval interpretation of microcosm and macrocosm and is obviously familiar with the Christian tradition of placing the man in the centre of the universe. Neither the central position of man nor the possibility to define oneself according to one's own free will, both characteristic of Christian theology, can be considered Giovanni Pico's novel idea. Instead, the basis of Pico's thought, at least at the first two stages of his philosophical career, was formed by the doctrine of the new Adam taken from saint Paul and the compatibilities of *prisci theologi* and Kabbalists with the Christian religion.

After having settled in Florence, Giovanni Pico continued to introduce the Kabbalistic tradition into Christian discourse. Nor did he put aside the *prisca theologia* model in his later theologically-orientated writings. As was mentioned above, in the *Heptaplus*, where he

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 51: 'Sicut fuit luna plena in Salomone, ita fuit plenus Sol in uero Messia qui fuit Iesus. Et de correspondencia ad diminutionem in Sedechia potest quis coniectare, si profundat in cabala'.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 18: 'Qui coniurixerit Astrologiam Cabale, videbit quod sabbatizare et quiescere conuenientius fit post Christum die dominico, quam die sabbati'.

<sup>273</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Discorso sulla dignità dell'uomo*, pp. 2–4.

<sup>274</sup> The critique of such a representation of the *Oratio* is in Brian Copenhaver's numerous articles. See, for instance, n. 93.

commented on the Creation using Kabbalistic texts rather than relying on traditional exegesis, Giovanni Pico claims that elements of Moses' doctrine can be found among the Egyptians from whom they were later transmitted to the most prominent Greek philosophers, namely Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles and Democritus.<sup>275</sup> Giovanni Pico's aspiration was to confirm the existence of the *prisca theologia* and its transmission from Moses through ancient philosophers to his own time.

The influence of the Kabbalah on the content and structure of the *Heptaplus* becomes evident through two main points. First, Pico's treatise consists of forty-nine chapters, which fits with the forty-nine 'gates of wisdom' described in Jewish mystical texts. Giovanni Pico knew very well the treatise *Portae iustitiae*, written by the leading Jewish medieval theologian Moses ben Nachman Gerondi (Nahmanides) and translated in the fifteenth century by Egidius of Viterbo.<sup>276</sup> According to Moses ben Nachman, these 'gates of wisdom' correspond to the forty-nine levels of knowledge revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. This idea was primarily diffused within the Spanish Kabbalistic branch in the thirteenth century and was then transmitted to Italy. Abraham Abulafia and Mehanem ben Recanati, both well known to Giovanni Pico, are among its most significant supporters. Another important Kabbalistic feature of the *Heptaplus* is its analysis of the word *bereshit*, 'in the beginning', which is the first word of the Torah.<sup>277</sup> On the one hand, Giovanni Pico claims that after having discovered the forty-nine 'gates of wisdom' one will be able to reach God. The square of seven is forty-nine and, following the Kabbalistic interpretation of numbers, Giovanni Pico associates seven with the Sabbath or the highest position of contemplation and reunion with God. On the other hand, the last, forty-ninth chapter of the *Heptaplus* directly

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<sup>275</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'Heptaplus', pp. 170, 178–80.

<sup>276</sup> Black, *Pico's Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 223–30; Brian Ogren, 'The Forty-Nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-Nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Heptaplus and Nahmanidean Kabbalah', *Rinascimento*, 49 (2009), 27–43.

<sup>277</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'Heptaplus', pp. 374–82.

addresses the question of the interpretation of *bereshit*. Pico's interpretation has great theological significance: the end reveals itself through the beginning. Giovanni Pico was already familiar with this idea having used it in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* when presenting the concept of the 'new Adam'.

Giovanni Pico interprets the word *bereshit* using magical combinatorial techniques. In his opinion, it is possible to combine each letter of the word with another letter and thus form an independent Hebrew word that consists of two letters taken from *bereshit*. Through this technique, Giovanni Pico creates twelve different words united into one phrase: 'The Father, in the Son and through the Son, the beginning and end or rest, created the head, the fire, and the foundation of the great man with a good alliance'.<sup>278</sup> The phrase, which concerns Christ, undoubtedly contradicts the core of Jewish mysticism. For Giovanni Pico, however, it is of great intellectual importance. Demonstrating the accordance between Kabbalistic and Christian sources on the same subject, he does not seek to convert Jewish people to Christianity; his only aim is to substantiate the truth of his own religion. Finally, the unfinished *Expositiones in Psalmos* is rich in references to the Talmudic literature. It is worth noting that the impact of the Kabbalah on the *Expositiones* is less evident. Be that as it may, the references to Abraham ibn Ezra and particularly to David Kimchi reveal that in the *Expositiones* Giovanni Pico remained under the influence of Jewish theology. In this context the position of Giovanni Pico's nephew, Gianfrancesco Pico, regarding the *Expositiones* would seem surprising: he criticised his uncle for his admiration of the Kabbalah, at the same time as pointing out that the *Expositiones* was a turning point in Giovanni Pico's conversion to the true Christianity.<sup>279</sup> It is likely that this assessment was conditioned by the general lack of Kabbalistic or other magical sources in the *Expositiones*. After some time Giovanni

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p. 378: 'Pater in Filio et per Filium principium et finem sive quietem creavit caput ignem et fundamentum magni hominis foedere bono'.

<sup>279</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, p. 100.

Pico radically changed his mind regarding the legacy of Abraham ibn Ezra and in the *Disputationes*, he appears as one of the main authorities in matters of astrology.

Thus, the *prisca theologia* played a crucial role in Giovanni Pico's thought during the whole period of his intellectual activity, and so the transformation of his attitude towards it in the last book of the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* seems therefore to contradict his earlier position. The decision of Giovanni Pico or of the compiler of the last book of the *Disputationes* to disprove the *prisca theologia* is ambiguous and generally contrasts with his previous writings. In what follows, I will provide a closer analysis of the way in which Pico re-considers the *prisca theologia* in the *Disputationes*. I argue that in the light of our analysis of Book I we are in a better position to examine Pico's arguments against the *prisca theologia* doctrine.

#### On the Origin of Astrology:

##### Giovanni Pico della Mirandola versus *prisca theologia*

In terms of stylistic coherence, the twelfth book of the *Disputationes* is far below the Piconian standards. Its Latin does not resemble the language of the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* or of the letter to Ermolao Barbaro.<sup>280</sup> The text contains numerous unnecessary repetitions and overlaps with important passages from other chapters of the *Disputationes*. However, a more careful reading uncovers the book's general structure. Despite the fact that Giovanni Pico had no time to polish the text in question, his basic idea is clearly outlined. First, he intends to focus on

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<sup>280</sup> This famous letter was published: *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, pp. 804–23. For the full correspondence between Barbaro and Pico on this subject, see: Quirinus Breen, 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the Conflict of Philosophy and Rhetoric', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 13, 3 (1952), 384–412. On the debates and their context, see: Hanna Gray, 'Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24, 4 (1963), 497–514 (pp. 507–10); Letizia Panizza, 'Pico della Mirandola et *Il Genere Dicendi Philosophorum* del 1485: L'encomio paradossale dei 'barbari' e la loro parodia', *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, 8 (1999), 69–103.

the reasons why ancient people, specifically the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, became attached to astrological superstitions. After examining once more several key terms used in astrological practice, he observes the ways of transmission of astrological knowledge from ancient Eastern societies, the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, to Greece, the Islamic world and then to the Christian West.

According to Giovanni Pico, his intention in the previous books of the *Disputationes* was to show the dissent among astrologers regarding the basics of astrology. He claims that the question of its origin is still unclear. At the same time, his arguments radically differ from his earlier views. Astrology, in his opinion, inspires 'us' in accordance with 'our merits'<sup>281</sup>; this apparently relates to Savonarola's sermons and to Gianfrancesco Pico's writings in which contemporary issues were often interpreted through human sins and faults. Giovanni Pico points to various possible origins of astrological speculation. Apart from his permanent opponents - the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, Ptolemy and the Arabs - he mentions the Jews. The attribution of astrological superstition to this tradition, which Giovanni Pico esteemed all his intellectual life, seems strange. Be that as it may, the author ultimately ascribes the rise of astrology to the Egyptians and the Chaldeans.

In the section concerned with the motivations for the ancients' reliance on astrology, the author explains that for a Christian the inspiration for astrological speculation is undoubtedly provoked by demons.<sup>282</sup> The polemical strategy of stigmatising pagan astrologers as supporters of diabolic knowledge, which ultimately derives from Augustine, is not typical of Giovanni Pico and

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<sup>281</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, XII, pp. 484–86: 'Atqui si forte persuasio haec aliquem cepit, sciat nonnihil sibi prodesse divinas huiusmodi revelationes, quandoquidem, ut vidimus, tanta sit in decretis astrologiae dissensio, nec revelatum sit adhuc Chaldaeorum ne astrologia, an potius Aegyptiorum, an Iudaeorum, an Ptolemaei, an Arabum illa sit, quam munere singulari Dii nobis bene merentibus aspiraverunt'.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p. 486: 'Quid, si mihi sermo cum Christianis, quaeram putent a Deo revelatam, aut a daemone potius? A Deo dici non potest, siquidem illam litterae sacrae divinae vocis interpretes interdicunt. Si respondeant a daemone, nulla fides daemoni, quem mendacii patrem Deus appellavit'.



does not agree with the rest of his written legacy. It is, however, characteristic of his radical followers, namely, Gianfrancesco Pico.

However, there are instances where the strategy used by the author of Book XII is very similar to the one used in previous books, which is to find contradictions between different representatives of a given tradition in order to undermine the validity of that tradition. For instance, according to the author of the last book of the *Disputationes*, astrologers usually refer to a large variety of stories on the origin of astrology to justify their doctrine. Among such stories, he mentions the legend that astrological knowledge was given to Adam by God. It was later transferred to Noah whose fourth son Ionicus, according to a certain Methodus, was an expert in astrological predictions and made many of them.<sup>283</sup> Astrologers insist, in Giovanni Pico's opinion, that after Ionicus the knowledge of astrological practices was transmitted to Abraham, who then taught it in Egypt.<sup>284</sup> Giovanni Pico obviously disagrees with this chronology; for him, to accept the Jewish origin of astrology is the same as to oppose the history of Christianity. To undermine the validity of the testimony of Methodius, whose interpretation of the history of astrology formed the basis of the supposition that it was of Jewish origin, he carefully deconstructs the whole tradition by showing that Methodius is not a reliable source. It is worth noting that the person of Methodius, who was under such rigorous critique in the *Disputationes*, cannot be identified with certainty.

According to him, the Methodius once mentioned by Saint Jerome should not be confused with the Methodius in Petrus Comestor's writings, the latter being a person of mediocre

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., pp. 486–88: 'Ad Ionicum veniamus. Scribit quidem de hoc Methodius, sed idoneus parum auctor; neque enim ille est, cuius meminit inter viros illustres divus Hieronymus; hic Patarensis fuit, ille alius omnino, citatus interdum a Petro Commestore, in quo nemo mediocriter eruditus delectum bonorum auctorum non desiderat'.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p. 486: 'Hinc illorum insania confutatur, qui divinitus hanc scientiam, sicut alias omnes, Adae collatam fabulantur, a quo per manus devenere ad Noe, cuius filium Ionicum referat Methodius multa futura per hanc artem praedixisse; tamen per filios Noe superstites cataclysmo ad Abraam Patriarcham, qui docuerit eam Aegyptios, teste Iosepho, et ab Aegyptiis ad Graecos, a Graecis ad Latinos devolutam'.

intelligence and poor intellectual activity, who was not even familiar with the Biblical passages on Noah's family. The mention of a fourth son of Noah perfectly demonstrates the unreliability of Methodius' opinion regarding astrology's Jewish origins. In addition, Pico argues, no one among the prominent 'commentators on the law of Moses', including Flavius Josephus and Philo, had ever mentioned the existence of a fourth son of Noah.<sup>285</sup> Therefore, Methodius should be dismissed as a valid authority on the subject. On the other hand, Giovanni Pico affirms that Abraham had indeed taught astrology to the Egyptians, though not its superstitious branch that deals with divination and other magical practices, but limited his teaching to mathematical astrology.<sup>286</sup> In Pico's opinion, this was completely new and useful knowledge for the Egyptians, which allowed them to learn the position and movement of celestial spheres and bodies in order to observe the time of their ceremonies. Additionally, they were already familiar with judicial astrological practices through the influence of the Chaldeans.<sup>287</sup> Regarding the problem of astronomical knowledge among the Chaldeans, Giovanni Pico did not miss another opportunity to point out the controversial nature of astrological writings on the same subject. While Ptolemy declared in the *Almagest* that the Chaldeans were ignorant in practical astronomical calculations, Abu Ma'shar contradicted him by saying that Noah's sons had come to the land of the Chaldeans to consecrate them in the science of astrology/astronomy, which is, according to Giovanni Pico, an absurd

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., p. 488: 'Ceterum super isto Ionico quid valere potest ignobilis scriptoris auctoritas, cum et Moses ipse propheta tres tantum Noes filios numeret: Sem, Cham et Iaphet, nec Iosephus alium quemquam praeter hos nominet, nec Philon, nec Hebraeus quisquam, vel annalium conditor, vel mosaicae legis expositor?'

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.: 'Abraam Aegyptiis astrologiam tradidisse Iosepho credamus sed non divinatricem superstitiosam, frequentiore apud idolatras quam apud veri Dei cultores, qui Deus Abraam nuncupatur, a Mose et a prophetis fugillatam, qui se tamen Abrae traditionem et praecepta sequi profitebantur'.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.: 'Haec non sine arithmetica discitur, quoniam tota fere numeris constat et mensuris, quam simul cum astrologia Aegyptiis demonstrasse Abraam, scribit Iosephus, qui si divinatricem potius istam intellexisset, falsus omnino esset, siquidem ait hanc astrologiam, quam primus Aegyptiis Abraam indicaverat, a Chaldaeis Aegyptios accepisse'.

affirmation.<sup>288</sup> Thus, once again manipulating various sources and finding crucial contradictions among astrologers on the fundamental points of their doctrine, Giovanni Pico totally rejects the idea that astrology and its further diffusion went back to the time of Noah and Abraham. He ascribes the interest in astrology to ancient idolatrous societies, specifically to the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, and not to divine providence and the Jewish tradition.

In order to explain how astrology spread among the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, Giovanni Pico named two key features of their cultures: idolatry and astronomical studies.<sup>289</sup> He also admits that their interest in astronomy and then in astrology was determined by geographical specifics: in his opinion, large valleys and open spaces are conducive to the observation of celestial movements.<sup>290</sup> The custom of contemplating nature resulted in a religious perception of natural phenomena in ancient societies; as an example, Giovanni Pico names the religious interpretation of the Nile in the Egyptian tradition.<sup>291</sup> He also claims that in those ancient societies astronomy was readily associated with religious practices. Notably, he did not see any particular difference between the religious traditions and thought of the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, uniting them under the shared notion of idolatry. Despite the ambiguous status of their religious doctrine, both the Chaldeans and the Egyptians were highly respected by other ancient societies. Giovanni Pico

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., pp. 488–90: ‘Irridens autem Aboasar, qui suo loco filios Noe in Chaldaeam cum venisset hanc ait disseminasse scientiam, quam caelitus habitam chaldaicam ipse de finibus planetarum reicit opinionem’.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 490: ‘Quales Aegyptii et Chaldaei, apud quod nata astrologia’; pp. 490–92: ‘Nata igitur de Chaldaeis Aegyptiisque parentibus, de quibus dicendum aliquid priusquam de vanitate ipsorum ista dicamus. Fuit igitur utraque gens duarum rerum in primis studiosa atque perita, idolatricae religionis et mathematicae’; I, V, p. 618: ‘non erit alia Aegyptiorum, alia Chaldaeorum religio sed una atque eadem, hoc est idolatria’.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., II, XII, p. 492: ‘Ad hanc loci oportunitate invitabantur; nam patentes campos et planities latas habitabant, unde siderum facilis veriorque prospectus’.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., pp. 494–96: ‘in quam opinionem non ob aliud puto ductos Aegyptios, quam quod de Nili inundatione beari suam regionem et fieri fecundam videbant, unde ab illius quoque exitu per Aegyptum annum auspicabantur’.

admitted that in his earlier writings, being too young, he was also under their influence.<sup>292</sup> The most prominent philosophers of Antiquity, including Pythagoras, Democritus, Eudoxus and Plato also succumbed to this ‘plague’. This assertion radically contradicts Giovanni Pico’s words in Book I of the *Disputationes*, where he worked through anti-astrological sources; by contrast, it agrees with the attack against both astrology and philosophy, undertaken by his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola. It was also not typical for Giovanni Pico to acknowledge mistakes of his youth. This is the first confession of this sort in the whole corpus of Piconian writings and its style is reminiscent of some passages concerning Giovanni Pico’s ‘re-conversion’ in the *Vita*, written by his nephew Gianfrancesco. Consequently, if we accept Giovanni Pico’s authorship of the *Disputationes*, then in the last book of his anti-astrological treatise he decisively rejects his earlier ideas on the *prisca theologia* and the theurgical traditions of hermetism and the Pseudo-Zoroastrian oracles. Giovanni Pico did not touch upon the topic of secret divine knowledge that had arguably preceded philosophy and Christian theology. However, wishing to remain within the aforementioned doctrine of reconciling all anti-astrological sources, including Greek philosophers, the author of the last book of the *Disputationes* tried to explain the origin of his predecessors’ error. According to the author, all peoples and philosophers spontaneously agree that the only true knowledge is religion. The international fame of the Chaldeans and Egyptians as experts in cults and ceremonies attracted the interest of ancient philosophers. Astronomy was considered another field of their expertise. That is why, according to the author of the last book of

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., pp. 492–94: ‘Neque vero nos fallat, quod me quoque adolescentem olim fallebat, celebrata veteribus etiamque Platoni Aegyptiorum sapientia et Chaldaeorum, quos adisse Pythagoram et Democritum, Eudoxum, Platonem, alios complures, non ob aliud quam comparandae sapientiae gratia, memoriae proditum est. Nam celebre quidem illud atque divinum sapientiae nomen, de sola sibi cerimoniae et colendorum deorum cognitione vendicabant, quia fuit apud omnes gentes, apud omnes etiam bonos philosophos haec semper persuasio, summam sapientiam in religione consistere. Quae Plato, Pythagoras, aliique complures, hoc quidem recte videntes, verissimam philosophiam in divinorum esse notitia, cum fama esset Aegyptios huius in primis esse peritos, ad eos descendebant aviditate discendi, quicquid apud illos occultius sanctiusque videretur’.

the *Disputationes*, ancient (specifically Greek) philosophers recognised the Egyptians and the Chaldeans as famous priests and astronomers, while both peoples were completely ignorant in philosophical matters.<sup>293</sup> But the author's attempt to reconcile all anti-astrological sources and to avoid contradictions with the first book of the *Disputationes* failed. His obvious antipathy towards anti-religious philosophy incites him to affirm that despite their generally negative attitude towards astrology, Greek philosophers founded the basics of their philosophical systems on Eastern astrologers. For example, the author of the last book of the *Disputationes* accuses Thales of Miletus of borrowing elements from Egyptian and Chaldean theurgy to establish the key principles of his philosophy.<sup>294</sup> In a similar way, he asserts that Plato adopted the doctrine of the four basic elements that form the structure of the universe from Ancient Eastern religious cults, and which in Egypt was closely related to astrological practices.<sup>295</sup> The author of the last book of the *Disputationes* concludes that despite the numerous travels to Egypt intended for exploring astrology and religious ceremonies, Greek philosophers were not caught up in astrological superstition. As the most

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 494: 'Descendebant etiam ut mathematicam discerent, quam quod modo memoravimus avide combiberunt: Pythagoras ille, Democritus et Eudoxus. Verum tamen ille titulus sapientiae praerogativaque secretioris disciplinae non aliunde Chaldaeis Aegyptiisque, quam de magisteriis doctrinaque numinum colendorum, quam auditam ab illis probaverint necne boni philosophi, alibi diximus; hoc tantum asseveramus naturalis primaevae philosophiae, quae rationibus demonstratur, nihil Graecos philosophos, quicumque recte philosophati sunt, ab Aegyptiis accepisse, sed quae ad caerimonias mathematicamque spectarent. Cuius rei vel illud sit argumento, quod si aut de mathematicis, aut mysteriis agitur, Chaldaeos citari et Aegyptios videmus, eorumque sententias afferri semper in medium'; p. 496: 'Thales in epistola ad Pherecidem: 'In Aegyptum, inquit, ego cum Solone descendi, ut sacerdotes et astronomos videremus'; nihil de philosophia'.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., pp. 494–96: 'Quod si philosophatum in Aegypto Thaletem dicas, non negabo, ut qui ab eis etiam didicerit aquam esse rerum principium'.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 510: 'De signis ita primum commenti sint: erat Aegyptiis indubitatum, omnia constare ex quattuor elementis ... Et quoniam prima fuisse corpora ignem terramque opinabantur, utpote centrum et circumferentiam, nam ignis illis erat supremum corpus, tum inter media advenisse aerem et aquam, ut etiam Plato ostendit in *Timaeo*, idcirco primum signum igneum statuerunt, secundum terreum, tertium aereum, quartum aqueum'.

remarkable example, in accordance with Book I of the treatise, he chose Eudoxus of Cnidus.<sup>296</sup> This attempt to avoid obvious clashes between Book I and Book XII of the *Disputationes* is unsuccessful. The author's attitude towards philosophy and its relations with astrology and other magical practices is extremely negative and drastically contradicts the content of Book I.

The same position was replicated with some minor changes in the *De rerum praenotione* of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola.<sup>297</sup> However, during the years of his activity, Gianfrancesco's uncle, Giovanni Pico was far from this radicalism against philosophy. Giovanni Pico's statement that astrology can be convincing only among idolaters led him to make conclusions on the nature of astrological speculation. He admits that the development and diffusion of astrology might take place in a particular mental and religious environment, i. e. within societies that are unfamiliar with true religion. Giovanni Pico's interpretation, however, has nothing to do with sociology or scientific approaches to this question. His position is more radical: under 'true religion', he understands specifically and exclusively Christianity. For him astrology is an important and influential part of idolatrous doctrines that focuses solely on the study of nature and completely ignores the central place of man, his free will and ability to influence terrestrial events to the same degree as natural forces. Giovanni Pico proceeds by insisting that astrology totally contradicts true religion and refutes it by establishing idols. According to him, the worship of these idols, originally intended for defining good and evil, inevitably leads to the Manichean heresy.<sup>298</sup> To sum up, Giovanni Pico repeats his mantra: astrology can emerge only in the absence of true religion; the idolatrous doctrines, dedicated solely to the study of the nature, tend to replace true

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 496: 'Et sic Eudoxus quoque in vera Aegyptios est secutus astronomia, in divinatrice praeterea illis non consentit'.

<sup>297</sup> On that, see below.

<sup>298</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, p. 134: 'Quod si qua astrologo capessenda religio sit, ad quam erit propensior quam ad idolatriam, ut eos potissimum deos et colat et revereatur, a quibus omnia hominibus et bona et mala putet provenire? Iam haereses Manichaeorum, arbitrii libertatem tollentes, unde potius putamus emanasse, quam ex ista de fato astrologorum falsa opinione?'

religion and in the end resemble the most dangerous heresies. Their ultimate aim is to overcome Christianity.

The author of the last book of the *Disputationes*, tracing the history of astrology, tried to identify the next recipients of idolatrous doctrines in Greece and in other regions. To avoid contradictions with Book I, he admits that the most renowned philosophy schools did not accept astrology. In this context, the figure of Thales appears outlandish, as the author accuses him of asserting that astrology had a positive impact and of using it in his philosophical discourse.<sup>299</sup> However, his main polemical strategy at this stage is to show that only unknown or minor philosophers in Greece had adopted astrological doctrines. The only major author who sought to give a philosophical justification to astrological speculation was Ptolemy.<sup>300</sup> His authority and fame as the greatest astronomer legitimised astrology among his followers. To prove this the author mentions Porphyry, who accepted numerous forms of superstitions and believed in demonic cults. The author also claims that Porphyry's teachers Plotinus and Iamblichus denounced Porphyry's fascination for superstitious doctrines.<sup>301</sup> The passage in question shows that the author was acquainted with Iamblichus' magical and philosophical writings, which is atypical for Giovanni Pico. Moreover, the name of Porphyry for the first time emerges in relation to pro-astrological views in this passage. Previously he was mentioned in the *Disputationes* principally as the biographer of Plotinus. If the last book of the *Disputationes* was distorted, the radical change in

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., II, XII, p. 526: 'Ab Aegyptiis et Chaldaeis ad Graecos astrologia devenit, sed per auctores ignobiles. Nam excepta domibus circulatorum, Liceum et Academiam non intravit, sed nec in Porticum quoque, licet procurante Thale concorditer admissa; nec qui poterat atomis et vacuo, astrologiae tamen credere potuit Epicurus'.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.: 'Primus centesimo et quadagesimo post Christum anno bene audiens in litteris eam consuluit Ptolemaeus, sed parcius quam ceteri, ita ut non tam insaniae isti favere, quam modum ponere voluisse videatur'.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.: 'utrumque auctoritas unius hominis semper mathematici, raro philosophi, tot contra in mathematicis philosophiaque hominum clarissimorum obstantibus praeiudiciis relabatur. Rapuit nomen Ptolemaei Graecos aliquos in errorem, alioquin ad superstitionem propensos, ut Porphyrium, cuius nimiam in cultu daemonum operam curamque superstitionum, et praeceptor Plotinus et discipulus Iamblichus damnaverunt'.

Porphyry's status could be related to his position as one of the main theorists of natural magic, expressed earlier in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* and criticised by Gianfrancesco Pico.<sup>302</sup>

Then the author of Book XII of the *Disputationes* discusses the influence of Ptolemaic astrological writings upon Ptolemy's Arabic and Persian followers, again with particular emphasis on the leading astrologer Abu Ma'shar, who, according to him, was ignorant in matters of both astronomy/astrology and philosophy.<sup>303</sup> Exploring the ways in which astrological knowledge was transmitted to Europe, the author justly highlights the courts of Alfonso X and Frederick II as the centres of magical and astrological speculation. The author acknowledges the contribution of the Spanish king to the development of astronomy and mathematics, but admits that Alfonso X could not avoid the destructive influence of astrological superstitions.<sup>304</sup> Alfonso's interest in practical astrology prompted him to collect many astrological treatises of Greek and Eastern origins, later translated either in Spain or at the court of Frederick II in Sicily. The most intriguing figure in the list of these astrological translators is Michael Scot.<sup>305</sup> Born in Scotland, Michael studied at Oxford

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<sup>302</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'De hominis dignitate', p. 148.

<sup>303</sup> Idem, *Disputationes*, II, XII, pp. 526–28: 'ita acceptam a Graecis grammaticus quidam Aboasar, et scriptor historiae, refert nugis et fabulis innumerabilibus fecitque astrologiam pene tanto peiorem astrologia Ptolemaei quanto bonis artibus peior est astrologia, factus homo ad inanem loquacitatem, nec modo philosophiae, sed astronomiae quoque fere penitus insolens, fugillatus a doctissimo quoque astrologorum, multitudini gratus, apud quam magnus qui plura dixerit, non qui meliora'.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., p. 528: 'Crevit autem per ea tempora studium mathematicae, sicut totius quoque philosophiae disciplinarumque omnium in Hispania, in qua cum regnaret Alphonsus, in numeris mathematicis et caelestium motuum supputatione diligentissimus, amaret quoque divinatricem vanitatem, alioquin philosophiae studiis non imbutus, et in eius gratiam Arabum et Graecorum multa eius artis monumenta ad nos pervenerunt, per Johannem praesertim Hispalensem et Michaellem Scotum, scriptorem nullius ponderis, multae vero superstitionis'.

<sup>305</sup> On Michael, see first of all: Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, pp. 287–88, 318–19; Graziella Federici Vescovini, 'Michel Scot et la 'Theorica Planetarum Gerardi'', *Early Modern Science and Medicine*, 1, 2 (1996), 272–82. One of Michael's main astrological writings was recently published in: 'Le Liber particularis de



and Paris before moving to Toledo. There he learned Arabic and started working on translations of numerous philosophical and astronomical/astrological texts from Arabic into Latin. At some point, Frederick II invited Michael to join his court. The fame of Michael as a magician spread across Italy and Europe: he was even mentioned in Dante's *Inferno*.<sup>306</sup>

As for the anti-astrological sources in Book XII, on the whole this list coincides with the one in Book I. This applies to both the Biblical prophets and to ancient and medieval thinkers. The only difference is that the author adds some new names, those who opposed astrology after its successful introduction in Europe.<sup>307</sup> Apart from some stylistic inaccuracies, the rest of the book reflects Giovanni Pico's main arguments against astrology and his method of working with astrological and anti-astrological sources.

### Conclusion

To sum up, Book XII of the *Disputationes* is the most questionable in terms of its authorship. Its author severely criticises the doctrine of *prisca theologia*, accusing the Egyptians

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Michel Scot', ed. Oleg Voskoboynikov, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 81 (2014), 249–384.

<sup>306</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Volume I: Inferno*, ed. Richard Durling (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1:210 (*Inferno*, 20, pp. 115–17): 'Quell'altro che ne' fianchi è così poco, Michele Scotto fu, che veramente de le magiche frode seppe 'l gioco'. On Dante and astrologers: Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance. Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XII-XV siècle)* (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2006), pp. 13–18; Simon Gilson, 'Tradition and Innovation in Cristoforo Landino's Glosses on Astrology in his *Comento sopra la Comedia* (1481)', *Italian Studies*, 58 (2003), 48–74.

<sup>307</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, pp. 530–32: 'Ubi vero in Academia parisiensi primitus apparuit, vix impetratum a curiosis quin internitioni data sub ignibus delitesceret, cumque aliquot post annos honestare eam Rogerius Bacchon et alii quidam conarentur, restiterunt eis viri doctissimi Guilelmus Alvernius episcopus Parisiensis, et post eum Nicolaus Oresmus mathematicus excellens, et Henricus ex Assia, et Ioannem Caton, et Brenlanlius Brittanus astrologiam, non solum qua parte laedit religionem, sed plane totam, ut vanam falsamque detestantes'.

and the Chaldeans of developing and disseminating astrology. He affirms that astrology can only be accepted in societies unfamiliar with the true religion that is Christianity. He also attacks those philosophers who adopted and adapted various elements of astrological speculation into their philosophical systems. This radical critique of the *prisca theologia* is not typical for Giovanni Pico, who remained loyal to it during the previous years of his intellectual activity. However, this critique perfectly fits the position of Giovanni Pico's nephew, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, who was responsible for the posthumous edition of his uncle's *Opera Omnia*, including the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*. As we do not have enough evidence on whether or not the last book of the *Disputationes* was written by Giovanni Pico himself or distorted by Gianfrancesco Pico, two explanations are possible. As we do not possess the original manuscript of the *Disputationes*, a close examination of Giovanni Pico's work on the treatise at different stages is not possible. A study of Pico's activities over the last years of his life, 1493 and 1494, could have provided a better understanding of his later philosophical outlook. But this is also impossible due to the lack of documents. It must be noted that some traces of Pico's attack on the *prisca theologia* doctrine appear in other books of the *Disputationes*; thus, in Book II written in 1493 he compares Eastern idolatrous cults and astrology with the heresy of Manichaeism. This may add weight to the hypothesis that during the two years of his work on the *Disputationes* Giovanni Pico radically altered the principles of his philosophy. Also, the arguments against the *prisca theologia* doctrine generally correspond to Pico's main polemical strategy of deconstructing the notion of tradition. Finally, Pico's drastic shift from Neoplatonism and *prisca theologia* towards traditional Christian views, based on a close reading of Saint Thomas and Saint Augustine, could have been conditioned not only by his close ties with Savonarola, but also by his interest in the sceptic tradition, especially in Sextus Empiricus. According to Pearl Kibre and Sebastiano Gentile, Pico possessed the *Adversus astrologos* chapter of Sextus' *Adversus mathematicos* and, possibly, used

it while working on the *Disputationes*.<sup>308</sup> The second possible explanation is far simpler: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola distorted some of the passages of Book XII of the *Disputationes*. However, despite the lack of firm evidence either *pro* or *contra* the last book's authorship, it is possible to conclude that Gianfrancesco Pico's involvement in the final version of the treatise could have been only partial: there is no sign of a total and radical distortion of Pico's *Disputationes*, but some evidence suggests that Giovanni Pico prepared a draft of Book XII that Gianfrancesco Pico might have slightly revised in order to develop his own intellectual agenda.

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<sup>308</sup> Pearl Kibre, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 258; Sebastiano Gentile, 'Pico filologo', pp. 465–90 (p. 479). Gentile also admits that Giovanni Pico studied the text of Sextus Empiricus. In a manuscript of Sextus, which Angelo Poliziano was working with, there can be found the handwriting of a second person. Gentile supposes that it could be notes made by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

## Chapter IV

### **‘Princeps aliorum’ and his Followers: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the ‘astrological tradition’ in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem***

#### Introduction

One of the main polemical strategies against astrology used by Pico was to find contradictions within astrological writings, by analysing in detail all the different sources available to him. This formed the basis for Giovanni Pico’s attack: his analysis of astrological practices came *ex principio*, that is, from studying Claudius Ptolemy’s writings on astrology,<sup>309</sup> and supplementing it with a criticism of Ptolemy’s followers, who, he argued, either did not understand their ‘teacher’ or entirely misrepresented his ideas and calculations. This chapter is devoted to the question of Pico’s astrological sources, which usually remains outside of scholarly interest. The main aim of this chapter is to show how Pico used his sources to set Ptolemy against other astrologers and for emphasising the dissonance in the astrological tradition.

Pico is familiar with all major ancient and medieval astrological authorities. His aim is to explain the genesis of a long astrological tradition, which he considers as fundamentally wrong because it is based on a misinterpretation of philosophy, especially Aristotelian natural philosophy. According to him, the first to have made this mistake is Ptolemy. Ptolemy is, Pico argues, *optimus malorum*: he is ‘the best of the worst’<sup>310</sup>, thus underlining right at the start that astrology is to be rejected. Pico knew very well all three of the works written by or attributed to Ptolemy: the

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<sup>309</sup> I disagree with Louis Valcke’s notion (expressed in his book *Pico de la Mirandole. Un itinéraire philosophique*, p. 305) that Pico’s ‘bête noire’ was Pierre d’Ailly. Pico himself had stated that all astrological speculations, even those in ‘christianized’ astrology, were based on Ptolemy’s theories. See: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 70: ‘Porro Ptolemaeum principem aliorum facile concedent; est enim doctissimus astrologorum et, quod attinet ad mathematica, vir ingeniosissimus’.

<sup>310</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 70.

*Almagest*, the *Tetrabiblos*, and the *Centiloquium*. Pico explains the reason for singling Ptolemy out as being based on Ptolemy's philosophical studies. Ptolemy is praised for having attempted to establish the philosophical and scientific foundations for astrology, and to have contributed to the development of mathematical astrology, that is, astronomy. However, Pico argues, Ptolemy's philosophical premises are fundamentally wrong. In the introduction to the *Almagest*,<sup>311</sup> Ptolemy 'following the opinion of Aristotle', distinguishes three types of contemplative philosophy: theological, natural and mathematical. Pico argues that Ptolemy is wrong when he says that 'everything that exists consists of three elements: matter, form, and movement, which can be divided conceptually, but not in the things themselves'.<sup>312</sup> From this idea, Ptolemy concludes that each type of contemplative philosophy corresponds to one of the elements: theology to movement (as the prime cause of motion is nothing but God), physics to matter, and mathematics to form. Pico calls this conclusion absurd and contradictory to Aristotle and to any philosophy.<sup>313</sup> Despite this fundamental error, however, Ptolemy differs from other astrologers, since he attempted to bring astrology closer to science and philosophy. It is important to note that in the following pages of the *Disputationes*, Pico leaves aside the *Almagest* and generally focuses on Ptolemy's two astrological treatises — the *Tetrabiblos* and the *Centiloquium*.

Pico's focus on Ptolemy and his attempt to question Ptolemy's *auctoritas* (i. e. Ptolemy is only an *auctoritas* and the starting point of a long tradition of textual misinterpretation) was no coincidence, since the status and value of Ptolemy was central to astrological and philosophical controversies that took place in the fifteenth century. With the revival of Ptolemy's *Almagest* in

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<sup>311</sup> Ptolemy, *Syntaxis mathematica*, 2 vols, ed. Johan L. Heiberg (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898–1903), vol. 1 (1898), prooemium, pp. 4–7; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, pp. 70–72.

<sup>312</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 70: 'Exordiens enim libros mathematicos, partitur philosophiam contemplatricem, ex Aristotelis sententiam, in tria genera, theologicum, naturale et mathematicum; tum, rationem partitionis exponens, omnia, inquit, quae sunt, ex tribus constant: materia, forma et motu, quae separari ab invicem cogitatione quidem possunt, re autem non possunt'.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70–72.

the mid-fifteenth century thanks to George of Trebizond's Latin translation and commentary, a debate ensued about the place and legitimacy of Ptolemy within the commentary tradition. Whilst George of Trebizond favoured a strict return to Ptolemy's original texts, Bessarion considered that Theon of Alexandria's commentary on the *Almagest* (composed in the fourth century AD) was the best source to understand Ptolemy and Greek astronomy. In 1451, George of Trebizond completed a new translation of the *Almagest* from Greek and 'accompanied his version of Ptolemy's *Almagest* with a commentary of enormous length'.<sup>314</sup> He intended to dedicate it to Nicholas V but had to abandon this idea.<sup>315</sup> In his work, George sought to purify Ptolemy's original ideas from medieval, both Arabic and Latin, interpretations, as well as to oppose Bessarion, who had advised him to use Theon of Alexandria's commentary on the *Almagest* as an example. The attempt to prove that Theon of Alexandria's influence on medieval thinkers was negative and caused misunderstanding of Ptolemy's work incited a response from one of Bessarion's most famous pupils, Regiomontanus, who wrote a special treatise against George known as the *Defensio Theonis contra Trapezuntium*.<sup>316</sup> Other figures, such as Georg von Peurbach and Niccolò Perotti, were also involved in the debate, which along with the famous Plato-Aristotle controversy formed the

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<sup>314</sup> John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of his Rhetoric and Logic* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 71.

<sup>315</sup> After George completed his work on *Almagest*, Jacobus Cremonensis, the Augustinian friar and translator of Archimedes, criticized George's final text. Nicholas V seemed to support his criticism and probably asked George to rewrite some problematic passages. However, George rejected this idea. Later he dedicated various versions of his translation to Iacopo Antonio Marcello, to Mehmed II, and to Matthias Corvinus. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–8; *Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond*, ed. John Monfasani (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, 1984), p. 672.

<sup>316</sup> Antonio Rigo, 'Bessarione, Giovanni Regiomontano e i loro studi su Tolomeo a Venezia e Roma (1462–1464)', *Studi veneziani*, 21 (1991), 49–110.

essence of the Bessarion-George conflict.<sup>317</sup> Later in the sixteenth century, Ptolemy was at the centre of Girolamo Cardano's 'restored' Greek astrology.<sup>318</sup> Thus, the idea of reconsidering the position of Ptolemy within the astrological tradition seems to be typical for Renaissance scholars. Pico's *Disputationes* was an important landmark in that respect.

Despite the apparent existence of such an astrological tradition, Pico contends that Ptolemy and his followers contradicted each other regarding key theoretical positions and in their astrological practices. In this approach, Giovanni Pico establishes a distinction between Ptolemy, an astrologer of a higher level, albeit fundamentally wrong in his interpretation of Aristotle, and his followers, who, Pico argues, distorted his legacy. In order to confirm his idea of the fundamental dichotomy within the astrological tradition, Pico uses two modes of argumentation. On the one hand, he shows that Abu Ma'shar and others often made mistakes in interpreting Ptolemaic astrological terms and as a result used them in a completely different sense. On the other hand, commenting on the *Centiloquium* (now considered spurious), Giovanni Pico constantly disputes the points that contradict Ptolemy's other texts, but at the same time agree with the writings of more recent astrologers.<sup>319</sup> Without trying to question the authorship of the *Centiloquium*, he chose another method of attack. In his opinion, instead of using the original text of the *Centiloquium*, astrologers relied on a bad translation in which Ptolemy's ideas were distorted. However, he argues, the original Greek text does not, in fact, contradict the rest of Ptolemy's writings. Pico claims to have compared the Latin translation of the *Centiloquium* with

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<sup>317</sup> Much has been written on this subject. See: John Monfasani, 'Il Perotti e la controversia tra platonici ed aristotelici', *Res Publica Litterarum*, 4 (1981), 195–231; Idem, 'The Pre- and Post-History of Cardinal Bessarion's 1469 *In Calumniatorem Platonis*', in *Inter graecos latinissimus, inter latinos graecissimus: Bessarion zwischen den Kulturen*, eds Claudia Märkl, Christian Kaiser and Thomas Ricklin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 347–66; Basilio Bessarione, *Contro il calunniatore di Platone*, ed. Eva del Soldato (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2014).

<sup>318</sup> Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos*, pp. 127–54.

<sup>319</sup> On the history of this text see below.

the original text, and that he was able to find more than six hundred errors in the translation.<sup>320</sup> As Eugenio Garin and Sebastiano Gentile have shown, Giovanni Pico most probably used the translation of the *Centiloquium* made by Giovanni Pontano and completed between 1477 and 1490, rather than one of the numerous medieval translations.<sup>321</sup> These two approaches to the reception of Ptolemy and his followers in the *Disputationes* determine the structure of the current chapter: its first part deals with astrological practices, modified or misunderstood in the astrological tradition, while the second section focuses on the problem of the *Centiloquium*.

### The Use of Astrological Techniques and its Controversies

As stated above, Pico's first strategy is to show the contradictions between astrologers in practical matters. The three examples below illustrate how Pico identifies the errors in the usage of astrological terms. The first one deals with the solar eclipse discussed in the *Tetrabiblos*. According to Ptolemy, someone watching the solar eclipse should note the place where it occurs and calculate the angle from this place:<sup>322</sup> if the eclipse occurred in the ninth region of the sky, then the angle of the tenth is calculated and so on. However, Pico claims that Ptolemy's followers incorrectly translated the term τοῦ ἐπομένου κέντρον ('the angle of the following area') as *anguli praecedentis*, i.e. the angle of the previous area, which, he argues, completely changed

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<sup>320</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, pp. 154–56.

<sup>321</sup> Eugenio Garin, 'Annotazioni', in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, p. 648; idem, 'Introduzione', in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, p. 52; Sebastiano Gentile, 'Pico filologo', in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte*, vol. 2, p. 482.

<sup>322</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, VII, p. 144. See also: Claudio Tolomeo, *Le previsioni astrologiche (Tetrabiblos)*, II, 6.



the very principle of this calculation.<sup>323</sup> In Pico's opinion, therefore, on account of this error in translation, Ptolemy's followers misinterpreted the way the eclipse could be calculated.<sup>324</sup> Continuing the examination of the misinterpretation of this passage, Giovanni Pico gives another example. Speaking about calculating the eclipse angle, Ptolemy wrote that the angle might refer to both the eastern and the middle parts of the skyline. 'The Greek commentator', the so-called pseudo-Proclus,<sup>325</sup> interpreted Ptolemy as saying nothing regarding the attitude of the angle to the western part of the horizon, because in accordance with the aforementioned theory, in this position the angle could not be located after the place of the solar eclipse, and the eclipse itself would have no effect.<sup>326</sup> According to Pico, the only reason why the Greek commentator makes this argument is that he misunderstands *τοῦ ἐπομένου κέντρον* as referred to *anguli praecedentis*.<sup>327</sup> Consequently, he too failed to grasp the significance of Ptolemy's doctrine. What is particularly important for Pico is that these misinterpretations could lead to the incorrect prediction of the future and therefore undermine the validity of astrology.

The role of 'the Greek commentator' is worth attention also in another context. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, an excerpt of four chapters from Geminus' *Isasoge* was ascribed

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<sup>323</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, VII, p. 144: 'Quoniam autem, ibi graece scribitur *τοῦ ἐπομένου κέντρον*, hoc est sequentis anguli, in vulgata translatione habetur *anguli praecedentis*, unde contrarius omnino sensus elicitur'.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., pp. 144–46. About the identification of 'Ioannes Astendensis' see: Eric Weil, 'Pic de la Mirandole et la critique de l'astrologie', in idem, *La philosophie de Pietro Pomponazzi. Pic de la Mirandole et la critique de l'astrologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1985), p. 138.

<sup>325</sup> It is possible to find some notes on Pseudo-Proclus in: Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque*, p. XII. On Pseudo-Proclus and his *De sphaera* see also: Robert Todd, 'The Manuscripts of the Pseudo-Proclan *Sphaera*', *Revue d'histoire des textes*, 23 (1993), 57–71.

<sup>326</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, VII, p. 146. See also: *In Claudii Ptolemaei Quadripartitum Enarrator ignoti nominis, quem tamen Proclum fuisse quidam existimant item* (Basle: ex officina Petriana, 1559), p. 64.

<sup>327</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, VII, p. 146.

to the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus under the title of *Sphaera*. The reason for the attribution of the previously unknown astrological/astronomical treatise to Proclus remains unclear. Since the beginning of the fifteenth century the *Sphaera* by Pseudo-Proclus was diffused in manuscripts across Europe. The *Sphaera* remained a very popular text in the sixteenth century, with over sixty editions being made. It was also translated into English by the famous English humanist Thomas Linacre. The popularity of the *Sphaera* by ‘Proclus’ made it the second most important astrological/astronomical ‘manual’ in the West, behind only the *Sphaera* by Johannes de Sacrobosco. Some scholars even consider the Pseudo-Proclean *Sphaera* as the humanist response to Sacrobosco’s ‘medieval’ treatise of the same name.<sup>328</sup> This supposition, however, still needs to be confirmed by additional documents and sources, as the humanist foundation of the response is not evident. At first sight, the Pseudo-Proclean *Sphaera* seems to be a rather traditional text in terms of astrological/astronomical calculations and interpretations, which caused doubt among Renaissance scholars and humanists about its authenticity. Giovanni Pico most probably shared that doubt and hence preferred to call the author of the *Sphaera* ‘the Greek commentator’, without mentioning the name of the prominent Neoplatonic philosopher.

Another example Pico gives to show that Ptolemy’s terminology was misunderstood and mistranslated by his predecessors concerns the Arabic astrologer Haly Abenragel, who asserted that according to Ptolemy there are five so-called *hylegh* (additional phenomena affecting a human being’s fate). These are: the Sun, the Moon, the horoscope, the portion of Destiny and the place of the full moon or of the new moon immediately preceding birth.<sup>329</sup> These, together with the five

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<sup>328</sup> The idea of the *Sphaera* being a Neoplatonic and humanist alternative to Sacrobosco is supported by Johanna Biank who is currently preparing her PhD at Berlin on the topic and a critical edition of the text. On Sacrobosco’s *Sphaera* in the Renaissance see: Richard J. Oosterhoff, ‘A Book, a Pen, and the *Sphere*: Reading Sacrobosco in the Renaissance’, *History of Universities*, 28, 2 (2015), 1–54. Oosterhoff’s article shows that Renaissance humanists were also extremely interested in Sacrobosco’s treatise.

<sup>329</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, VII, pp. 146–48: ‘Super spacio vitae praecidendo quam nihil videant isti divinaculi paucis ostendam. Haly Abenragel, oraculum astrologorum huius aetatis, quarta parte operis sui

remaining planets are fundamental in astrological calculations, especially for the preparation of horoscopes. Continuing his argument and speaking about the *alchochoden*,<sup>330</sup> Pico states that Haly, once again referring to Ptolemy, confirmed that the *alchochoden* was the dominant element among the *hylegh*.<sup>331</sup> In Pico's opinion, however, Ptolemy never discussed this subject, did not sympathise with the very idea of *alchochoden*<sup>332</sup> and, moreover, recognised only four *hylegh*, which had then been added to the full and the new moons.<sup>333</sup>

Finally, the question of the structure and number of celestial spheres, already crucial in his previous works, remains central in Pico's anti-astrological polemics. As we have seen, in the *Commento alla Canzona d'amore di Girolamo Benivieni*, he used ten celestial spheres and combined classical astronomical doctrines with the Neoplatonic triad of One-Intellect-Soul,

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ex sententia ait Ptolemaei quinque esse hylegh, ita enim ipsi loquuntur Solem, Lunam, Horoscopum, Partem Fortunae et locum plenilunii vel novilunii proxime antecedentis; praeter autem haec quinque planetas considerandos, in illis quinque locis et ius et auctoritatem obtinentes'. I should note that Pico did not cite correctly this fragment from Haly Abenragel's work, having used *horoscopum* instead of *gradus ascendentis*, but this discrepancy does not affect the overall meaning of the passage. Cf: Albohazen Haly filii Abenragel, *Libri de iudiciis astrorum* (Basle: ex officina Henrici Petri, 1551), IV, 3, p. 147.

<sup>330</sup> According to these astrological techniques, the *hylegh* was considered to be the 'giver of life', while the *alchochoden* was responsible for indicating how many years the stars would give to the subject of the natal chart.

<sup>331</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, VII, p. 148: 'In proximo capite, de eo loquens quem vocant alchocoden, est autem annorum dator, Ptolemaeus, inquit, alchocoden facit planeta, qui plus auctoritatis habuerit in hylegh sive eum respexerit sive non respexerit, et ita deinceps multa iterat saepe de hoc alchocoden ex sententia Ptolemaei'. Cf.: Albohazen Haly filii Abenragel, *Libri de iudiciis astrorum*, IV, 4, p. 148.

<sup>332</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, VII, p. 148: 'At vero apud ipsum Ptolemaeum tam est nihil omnino illud alchocoden, quam est nihil hircocervus atque chimera'; p. 150: 'ubi apud Ptolemaeum alchocoden legistis?'

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., p. 150: 'Ptolemaeus inter hylegia planetas ponit in reliquis locis hylegialibus dominantes; isti rem esse eos diversam putant ab hylegiis, ut reliqua quattuor, Sol, Luna, Horoscopus et Pars Fortunae, cui et falso novilunium pleniluniumque addiderunt, sola hylegii haberent rationem, planetae eorum locorum dominatores annos decernerent'.

having placed the immovable Neoplatonic God, Creator of the First Intelligence only, beyond physical and even metaphysical reality. In the *900 Conclusiones*, he tried to link the Kabbalistic doctrine of ten sephirot with the ten celestial spheres and further developed this idea in the *Heptaplus*, where Pico gave the complete analysis of his views of celestial spheres and of their influence upon the terrestrial world.<sup>334</sup> Five years later, however, in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* he offers a completely different overview of the question.

His aim here is to prove the existence of a disagreement among astrologers regarding this fundamental point. He states that ancient astrologers believed in the existence of eight celestial spheres – an idea later supported by many famous philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle.<sup>335</sup> Giovanni Pico claims that many followers wrongly attributed to Ptolemy the idea of a ninth sphere; but in fact, Pico convincingly argues, a closer look at the *Almagest* indicates that Ptolemy never mentioned a ninth sphere. In this text, Ptolemy stated that moving stars belonged to the eighth sphere, while immovable planets belonged to the remaining seven. Ptolemy's medieval commentators assumed that apart from the moving stars of the eighth sphere the 'teacher' had also defined different heavenly bodies as parts of the ninth sphere, which received impulses from the Primum Mobile. According to Pico, however, Ptolemy considered the celestial universe was only composed of eight spheres and said nothing about the existence of a ninth one.<sup>336</sup> According to Pico, the idea of a ninth sphere was first introduced by King Alfonso of Castile and shared by two authors, who in Pico's treatise are referred to as 'ancient' and 'excellent mathematicians': Proclus, in this context considered to be the author of the *De sphaera*, and Leo

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<sup>334</sup> On the problem of celestial spheres in Pico's works see: Ovanes Akopyan, 'The Architecture of the Sky: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on Celestial Spheres', *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 2 (2015), 265–72.

<sup>335</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, I, p. 228: 'Aegyptiorum et Chaldaeorum astronomi supra orbem octavum nihil esse arbitrari sunt, quos secuti sunt Plato et Aristoteles et Hipparchus et Ptolemaeus'.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228–30. Cf: Ptolemy, *Syntaxis mathematica*, II, 7; Idem, *Le previsioni astrologiche*, I, 11.

the Jew (i.e. Levi ben Gershon, better known in the West as Gersonides).<sup>337</sup> Giovanni Pico explains why medieval astronomers and astrologers needed to introduce a ninth sphere. According to them, non-wandering stars move from West to East, while the celestial sphere with other stars move in the opposite direction. The ninth sphere, directing heavenly bodies from East to West, was introduced in order to explain this mysterious phenomenon.<sup>338</sup> Some philosophers offered their own solutions, for instance, by endowing the sky with a Soul or attributing to the highest sphere the main function of the moving impulse.<sup>339</sup> Pico admits that some, like Campanus of Novara, Messahala, Leopold of Austria and Alfonso of Castile, had even tried to solve the problem by introducing a tenth sphere, which they erroneously attributed to their main astrological authority, Ptolemy. Many medieval philosophers, such as Albert the Great, followed that tradition, which was, according to Giovanni Pico, based on a mistaken idea.<sup>340</sup> Thus, Pico's purpose here is to provide an archaeology of knowledge detailing how errors occurred in the astrological tradition, and how these errors were based on a sustained misinterpretation of the original texts. This allows him to discredit the astrologers, whose positions, he argues, were full of contradictions and dangerous to the integrity of their theory. He further supported his opinion by citing the incertitude of the basic planet order relative to the Sun.<sup>341</sup>

The problem of identifying a consistent number of celestial spheres affects the scientific basis of astrology and testifies to the existence of substantial differences within the tradition regarding the interpretation of fundamental points of doctrine. Thus, Giovanni Pico showed that

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<sup>337</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, I, pp. 230–32.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 232. Michel-Pierre Lerner explained in his book that in the late Middle Ages it was quite common to admit the existence of more than eight spheres (seven planets and a sphere of stars) to explain motion associated indirectly with planets or stars. Giovanni Pico referred to this idea only to highlight the disagreements among astrologers on this point: Lerner, *Le monde des sphères*, vol. 1, pp. 195–210.

<sup>339</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, I, p. 232.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., II, X, IV, pp. 368–76.

in its very foundations astrology does not meet the criteria for the role to which it aspires. It is interesting to note here that Pico does not seem particularly interested in solving the doctrinal problem he has identified: he offers no solution to the actual number of celestial spheres. He does not openly support any of the doctrines discussed and completely rejects their possible connections with Kabbalistic and Neoplatonic interpretations – something he explicitly did in the *Commento*, the *Conclusiones*, and the *Heptaplus*. His main purpose is to discredit astrology as a dangerous superstition rather than reflect on the actual structure of the astrological/astronomical universe.

With the help of these examples, Pico attempted to demonstrate in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* the existence of a ‘dissonance’ within the astrological tradition and therefore the falsity of the whole science of predictions. The examples cited by Pico touched upon the very foundation of astrology and attested to the existence of significant differences in the interpretation of fundamental concepts. Consequently, according to Giovanni Pico, astrology is disreputable already at its most fundamental level.

Pseudo-Ptolemy’s *Centiloquium*  
in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*

The second group of problems regarding astrological practices associated with Ptolemy concerns the reception of the *Centiloquium* in the astrological tradition. In Pico’s opinion, the later commentators misunderstood the terms used in the text as a result of reading an inaccurate translation rather than the authentic Greek text.<sup>342</sup>

During many centuries, the *Centiloquium* was considered the epitome of the *Quadripartitum* and therefore it was often referred to as *Liber Fructus* and considered an original

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<sup>342</sup> As mentioned above, Pico used Giovanni Pontano’s translation of the *Centiloquium*. He also mentioned George Trapezuntius’s commentary on it. However, he tells us that he had no chance to work with the latter text: Ibid., II, VIII, V, p. 284.

work by Ptolemy. Only at the end of the nineteenth century did the German scholar Franz Boll, the author of several outstanding studies on ancient astronomy and on Ptolemy in particular, prove that it had not been written by the great Alexandrian scholar.<sup>343</sup>

There are various hypotheses regarding the authorship and origin of this text. According to the first modern publisher of the *Centiloquium*, Emilie Boer, the original version was written in Greek.<sup>344</sup> However, Richard Lemay demonstrated that the diffusion of the text had only begun in the tenth century due to the commentary on it written by Ahmad ibn Yusuf al-Misri.<sup>345</sup> According to Lemay, the text's real author was Ahmad himself and it was only afterwards translated into Greek. In addition, there was a confusion with the names of Ptolemy's commentators: Haly ibn Ridwān (known in the West as Haly Avenrodan), the author of the *Commentary on Tetrabiblos*, was confused with Ahmad ibn Yusuf and consequently during the Middle Ages Haly ibn Ridwān was assumed to have been the author of the commentary on both the *Tetrabiblos* and the *Centiloquium*.<sup>346</sup>

The *Centiloquium* attracted great interest throughout the Middle Ages. More than one hundred and fifty manuscripts have survived; in the twelfth century alone, it was translated at least six times.<sup>347</sup> The *Centiloquium* was also influential in the fifteenth century. In 1454, the Greek

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<sup>343</sup> Franz Boll, *Studien über Claudius Ptolemaeus: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie und Astrologie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1894).

<sup>344</sup> Emilie Boer, 'Praefatio', in Ptolemy, *Καρπός*, Pseudo-Ptolemaei *Fructus sive Centiloquium*, ed. E. Boer, idem, *Opera quae exstant omnia*, 3 vols, ed. Johan L. Heiberg (Leipzig: Teubner, 1952), III, pp. XIX–XXXIII.

<sup>345</sup> On the Arabic origin see: Richard Lemay, 'Origin and Success of the *Kitab Thamara* of Abu Ja'far ibn Yusuf ibn Ibrahim: From the Tenth to the Seventeenth Century in the World of Islam and the Latin West', in *Proceedings of the First International Symposium for the History of Arabic Science*, 2 vols (Aleppo: Institute for the History of Arabic Science, 1976), II, pp. 91–107.

<sup>346</sup> On Ibn Ridwān, see especially Jennifer Seymore, *The Life of Ibn Ridwān and his Commentary on Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, Ph. D. dissertation (New York: Columbia University, 2001).

<sup>347</sup> Hübner, 'The Culture of Astrology from Ancient to Renaissance', p. 19.

scholar George of Trebizond, who was then at the court of the Aragonese king in Naples, began to translate the *Centiloquium* from Greek. According to John Monfasani, George of Trebizond prepared three versions of his text, with the last one dating to the second half of 1456.<sup>348</sup> The translation was supplemented with a special commentary on the *Centiloquium* and two astrological opuscula – *De antisciiis*<sup>349</sup> and *Cur his temporibus astrologorum iudicia fallant*<sup>350</sup> – all dedicated to his patron Alfonso of Aragon.<sup>351</sup> In his introduction, George, known above all as a translator of philosophical texts and Plato's critic, claims that astrology should be considered as a part of natural philosophy, and that its main aim is to help philosophy in understanding the world. George suggests using Ptolemy's *Centiloquium* to explore *natura secreta* ('nature's secrets') and in his *Commentary* draws together the philosophical positions of Ptolemy and 'his teacher' Aristotle.<sup>352</sup>

Several decades later the *Centiloquium* was translated by Giovanni Gioviano Pontano.<sup>353</sup> Pontano's idea of translating Pseudo-Ptolemy's treatise, together with his interest in Firmicus Maternus and ancient astrological literature, can be considered as a part of his major astrological project. An admirer of ancient astrology, Pontano paid special attention to the Latin and Greek astrological tradition and sought to renew it by offering new translations and interpretations. In

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<sup>348</sup> Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 118–19; *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, pp. 689–97. In the *Collectanea* John Monfasani published two versions of the introduction to George's translations of the *Centiloquium* (ibid., pp. 97–100). In general, on the philological aspects of the *Centiloquium* in the Renaissance: Michele Rinaldi, 'Pontano, Trapezunzio ed il *Graecus Interpretes* del *Centiloquio* pseudotolemaico', *Atti dell'Accademia Pontaniana*, 48 (1999), 125–71.

<sup>349</sup> 'Georgii Trapezuntii brevis de Antisciiis tractatus', *Georgii Trapezuntii in Claudii Ptolemaei centum Aphorismos Commentarius* (Cologne: Ioannes Gymnicus, 1540), pp. 155–65. This term signifies the opposite degrees of the Zodiac, which, as George believed, were ignored in contemporary astrological predictions (*Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, p. 696).

<sup>350</sup> In the Cologne edition, this treatise is entitled *Cur astrologorum iudicia ut plurimum sint falsa* (pp. 166–85).

<sup>351</sup> *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, pp. 695–97.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., pp. 99–100.

<sup>353</sup> It was printed posthumously in 1512.



1535, for the first time, the Greek original of the *Centiloquium* was printed alongside the Greek text of the *Tetrabiblos*, in an edition prepared by Joachim Camerarius and Philip Melanchthon. Analysing the Greek text of Ptolemy's works, Girolamo Cardano concluded that the authorship of the *Centiloquium* had to be reconsidered. In Cardano's opinion, several astrological techniques and ideas described in the *Centiloquium* were introduced in more recent astrological discussions and Ptolemy could not have had the opportunity to partake in them.<sup>354</sup> However, the final refutation of Ptolemy's authorship was made three centuries later.

The problem of the *Centiloquium*'s authorship, which Giovanni Pico faced while working through the astrological techniques in the *Disputationes*, determined the method of the text's analysis. Three examples clearly reveal Pico's polemical strategy. The first case deals with the theory of decans. The theory in question was well-known during the Renaissance and influenced astrological iconography, including the frescoes in the Salone dei Mesi at the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara.<sup>355</sup> Since the decans are considered part of the zodiacal system it is worth starting with Giovanni Pico's examination of its principles. Pico's intention is not to reject the astronomical system of the signs of the Zodiac, but to show that astronomical data is not related to astrologically orientated artificial images.<sup>356</sup> This forms the basis of his critique of talismanic magic. Pico offers a severe criticism of the very use of the twelve signs of the Zodiac to attract planetary influences. He argues that the choice of the twelve signs was not conditioned by their correspondence with any real astronomical models, but rather was introduced merely for the astrologers' convenience.<sup>357</sup> Similarly, he argues that the association the astrologers established with the four

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<sup>354</sup> Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, 'Girolamo Cardano e il ritorno a Tolomeo', in *Il linguaggio dei cieli. Astri e simboli nel Rinascimento*, pp. 127–28.

<sup>355</sup> See n. 30.

<sup>356</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, III, p. 242. On astrological talismans in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance see Nicolas Weill-Parot's book: *Les 'images astrologiques' au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance. Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XII–XV siècles)* (Paris: Champion, 2002).

<sup>357</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, III, p. 246.

basic elements is a way to make their calculations and predictions easier rather than something that corresponds to reality.<sup>358</sup> In addition, Pico points out that not all astrological schools accepted the number of twelve zodiac signs: the Chaldean astrologers, for instance, operated with eleven signs.<sup>359</sup> These inconsistencies between astrologers on this important aspect of their doctrine lead Pico to conclude that every possible influence ascribed to a particular astrological image is nothing more than the product of the astrologers' imagination. According to him, there is no actual mathematical or physical evidence that would justify the attribution of natural characteristics to zodiac signs.<sup>360</sup> He accuses Ptolemy and his less gifted followers of an unconvincing attempt to connect the basic elements of the world with artificial and fictitious astrological images.

Apart from the images of the zodiac signs, Pico examines their compositional parts, the so-called decans. They are thirty-six astrological images, dividing an astrological circle into thirty-six equal parts, each of ten degrees. Hence, each sign of the Zodiac contains *in se* three decans. The classical system of decans, which opened the large door for specification of astrological predictions, went back to the Indian tradition and from there later expanded into the Islamic world, not reaching the West until the twelfth century.<sup>361</sup> Pico's main purpose here is to highlight the divergences within the tradition regarding the number of decans and how they operated. He wrongly attributed the origin of the doctrine to the Egyptians,<sup>362</sup> which allows him to argue that the decan theory in India was different from its Egyptian version.<sup>363</sup> According to him, the

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid., II, VI, IV, p. 36. Cf. *Abū Ma'Šar al-Balhī [Albumasar], Liber introductorii maioris ad scientiam judiciorum astrorum*, VIII, II, 3.

<sup>359</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, IV, p. 268.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., II, VIII, III, p. 258.

<sup>361</sup> David Pingree, 'Indian Planetary Images and the Tradition of Astral Magic', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 52 (1989), 1–13; idem, 'The Indian Iconography of the Decans and Horâs', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 26, 3–4 (1963), 223–54.

<sup>362</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VI, XVI, p. 126.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.: 'Indi, sua quoque ipsi figmenta comminiscetes, in novem partes signum quodlibet diviserunt'.

Chaldeans created an additional astrological image, called *dodecathemorius*, which represents the twelfth part of each sign of the Zodiac.<sup>364</sup> The features of the decans and the *dodecathemorii* remained unclear to astrologers for several centuries, causing additional confusion in the astrological tradition. Abu Ma'shar was responsible, according to Pico, for the final astrological development of the decan theory.

To discredit the doctrine, Pico attempted to prove that the invention of decans was not established by the *optimus malorum*, i. e. Ptolemy, but by his followers. To achieve this, he also questions the way the *Centiloquium* was interpreted by the commentators. Astrologers believed, he states, that Ptolemy had introduced the concept in the ninety-fifth conclusion of the *Centiloquium*.<sup>365</sup> Pico, however, tried to demonstrate that the theory of decans emerged at a later date. In his analysis of the ninety-fifth thesis, Pico resorts to the following tactics: he argues that since the translation of this passage is full of errors, Haly Ibn Ridwan misunderstood it and wrongly commented on it. Thus the Greek original term *παρανατέλλοντα* does not mean the same thing as its corresponding Latin term *decan*. According to Pico, the Greek term refers to thirty-six celestial images that do not belong to the Zodiac.<sup>366</sup> This can be confirmed by the practice of ancient astrology.<sup>367</sup> Due to the incorrect interpretation of this notion, other astrologers came to the conclusion that Ptolemy shared their understanding of this astrological theory. Giovanni Pico states that the decan theory was in fact first mentioned by Abu Ma'shar, and thus long after Ptolemy.<sup>368</sup> Although other astrologers attempted to find traces of this theory in the writings of the

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., pp. 124, 126. Cf.: Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos libri VIII*, II, 13.

<sup>365</sup> Ptolemy, *Καρπός*, 95: 'Κινδυνεύει τὰ παρανατέλλοντα ἐκάστῳ δεκανῶ δηλοῦν τὴν προαίρεσιν τοῦ γεννωμένου καὶ τὴν τέχνην ἣν μετέρχεται'.

<sup>366</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VIII, V, p. 282.

<sup>367</sup> For the history of the term see: Franz Boll, *Sphaera. Neue griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903), pp. 75–90; Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque*, pp. 225–29.

<sup>368</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VI, XVI, pp. 124–26.

author of the *Tetrabiblos*, they could not come to a consensus on how to use it.<sup>369</sup> Having explored the works of a number of astrological authorities, Pico concludes that they expressed the same idea of decans through very different images. In his opinion, this divergence in understanding provides strong evidence against the theory of decans. Finally, Pico argues that there is no physical evidence that the decans exist: according to him, they too are celestial figures invented by astrologers. This applies, according to Giovanni Pico, to other significant astrological images as well. Among them, he singles out the tail and head of the Dragon, which do not have any particular physical effects on the terrestrial world.<sup>370</sup> These scary names are nothing but a convenient instrument for astrologers. As usual, Pico does not miss an additional opportunity to pinpoint the divergence of numerous astrologers on this particular topic.

Another central issue that Pico discusses in detail is the problem of the ‘new moon’, or the ‘full moon’, preceding the birth of a human being. The importance of this phenomenon for astrological predictions was described in the *Tetrabiblos*.<sup>371</sup> In the *Disputationes*, Giovanni Pico rejects horoscopic astrology in general and attacks directly the doctrines of astrological houses and their aspects.<sup>372</sup> He questions the astrologers’ ability to determine exactly the time of a child’s conception or birth, a central question in horoscopic astrology, not only because of its potential theological, religious or scientific problems but because he thought that the problem of the ‘new moon’, or the ‘full moon’, preceding the birth of a human being was not treated consistently in the astrological tradition. Ptolemy had stated that the main challenge for the astrologer was to set the rising degree of the Zodiac. The planet, associated with several types of influence on a fixed place takes the name of ‘ruler’ and it is believed that its degree rises at the time of birth under the given sign. If there are multiple ‘rulers’, the one which is closest to the rising degree should be taken into

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., II, VIII, V, pp. 276–78.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., II, VI, XI, pp. 82–88.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., II, IX, III, 294. Cf.: Claudio Tolomeo, *Le previsioni astrologiche*, III, 2.

<sup>372</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, VI, III, pp. 20–28; II. VI, V, pp. 46–54.

account. This doctrine, being the basis of natal predictions, is indispensable for making horoscopes. Among astrologers, it is known as *almuseli* or *animodar*. Not all astrologers, however, had accepted it: Giovanni Pico mentions that Abraham ibn Ezra identified fundamental flaws in the Ptolemaic calculations.<sup>373</sup> Many other well-known astrologers were in agreement with ibn Ezra in their negation of the doctrine of *animodar*. Pointing to numerous contradictions between Ptolemy and his followers, Giovanni Pico presents yet another example demonstrating the fallacy of the Alexandrian astronomer's theory. He proposes to consider two children born simultaneously in two different cities. Their horoscopes should be different because the heavenly pattern would not be the same for two different places; yet according to Ptolemy's teaching, their horoscopes must be identical, because they are preceded by the same 'full moon' and their 'ruler' thus must also be the same, which is dubious.<sup>374</sup> The name of the same ancient astronomer is also related to other methods of producing horoscopes. For instance, astrologers attributed to him the opinion that the position of the Moon during conception and birth are completely identical. This attribution is based on a thesis found in the *Centiloquium*.<sup>375</sup> In this regard, Giovanni Pico repeats his thesis that the words of Ptolemy were misunderstood and misinterpreted by his followers. Astrologers believe that the concurrence is correct up to a degree, but according to Ptolemy, it should be correct up to the sign,<sup>376</sup> which is fundamentally different from the erroneous assumption of those astrologers who misunderstood him. Moreover, Pico turned to other texts by Ptolemy, first of all to the *Tetrabiblos*, and did not find there any elements of such a doctrine.

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., II, IX, III, pp. 294–96. Cf.: Abraham ibn Ezra, *Abrahe Avenaris Judei Astrologi peritissimi in re iudiciali opera* (Venice: ex officina Petri Liechtenstein, 1507), f. XLV.

<sup>374</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, IX, III, p. 296.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., II, IX, IV, p. 298. Cf.: Ptolemy, *Καρπός*, 51.

<sup>376</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, II, IX, IV, p. 298. We should note that the end of that thesis 'ἢ τὸ τούτου κατὰ διάμετρον' is missing in the original text. For the analysis of Pico's philological criticism of this passage see: Gentile, 'Pico filologo', pp. 482–85.

## The Great Conjunctions, Abu Ma'shar and 'Other' Astrologers

Finally, Pico identifies as a third major problem concerning the *Centiloquium* the so-called theory of great conjunctions, which supposes that when the orbits of the planets meet at regular intervals of 20, 240 or 960 years, important changes occur on earth. This theory goes back to the Islamic tradition of astrology. First mentioned in the writings of Masha'Allah (known as Messala in the Latin West), who was working in Baghdad during the eighth and early ninth centuries, it was later adopted by the famous Arabic scholar al-Kindi and found its first full justification in Abu Ma'shar's *De magnis coniunctionibus*.<sup>377</sup> Al-Kindi, for instance, applied this theory to show that it was possible to predict astrologically the birth of Muhammad. According to this description, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn takes place every twenty years, while their conjunction in the sign of Aries, forming a triangle, occurs every 240 years. The most powerful conjunction of all is when Jupiter, Saturn, and Aries are in a single point of the sign of the Zodiac, which takes place every 960 years and provokes great historical events such as changes of kingdoms, emergence of new religions and birth of great prophets.<sup>378</sup> Giovanni Pico, however, insists that astrologers contradict each other on even the most basic elements of the theory. Thus, according to him, Messala considered the great conjunction as a conjunction of three planets, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, without pointing out its relation to any sign of the Zodiac (Aries in this specific respect).<sup>379</sup> Other astrologers used other signs than Aries to make astrological predictions, thus making it

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<sup>377</sup> For the history of the theory of great conjunctions see: Marco Bertozzi, 'Il fatale ritmo della storia. La teoria delle grandi congiunzioni astrali tra XV e XVI secoli', *I castelli di Yale*, 1 (1996), 29–49; idem, 'Astri d'Oriente: fato, divina Provvidenza e oroscopo delle religioni nelle *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola', in *Nello specchio del cielo*, pp. 143–60.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p. 150; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, V, IV, pp. 542–44.

<sup>379</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, V, IV, p. 544.

increasingly complex and difficult to apply the theory.<sup>380</sup> Emphasising his crucial argument regarding the fundamental contradictions among main astrologers in astrological questions, Giovanni Pico claims that the astrological calculations made to prove the theory of great conjunctions are incorrect. To demonstrate this, Pico gives a series of examples. First, Abu Ma'shar predicted that the end of Christianity would occur in 1460; he also predicted the rise of Islam but the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn calculated by Abu Ma'shar took place fifty years prior to the actual formation of Islam.<sup>381</sup> Secondly, Abraham the Jew predicted the advent of the Messiah in 1464 on the basis of wrong calculations,<sup>382</sup> and he also proposed an astrological determination for the birth of Moses.<sup>383</sup> As a final example, Giovanni Pico refers to the failed attempt of Arnaldus de Villa Nova to predict the appearance of the Antichrist with the use of the same great conjunctions theory.<sup>384</sup> Thus, exploring the religious application of the theory of great conjunctions Pico does not accept it because the predicted events never occur and simultaneously because the whole theory is based on misinterpretation.

After disproving this aspect of the theory, Pico argues that, contrary to what Ptolemy's followers stated, the theory of great conjunctions is not found in Ptolemy. Thus, he claims that in the *Tetrabiblos* Ptolemy denied that the planets (in contrast to the Moon and the Sun) might cause important events to occur on Earth.<sup>385</sup> As regards the text of the *Centiloquium*, Giovanni Pico finds himself in a difficult situation because several sections of this treatise mention the idea of the

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid.: 'Mediam inter has coniunctiones esse eam quae trigesimo quoque anno perficiatur Saturni et Martis in Cancro'.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., I, V, I, p. 522; I, V, XV, p. 612.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., I, V, I, p. 522: 'Abraham Judaeus anno Christi millesimo quadringentesimo sexagesimo quarto Messiam eorum venturum dixit ex astrologica observatione'.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., I, V, XII, p. 592.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., I, V, I, p. 522.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., I, V, V, p. 548.

conjunctions of planets.<sup>386</sup> Giovanni Pico once again underlines that the passages in question were misinterpreted because of an incorrect translation.<sup>387</sup> Furthermore, he states that Ptolemy only recognised the influence of the combination of the Sun and the Moon, without even mentioning the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter (the conjunction that was central to the theory of great conjunctions).<sup>388</sup> With this, Giovanni Pico performs his main task: he outlines the inception of the theory of great conjunctions, calling it ‘new’<sup>389</sup> and arguing that in this matter Ptolemy and his followers maintained completely different positions.

As mentioned above, Pico saw the history of the astrological tradition as an increasing and progressive corruption of astrological/astronomical calculations and misinterpretation of Ptolemy’s ideas. In this context, he demonstrates that Ptolemy’s followers are not real authorities in astrological matters. In Pico’s narrative, the second ‘best among the worst’ astrologers was Abu Ma’shar. Giovanni Pico questions his expertise in astrological matters, claiming that Abu Ma’shar started his career teaching grammar and did not show any knowledge of astronomy and its related disciplines.<sup>390</sup> Giovanni Pico says that Abu Ma’shar refrained from writing on history and focused solely on astrology; Pico’s statement, historically incorrect, clearly comes from his reading of Abu Ma’shar’s *De magnis coniunctionibus* (‘On the Great Conjunctions’), in which the author tried to compound history and astrology while commenting on the most remarkable events in the history of mankind. Along with the *De magnis coniunctionibus*, Pico is familiar with another astrological treatise by Abu Ma’shar, the *Liber introductorii maioris ad scientiam iudiciorum astrorum*. He claims, however, that both texts only prove their author’s ignorance and accuses Abu Ma’shar of misinterpreting Ptolemy’s origin: in the *Great Introduction to Astrology*, Abu Ma’shar admitted

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., pp. 548–50. Cf.: Ptolemy, *Καρπός*, 50.

<sup>387</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, V, V, p. 550.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., pp. 552–56.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., I, V, V, p. 544: ‘magnasque istas coniunctiones novum esse inventum de malo Ptolemaei intellectu natum’.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., I, I, p. 72.



that Ptolemy had been a member of the Egyptian royal family, which had succeeded Alexander the Great in governing Egypt. Pico considered this sufficient proof of Abu Ma'shar's ignorance in astrological matters.<sup>391</sup> At the same time, he mentions that there was an instance where the names of Eastern astrological authorities were mixed up, a problem most medieval and Renaissance thinkers had to deal with. He insists on the existence of two different Albumazars: a philosopher and an astrologer. Due to a faulty translation, Pico states, the two of them had come to be considered one and the same author, though the philosopher should be known under the name of Abunazar, while the astrologer should be called Aboazar.<sup>392</sup> In Pico's interpretation, Aboazar is apparently identical with Abu Ma'shar (or Albumazar in the Latin West). The identification of the remaining 'Albumazar' is unexpected: it seems to be the renowned philosopher al-Farabi, known in the West as Alfarabius; his original name is Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Fārābī. The first part of this long name, Abū Naṣr, might have caused this misunderstanding. Interestingly, this was not the only mention of al-Farabi in the whole corpus of Giovanni Pico's texts: he also referred to him in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*.<sup>393</sup> Pico's very good knowledge of Arabic is probably a myth; at least there is no evidence that he was able to read original Arabic texts without assistance. Apart from Hebrew and Kabbalistic literature, Flavius Mithridates supposedly taught Arabic to Giovanni Pico. Another possible assumption is that Pico could have started working through original Arabic texts while in Padua, under the guidance Elia del Medigo. In any case,

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<sup>391</sup> Abū Ma'shar al-Balḥī [Albumasar], *Liber introductorii maioris ad scientiam iudiciorum astrorum*, VIII, IV, I, p. 56: 'Post Alexandrum Macedonem Grecie Reges Egypto cclxxv annis imperasse narrantur, quorum X continuo succedentes omnes uno Ptholomei cognomine vocati sunt. Ex quibus unus ex Philadelphia ortus in Egypto regnans Astronomie *Librum Almagesti* ionica lingua scripsit. Eidem nonnulli et Astrologie *Tractatum Quatuor Partium*, plerique uni cuilibet ex aliis, quod vel ita confirmari vel aliter esse nostra nichil interest excepto quod cum in eo libro stellarum naturas disserat minus accurate rerum causas exsecutus est.' I refer to the translation of Hermann of Carinthia.

<sup>392</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 80.

<sup>393</sup> Idem, *De hominis dignitate*, pp. 146–48.

Pico's real knowledge or, on the contrary, ignorance of Arabic needs to be supported with additional documents. The passage in question provides no real evidence on this.

Another similar example deals with the name of a certain Abubater. According to Giovanni Pico, one Abubater was a philosopher and the other wrote a treatise on astrology and horoscopes.<sup>394</sup> The only means to distinguish them is by their fathers: the former was the son of Al-Khaṣībī (Alchasibi), while the latter was the son of Tofail. This case is more evident than the previous and can be supported with some additional facts. Abū Bakr al-Hassan ibn al-Khasib, known in the West under the name of Abubater or Albubat(h)er, wrote the *De nativitatibus*. The treatise *Quo quisque pacto per se philosophus evadat* of Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Tufail came to the attention of Giovanni Pico in 1492. As Franco Bacchelli has shown, he or, more probably, one of his professional translators, worked on the translation of the text, which Giovanni Pico intended to adopt into his Kabbalistic discourse.<sup>395</sup>

Apart from the aforementioned astrologers, Giovanni Pico adds to his list a significant number of others, including al-Kindi, Haly Abenragel, Abraham ibn Ezra, Omar or Umar, and Masha'Allah. Pico's knowledge of these authors and his close reading of their astrological writings allow him to expose the contradictions within the astrological *auctoritates'* writings. This indicates that Pico had carefully considered these sources and developed a very detailed knowledge of astrological writings, which allowed him to identify the way in which astrological ideas and concepts circulated and were progressively corrupted. It should be noted, in this context, that one of Pico's opponents, the Sienese physician Lucio Bellanti, claimed that the *Disputationes* had been written by someone who was ignorant of astrological matters. This claim caused Bellanti to question the authenticity of Pico's last treatise in the *Responsiones in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos* published in 1498. The list of numerous astrological authorities and consistent

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<sup>394</sup> Idem, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 80

<sup>395</sup> Franco Bacchelli, 'Pico della Mirandola traduttore di Ibn Tufayl', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 13, 1 (1993), 1–25.

references to their writings reveal that Pico was not ignorant in astrological matters. However, his use of astrological terms and polemical strategies was more problematic: by trying to find contradictions among astrologers regarding the application of fundamental astrological principles, in several cases, Giovanni Pico did not refrain from manipulating his sources and their content in order to support his line of argumentation, to refute the main astrological authorities, and thus to reject astrology as such.

### Medieval Christian Astrologers and the Problem of Religion in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*

The question of religious implications of astrology was at the centre of Pico's anti-astrological debates. In the *Disputationes*, he opposed the idea that astrological practices could be used in theological matters. In this context, Giovanni Pico sought to disprove the medieval authors who attempted to apply the theory of great conjunctions in order to interpret vital dogmas and episodes in Christian history. This was the reason for Pico's negative attitude towards Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly, whom he accused of introducing astrological elements into Christian theological matters.

In his analysis of medieval sources, Pico establishes a distinction between two 'camps' of astrological and anti-astrological authorities. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas belong to the group of authors who, according to Pico, had rejected the possibility of using astrology to interpret Christian dogmas. The inclusion of Albert the Great is surprising at first, since this author was well known for his fascination for various magical disciplines. One reason for emphasising the superiority of Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great might be that they both belonged to the Dominican order, to which also belonged Giovanni Pico's mentor Girolamo Savonarola. This might explain Pico's negative attitude towards the Franciscan theologian and philosopher Roger Bacon. Among other prominent medieval proponents of astrology, he also names Cardinal Pierre

d'Ailly and the astrologer Guido Bonatti. The list included also other personalities, such as Arnaldus de Villa Nova, mentioned above, or Pietro d'Abano.

Pico first attacks Guido Bonatti. According to him, Bonatti should be rejected because he is ignorant in philosophical matters and is 'delirious' and 'mad'.<sup>396</sup> Pico accuses Bonatti of stating numerous fallacies in his *De iudiciis*. Among Bonatti's many flaws, Pico refutes his claim that astrology is a key component of the quadrivium without which the whole education system would be destroyed.<sup>397</sup> But Pico does not explore the content of Bonatti's astrological writings in depth. It seems that for him only a few examples illustrate his opponents' errors. The fact that Bonatti was not involved in the philosophical and theological debates of his epoch makes it possible for Pico not to take Bonatti's views on astrology into particular consideration. In the *Disputationes*, Bonatti is considered to be 'just' an astrologer, who pretended to incorporate false astrological knowledge into the world of Christianity. That is why two other opponents, Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly, famous for their theological and philosophical work, attracted Pico's primary attention.

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<sup>396</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 74: 'Est Bonatus inter eos primae auctoritatis; is non ignarus modo est philosophiae, sed furit plane atque delirat'.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., pp. 74–76: 'Lege eius primum librum *de iudiciis* in quo super opere ipse prooemiatur; mentior nisi helleboro dignum hominem iudicaveris. Struit, ubi desipit minus, rationes quasdam quibus astrologiam probet esse veram; illas quid dicam falsas? Immo supra quam dici possit pueriles atque ridiculas. Quam vero putat efficacissimam illa est; quadrivium destrui si astrologia tollatur; esse enim unam ex quattuor artibus mathematicis'. Cf: Guido Bonatti, *Guidonis Bonati Foroliviensis mathematici De astronomia tractatus X universum quod ad iudiciarum rationem nativitatum, aëris, tempestatum, attinet, comprehendentes* (Basle: Jacob Parcus, 1550), I, 14, c. 19: 'Praeterea, si Astrologia, sive Astronomia, non esset ars, sive scientia, destrueretur iam illud famosum quod ab omnibus universaliter praedicatur, scilicet quod artes liberales sunt septem. Non essent igitur nisi sex, vel nulla: quoniam quia ratione Astronomia non esset, eadem ratione sex non esseat, quod esset inconveniens et valde horrendum. Item cum Astronomia, sive Astrologia dicatur, quarta pars scientiae quadrivialis, si ipsa non est, et quadrivium totum non est'. The *De iudiciis* is also known as the *Tractatus de astronomia*. It is also worth noting that unlike Michael Scot, for instance, Guido Bonatti has not received the attention he deserves.

Giovanni Pico avoids calling Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly mad and insane; he even acknowledges Pierre d'Ailly's expertise in philosophical and theological matters.<sup>398</sup> In fact, this is precisely the weakness of Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly: according to Pico, they did not have sufficient expertise in astrological studies, and their error was to consider astrology as a handmaid to religion. Thus, Giovanni Pico correctly repeats his opponents' argument by claiming that Pierre d'Ailly considered astrology harmful during the early centuries of the Christian era, when Christianity had been establishing itself as the dominant religion, which, Pierre d'Ailly argues, explained the anti-astrological attacks formulated in patristic literature.<sup>399</sup> However, Pierre d'Ailly adds that by the fourteenth century, religion no longer faces any threat and can therefore use astrology as an instrument to serve Christian needs. Pico considers this way of combining Christian theology and history with astrology as 'false' and 'hateful'; he disapproves of it because it is 'adverse to religion'.<sup>400</sup> Pico then turns to Roger Bacon, whom he calls 'the great supporter of astrology'. Focusing on Bacon's philosophical texts, rich in references to astrology, Pico admits that his Franciscan opponent was under the influence of ignorant philosophers and their malign doctrines.<sup>401</sup> According to him, Roger falsely attributed various astrological writings to prominent

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<sup>398</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 96: 'Laudabo ego in Petro Alliacensi studium litterarum, experientiam rerum, multiplicem lectionem, et quod scite atque subtiliter theologica quaedam scripserit et tractaverit'.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., pp. 84–86: 'An, quod inquit Alliacensis, crescenti fidei potuit obesse, ideoque primi eam doctores nascentis Ecclesiae sunt persecuti; nunc adultae non nocet, immo prodest etiam, et vehementer?'

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., p. 96: 'Quod vero altero opusculo astrologiam historiae, altero theologiae conciliare voluerit, ut ibi veram, hic piam ratione probaret, plane non laudo, sed damno, execror atque detestor, cum tueri positionem nullam possimus, aut magis falsam, aut religioni magis adversam'.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., pp. 64–66: 'Rogerius Bacon, magnus astrologiae patronus, nullius libentius scriptoris testimoniis utatur, nisi forte praeferat Artephium, qui omnino secreta alia prodit innumera, quale illud: inspecto non astro, sed lotio, posse hominis et vitam et ingenium et conditiones denique omnes ad unam praecognosci. Sic magnam quoque ille fidem Ethico philosopho cuius liber *de cosmographia* translatus dicitur ab Hieronymo'. Cf.: Rogerius Bacones, 'Metaphysica fratris Rogeri ordinis fratrum minorum de viciis contractis in studio theologie', in *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi*, ed. Robert Steele (London: ex typographeo Clarendoniano, 1905), vol. I, pp. 1–2: 'Ab

thinkers of previous periods in order to increase the authority and importance of these treatises. To prove this point, Pico wrongly attributes the treatise *On the Seven Arts* to Severianus, against Bacon's correct attribution of the treatise to Cassiodorus.<sup>402</sup> It is the sole example of Roger Bacon's hypothetical manipulation with sources, mentioned in the *Disputationes*. It is possible that Pico's accusation of Roger Bacon was nothing but a rhetorical strategy, which corresponds quite well with his method of deconstructing the 'astrological tradition'.

Pico's main reason for opposing Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly was their fascination for the theological application of the theory of great conjunctions. He admits two ways of using this doctrine: first, through the calculation of great conjunctions to explore the history of religion from Adam to Christ;<sup>403</sup> secondly, through the use of astrological techniques to confirm the predictions of Biblical prophets.<sup>404</sup> Pico was familiar with Pierre d'Ailly's attempts to reconcile astrology with theology based on an astrologically oriented reading of Psalm 18 *Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei*<sup>405</sup>.

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auctoritatibus quidem philosophorum quos sancti recitant abstineo, nisi quod dicta Ethici astronomi et Alchimi philosophi auctoritate beati Hieronimi roborabo, quoniam nullus credere posset illos tot mira de Christo et angelis et demonibus et glorificandis et dampnandis dixisse, nisi Hieronimus vel alius sanctus eos hec dixisse firmaret'.

<sup>402</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 92: 'Severianus in libro de septem artibus, quem falso quasi Cassiodori citat Rogerius, postquam de vera dixit astronomia: «Tum ea, inquit, quae attinent ad praevidenda futura, ita debere nesciri, ut nec scripta esse videantur; sunt enim fidei nostra sine dubitatione contraria»'. Cf.: Cassiodorus Vivariensis, 'De artibus ac disciplinis liberalium litterarum', in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, LXX, VII, col. 1218c: 'Caetera vero, quae se ad cognitionem siderum conjungunt, id est ad notitiam factorum, fidei nostrae sine dubitatione contraria sunt, et sic ignorari debent, ut nec scripta esse videantur'.

<sup>403</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, IV, p. 116: 'Quod putasse videtur et Rogerius Bacon et Petrus Alliacensis, atque hic quidem duplici maxime ratione: altera, quod ex magnarum quas vocant coniunctionum astrologica supputatione haberi veritas possit de numero annorum ab Adam ad Christum'.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.: 'Alter, quod confirmari prophetarum possint oracula, si illorum praedictionibus astrologicae quoque praedictionis testimonium adiciatur'.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., pp. 116–18: 'Nam cum omne verum omni vero sit consonum, necessario verum astronomicae scientiae theologicae veritati esse concordem; quinimmo prae omnibus aliis scientiis illa veluti ancillam dominae subservire,

As was mentioned above, this Psalm had played an important role in the development of Pico's astrological views. On the other hand, the astrological reading of the Psalm was the basis for Pierre d'Ailly's demonstration that astrology and theology were in agreement in his *Vigintiloquium de concordia astronomice veritatis cum theologia*.<sup>406</sup> In Pico's opinion, this writing is full of errors, which force him to remember the words of Saint Paul about the 'concord' between Christ and Belial.<sup>407</sup> Pico also criticises Pierre d'Ailly for reconciling astrological practices and the interpretation of historical events in the *De concordantia astronomie veritatis et narrationis historice*, a point, which, as we have seen above, Pico uses to reject Islamic astrologers. In the astrological compendium, the *Elucidarium astronomice concordie cum theologica et historica veritate*, Pierre d'Ailly sought to summarise his views on the subject but, in Pico's opinion, did not succeed in avoiding several significant errors; thus, he predicted the next great conjunction to take place in 1465, i. e. in 61 years after the completion of the *Elucidarium*. He, however, did not mention and obviously did not know that the previous great conjunction had taken place in 1365.<sup>408</sup>

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cum invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt visibilia conspiciantur. Nihil sit autem inter illa caelo nobilius, unde illud davidicum: «caeli enarrant gloriam Dei et opera manuum eius nunciat firmamentum»'.

<sup>406</sup> All three astrological treatises of Pierre d'Ailly were published in: Petrus de Alliaco, *Concordantia astronomie cum theologia. Concordantia astronomie cum historica narratione. Et elucidarium duoque precedentium* (Augsburg: Erhard Ratdolt, 1490). In the titles, Pierre d'Ailly obviously refers to the previous astrological tradition: the *Vigintiloquium* corresponds to Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium*, while the *Elucidarium* serves to continue the tradition of Pietro d'Abano's *Lucidarium*. Surprisingly, the book of Laura Ackermann Smoller (*History, Prophecy, and the Stars: the Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly*, 1994) remains the only study on d'Ailly's astrology. His major astrological texts still await critical editions and modern translations.

<sup>407</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, IV, p. 118: 'Quam ipse opinionem quasi opere comprobaturus, opusculum scribit per viginti theoremata, quae vocat verba, distinctum, in quo plane tot errata quot verba; titulus est *de concordia astrologiae et theologiae*, quasi non legerit Paulum exclamantem: «quae societas luci cum tenebris? aut quae participatio Christi cum Belial?»; II Corinthians 6.14–15.

<sup>408</sup> The treatise of Pierre d'Ailly was completed in 1414: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, IV, p. 122: 'Quod ipse autem esset auditor tantum et parum peritus rerum astronomicarum, vel hinc potest cognosci, quod

As usual in the *Disputationes*, silence becomes a valid argument against Pico's opponents: as regards Pierre d'Ailly, the cardinal's silence makes it possible to accuse him of a total ignorance of astrological/astronomical calculations. Enumerating his major criticisms against Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly, Pico insists that astrology has nothing in common with history and especially religion.<sup>409</sup> After this general introduction, the author of the *Disputationes* proceeds to analyse particular examples illustrating how medieval Christian astrologers intended to reconcile these various fields of knowledge.

In this section, Pico lists a number of astrological examples, which, in his opinion, contradict religion and hence must be severely disclaimed by Christians. As the most remarkable case, he refers to the idea that Christianity, being a religion of Jupiter, received its basics from both Christ and Mercurius, and got its purity thanks to the astrologically interpreted Virgin, i.e. Virgo as an astrological sign.<sup>410</sup> He refutes Guido Bonatti's supposition that Christ based his advice to

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in ipso *Elucidario*, quod est eius opus emendatissimum, cap. XI, ait fuisse nos, cum illa scribebat, anno scilicet Christi quarto supra millesimum et quadringentesimum in aerea triplicitate, futurosque per annum adhuc unum et sexaginta, donec scilicet super mille et quadringentos quintus et sexagesimus annus ageretur. Tunc igitur futuram magnam Saturni et Iovis coniunctionem cum ab aerea ad aqueam triplicitatem mutatione. Ea vero mutatio per annos fere quadraginta praecesserat, anno scilicet Christi quinto et sexagesimo supra mille atque trecentos, quo tempore, die nona atque vigesima mensis octobris, in septima parte Scorpionis Saturnus et Iuppiter simul fuerunt, et deinceps in aqueis semper signis ad haec usque tempora se coniunxerunt. Noster vero Alliacensis, quod per centum fere annos ante contigerat, futurum adhuc praestolabatur'. Cf.: Petrus de Alliaco, *Elucidarium*, XI: 'Et fuit ibi mutatio triplicitatis terre in aeream, in qua triplicitate adhuc ad praesens sumus et erimus in eius participatione et significatione usque ad annos 1465 vel circa'.

<sup>409</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, II, IV, p. 124: 'Nihil fieri possit ad infirmandam religionem potentius et efficacius'.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., I, I, V, p. 132: 'In his quae quotidie de annorum eventibus publico vaticinio foras invulgantur, nonne et legem christianam Christi Mercurique doctrina esse perfectam, et Iovis religionem et a Virgine suscipere puritatem'.



the apostles not to return Judea on astrological calculations.<sup>411</sup> He also rejects Roger Bacon's suggestion to celebrate Saturday rather than Sunday in accordance with Jewish tradition, as it is the day governed by Saturn – a planet that prescribes abstinence from all activity.<sup>412</sup> Curiously, Pico seems to forget his own piece of advice to reconcile Jewish tradition of the Sabbath celebration with Christian needs expressed in the *900 Conclusiones*.<sup>413</sup>

The astrologers' second significant error concerns false mathematical calculations of great conjunctions. Basing his calculations on the Islamic astrological treatises, Pierre d'Ailly counts 5344 years from the Creation to Christ. This long period can be divided into two shorter ones: 2242 years from Adam to the Deluge and 3102 years from the Deluge to Christ.<sup>414</sup> The number of 2242 years springs from two main sources: Abu Ma'shar's *De magnis coniunctionibus*, with its 2226 years between the events, and Eusebius of Caesarea, who advised to subtract sixteen years from the result of astronomical calculations to get the exact number of years dividing Adam from the Deluge.<sup>415</sup> Here Pico refutes Pierre d'Ailly by manipulating the sources. He argues incorrectly that the number of years is not 2226: he refers to 2228 years (a number allegedly taken from Abu Ma'shar *De magnis coniunctionibus*), and comes to his usual conclusion that astrologers could not

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid.: 'Insanus ille Bonatus usum ait dominum Iesum horarum electione cum, apostolis consulentibus ne in Iudaeam rediret, respondit XII esse horas diei'.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.: 'Rogerius Bacon eo usque est evectus, ut scribere non dubitaverit errare Christianos, qui die sabbati non ferientur et operibus vacent ritu Iudaeorum, cum sit ea dies Saturni, quae stella rebus agendis parum commoda et felix existimatur'.

<sup>413</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, 18: 'Qui coniurixerit Astrologiam Cabale, videbit quod sabbatizare et quiescere conuenientius fit post Christum die dominico, quam die sabbati'.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., I, V, IX, p. 574.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., I, V, II, p. 530: 'Albumasar enim, quo praecipue auctore nituntur, a mundi initio ad diluvium numerat annos integros duo milia ducentos viginti octo, licet Eusebii supputatio hunc numerum annis sexdecim excedat'.

agree with each other on key points of their doctrine.<sup>416</sup> Pico's incorrect use of sources seems to be evident. Moreover, he admits that the number of years between the two main events of the Old Testament is 1556, although the method of his calculations remains unclear.<sup>417</sup> Alfonso the Great and Abu Ma'shar proposed a different number – 3102 years from the Deluge to Christ;<sup>418</sup> in this case, Pico denies any validity to mathematical and astronomical calculations and refers back to historical writings.<sup>419</sup> According to him, the texts of early Christian authors, along with some other sources, prove that only 2300 years passed between the Deluge and Christmas.<sup>420</sup> He adds that he is working on a special treatise on the subject entitled the *De vera temporum supputatione*. There is no other evidence of such a project. The passage in the *Disputationes* is the sole record of this either unfinished or prospective treatise.<sup>421</sup>

As for the religious applications of the great conjunctions theory, Pico definitely rejects any astrological interpretation of the formation of different religions. Commenting on the birth of Christ as well as on Muhammad and the diffusion of Islam, he firmly denies the notion that these

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<sup>416</sup> Abū Ma'šār, *On Historical Astrology. The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, II, I, I, 26, p. 15: 'Cuius rei exemplar est quod coniunctio que significavit diluvium fuit ante coniunctionem significantem sectam Arabum per 3958 annos et prefuit, scilicet illi orbi, Saturnus cum signo Cancris et fuit diluvium postea per 287 annos. Eruntque inter primum diem anni diluvii et primum diem anni in quo fuit coniunctio significans sectam Arabum 3671 anni. Narravit quoque Bentemiz et ceteri quod inter creationem Ade et noctem diei Veneris in qua fuit diluvium fuerunt anni 2226 et mensis unus et 23 dies et 4 hore'.

<sup>417</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, V, X, p. 582.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., I, V, VIII, p. 570: 'Alphonsus numerat a diluvio ad Christum annos tria milia centum et duos. Idem sentit Albumasar, quem ille scilicet est secutus'; I, V, X, p. 582: 'Sed nec a diluvio ad Iesum tot ulla historia annos computat quot Alliacensis, secutus Albumasarem et Alphonsum; hi enim annos numerant tria milia centum et duo'.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., I, V, VIII, p. 572.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., I, V, X, p. 582.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., pp. 582–84: 'A quo numero latini historici, qui plus annorum computaverunt, plus tamen centum et quadraginta annis a numero minore defecerunt, quamquam nos etiam pauciores qua supra colligimus exactissima notatione computandos in tractatu nostro *de vera temporum supputatione* probavimus'.

events might have been dictated by the planets.<sup>422</sup> In a similar way, he opposes the idea of astrological correspondence between planets and religions. According to this doctrine, Jupiter and Saturn correspond to the Jewish religion, Mars – to the Chaldeans who worshipped the fire, the Sun – to the Egyptians, Venus – to the Saracens, Mercury – to the Christians; and the Moon corresponds to the coming Antichrist.<sup>423</sup> For Pico, the doctrine in question is the result of the ‘admirable science of astrologers’,<sup>424</sup> which lacks proofs and provokes further contradictions among astrologers as regards exact correspondences between particular planets and particular religions. He accuses Pierre d’Ailly and Roger Bacon of accepting it and introducing into Christian theology.

To them, Pico opposes Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great. As we will see, Thomas Aquinas is used primarily to confirm Pico’s natural philosophical arguments against astrology. Together with Aristotle and Augustine, Thomas is central to the views Pico develops in Book III of the *Disputationes*. In addition, Pico claims that Thomas became a hostage of the astrologers’ attempt to attribute several magical texts to his legacy; thus, Pico mentions a certain treatise *De necromanticis imaginibus*.<sup>425</sup> In a similar way, Pico adds, astrologers sought to manipulate other sources of spurious origin: he questions the authorship of numerous treatises, ascribed to

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid., I, V, XIV–XV, pp. 604–14.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., I, V, XVII, p. 616: ‘Iuppiter enim cum Saturno Iudaeorum facit religionem, cum Marte Chaldaeorum ignem adorantium, cum Sole Aegyptiorum, qui caeli militiam hoc est sidera colunt, cum Venere Saracenam, cum Mercurio Christianam, cum Luna eam quae sub Antichristi postrema omnium est futura’.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 622: ‘Haec est admirabilis sapientia astrologorum; obliti scilicet sunt gentium bibliothecas, Arabum et Hebraeorum libros fere nullos adhuc viderunt’.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., I, I, p. 66: ‘Ita vero superstitiosum hoc genus hominum frontem perfricuerunt ut etiam sub Aquinatis Thomae titulo libros circumferant *de necromanticis imaginibus*’.

Aristotle,<sup>426</sup> Plato,<sup>427</sup> Ovid,<sup>428</sup> and Ptolemy<sup>429</sup>. In his opinion, Jerome never commented on magical texts,<sup>430</sup> and gnostics intended to present their texts as written by Zoroaster in order to legitimise their discipline.<sup>431</sup>

The name of the second influential Dominican *doctor*, Albert the Great, is extremely important in the context of historiographic debates concerning the authorship of the famous *Speculum astronomiae*. The *Speculum astronomiae* is one of the most influential magical and astrological texts in the Latin Middle Ages. Composed around 1260, the *Speculum* intended to defend astrology as an important discipline within a Christian context. Its authorship remains unclear. Over the years, it was ascribed to Albert the Great, though in some cases such attribution was debated.<sup>432</sup> In 1992, Paola Zambelli published a critical edition of the *Speculum astronomiae* with a detailed and detailed introduction.<sup>433</sup> The Italian scholar came to the conclusion that Albert

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 68: ‘Liber inscribitur Aristotelis *de regiminibus*, ita loquuntur ipsi, *caelestibus*’.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p. 64: ‘Sicut libros Platonis *de vacca* magi circumferunt, et quos vocant *institutionum*, execrabilibus somniis figmentisque refertos, et a Platone non minus alienos quam ista sint mendicabula a Platonis procul et probitate et sapientia’.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.: ‘Quis enim adducatur ut Ovidium *de vetula* Ovidium credat, in quo de magnis etiam coniunctionibus et christiana lege mirabilia pronunciantur’.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p. 66: ‘ut iam minus mirandum quod nescio quos Ptolemaei *de anulis* sed et ad Aristonem astrologicos fingant libros, quos Ptolemaeus numquam scripsit’.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., pp. 66, 68.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., p. 64: ‘Sic olim haeretici gnostici nuncupati Zoroastri libros ostentabant, quibus haeresim suam de Zoroastri antiquitate venerabilem facerent». Cf.: Porphyry, ‘Vita Plotini’, XVI: ‘Πορφύριος δὲ ἐγὼ πρὸς τὸ Ζωροάστρου συχνοὺς πεποιήμαι ἐλέγχους, ὅλως νόθον τε καὶ νέον τὸ βιβλίον παραδεικνὺς πεπλασμένον τε ὑπὸ τῶν τὴν αἵρεσιν συστησάμενων εἰς δόξαν τοῦ εἶναι τοῦ παλαιοῦ Ζωροάστρου τὰ δόγματα, ἃ αὐτοὶ εἵλοντο πρεσβεύειν’.

<sup>432</sup> Pierre Mandonnet, ‘Roger Bacon et le *Speculum Astronomiae* (1277)’, *Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie*, 17 (1910), 313–35.

<sup>433</sup> Paola Zambelli, *The Speculum astronomiae and its Enigma: Astrology, Theology and Science in Albertus Magnus and His Contemporaries* (Dordrecht; Boston; London: Kluwer, 1992).

the Great had composed the *Speculum* in response to the discussions at the University of Paris concerning the status of astrology. In addition, Zambelli established a connection between Albert's original writings and some important passages in defence of astrology found in the *Speculum*. In 2001, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani published his 'anti-Zambellian' book *Le Speculum Astronomiae, une énigme? Enquête sur les manuscrits*, in which he discussed in detail the manuscript tradition of the *Speculum* throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>434</sup> Paravicini Bagliani showed that the attribution of the treatise to Albert the Great was well-established by the fourteenth century, while the treatise remained anonymous in earlier versions of the *Speculum*. Paravicini Bagliani's conclusion is of a great importance, but his further attempt to ascribe the *Speculum* to the legacy of the thirteenth-century astronomer, mathematician and astrologer Campanus of Novara is not supported by sufficient evidence. Some time after the publication of Agostino Paravicini Bagliani's work, Nicolas Weill-Parot published his fundamental book on medieval and Renaissance talismanic magic.<sup>435</sup> Trying to keep aloof from historiographic and manuscript debates between Paravicini Bagliani and Zambelli, he, however, seems to have confirmed the authorship of Albert the Great through analysing the similarities between the representation of astrological images in Albert's known writings and the *Speculum*. Scott Hendrix's recent book on the subject does not express any doubts about the authorship of the *Speculum*.<sup>436</sup>

What is striking is that the fame and authority of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola played a crucial role in the debates on the attribution of the *Speculum*. In the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, Pico mentions the treatise twice in the context of astrological interests

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<sup>434</sup> Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Le Speculum Astronomiae, une énigme? Enquête sur les manuscrits* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001).

<sup>435</sup> Nicholas Weill-Parot, *Les 'images astrologiques' au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance. Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XII–XV siècles)* (Paris: Champion, 2002).

<sup>436</sup> Scott Hendrix, *How Albert the Great's Speculum astronomiae was Interpreted and Used by Four Centuries of Readers: A Study in Late Medieval Medicine, Astronomy and Astrology* (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 2010).

of medieval Christian thinkers. According to several modern scholars, in the passages in question, Pico attributed the authorship of the *Speculum* to Roger Bacon rather than to Albert the Great.<sup>437</sup> However, both the context and the content of Pico's references to the *Speculum* need to be clarified; for instance, modern commentators of the passage do not pay attention to the clerical implication of Pico's words and his tendency to emphasise the importance of the Dominican order. It is also worth noting that the *Disputationes* should not be regarded as a response to or an anti-astrological commentary on the techniques described in the *Speculum*. Pico's controversial use of sources reveals that opposing particular texts or astrologically oriented authors was not his intention. In the *Disputationes*, various texts could play an ambivalent role depending on the main purpose of its author. The case of the *Speculum* seems to be illustrative.

To clarify Pico's position on the *Speculum*, it is crucial to provide two full quotations from the *Disputationes*, which concern the problem of the *Speculum astronomiae*. The first one confirms that numerous books were attributed to Albert, perhaps, falsely:

If someone opposes to me Albert, the excellent theologian and, nevertheless, an opponent of astrology, I would remind you that numerous books are attributed to Albert, which in fact he did not write. We dealt with this above. If you happen to mention the book *On Licit and Illicit Books*, where he rejected magicians but recognised astrologers, I respond that many people ascribe it to Albert. However, neither Albert himself nor the title of this book confirm it precisely, because the author, whoever he was, purposely and in accordance with his studies kept back his name. Why? Because in this book a learned and good Christian can learn a lot of dishonorable things, of how to create astrological images, through which it is possible to make unlucky and unfortunate not even a single person, but a whole city; or of magical books, which should not be rejected as,

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<sup>437</sup> Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Le Speculum Astronomiae, une énigme?*, p. 139; Scott Hendrix, *How Albert the Great's Speculum astronomiae was Interpreted and Used by Four Centuries of Readers*, p. 176.

perhaps, they may become useful for the Church in the future.<sup>438</sup> It completely contradicts the decree of the Church, which ordered to burn and decisively destroy them, wherever they would be found. In fact, why is it useful to keep the books that it would have been better not to write at all? At least, either Albert did not write it, or, if he wrote it, it must be said with the Apostle: ‘In these things, I praise him, in this I do not’.<sup>439</sup>

Modern scholars often refer to the following passage, while trying to prove that Pico believed in Roger Bacon’s authorship of the *Speculum astronomiae*:

There is also a remarkable letter, which, however, our Roger often quoted in the *Letter to Clement*. It almost forces us to trust his short treatise entitled *On the Errors in the Study of*

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<sup>438</sup> Zambelli, *The Speculum astronomiae and its Enigma*, pp. 270–72: ‘De libris vero necromanticis sine praeiudicio melioris sententiae videtur, magis quod debeant reservari quam destrui: tempus enim forte iam prope est, quo propter quasdam causas quas modo taceo eos saltem occasionaliter proderit inspexisse, nihilominus tamen ab ipsorum usu caveant sibi inspectores eorum’.

<sup>439</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 94: ‘Quod, si mihi opponas Albertum, theologum praestantissimum, fautorem tamen astrologorum, admonebo te primum multa referri in Albertum quae Alberti non sunt, quod et supra tetigimus; tum, si mihi forte obicias librum *de licitis et illicitis*, in quo reicit quidem magos, astronomicos autem probat auctores, respondebo existimari quidem a multis esse illud opus Alberti, sed nec ipsum Albertum, nec libri inscriptionem usquequaque hoc significare, cum auctor ipse, quicumque demum fuerit, nomen suum consulto et ex professo dissimulet. Quid? Quod in eo multa leguntur indigna homine docto et bono christiano, qualia illa sunt, imagines fieri posse quibus etiam non unus homo, sed una etiam civitas tota vel infelix fiat, vel infortunata; tum non esse magicos libros abiciendos, qui Ecclesiae utiles futuri aliquando sint. Est enim hoc plane adversum iudicio ipsius Ecclesiae quae illos, ubi locorum fuerint inventi, uri iubet et prorsus exterminari; nam quae ratione utile erit servare integros libros, quos utillimum erat numquam esse conscriptos? Quae utique, aut non scripsit Albertus aut, si scripsit, dicendum est cum Apostolo: «In iis laudo; in hoc non laudo». Cf.: I Corinthians 11.22. The quotation from Saint Paul’s Epistle is incomplete.

*Theology*.<sup>440</sup> In the first part, he accuses our theologians of looking for the confirmation of religious secrets in the writings of Aristotle and other philosophers instead than drawing on the writings of the following authors: Ethicus, Artephius, Ovid's *De vetula* and similar poets. The book is attributed to Albert, which is absolutely false, as he never mentioned such a nonsense in his theological writings. It must be deservedly ascribed to Bacon; his other writings based on the testimonies and predictions of the mentioned authors clearly show what opinion he had on it [astrology].<sup>441</sup>

As is seen from the second passage, and contrary to modern interpretations, Pico does not actually mention that the text to be attributed to Roger Bacon is the *Speculum astronomiae*. Instead, Pico examines the astrological implications of Roger Bacon's *De viciis contractis in studio theologie*, which Pico argues was mistakenly attributed to Albert the Great. A close reading of this passage indicates that Pico cannot be used in support of the thesis that the *Speculum astronomiae* was spurious.

The first passage presents a more difficult case. It shows that Pico was aware that the authenticity of the work had been questioned. The passage itself reveals Pico's own doubts; a rhetorical figure with the use of the Biblical text, from Saint Paul's Epistle, is intended to prove the innocence of Albert if he, indeed, was a real author of the *Speculum astronomiae*. Recognising the highest status of the Dominican *doctor*, Pico leaves some room for critical remarks; he admits,

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<sup>440</sup> Bacones Rogerius, 'Metaphysica fratris Rogeri ordinis fratrum minorum de viciis contractis in studio theologie'.

<sup>441</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 66: 'Est autem lectio adeo deridicula ut nulla magis, sed frequenter citata a Rogerio nostro in epistula ad Clementem, ita ut fere adducar compositum ab eo libellum quendam, cui titulus *de erroribus studentium theologiae*, quo in primis volumine erroris accusatur quod theologi nostri mysteria religionis magis ex Aristotele ceterisque philosophis confirmant quam ex auctoribus quos modo nominavimus, Ethico, Artephio, Ovidio *de vetula*, poetisque similibus. Praescribitur vero liber Alberto, sed mendacissime cum numquam in theologicis suis scriptis haec ille somnia memoraverit, sed merito ad Baconem videtur referendus, cuius alia scripta in ea eum fuisse sententia facile declarant, illorum semper auctorum testimonia oraculisque perscatentia'.



though, that to err is human even for the most prominent authorities in philosophical and theological disciplines. Pico appears to be more lenient towards Albert than he was towards Pierre d'Ailly or Roger Bacon. In any case, both excerpts give no grounds to conclude that in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* Pico actually considered Roger Bacon to be the author of the *Speculum astronomiae*.

To conclude, the question of religious implications of astrology was at the centre of Pico's anti-astrological debates. He obviously opposed the idea of using astrology in theological and philosophical contexts. Contrasting two different groups of medieval theologians, one pro-astrological, another anti-astrological, Pico shows two opposite approaches to the problem within scholasticism. However, his views on Thomas Aquinas and especially on Albert the Great were not only determined by a careful examination of the sources but also by his orientation towards the Dominican order at the final stage of his career. This explains the apology of Albert's admiration for various magical and astrological practices and Pico's controversial attitude to the text of the *Speculum astronomiae*. At the same time, Pico is merciless in his criticism of medieval astrologers. The most ruthless attacks are directed against Roger Bacon and Pierre d'Ailly, whom he accused of introducing astrological elements into Christian theological discourse.

### Conclusion

To summarise, in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, dealing with the history of astrology, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola focused on three treatises of Claudius Ptolemy, subjecting them to scrutiny and criticism. In this discussion, Ptolemy appears as a major astrological authority who laid the foundations of astrological theories and practices, largely distorted in the subsequent tradition. In his intention to reconsider Ptolemy's legacy, Pico aims to present in a systematic way how the astrological tradition developed over time as a progressively corrupt set of doctrines based on misinterpretation and mistranslation of Ptolemy's work, as well

as an incomplete knowledge of the sources and their contexts. However, this did not lead Pico to advocate a return to a purified Ptolemy, as he had done for Plato and Aristotle in the *De ente et uno*. For Pico, astrology is a dangerous superstition, and Ptolemy remains ‘the best among the worst’. As we have seen, Pico demonstrates this in Books I and II of the *Disputationes* by showing the incompatibility of astrology with philosophy and religion. At the same time, unlike most of his predecessors, he did not limit himself to these polemical issues. Pico devoted two thirds of the *Disputationes* to a careful treatment of astrological texts, practices, and techniques, and combined theological or philosophical arguments against astrology with a systematic criticism of its practical side. The ways in which Pico interpreted his sources, resorting to some manipulations with texts and terms, shed light on his polemical strategies. Over his *itinéraire philosophique*, Pico did not refrain from distorting philosophical doctrines to defend his thesis, as we have seen in the case of the *Conclusiones* and the *De ente et uno*. The same holds true for the *Disputationes*. The ambivalent use of sources in the *Disputationes* is of a great interest, specifically in the context of Pico’s intellectual laboratory. Criticising the ‘Ptolemaic’ foundation of astrological predictions, Giovanni Pico intends to strike a serious blow at the whole of astrological science. He reveals numerous discrepancies in the interpretations of identical concepts by different astrologers. A lot of such cases are associated with Ptolemaic terminology, which was misunderstood by his successors. According to Giovanni Pico, this inconsistency in applying concepts and practices is an additional argument against astrology. By rejecting the heritage of Ptolemy, who was by far the most influential astrologer and astronomer in history, and his commentators, Pico achieved his main purpose – that of undermining the very foundations of astrology.

## Chapter V

### Back to Aristotle?

#### Natural Philosophy in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*

In the previous chapters, Giovanni Pico's philosophical arguments against astrology almost remain in shadow. My primary task was to show Pico's use of sources, his attack on practical aspects of astrology, and the controversial religious background of astrological predictions. This chapter in turn deals with Pico's natural philosophy and his interpretation of celestial influences upon the physical world. I also intend to focus on how Pico represents two main celestial bodies, the Sun and the Moon, especially in comparison with other planets and stars; the question of the philosophical context of Pico's ideas and the development of his natural philosophical views will be discussed as well.

Throughout his treatise Pico confirms that celestial impulses influence the terrestrial world; thus, as he claims in Book III of the *Disputationes*, his aim is not to reject the fact that celestial spheres somehow affect the terrestrial world but to differentiate "true" natural effects and "false" astrological speculations based on incorrect natural philosophical arguments. He states that the spheres operate by two main categories through which they influence the terrestrial world, namely motion and light, supplemented with heat.<sup>442</sup> According to Pico, astrology contradicts the main idea of causality: assuming that heaven influences the world, astrologers labelled it as a universal cause, which is responsible not only for natural effects but also for the intellectual and mental

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<sup>442</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, I, pp. 176–78: 'Id quod ita tractabitur a nobis, ut hoc quidem libro defendamus agere caelum in nos tantum motu et lumine; praeter haec frustra occultiores afflatus alios cogitari; tum a lumine illo siderum et motu, non aliud communicari materiae patienti quam motum, lucem et calorem. Calorem, inquam, et corpora consummantem in fluxu generali et ad vitam vitaeque functiones capacia vitae corpora disponentem; hoc ab omnibus fluere stellis, quamquam non sit confessum omnium ad nos etiam planetarum defluvia provenire'.

formation of each individual.<sup>443</sup> Pico does not doubt that celestial impulses can provoke certain natural phenomena or affect one's health.<sup>444</sup> However, he claims that the astrologers' doctrine of universal cause is in conflict with two fundamental ideas. First, it completely ignores the individual causes of natural phenomena, which even if they depend on a more general universal cause determine in their turn the individual effects and differences within one species.<sup>445</sup> In order to prove this notion, Pico refers to an example of two people born on the same day, at the same time and under the same position of celestial spheres whose lives cannot be identical due to the individual causes.<sup>446</sup>

Secondly, he accuses astrologers of ascribing their fundamental idea of the universal cause to Aristotle. Pico's main intention in Book III of the *Disputationes* is thus to purify Aristotle from

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., I, III, III, p. 188: 'Nam, quod ad primam attinet rationem, simul atque dixerunt astrologi motum omnem inferiorem a caeli motu dependere, statim dogmati suo contradixerunt, cum inde illud sequatur tritum apud philosophos, esse caelum universalem causam effectuum inferiorum'.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., I, III, II, pp. 180–82: 'Quis igitur, inquit, dubitaverit, mutationes quascumque rerum terrenarum a motibus fieri corporum superiorum? Quod vel ipsa quoque demonstrat experientia, variatis anni temporibus ex accessu Solis ad nos atque recessu, unde viventium quoque omnium habitus et conditio variatur, dum temperat arva caelum, dum variat fruges, redditque rapitque. Sed et in diurna revolutione Sol aeris qualitates immutat, plus, minus, tum meridie, mane, vespere, calefaciens, exsiccans, humori, frigori derelinquens. Luna quantas habeat vires in omnia corpora, praesertim fluxiora, quis ignorat? Aestus haec oceani faciens, ascendens atque descendens pontum movet, et terris immittit et effert, sed et summersa fretis, concharum et carcere clausa, ad Lunae motum variant animalia corpus; crisimi dies a medicis observati Lunae Solisque motus sequuntur'.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., I, III, III, pp. 188–90: 'Causa autem universalis effectus non distinguit, neque cur hoc fiat, aut illud, quaeritur ab ea, sed a proximis causis, quae variae et differentes sunt, pro effectuum differentia et varietate; et cum ex his alia aliud faciat, universalis causa cum omnibus omnia facit. Quod cum manifeste appareat in rebus natura specieque diversis, mirum quomodo non intelligant multo magis idem credendum de varietate individuorum quae, quanto magis et particularis est a materia plurimum trahens originem, minus referri potest in causam maxime et formalem et universalem. At quis non videt caelum cum equo equum generare, cum leone leonem, nec esse ullam siderum positionem sub qua de leone leo, de equo equus non nascatur?'.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., pp. 190–92.

what he sees as subsequent and erroneous astrological interpretations. As we have seen from the previous chapters, Pico applied the method in question while deconstructing the astrological tradition and the *prisca theologia* concept. Without a doubt, he was familiar with another tradition – the one according to which astrology was founded upon Aristotle’s philosophy. Although most of the texts that gave rise to the diffusion of astrology in medieval Europe were falsely attributed to Aristotle, until Pico’s time the notion that astrological speculations were based upon an Aristotelian vision of the world was still widespread. Thus, in Book III when analysing the celestial influences provoked by motion and light, Pico addresses the question of the authenticity of Aristotle’s thought on that topic and its subsequent distortion within the astrological tradition. We have already seen how critical Pico was of Ptolemy’s attempt to comment on Aristotle in the *Almagest*. The third book of the *Disputationes* presents a significantly expanded argument against these attempts.

Pico’s polemical strategy determines his arguments. Apart from saying that the idea of multiple individual causes dates back to Aristotle and another central authority, Augustine, who is considered as the main Christian thinker in the *Disputationes*, Pico bases the whole discourse about the first of his major natural philosophical categories, celestial motion, only on Aristotle’s *Physics*.<sup>447</sup> He generally remains within a traditional natural philosophical framework claiming that the world is governed by the prime mover, which gives its impulses through circular motion and light. Considering the way in which the stars and other celestial bodies move, Pico gives an overview of astrological sources and, as he had done previously, applies his usual method, which consists of identifying contradictions among astrologers. He claims that astrologers failed to

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., I, III, II, p. 180: ‘Theologorum et philosophorum una vox est, mundum inferiorem a Deo per caelum gubernari; hoc Aristoteles vulgatissima illa sententia docet: necessario mundum hunc inferiorem superioribus motibus esse contiguum, ut omnis eius virtus inde gubernetur; sic Aurelius quoque dixit Augustinus, per corpora subtiliora grossiora haec regi atque moveri’. See also: ibid., I, III, III, pp. 192–96.

explain the nature and difference of the stars' motion.<sup>448</sup> To a variety of opinions on the subject, he opposes the only solution that he finds reliable, the one in Aristotle's *On the Heavens*:<sup>449</sup> the stars receive the impulse for moving from the prime mover and each star's motion is permanent and is determined by its importance within the system of the universe.<sup>450</sup> Pico says that all these notions are fundamental and indisputable, and rejecting any of them contradicts the essence of natural philosophy.

While the problem of motion seems to be considered exclusively within the Aristotelian framework, Pico's analysis of the second philosophical category, celestial light, represents an entirely different case. As we have seen earlier, the question of celestial light was important for Pico in his previous writings, especially in the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos*. The analysis of Book III of the *Disputationes* gives new evidence on the development of his views in this respect.

As John Finamore has pointed out, the nature of light posed a dilemma for Neoplatonists, who were committed to the view that the teachings of Plato and Aristotle had been consistent with

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., I, III, IX, pp. 236–38: 'De velocitate tarditateque eorum nihil satis exploratum; nam Aurelius Macrobius, imitatus antiquiores, affirmat pari passu procedere omnes planetas, cui sententiae suffragabitur Avenazra, collocans in eadem sphaera Solem, Venerem et Mercurium, epicyclorum sedibus separatos. Qui vero faciunt illos inaequales, inter se digladiantur; nam Alpetragius, qui videntur velociores, eos astruit esse tardiores; contra alii restitutionis tempus observant, quod omnino fallat necesse est, nisi quis proportionem morarum spaciorumque pensiculatius examinaverit'.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 236: 'Aristoteles multitudinem motuum et paucitatem pertinere non putat ad effectarum sive motarum rerum diversitatem, sed pro dignitate moventium fieri ut quod nobilius pauci, ignobilius non nisi multis motibus assequatur'; Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, trans. William K. C. Guthrie (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), II. 12.

<sup>450</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, IX, pp. 238–40.

each other.<sup>451</sup> In the *Timaeus*, Plato states that light is corporeal, while according to Aristotle it is incorporeal. Among the Neoplatonists, who discussed the nature of light, Proclus alone claimed that it was corporeal, while Plotinus and others insisted on its incorporeality. For us, the central figure among Neoplatonists is Iamblichus who, according to Finamore, did not explicitly discuss the nature of light, but in some of his writings, first of all in the *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, presented his theory of light as a compromise between the Platonic and Aristotelian theories.

The *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* appeared to be an important source for late fifteenth-century Florentine thinkers. Pico's elder colleague Marsilio Ficino started translating Iamblichus in 1488.<sup>452</sup> Although his paraphrase of the *De mysteriis* was ready by the beginning of 1489, it was for the first time published in 1497 by Aldus Manutius. However, the later publication does not mean that Ficino's work was not known before 1497: after completing his translation, Ficino himself sent its versions to some of his colleagues and patrons. Giovanni Pico settled down in Florence in 1488, immediately entered the Florentine intellectual life and despite some tensions remained close to Ficino. He should therefore have been familiar with Ficino's work. He also owned some of the manuscripts with which Ficino was working while preparing his translation and commentary on the *De mysteriis*.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> On the notion of light in Iamblichus and other Neoplatonists see: John Finamore, 'Iamblichus on Light and the Transparent', in *The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, eds Henry J. Blumenthal and E. Gillian Clark (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), pp. 55–64.

<sup>452</sup> On Ficino's translation and commentary on Iamblichus: Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, vol. 1, pp. CXXXII–CXXXIV; Guido Giglioni, 'Theurgy and Philosophy in Marsilio Ficino's Paraphrase of Iamblichus's *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*', *Rinascimento*, 52 (2014 [2012]), 3–36.

<sup>453</sup> Maude Vanhaelen, 'L'entreprise de traduction et d'exégèse de Ficino dans les années 1486–89: demons et prophétie à l'aube de l'ère savonarolienne', *Humanistica*, 4, 1 (2010), 125–36.

Ficino too in his turn contributed to the problem of celestial light.<sup>454</sup> Leaving aside the theological dimension of celestial light that Ficino developed mostly in two treatises, the *De amore* and the *De lumine*, I intend to focus on Ficino's interpretation of astrological light and the ways it operates, influences the terrestrial world and combines with matter. In order to do so, I will analyse two texts by Ficino, the *De Sole* and the commentary on Iamblichus' *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*.<sup>455</sup> I will show that the latter can be considered as an alternative to the *De Sole* and represents a different approach to the problem of light in Ficino's late works.

In the introduction to the *De Sole*, written in 1492, Ficino claims that his book is allegorical and does not intend to comment on the whole essence of the Christian religion, but to examine the similarities between Platonic and ancient theologians' mysteries, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other.<sup>456</sup> The Sun receives the most honourable place in the universe, and, according to Ficino, gives its divine impulse to physical effects. It operates through rays and light – the formula typical for the European astrological tradition after al-Kindi's *De radiis* – and cooperates with other planets and celestial bodies in order to create the harmony of the universe. Ficino shows a deep knowledge of medieval astrology, including the Islamic tradition. He is obviously familiar with Abu Ma'shar's theory of great conjunctions and his decan doctrine, as well as with notions that were less disseminated, such as the correspondence between the Sun, the Moon and other

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<sup>454</sup> On Ficino's theory of light in the *De Sole* and related texts : Andrea Rabassini, 'La concezione del Sole secondo Marsilio Ficino: Note sul *Liber de Sole*', *Momus*, 5, 7–8 (1997), 115–33; idem, 'L'analogia platonica tra il sole e il bene nell'interpretazione di Marsilio Ficino', *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 60 (2005), 609–30; idem, 'Amicus lucis: Considerazioni sul tema della luce in Marsilio Ficino', in *Marsilio Ficino: fonti, testi, fortuna*, eds Stéphane Toussaint and Sebastiano Gentile (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2006), pp. 255–94.

<sup>455</sup> Ficino, 'Liber de Sole', in *Opera*, pp. 965–75. For Ficino's commentary on Iamblichus see: Iamblichus, 'De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum Marsilio Ficino interprete', in Iamblichus, *I misteri egiziani*, ed. Angelo Raffaele Sodano (Milan: Bompiani, 2013), pp. 539–634.

<sup>456</sup> Ficino, 'Liber de Sole', p. 965.



planets termed *almugea* in the Islamic tradition.<sup>457</sup> In the likeness of God, the Sun produces two types of celestial light, and its intelligible form is reflected, as in the mirror in the second – physical – form, which, despite its nature, retains the essence of divine light.<sup>458</sup> Because of its incorporeal nature and origin, this light does not involve the use of judicial astrology but manifests how through its universal penetration God operates in the physical world.

Ficino's developed this doctrine over a long period. Some of its traces can already be found in his letter to Cavalcanti *Comparatio Solis ad Deum* composed in 1479.<sup>459</sup> Inspired by two primary sources, namely Neoplatonism and medieval astrological tradition, it gives Ficino an opportunity to expand the theological interpretation of the similarities between the Christian God and the Sun seen within a Neoplatonic framework, and explain in terms of medieval astrology the practical influences that the Sun/God has on the terrestrial world. To clarify the interactions between the two worlds in the most famous of his astrological writings, the *De vita*, Ficino introduces the notion of *spiritus*, which contains *in se* divine *logoi spermatikoi* and through them operates within the mundane world.<sup>460</sup> Moreover, Ficino does not limit himself to comparing Christ to the Neoplatonic Sun but goes as far as to claim that the "small" Sun, the Moon is *regina coelestium*, thus clearly referring to the Christian "Queen of Heaven" or Mary.<sup>461</sup>

The commentary on Iamblichus' *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* generally follows the doctrine of celestial influences described in Ficino's previous works. At the same time, it represents a different approach to the same issue as it focuses on the reconciliation of Neoplatonic intelligible

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid., p. 970.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid. pp. 970–71.

<sup>459</sup> Idem, 'Orphica comparatio Solis ad Deum, atque declaratio idearum', in *Opera*, pp. 825–26.

<sup>460</sup> Idem, *Three Books on Life*, III, I, p. 246: 'Semper vero memento sicut animae nostrae virtus per spiritum adhibetur membris, sic virtutem animae mundi per quintam essentiam, quae ubique viget tanquam spiritus intra corpus mundanum, sub anima mundi dilatari per omnia, maxime vero illis virtutem hanc infundi, quae eiusmodi spiritus plurimum hauserunt'. On *logoi spermatikoi* in Ficino and Pico see above n. 130.

<sup>461</sup> Idem, 'Liber de Sole', pp. 967–68.

light and its physical form with matter, the issue that Giovanni Pico tried to solve in the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos*.

In the commentary to the *De mysteriis*, Ficino states that miracles and prophetic powers of every sort cannot derive from heavenly virtues; they must be caused by divine inspiration. The celestial virtues are responsible in principle for natural effects, because they are provided with the power of light. Following Iamblichus, Ficino ascribes to light and its natural consequence, *calor* (heat), a dominant impact upon natural things.<sup>462</sup> In Iamblichus, the lowest of these light powers is physical and concerned with the realm of generation. The first class of physical powers has its source in entities above the physical gods, namely the noetic forms and the noeric seminal reasons. These powers are, therefore, equivalent to divine illumination, whose source is also noetic and noeric. The second class of physical powers is, however, quite different. Its source is perceptible, it is more immediately involved in the realm of generation, and proceeds by effluences from visible gods. Ficino generally follows the structure of Iamblichus' hierarchy of different kinds of light, making the lowest and the middle ones accessible for human contemplation, though the third level is considered divine. In terms of Ficino's doctrine of celestial light, this means that by going through the two lowest levels heavenly light penetrates the terrestrial and without losing its divine nature acquires physical dimension; thus, it mixes with matter and because of this mixture can change the ways in which it produces certain influences. In Chapter X of his commentary on the *De mysteriis* Ficino makes his theory clear: even despite its incorporeal character, the divine light can be combined with physical reality in order to produce terrestrial effects through *mutatio*. Such a mixture of the eternal and incorporeal with the temporary and corporeal is responsible for the generation of natural effects and because of the possibility of *mutatio* eliminates any deterministic opportunities. In that way, Ficino develops Iamblichus' argument on the compromise between the

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<sup>462</sup> For the analysis of celestial light in Ficino's paraphrase of Iamblichus see: Iamblichus, 'De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum Marsilio Ficino interprete', pp. 552–54; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, III, 28–29, 169–70; Finamore, 'Iamblichus on Light and the Transparent', pp. 59–60.

two schools on the nature of celestial light. In his commentary on the *De mysteriis* Ficino tried to reconcile the notion of incorporeal light mostly taken from Plotinus' teaching, with Aristotelian physics. Thus, the analysis of Ficino's work clearly reveals that around the same time both Ficino and Pico worked on the same philosophical problem. We do not still have enough evidence to conclude that Pico had an opportunity to familiarise himself with Ficino's particular argument on the reconciliation of light with matter. Moreover, this does not also mean that they influenced each other: despite some similarities, their theories differ. However, with some significant methodological and polemical changes, Pico proposes a similar theory of celestial influences and their combination with matter in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*.

The name of Iamblichus appears in the *Disputationes* only once. Thus, in Book III Iamblichus and the reconciliation of Platonism and Aristotle do not appear to be among Pico's main philosophical interests. Moreover, he bases the whole discourse on celestial light exclusively on Aristotle, whom he tries to separate from what the astrologers made of him in their own theories. At the same time, however, the structure of celestial influences in the *Disputationes* echoes Ficino's mixed solution.

Putting aside the divine providence and the miracles produced in accordance with God's will, in Book III Pico focuses on the natural effects of celestial light. He claims that motion, light and heat are three fundamental qualities through which the celestial spheres operate and produce natural effects. While, according to Aristotle on whose teaching Pico relies, motion gives a first impulse, 'perfect and celestial' light and heat that 'penetrate, warm up and govern upon everything' are responsible for creating the environment suitable for life and further generation.<sup>463</sup> As divine attributes, the three qualities are permanent and universal *per se*; however, when they

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<sup>463</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, IV, p. 196: 'Quoniam sequitur lucem, quasi proprietates eius, calor quidam non igneus, non aereus, sed caelestis, sicuti lux caeli propria qualitas'; *ibid.*, p. 202: 'Idem igitur ille calor, filius lucis...'; *ibid.*, p. 196: 'Calor — inquam efficacissimus maximeque salutaris, omnia penetrans, omnia fovens, omnia moderans'.

come into contact with matter and produce natural effects they are subject to change: for instance, heat can be transformed into cold.<sup>464</sup> Pico claims that according to this universal principle, heaven produces only the three fundamental qualities, while individual causes determine all their modifications by chance. Pico's conclusion is reminiscent of a famous theological doctrine according to which evil must be considered not as a universal principle but as a lack of universal and primordial good. To prove the theological dimension of his argument on the universal character of light and heat, Pico refers to Thomas Aquinas.<sup>465</sup> Thus, the astrological doctrine opposes both theology and natural philosophy personified in Book III of the *Disputationes* by the names of Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle respectively.

Pico claims that astrologers do not recognise these three fundamental principles of natural philosophy. First, in his opinion, they do not acknowledge that the rays operate accidentally and only through the three principles mentioned above, and therefore do not depend on the position of spheres or planets. This assumption leads Pico to conclude that, whenever all the effects are of accidental nature, astrology has no natural philosophical grounds. According to Pico, the opposite would contradict experience and the teaching of Aristotle and other authorities.<sup>466</sup> Secondly,

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., pp. 196–98.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., pp. 200–2: 'Et siquidem hoc modo negaremus per se fieri aliud a caelo quam calorem, sequerentur absurda illa quae dicit Thomas: frigiditatem, siccitatem et humiditatem, non per se esse in universos, sed per accidens, nec formas omnes substantiales inferiorum corporum in virtute caelestium corporum contineri; quae nullo modo sequuntur cum negamus caelum per se et ex se vel aerem vel inferiora corpora frigefacere. Quocirca probant rationes illae Thomae, non quod negamus ipsi, sed quod asserimus'. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *La somma teologica*, 4 vols (Bologna: Edizioni studio domenicano, 1996), I, pars prima, 115.

<sup>466</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, IV, p. 202: 'Idem igitur ille calor, filius lucis, suscitans e terrenis corporibus vaporosos halatus, extenuans crassa, faeculenta dissolvens, parit ea quae fiunt in sublimi, diversa pro diversitate materiae, quae sursum tollitur. Nam si vapor a fluxu tollitur corpore, facit humidus impressiones in media aut infima regione aeris. Si a sicco atque terrestri tollitur evaporatio ignea ad superiora, quae contigua aetheris, necessario ex motu et ignis vicinitate concalescit. Haec igitur omnia quoque calor ille caelestis operatur, sive frigida illa sive calida, quoniam de vaporibus omnia, quos solus elicit calor; omnia igitur calor et universaliter omnia, cum

astrologers ignore Aristotle's teaching on matter according to which natural effects are provoked only by a combination of light/heat with matter that accepts the celestial influences and somehow accidentally modifies them.<sup>467</sup> Finally, Pico adds that only two celestial bodies, the Sun and the Moon, are able to produce powerful influences upon the physical world.<sup>468</sup> With reference to Aristotle (and with no usual reference to Ptolemy) Pico calls the Moon the Sun's 'younger brother' pointing to the exceptional position of the two celestial bodies.<sup>469</sup> At the same time, Pico says, astrologers attributed to Aristotle a theory according to which all the planets have identical nature and thus produce identical influences. In order to reject this supposition, Pico deconstructs the pro-astrological reading of Aristotle's *On the Heavens* claiming that although the Stagirite confirms that by their own nature all the planets and stars can produce certain influences, it does not mean that their influences are identical.<sup>470</sup> Commenting on the same passages from Aristotle's treatise, Pico reinterprets them in a non-astrological way. He declares that the planets *per se* can have identical powers, but in fact, their productivity varies due to additional causes. He distinguishes three primary causes: size, density and proximity to Earth.<sup>471</sup> Depending on these factors, the

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eorum distinctio atque varietas non a varietate constellationis, ut astrologi fabulantur, sed penes materiam et locum in quo generantur, ut ex *meteorologicis* Aristotelis libris et *Timaeo* Platonis innotescit'; I, III, V, p. 210; I, III, VI, pp. 220–22.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., I, III, IV, pp. 202–4. Cf.: Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, trans. Henry Desmond P. Lee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), I, 2.

<sup>468</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, VI, p. 216.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., pp. 218–20; On Ptolemy see above n. 336.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., I, III, X, p. 242: 'Stellas alias a Sole et Luna aut nihil, aut certe parum, in nos agere'; p. 246: 'Avenrodam sic argumentatur: «Agunt in nos Sol et Luna, igitur cetera, cum sint omnia eiusdem naturae». Placet species argumentationis, et Aristotelem sapit qui sic quoque argumentatur: «Luna non movetur proprio motu, sed cum sphaera quod eius maculae declarant; idem ergo de ceteris iudicandum, cum sit una natura omnium caelestium'. Cf.: Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, II, 8.

<sup>471</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, X, p. 248: 'Sic qui dicerent agere in nos tantum Solem ed Lunam, habent quas afferant rationes suae suspicionis, licet in omnibus sit caelestibus eadem natura; nam luminis

influence of each celestial body becomes stronger or weaker. Pico adds that due to the rotation of planets or stars, the angle and, therefore, the intensity of their radiation can change too. Considering the variety of factors that determine the power of celestial radiation, Pico concludes that the Sun and the Moon only are in a position to produce effective and strong influences on the physical world; even though other planets and stars are much bigger than the Sun and the Moon, they are too far away from Earth, which reduces their power.<sup>472</sup> Thus, Pico points to another mistake of astrologers who, in his opinion, misunderstood Aristotle; by deconstructing previous interpretations of this passage from Aristotle's *On the Heavens* and reinterpreting it in accordance with his primary polemical strategy, Pico achieves his purpose of purifying Aristotle from subsequent astrological speculations and of demonstrating that there is no philosophical basis for a belief in astrology.

These features – a detailed description of the mechanism of celestial influences through the combination of ‘perfect’ light with matter, a clear orientation towards Aristotelian physics, an attack on astrology from both theological and natural philosophical perspectives – form the basis of Pico's natural philosophical arguments against astrology. They correspond to Pico's main polemical strategy to return *ad fontes* expressed in other parts of the *Disputationes*: he intends to restore what he sees as the true meaning of the philosophical and theological texts, which were

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efficacem in nos actionem tres praecipue faciunt lucentis corporis conditiones, magnitudo, densitas et propinquitas. Haec in Sole concurrunt omnia praecellenter, nam et proximus nobis, praesertim si supra Lunam collocatur, quod veteres et post Ptolemaeum, Ieber Theonque contendunt, et corpore ita vasto, ut maximam stellarum plus sexquialtera proportionem superet, tum densissima luce conspicitur omnium fulgentissimus’.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., pp. 248–50. See also: ibid., p. 250: ‘Sed et ita putantibus astipulari videtur Aristoteles, qui quidem cum de motu agit omnium meminit, ut in libro *de caelo*, et supremi maxime motus, ut in postremo *physicae auscultationis* quoniam scilicet moventur ab his motibus omnia corpora. Cum vero de calore illo vivifico, foyente rerum generationes perficienteque, loquitur, aut tantum Solis, ut cum a Sole et homine generari hominem dixit, aut Solis et Lunae, ut in libris *de animalium generatione*, facit mentionem, ut si quis hanc Aristoteles opinionem fuisse contendat, nullis possit eius philosophiae dictis refutari’.

distorted by astrologers in order to give their discipline more authority. Pico's conclusion is that astrology has nothing in common with natural philosophy and is based exclusively on astrologers' 'false' theories and calculations.

Apart from the general philosophical perspective, to support his argument, Pico refers to a number of practical examples. He claims that astrologers falsely attribute several natural effects to the influence of the Sun and the Moon. He refutes their opinion by using two polemical methods: again, he reminds us of the discrepancies, contradictions and inconsistencies within the astrological tradition concerning all major theoretical problems; he also indicates that astrologers often ascribe astrological causes to natural phenomena, whilst, according to Pico, most of the astrological concepts are at variance with natural philosophy and experimental knowledge. These cases include seasonal illnesses<sup>473</sup> and the change of seasons.<sup>474</sup> He firmly rejects the idea that the traditional fields of human activity connected to the observations of the Sun – navigation, medicine and agriculture – can be subject to astrological speculation.<sup>475</sup> In a similar way, he opposes the so-called 'Lunar' astrology claiming that all the influences provoked by the Moon are of accidental nature.<sup>476</sup> He purifies the legacy of Hesiod in whose writings astrologers sought to find some ground for their predictions.<sup>477</sup> As for Galen, Pico accuses the ancient physician of acknowledging some elements of Lunar astrology, but at the same time, Pico points at the misunderstanding of Galen's teaching among subsequent medico-astrologers.<sup>478</sup> He also adds that other prominent

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid., I, III, XIII, pp. 278–80.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., pp. 276–78.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., pp. 282–84.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., pp. 296–98.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., I, III, XIV, pp. 298–302.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., I, III, XVI, p. 336: 'Nam hoc medici officium, in qua professione praecellentem Galenum vereque divinum cum doctorum consensu probamus et admiramur. At cum causa investigatur eorum dierum, quod altioris hoc opus philosophiae, non modo praeiudicii, sed nec maioris testimonii loco sententia fuerit Galeni, quando, quod Moses

physicians, namely Hippocrates and Avicenna, contrasted with Galen and never accepted astrological speculation.<sup>479</sup> Finally, the most significant practical example with which Pico intends to demonstrate the fallacy of astrology deals with the problem of tides.

As is well known, two famous interpretations of tides are by Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton, but the origin of this natural phenomenon was hotly discussed before the publication of Galileo's *Dialogo*.<sup>480</sup> We still do not have enough evidence about ancient representations of tides; at least, none of the theories were supported without some reservation. According to some studies, the primary source of the ancient theories of tides is Pliny the Elder who strongly influenced all medieval authors concerned with natural history. In his *Naturalis Historia* Pliny states that an interaction between the Sun and the Moon on the basis of the fortnightly cycles causes the tides, but he does not go into much detail and gives no explicit explanation for the fortnightly cycle.

In the Middle Ages, many explanations for tidal motions were put forward. Some of them had a clear astrological background and were introduced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries due to the transmission of Islamic knowledge in the West. As Lucio Russo has pointed out, there were three main tidal theories in the Middle Ages. The first one admitted the existence of underwater

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Aegyptius et Avicenna, magni viri magnique in medicina Galeni fautores, tradunt, plus ramis scientiarum reliquarum quam radicibus inhaesit'. See also: *ibid.*, p. 322. For secondary literature about Galen in the *Disputationes*, see n. 205.

<sup>479</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, XVI, pp. 334–36: 'Falso autem quidam ex neotericis hoc quoque Avicennam et Hippocratem opinatos tradunt. Nam Hippocrates quidem nusquam super hoc verbum, sed hunc potius ordinem rettulisse nixus ad numeros quos libenter observare natura soleat, in quod Celsus Asclepiadesque notarunt. Avicenna, cum meminisset opinionis referentis haec ad Lunam, multa, inquit, in his dictis ambiguitas. Tum quaestionem reiecit, ut cuius perscrutatio ad medicum non spectaret, quin illi potius esset impedimento'.

<sup>480</sup> Here and below on the history of the debates see: Federico Bonelli, Lucio Russo, 'The Origin of Modern Astronomical Theories of Tides: Chrisogono, de Dominis and Their Sources', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 29 (1996), 385–401; Lucio Russo, *Flussi e riflussi. Indagine sull'origine di una teoria scientifica* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003); Vincent Deparis, Hilaire Legros, Jean Souchay, 'Investigations of Tides from the Antiquity to Laplace', in *Tides in Astronomy and Astrophysics*, eds Jean Souchay, Stéphane Mathis and Tadashi Tokieda (Berlin; Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), pp. 31–82.



chasms, which periodically drew in and forced out the water, and thus in analogy with breathing in an animal caused the movement of the tide due to certain natural rules. The second theory, also of more physical nature, attributed tides to, among other things, the action of rivers and winds, the salinity of the sea water or the natural heat of deep water. Finally, the third, astronomical/astrological theory was based on a recognition of the correlation between tides, diurnal rotation and the Lunar cycle (although such explanations could also assign roles to the Sun and, possibly, to other heavenly bodies). It dated back to Abu Ma'shar's *Liber introductorii maioris ad scientiam iudiciorum astrorum* and thus received a strong astrological dimension. The theory was widely accepted in medieval Europe and gave rise to new interpretations of tidal motions. At the same time, Abu Ma'shar himself confirms that the tides can have dual origin: after a lengthy exposition on the astronomical/astrological origin of tides, he adds, as another cause of the phenomenon, the action of the winds. As we will see, such ambivalence in Abu Ma'shar's words is crucial for Giovanni Pico's arguments against astrological interpretations of tides. In addition, Abu Ma'shar contributed to an idea that besides the Moon, other heavenly bodies including the Sun and the planets also influenced the tides, which gave an additional argument for the diffusion of pro-astrological explanations of the phenomenon.

The revival of Platonism in fifteenth-century Florence had no impact on the debates on tides. Although Marsilio Ficino had examined the problem of *fluxus/refluxus* and discussed whether heavenly bodies influenced the terrestrial world permanently or not,<sup>481</sup> the only text in which the tidal motions were interpreted through the lens of Neoplatonism was Laonikos

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<sup>481</sup> Ficino discussed it in the same Chapter X of his commentary on Iamblichus: Iamblichus, 'De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum Marsilio Ficino interprete', pp. 552–54.

Chalkokondyles' *Histories*, unknown to both Ficino and Pico.<sup>482</sup> Thus, while considering the origin of tides, Pico remained entirely within the medieval tradition.

Pico shows a good knowledge of the debates on the problem in question rejecting step by step various tidal theories.<sup>483</sup> His main aim, however, is to prove that the tides have nothing to do with 'Lunar astrology'. In opposition to the astrological interpretation of which he accuses Abu Ma'shar and his followers, he proposes another explanation, namely that the winds determine the tidal motions.<sup>484</sup> Although as we have seen that both theories go back to Abu Ma'shar *Liber introductorii maioris*, relying on Abu Ma'shar would contradict Pico's strategy of stigmatising the Persian astrologer as one of his main opponents. That is why he attributes the theory he accepts to a certain 'Adelandus Arabus' or Adelard of Bath who in fact was responsible for the first ever translation of Abu Ma'shar into Latin.<sup>485</sup> Adelard also adopted most of the Persian astrologer's doctrines including the one on tidal motions influenced by the winds. Thus, even though in fact 'Adelandus Arabus' should be considered as a follower of Abu Ma'shar, ascribing the tidal theory to him instead of Abu Ma'shar allows Pico to underline once more that astrologers are unable to provide precise calculations and contradict each other on almost every major concept of their discipline.<sup>486</sup>

To summarise, Giovanni Pico's natural philosophical arguments against predictions formed a significant part of his general attack on astrology in the *Disputationes adversus*

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<sup>482</sup> Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, 2 vols, ed. Anthony Kaldellis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), I, 1.88-18-1. 90.8. Laonikos was known as a follower of Plethon. I would like to thank my colleague Sergei Fadeev for his generous help and suggestions concerning the passage in question.

<sup>483</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, XV, pp. 304-20.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304-6.

<sup>485</sup> 'Adelandus Arabus' seems to have been identified with Adelard of Bath, in the 900 *Conclusiones*: Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 13-14. In the edition of the *Disputationes*, Eugenio Garin translated an original Latin form 'Adelandus' as 'Adelardo' in Italian: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, XV, p. 308.

<sup>486</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, III, XV, pp. 310-16.

*astrologiam divinatricem*. On the one hand, Book III of the *Disputationes* marked the transformation of Pico's views on the question of celestial light. As we have seen, he put forth the problem of the communication of light with matter in the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos*, but at that stage did not succeed in combining the notion of celestial light interpreted within a Neoplatonic framework, with Aristotelian physics. In the *Disputationes*, however, probably due to the influence of the *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* and Marsilio Ficino's commentary on Iamblichus' treatise, Giovanni Pico proposed a compromise between the Platonic and Aristotelian theories. On the other hand, Pico's polemical strategies in Book III correspond to the arguments developed in the rest of the treatise. He insists that the legacy of Aristotle was distorted by subsequent pro-astrological interpretations and needs to be restored to its fullest and purity. The whole natural philosophical discourse in Book III remains strongly within an Aristotelian framework. This also confirms Pico's intention to avoid, at least openly, contemporary intellectual trends, which can be observed throughout the whole *Disputationes*: as we have seen, in most cases he refers to classical authors not associated with any philosophical novelties and therefore comes back to the origins of philosophy and theology personified in the *Disputationes* by the figures of Aristotle, and Augustine and Thomas Aquinas respectively. Thus, the analysis of Book III of the *Disputationes* sheds light on both the development of Pico's philosophical views over his intellectual itinerary and the polemical strategies he applied in his last anti-astrological treatise.

### Part III

The posthumous publication of the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* provoked heated discussions on the place of astrology within Renaissance culture. As we have seen above, in his work, Giovanni Pico questioned the status of astrology as a discipline able to predict the future. It is not surprising that the *Disputationes* faced severe opposition. In the following two chapters, my main goal is to analyse the reception of Giovanni Pico's treatise. The research will focus on the immediate reaction to the *Disputationes* among those who supported or, on the contrary, opposed Giovanni Pico's anti-astrological views. Most of the thinkers mentioned below either knew Giovanni Pico in person or were among the first readers of the *Disputationes*, sometimes even before its publication. The first three chapters cover three case studies on the 'positive' reception of the *Disputationes*, after that I intend to focus on Giovanni Pico's opponents.

### Chapter I

#### Ideological Appropriation of Giovanni Pico's Arguments:

#### Girolamo Savonarola and his *Contro gli astrologi*

In 1494, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola suddenly died in mysterious circumstances. From that moment on, one version of his death became particularly popular: Giovanni Pico was killed by the order of Pope Alexander VI. The point is that until 1493 Giovanni Pico had still been officially persecuted as a heretic. The decree of Pope Alexander's predecessor, Pope Innocent VIII, was not cancelled. Right after his election, the new Pope had solemnly forgiven Giovanni Pico. The text of his decree was then published by Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola at the beginning of his uncle's *Opera omnia*.<sup>487</sup> Nevertheless, Alexander VI quickly changed his opinion on Pico as

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<sup>487</sup> It was then reproduced in all subsequent editions of Pico's *Opera*. See, for example: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia Ioannis Pici, Mirandulae concordiaequae comitis* (Basle, 1557), p. 1.

the latter, as well as almost all his friends and colleagues, accepted the new political regime under Savonarola, established in Florence after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492. According to those who accused Alexander VI of Pico's murder, the count of Mirandola's positive attitude to Savonarola was interpreted as one of the reasons that led the Pope to orchestrate Pico's death. Curiously, Pico's close friend Angelo Poliziano who was also among Savonarola's supporters, had died a month earlier. Though some studies seem to support the version of the murder,<sup>488</sup> the evidence is not sufficient to prove it.

Nevertheless, Giovanni Pico's sudden death played an important role in the construction of his myth. Pico obviously gained legendary status during his life. His enormous philosophical knowledge and the fame of a polyglot attracted the attention of his colleagues. In the early 1490s, it was quite common to travel to Florence for an audience with Giovanni Pico. Among the young and gifted scholars from European countries who admired Giovanni Pico was Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, who later became a famous humanist. Undoubtedly, Giovanni Pico and his Kabbalistic studies inspired several humanists throughout Europe to learn Hebrew.<sup>489</sup> But his fame involved negative elements as well. One of them was related to the posthumous publication of the *Disputationes*.

The controversies regarding the authorship of the *Disputationes* cast a shadow on Giovanni Pico's legacy. The core of his attack was also distorted: from that moment on, the *Disputationes* was often considered not a comprehensive and multi-faceted critique of astrology, but a religiously motivated invective. There were two reasons for this view. The first is the image of Giovanni Pico

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<sup>488</sup> Giovanni di Napoli, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la problematica dottrinale del suo tempo* (Rome: Desclée, 1965), pp. 241–42.

<sup>489</sup> After Giovanni Pico, studies of Hebrew became popular in Italy and Germany, as well as in France and other European countries, for both philosophical and theological reasons. For general references, see: *Hebrew to Latin, Latin to Hebrew: the Mirroring of Two Cultures in the Age of Humanism*, ed. Giulio Busi (Turin: Aragno, 2006) Busi, *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel Rinascimento*.

created by his nephew in the *Vita*, which exaggerated the religious aspect.<sup>490</sup> Secondly, in 1497, Savonarola himself published a text against astrology, which he presented as a simplified vernacular version of Pico's complex philosophical doctrines; through the use of simple expressions he tried to make Pico's ideas accessible to common people.<sup>491</sup> Savonarola's *Contro gli astrologi* came to be seen as the most influential continuation of Giovanni Pico's anti-astrological attack.<sup>492</sup> Apart from philosophical and scientific responses to the *Disputationes*, in many respects it was Savonarola's *Contro gli astrologi* that shaped the religious discourse on this subject. Interesting examples of responses focused not so much on Giovanni Pico's as much as on Savonarola's treatise, including the work by the famous Swiss theologian Thomas Erastus.<sup>493</sup>

According to secondary literature, Savonarola heavily influenced Giovanni Pico in the early 1490s. There are strong reasons to accept this conclusion. First, Savonarola probably came to Florence in 1490 on Pico's invitation.<sup>494</sup> From that moment until Pico's death in 1494, they remained friends. In 1492, Giovanni Pico visited an assembly of the Dominican order near Ferrara. Savonarola had participated in it and Giovanni Pico, inspired by the event, decided to write the so-called 'moral letters' to his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico.<sup>495</sup> Along with *De vita*, these letters

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<sup>490</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae viri omni disciplinarum genere consumatissimi vita per Ioannem Franciscum illustris principis Galeotti Pici filium conscripta* (Modena: Aedes Muratoriana, 1994).

<sup>491</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, ed. Claudio Gigante (Rome: Salerno, 2000), pp. 34–35.

<sup>492</sup> Giancarlo Garfagnini, 'La questione astrologica tra Savonarola, Giovanni e Gianfrancesco Pico', in *Nello specchio del cielo*, pp. 117–37.

<sup>493</sup> Thomas Erastus, *Defensio libelli Hieronymi Savonarolae de astrologia divinatrice, adversus Christophorum Stathmionem, medicum Coburgensem* (Geneva: apud Ioannem Le Preux et Ioannem Parvum, 1569).

<sup>494</sup> Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City. Savonarola and the Struggle for Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 19.

<sup>495</sup> They were published in: Francesco Borghesi, *Concordia, pietas et docta religio. Le lettere di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: edizione e studio dell'incunabolo bolognese del 1496* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004). See also: Prosatori *latini del Quattrocento*, pp. 824–32.

became the foundation of Giovanni Pico's international reputation. Thomas More even translated the body of Giovanni Pico's later religious works and his *Vita* into English.<sup>496</sup>

Savonarola gave several pieces of advice to his young follower regarding what books he should read. He insisted that Pico needed to explore in depth the Scriptures, and to read carefully Thomas Aquinas and other 'traditional authors'.<sup>497</sup> Finally, Pico's 're-conversion' was finalised by his solemn burial at the San Marco monastery in the Dominican habit.<sup>498</sup> Although Gianfrancesco Pico in all probability exaggerated Savonarola's 'positive' influence on Giovanni Pico, one cannot disregard some important facts supporting the portrayal of his uncle. It is obvious that in the early 1490s Pico's philosophical views developed from earlier positions. As his keen interest in religious texts coincided with Savonarola's sermons in Florence, one can presume that the evolution of his ideas was at least partially influenced by the sermons. Besides, we know that the 'Ferrarese prophet' inspired other intellectuals from the Medici circle. Angelo Poliziano was buried next to Giovanni Pico at San Marco, meanwhile Girolamo and Antonio Benivieni were among Savonarola's most fervent followers. Even Marsilio Ficino supported the new regime in Florence for a while.<sup>499</sup> It would appear then that Pico's thought was subject to the same influences.

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<sup>496</sup> On More's translations and interest: Vittorio Gabrieli, 'Giovanni Pico and Thomas More', *Moreana*, 15–16 (1967), 43–57.

<sup>497</sup> Giancarlo Garfagnini, 'Pico e Savonarola', in *Pico, Poliziano e l'Umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Viti (Florence: Olschki, 1994), pp. 149–57. On Savonarola's reading advices: Roulier, *Jean Pic de la Mirandole*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>498</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae viri omni disciplinarum genere consumatissimi vita*, pp. 74–76.

<sup>499</sup> In the beginning, Ficino had supported Savonarola, but changed his mind as soon as Savonarola initiated repressions against Ficino's friends: Paolo Viti, 'Ficino, Platone e Savonarola', in *Marsilio Ficino: Fonti, testi, fortuna*, pp. 295–318. On Ficino's anti-Savonarolan interpretations: Maude Vanhaelen, 'Ficino and Savonarola on Prophecy: An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of St Paul's *First Epistle to the Romans* (1497)', in *The Rebirth of the Platonic Theology*, eds James Hankins and Fabrizio Meroi (Florence: Olschki, 2013), pp. 205–33.

At the same time, the evidence is not sufficient to prove that Savonarola and his religious texts determined the content and polemical strategies of the *Disputationes*; as we have seen, Pico's polemical strategy – to distinguish Aristotle, Plato, and to some extent Ptolemy, from later distortions of their thought – was more humanistic than the one of Savonarola. One could also argue that there was an influence in the opposite direction, i. e. from Giovanni Pico to Savonarola. Savonarola paid special attention to pagan theories on prophecy and demons but as Robert Ridolfi has shown in his fundamental monograph, although in his sermons of 1486 Savonarola accused all forms of predictions and superstitions including astrology, he did not develop this condemnation into a substantial critique.<sup>500</sup> Besides, around the early 1480s, Savonarola accused those who supported chiromancy, again without a further analysis of the phenomenon in question.<sup>501</sup> His first attempt to disprove occult sciences as such is the *Contro gli astrologi*. Later he would repeat his main arguments against occultism and superstitions in *Il Trionfo della Croce*,<sup>502</sup> though the *Contro gli astrologi* remained the only treatise directed specifically against astrology.

Savonarola does not deny that Pico's *Disputationes* prompted him to undertake his own attack on astrology. In the introduction to *Contro gli astrologi*, he claims that he had an ambiguous attitude towards the *Disputationes*. On the one hand, he found it very useful for Christians, since it helped them to avoid being enslaved by various dangerous superstitions. On the other hand, he regretted that Pico had died too suddenly and did not get a chance to polish his text.<sup>503</sup> This justifies

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<sup>500</sup> Roberto Ridolfi, *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola*, 2 vols (Rome: Alberto Belardetti, 1952), I, p. 36.

<sup>501</sup> Giancarlo Garfagnini, 'La questione astrologica tra Savonarola, Giovanni e Gianfrancesco Pico', p. 128.

<sup>502</sup> Claudio Gigante, 'Introduzione. Il profeta e le stelle', in Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, p. 12.

<sup>503</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 33–34: 'Ora, essendosi pubblicato el libro delle disputazioni del Conte Giovanni Pico dalla Mirandola contra questi superstiziosi astrologi e avendolo letto, mi sono e rallegrato e contristato. Rallegrato, dico, di tale opera, certo utile e necessaria alli cristiani nelli nostri tempi nelli quali tutto el mondo è involto in questa pestifera fallacia; contristato che tanto uomo, in questa età al mondo singulare, sia morto



Savonarola's own motivation for taking up Pico's fight against astrology by translating Pico's main arguments into Italian, and adapting them as his own.

The idea of *translatio studii* can be seen in the very structure of *Contro gli astrologi* and in Savonarola's argumentative strategy. He copies the introduction to the *Disputationes* declaring that no philosopher, theologian, or ruler has ever supported the idea of predictions. He dedicates to this question the whole first book of his treatise, which is very closely related to the 'historiographic' first book of Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes*. The sole difference is that Savonarola has changed the order of arguments. Whereas Giovanni Pico started with philosophy, Savonarola first insists on the theological contradictions between astrology and other occult sciences, on the one hand, and religion, on the other. Savonarola's arguments are, however, standard. As most of the opponents of astrology have already stated, astrology contradicts the very idea of free will and undermines the faith in God's omnipotence.

To prove this notion, Savonarola refers to the Bible. However, he prefers not to quote the New Testament: in the whole treatise, there is only one extract from it, although quotations from prophets and other books of the Old Testament are quite numerous. The same strategy may be observed in other works. According to Riccardo Fubini, the predominance of the Old Testament in Savonarola's texts has to do with the idea of self-representation: Savonarola represented himself as a successor to the Old Testament prophets, who had sought to turn people from superstitions and sins back to God and were the direct intermediaries between God and the people.<sup>504</sup> Hence, Savonarola's own prophetic intentions gain another dimension. In order to confirm the idea that

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nel fiore della sua gioventú, massime non avendo a questa opera potuto dare la sua perfezione e mettergli la estrema mano'.

<sup>504</sup> Riccardo Fubini, 'Savonarola riformatore: radicalismo religioso e politico all'avvento delle guerre d'Italia', idem, *Politica e pensiero politico nell'Italia del Rinascimento. Dallo Stato territoriale al Machiavelli* (Firenze: EDIFIR, 2009), pp. 249–71; idem, 'Profezia e riforma nel pensiero di Girolamo Savonarola', *Studi slavistici*, 7 (2010), 299–311.

astrology remained at the margins of culture and religion during the centuries, Savonarola chooses several quotations from the Old Testament claiming that the Hebrews who deviated from God had done so because they had fallen victim to false prophets and doctrines.

In the second section of Book I, Savonarola argues that the ‘good’ theologians have consistently adopted an anti-astrological attitude. He illustrates this by referring to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, quoted several times in contrast to other thinkers such as Saint Jerome, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite<sup>505</sup> and Gregory I.<sup>506</sup> In this context, Savonarola repeats word for word Pico’s analysis of the theologians’ anti-astrological arguments in the *Disputationes*. The most obvious examples are related to Basil of Caesarea,<sup>507</sup> John Chrysostom,<sup>508</sup> Saint Ambrose<sup>509</sup> and Origen.<sup>510</sup> He also translates an entire section of Pico’s *Disputationes* related to the prohibition of magical rituals and studies with the use of canon and civil law (such as the *Decretum Gratiani* and the decree of the Council of Toledo) but he expands the section by offering his own interpretation of the decrees.<sup>511</sup> In the final account, he translates Giovanni Pico’s section on the Code of

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<sup>505</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 43–44, 46–47.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., p. 44: ‘San Gregorio similmente la danna in una sua omelia’. It is the only example without an exact reference to Giovanni Pico’s text.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., p. 44: ‘Santo Basilio sopra el Genesi dice questa arte essere una occupatissima vanità’. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 90: ‘Eodem loco Basilius eam occupatissimam dixit vanitatem’.

<sup>508</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, p. 44: ‘Santo Giovanni Crisostomo dice ch’ella è vana, falsa e ridicula’. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 90: ‘Chrisostomus vanam, falsam, ridiculam’.

<sup>509</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, p. 44: ‘Santo Ambrosio dice che ella è inutile e impossibile’. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 90: ‘Ambrosius inutilem et impossibilem’.

<sup>510</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, p. 44: ‘Origene spesso con molte ragione monstra che è cosa vana e pernicioso’. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 54. Here Savonarola does not repeat Pico’s words.

<sup>511</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 48–51. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 92.

Justinian in which, according to him, ‘mathematical art, that is divinatory astrology, was condemned’.<sup>512</sup>

The analysis of the first book of the *Contro gli astrologi* reveals, therefore, that despite being apparently faithful to Pico’s text Savonarola carefully re-orders Pico’s arguments and thereby significantly changes the perspective of the anti-astrological attack. The attack is no longer considered as a view to reflect on the ways errors and misinterpretations had crept in the tradition over centuries with the job of corrupt translations and commentaries, but as a fundamental and consistent position within religious authorities. His aim is to demonstrate that Biblical prophets and theologians rejected astrology, and that true religion can only be attained through the Scriptures.

Savonarola’s main strategy is developed in the second book. Whilst Giovanni Pico had provided a detailed overview of anti-astrological literature, from ancient Greece to French *calculatores* and the Florentine thinkers, humanists and scientists, Savonarola only mentions in passing some of the ancient philosophers already quoted in the *Disputationes*, including Plato, Pythagoras, Democritus, Plotinus, Averroes, Avicenna, Favorinus and Euxodus of Cnidus.<sup>513</sup> His aim is different.

From the very beginning of his ‘philosophical’ Book II, Savonarola highlights Aristotle as the most authoritative thinker of all. The point is very important for, as is known, Savonarola charged Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni Pico’s nephew, with the job of translating and commenting on various fragments from Sextus Empiricus’ *Adversus mathematicos* in order to

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<sup>512</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 51–52. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, pp. 96–98.

<sup>513</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 54–55.

use the arguments they contained against ancient philosophy.<sup>514</sup> This caused the rise of anti-philosophical writings in Savonarola's circle; the anti-Aristotelian polemics of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola is especially worth mentioning.<sup>515</sup> However, we know that Savonarola's attitude towards philosophy was not straightforward. He studied Plato and Aristotle, compiled for his purposes some compendia with excerpts from their texts, which he quoted in his sermons and treatises.<sup>516</sup> Such an activity proves that Savonarola still considered Plato and Aristotle as authorities, despite his message that all pagan philosophy needed to be excluded from the religious experience. His attitude to Aristotle seems to be ambivalent. On the one hand, the Stagirite is considered as one of the authorities of ancient philosophy, which was criticised within Savonarola's circle. On the other hand, as is shown in the *Contro gli astrologi*, Savonarola does not deny the influence of Aristotle on scholastic philosophy and Thomas Aquinas in particular. That is why Savonarola allows himself to include such a philosophical discourse within his anti-astrological attack, though in the *Contro gli astrologi* Aristotle is presented in a 'Christianised' version to prove the basis of the religious refutation of astrology.

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<sup>514</sup> On Gianfrancesco's scepticism see: Gian Mario Cao, 'Scepticism and Orthodoxy. Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus. With a Facing Text of Pico's Quotations from Sextus', *Bruniana et Campanelliana*, 13, 1 (2007), 263–366.

<sup>515</sup> Charles Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967). Gianfrancesco pointed out his anti-Aristotelian position in the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis Christianae disciplinae* which significantly influenced Cornelius Agrippa's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque artium declamatio inveciva*. I believe that Gian Mario Cao is currently preparing a critical edition of the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*.

<sup>516</sup> On Savonarola's philosophical studies, see: Lorenza Tromboni, 'Girolamo Savonarola lettore di Platone: edizione e commento del *De doctrina Platoniorum*', *Rinascimento*, 46 (2006), 133–213; eadem, *Inter omnes Plato et Aristoteles. Gli appunti filosofici di Girolamo Savonarola* (Porto: FIDEM, 2012).

Thus, following Pico in general terms, Savonarola tied together two significant theories, that of knowledge and that of *ens per accidens*<sup>517</sup> regarded from the standpoint of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. The first question he poses is on the method of cognition. Here Savonarola follows Aristotle as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas, pointing out three forms of cognition: sensation, imagination and intellect.<sup>518</sup> According to this point of view, the feelings and the imagination may help with the knowledge of past or present things, but cannot be useful as regards the prediction of what will happen in the future. The only way to know the future is through intellect, which is also limited. However, without knowing the actual and present, perceived by the first two forms of knowledge, the intellect will be unable to predict the future. Thus, mathematical astrology may be considered as science inasmuch as it explores real, present causes of natural elements and events.<sup>519</sup> This idea, taken from Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, had already been expressed in the introduction to the *Disputationes*, where Giovanni Pico insisted on two opposite definitions of astrology. Finally, the same notion was transferred to the *Contro gli astrologi*. Savonarola's personal contribution consists in the following: the knowledge based on the idea of *ens per accidens* is not science, as it deals with fortune which is not predictable. The predictions doubt the boundlessness of the unknowable divine will, which illuminates the human reason and makes divine secrets accessible to ordinary people. Savonarola insists that heaven or God is a

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<sup>517</sup> Under this term, medieval scholastics mean any effect produced accidentally or by chance.

<sup>518</sup> Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, p. 62–66; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 2 vols, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933–1935), VI, 1026b–1027b; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan, 2 vols (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), I, V, 889. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, pp. 424–42.

<sup>519</sup> Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 61–62: 'La astrologia dunque speculativa è vera scienza perché cerca di conoscere li effetti per le vere cause, come sono li eclissi e le coniunzioni de' pianeti e simili altri effetti che procedono di necessità e sempre dalle sua cause; e similmente quella che cerca di conoscere certi effetti naturali che procedono quasi sempre dalla allongazione o appropinquazione del sole o dalla coniunzione e opposizione e moti della luna si può dimandare arte o scienza'.

universal rather than a particular cause, ruling all the natural effects in the world but leaving some room for individual initiative.<sup>520</sup> It is obvious that such a position is very close to Augustine's doctrine of free will and divine predestination, expounded first in the *De Civitate Dei* and then in his writings directed against Pelagius. Moreover, as a theoretical basis for his conclusion, Savonarola takes Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas; thus, he unites the most important authorities within a single concept of his own. This combination becomes very important for the rest of Savonarola's arguments as he received a chance to prove the falsity of astrological predictions in philosophical and theological terms. Nevertheless, such a 'Christianised' interpretation of Aristotle was then completely rejected by Pietro Pomponazzi in the *De incantationibus* and the *De fato, libero arbitrio et predestinatione*. Pomponazzi made just a short step to a more radical reading of Aristotle and, as a result, completely reconsidered the whole system supposing that natural causes (which, according to first two forms of cognition, are responsible for the knowledge of past or present events only), may be used also to understand the future.<sup>521</sup>

Finally, in the third book of the *Contro gli astrologi* Savonarola briefly considers some technical aspects of astrology. For Giovanni Pico, the practical part of predictions was far more important than for Savonarola. Pico dedicated to it almost two thirds of his treatise. In contrast, Savonarola does not pay much attention to this question, which evidently lies beyond his interest. Nevertheless, Savonarola mentions Ptolemy as the most important author who had ever written on astrology, although, in opposition to Pico, he does not focus on contradictions within the astrological traditions. To disprove Ptolemy's authority, Savonarola adopts the same strategy as Giovanni Pico. He claims that Ptolemy has to be considered as the leader among astrologers not only because of his fundamental treatises, but also because of his status as a philosopher. He

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid., p. 61. Cf. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 188.

<sup>521</sup> The concepts of fate, fortune and divination were analysed in two of Pomponazzi's treatises: Pietro Pomponazzi, *Il fato, il libero arbitrio e la predestinazione*, 2 vols, ed. Vittoria Perrone Compagni, (Turin: Aragno, 2004); idem, *De incantationibus*, ed. Vittoria Perrone Compagni (Florence: Olschki, 2011).

repeats, word for word, Pico's refutation of Ptolemy's idea that philosophy has to be divided into three parts, theology, mathematics and natural philosophy, each governing its respective field of knowledge.<sup>522</sup> Savonarola claims that Ptolemy was working with mathematical astrology, while other less gifted astrologers such as Abu Ma'shar and Haly ibn Ridwan, were embroiled in vanity and superstitions.<sup>523</sup> Savonarola remembers that during the Middle Ages astrology was legitimised due to some works falsely attributed to prominent philosophers, such as Albert the Great or Aristotle.<sup>524</sup> However, it is not possible to determine whether when mentioning Pseudo-Albert Savonarola had in mind the legendary *Speculum astronomiae*. In the *Disputationes*, Giovanni Pico mentioned two other treatises attributed to Albert the Great, the *De viciis contractis in studio theologie* (actually by Roger Bacon) and a certain text by Robert of York.<sup>525</sup> Further, Savonarola briefly examines the most important astrological techniques, such as horoscopes,<sup>526</sup> especially the horoscope of Christ<sup>527</sup> and horoscopes of religions,<sup>528</sup> as well as the astrological speculations on

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<sup>522</sup> Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 56–57: 'E se alcuno dicesse che Tolomeo, principe delli astrologi, fu uomo dottissimo né fu barbaro né quanto al nome né quanto alla sapienza, si può facilmente rispondere che Tolomeo ha ne' suoi libri dimostrato poca filosofia, con ciò sia che nel principio di suoi libri distingue la filosofia in tre parte: cioè nella teologica, naturale e matematica, e assegna la ragione di questa divisione dicendo che ogni cosa è costituita di materia e di forma e di moto, le quali tre cose si possono separare con la cogitazione ma non realmente. E dice che dal moto viene la parte teologica, e dalla materia la fisica, cioè la naturale, e dalla forma la matematica'. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 70.

<sup>523</sup> Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, p. 55: 'Ma certi uomini superstiziosi e di poco iudicio, piuttosto barbari che sapienti, l'hanno seguitata, come *etiam* appare per li nomi loro li quali tra li altri sono questi: Albumasar, Haly, Abenzagel, Aboasar, Avenasra, Aoniar, Petosiris, Avenrodan, Azerchel, Adarbaraba e simili altri'.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., P. 55: 'E, brevemente, non si troverrà che uomini dotti abbino dato opera a questa astrolgia, benché alcuni libri di astrologia falsamente siano attribuiti ad Aristotele e ad Alberto Magno e a molti altri filosofi'.

<sup>525</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, p. 66.

<sup>526</sup> Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 96–98.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., pp. 105–6.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

the number of celestial spheres and the signs of Zodiac.<sup>529</sup> Finally, Savonarola concludes that such superstitions as astrology and magic are found mainly in societies lacking true religious faith. As an example, he refers to the ancient history of the Egyptians and Chaldeans; this perfectly correlates with the last, twelfth book of the *Disputationes*.<sup>530</sup>

Thus, in his main arguments Savonarola followed Pico's attack on astrology. Savonarola's aim was to point out the superstitious character of astrological speculation, and to claim that it had nothing in common with religious beliefs. His motivation caused a re-orientation towards theological discourse, which became evident in the first book of his *Contro gli astrologi*. His interest in philosophical arguments was caused by the idea of uniting Aristotle's theory of knowledge with the scholastic doctrine of natural causes, as well as with Augustine's notion of free will. These, as well as the rest of Savonarola's arguments, were based on the text of *Disputationes* and, generally, reproduced Giovanni Pico's arguments. Hence, a question arises: did Savonarola influence Giovanni Pico's treatise or, on the contrary, Savonarola's *Contro gli astrologi* was written under the influence of the *Disputationes*?

Both Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola were instrumental in spreading an image of Pico as an ardent young man who had abandoned paganism in favour of Savonarolan spirituality centred upon the Scriptures. When it comes to astrology, however, Savonarola went even further: he gave an abridged interpretation of Pico's *Disputationes*, which served his own ideological campaign against the Florentine intellectuals (like Ficino). From that point on,

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid., p. 89–95.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., pp. 55–56: 'Se noi consideriamo diligentemente le istorie troverremo che questa astrologia fu trovata dalli Egizii e Caldei, li quali furono molto intenti alle scienze matematiche, e essendo grossi di ingegno, avendo inteso che il cielo è causa di queste cose inferiori, non pensarono più in là, ma con le loro figure matematiche si convertirono a considerare le stelle. E perché molto erano intenti al culto delli demonii, come stolti e semplici li demonii li cominciarono a inviluppare la fantasia e indurli in questa superstizione, alla quale tanto più facilmente e più volentieri si inclinorno quanto che, promettendo alli principi e gran maestri felicità, trovarono di molto guadagno'.



therefore, Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes* was seen as a vehicle for Savonarolan ideas that intellectuals had to follow or reject depending on their political allegiances.

It is difficult to form a clear view of Savonarola's influence on Pico. We still do not know the extent to which Pico's *Disputationes* was motivated by Savonarola's anti-astrological positions. But historical evidence suggests that Savonarola, who was interested in astrology and pagan doctrines on prophecy and who while in Florence read Aristotle and Plato, appropriated the treatise as expressing his own views. From the analysis of the *Contro gli astrologi*, it becomes evident that Savonarola's treatise is a careful manipulation of Pico, which purports to present an authentic, vernacular and polished version of Pico's work, but is, in fact, an ideological appropriation of Pico's ideas intended to serve a very different agenda.

## Chapter II

### *Praenotio, prisca haeresis, and Astrology:*

#### **Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola**

#### **between Savonarola and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola**

#### Introduction

Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, the nephew of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, is known as one of the most ardent followers of Girolamo Savonarola and as the author of both his uncle's and Savonarola's biographies. However, as an independent thinker Gianfrancesco Pico still remains in the shadow of his famous mentors, though his writings are crucial to understand the development of religious and philosophical ideas of the early sixteenth century. Promoting Savonarola's memory, he advanced his own position, which was based on the notion that philosophy could only serve as the handmaid of theology.

Gianfrancesco was born in 1470 to Giovanni Pico's elder brother Galeotto and Bianca Maria d'Este.<sup>531</sup> Little is known about Gianfrancesco's formation and education, except that he was influenced by the intellectual milieu of the d'Este court. In contrast to his famous uncle, who had refused the inheritance of the Mirandola counts' estate in order to dedicate himself to philosophical studies, in 1499 Gianfrancesco became the sole heir to his ancestors' domain. In the following years, he was involved in a prolonged and fierce war against his own relatives who wanted to take hold of the county of Mirandola. The several attempts to overthrow Gianfrancesco were supported by his mother Bianca Maria d'Este. In 1502, Mirandola was finally taken and Gianfrancesco was forced to leave. For nine years, he travelled across Italy and several European countries, including Germany where he presumably fell under the influence of pre-Reformation

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<sup>531</sup> For the biographical information on Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola see: Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 11–30; Elena Schisto, 'Introduzione', in Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Vita Hieronymi Savonarolae*, ed. Elena Schisto (Florence: Olschki, 1999), pp. 13–17.

ideas.<sup>532</sup> This journey, together with his friendship with Savonarola and the spreading of eschatological ideas in Italy, determined Gianfrancesco's religious outlook. In 1511, Pope Julius II helped Gianfrancesco to return to Mirandola, but it was only a temporary success. During the next two decades, Gianfrancesco had to oppose the Trivulzio family.<sup>533</sup> In 1511, when Mirandola was captured by French troops, Gianfrancesco Pico left for Rome where he came into contact with Pietro Bembo and wrote his famous treatise *De imitatione*.<sup>534</sup> In 1514, he reconciled with the Trivulzio family, but had to concede the principality of Concordia. This truce, which allowed Gianfrancesco Pico to return to Mirandola, proved to be fragile. In 1533, he was killed by his own nephew Galeotto, the son of Lodovico Pico and Francesca Trivulzio.

The philosophical path of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola was also marked by significant episodes. His philosophical views were decisively influenced by Giovanni Pico and Savonarola, whom he met in 1492. The impact these two mentors produced on Gianfrancesco led him to write two *Vitae*, glorifying both Giovanni Pico and Savonarola using several topoi from the Christian hagiographical tradition. An example of this is the description of Giovanni Pico's birth, which the author states was accompanied by the appearance of a flame in the room – in the hagiographic tradition this signifies the birth of a sage or a saint.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico's reasons for his travels also included a plea to legitimise his own claim against the rest of his family: Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>533</sup> By that year, his mother Bianca Maria had passed away (in 1506); Federico Pico died in 1502 due to an illness, and Lodovico Pico was killed in a battle in 1509.

<sup>534</sup> This dispute with Bembo has recently been published: *Ciceronian Controversies*, ed. JoAnn Dellaneva, trans. Brian Duvick (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 16–125.

<sup>535</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae vita*, p. 32: 'Prodigium haud parvum ante ipsius ortum apparuit. Visa enim circularis flamma est supra parientis matris astare cubiculum, moxque evanescere, fortasse nobis insinuans orbiculari figurae intellectus perfectione simillimum eum futurum, qui inter mortales eadem hora proderetur universoque terrae globo excellentia nominis circumquaque celebrandum, cuius mens semper coelestia ignis instar petitura esset cuiusque ignita eloquia flammatae menti consona Deum nostrum ... Legimus quippe

Gianfrancesco was only six years younger than his uncle, but, unlike him, at the time when Savonarola came to Florence in the early 1490s he appears not to have yet fully developed his philosophical ideas to engage in philosophical debates with Savonarola. Evidence suggests that he was, like many of his contemporaries, profoundly impressed by Savonarola's sermons. The restoration of Savonarola's reputation and the cult around his persona also contributed, at least in part, in influencing the future direction of Gianfrancesco's thought. Gianfrancesco dedicated some of his early writings to Savonarola, who was in correspondence not only with him, but also with other members of Gianfrancesco's family.<sup>536</sup> Moreover, Gianfrancesco Pico insisted that there had been close relations between the two families in the past: Savonarola's grandfather, the famous physician and natural philosopher Michele Savonarola, was a court physician to the d'Este family and treated Gianfrancesco's mother Bianca Maria d'Este.<sup>537</sup> During Savonarola's trial, Gianfrancesco was among the most fervent defenders of the Dominican friar and even testified against the accusations of Savonarola's follower Pietro Bernardino.<sup>538</sup>

Owing to the contributions of Gian Maria Cao, Gianfrancesco is today considered the first Renaissance sceptic.<sup>539</sup> His *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*, published in 1520, is the first

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doctissimorum sanctissimorumque hominum ortus insolita quandoque signa aut praecessisse aut subsecuta fuisse, veluti eorum incunabula infantium ab aliorum coetu divino nutu segregantia, summisque rebus gerendis natos indicantia'.

<sup>536</sup> Schisto, 'Introduzione', p. 15.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., p. 14. On Michele Savonarola and his impact: *Michele Savonarola. Medicina e cultura di corte*, eds Chiara Crisciani and Gabriella Zuccolin (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2011).

<sup>538</sup> Schisto, 'Introduzione', 16.

<sup>539</sup> Gian Mario Cao, 'The Prehistory of Modern Scepticism: Sextus Empiricus in Fifteenth-Century Italy', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 64 (2001), 229–80; idem, 'Inter alias philosophorum gentium sectas, et humani, et mites: Gianfrancesco Pico and the Sceptics', in *Renaissance Scepticisms*, eds Gianni Paganini and Jose R. Maia Neto (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), pp. 127–47. For general reading on the subject, see: *Scepticism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, eds. by Richard H. Popkin and Charles B. Schmitt (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987);

attempt to disseminate scepticism within Renaissance philosophy. His contribution to the Renaissance intellectual culture also includes several treatises on demonology, witchcraft, and female prophecy, as in the *Strix* and the biography of Caterina Mattei Racconigi.<sup>540</sup> In these texts, Gianfrancesco Pico establishes a strict dichotomy between pagan inspiration, which can only lead to demonic possession and witchcraft, and Christian inspiration, which is the only path to ecstasy and prophecy.

For the purpose of this thesis, however, the most interesting aspect of his intellectual activity is the *De rerum praenotione* of 1507, written in the context of the early sixteenth-century astrological controversies, and which became one of the most influential texts against magical and astrological speculation in the Italian Renaissance.

The *De rerum praenotione* and the *Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae*:

*Praenotio versus prophetia*

The *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* was published in 1520, although Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola started working on it around 1510, right after the completion of the *De rerum praenotione*. The impact of Gianfrancesco Pico's sceptical philosophy was significant. He extensively influenced subsequent thinkers, including in particular, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, who published a similar treatise entitled the *De incertitudine et vanitate*

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Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>540</sup> Armando Maggi, *In the Company of Demons. Unnatural Beings, Love, and Identity in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 25–65; Peter Burke, 'Witchcraft and Magic in Renaissance Italy: Gianfrancesco Pico and His *Strix*', in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 32–48. Some excerpts from the text: *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, eds Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 239–44.

*scientiarum atque artium declamatio invectiva*. In this text, printed in 1527, Cornelius Agrippa criticised all forms of knowledge and sciences. Among the disciplines Agrippa intended to disprove were magic and astrology.<sup>541</sup> Remarkably, several years later he would publish his legendary *De occulta philosophia*, containing the ideas he had previously criticised in a radical manner in the *De incertitudine et vanitate*. The main body of the *De occulta philosophia* was ready for publication before 1527, but Cornelius Agrippa did not proceed with its print. The reason for his hesitation remains obscure.<sup>542</sup> The publication order of Agrippa's books is one of the most intriguing questions in the history of Renaissance studies on magic.

Turning back to Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, we can conclude that he was influenced by Sextus Empiricus as early as the very beginning of the 1500s. Although he did not mention Sextus in the *De rerum praenotione*, his anti-magical radicalism might have been caused by a close reading of Sextus' sceptical writings during that period.<sup>543</sup> Thus, three main sources are central to Gianfrancesco's anti-astrological attack: the texts of Giovanni Pico and Girolamo Savonarola, mentioned by Gianfrancesco himself, and the philosophical tradition of scepticism, which he helped revive. Here the influence of Sextus Empiricus is clear but implicit; in his later

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<sup>541</sup> The Italian edition of the text: Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Dell'incertitudine e della vanità delle scienze*, ed. Tiziana Provvidera (Turin: Aragno, 2004). On Agrippa's use of Gianfrancesco: Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, p. 134. On Agrippa's scepticism: Vittoria Perrone Compagni, 'Tutius ignorare quam scire: Cornelius Agrippa and Scepticism', in *Renaissance Scepticisms*, pp. 91–110.

<sup>542</sup> A critical edition is: Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, ed. Vittoria Perrone Compagni (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1992). The first version of the *De occulta philosophia* was ready by 1510, but the final edition came to light only in 1533. On the history of the text, its context and intellectual impact: Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, pp. 138–82.

<sup>543</sup> On sceptical reading of Gianfrancesco before 1520 when he started working on the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*: Gian Mario Cao, 'Inter alias philosophorum gentium sectas, et humani, et mites: Gianfrancesco Pico and the Sceptics', pp. 127–28.

works directed against magic and astrology Gianfrancesco mentions Sextus much more openly and reuses his ideas to justify his anti-astrological positions.

At the beginning of the *De rerum praenotione*, Gianfrancesco offers a critique of all the ancient authors that have believed in prescience, which he understands to mean knowledge of the future, encompassed by the terms *praenotio*, *prognosis* as its Greek equivalent, *divinatio* and some others.<sup>544</sup> His aim is to establish a distinction between illicit and licit forms prophetic knowledge – the same distinction he applied to contrast the pagan Strix and the ‘living saint’ Catherina Mattei.

He tries to show that *praenotio* is composed of two words (*prae* and *notio*) and is synonymous with *cognitio*.<sup>545</sup> Without limiting himself to *praenotio*, Gianfrancesco aims to include the highest possible number of philosophical texts into his discourse. This strategy, moreover, allows Gianfrancesco to attack a number of great ancient thinkers. The very term *praenotio* provides a reason to put forward an important distinction between the ‘licit’ and ‘illicit’ types of prophetic knowledge. It would seem that Gianfrancesco Pico’s ideas related to criticising *praenotio*, false prophecies and magic were supported by many thinkers of the following generations.

Gianfrancesco’s anti-occult attacks were directed first of all against Aristotle. He explicitly rejects Aristotle’s notion of *praeexistens cognitio*,<sup>546</sup> which Cicero drew on to create the new Latin concepts of *praesumptio* and *notitia communis*.<sup>547</sup> Criticising these concepts as well,

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<sup>544</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, I, II, pp. 6–8.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., I, I, p. 5: ‘Praenotionis nomen compositum est ex praepositione ipsa *prae* et *notione* quae idem est atque *cognitio*’.

<sup>546</sup> Aristotle, ‘Posterior Analytics’, trans. Hugh Tredennick, in idem, *Posterior Analytics. Topica* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), I, 1, 3.

<sup>547</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, I, 1. On some aspects of the reception of *praenotio* of Aristotle and Cicero in Renaissance medicine see: Gianna Pomata, ‘*Praxis Historialis*: The Uses of *Historia* in Early Modern Medicine’, in

Gianfrancesco did not, however, change his positive attitude towards Cicero. This was presumably conditioned by Cicero's open criticism of these forms of predictions in his famous treatise *De divinatione*. Aristotle, whose writings Gianfrancesco considered the ultimate expression of pagan (that is, non-Christian) philosophy, did not do so in such an open manner. Thus, Gianfrancesco Pico's attitude towards Aristotle and pagan philosophy, in general, is different from the position of his uncle.

Another important target of Gianfrancesco's attacks on the notion of *praenotio* was Plato and the Platonists. The *praenotio* in its Platonic context was developed by Boethius. The author of the *De consolazione* translated the central element of Platonic philosophy, the term *idea*, as *praenotio* or *praecognitio*. For Boethius, emanation contains *in se* foreknowledge as it descends from God. As an important notion, which concerns the problem of free will and the divine predestination in Augustine's terminology, this concept was adopted by scholastics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>548</sup>

Finally, *praenotio* and its variations became a central point in the philosophy of Epicurus: the original term *prolepsis*, regarded as one of the criteria for true knowledge in Epicurian philosophy, was often translated as *praenotio* and *anticipatio* in its Latin interpretations. The most significant example of this terminological transformation, however, took place after the *De rerum praenotione*, namely in the works of Pierre Gassendi, who opposed the Aristotelian and scholastic views on the *praenotio*. It is quite symptomatic that Gianfrancesco's followers, including such

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*Historia. Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe*, eds Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 2005), pp. 105–46 (p. 119).

<sup>548</sup> Jacqueline Hamesse, 'Idea chez les auteurs philosophiques des 12 et 13e siècles', in *Idea. Atti del VI Colloquio Internazionale del Lessico Intellettuale Europeo (5-7 gennaio 1989)*, eds Marta Fattori and Massimo L. Bianchi (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1990), pp. 99–135.



prominent thinkers as Francis Bacon and Gassendi, also adopted the same philosophical discourse regarding *praenotio*.<sup>549</sup>

Gianfrancesco's attack on *praenotio* had the fundamental purpose of rejecting all possible sorts of pagan divination. Though Gianfrancesco did not conceal his intentions to follow Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes* and especially Savonarola; he also expanded on their anti-astrological and anti-magical discourse. He said that his uncle Giovanni Pico had dedicated his twelve books to the refutation of astrology, which he summarised in the fifth book and stated that he had nothing to add to it.<sup>550</sup> However, Gianfrancesco insisted that he would broaden his project by refusing and rejecting all superstitions. Thus, he dedicated special chapters to various types of occultism, for example, the seventh book to magic, the sixth to physiognomy, etc. At the same time, he opposed to these *praenotiones* the unique capacity to obtain foreknowledge, namely (in his terms) *prophetia*.<sup>551</sup> According to Gianfrancesco, *prophetia* differs from *praenotio* by its very nature: as opposed to prophecy, which is conditioned by the divine intellect, the *praenotio* is considered just as a philosophical or, in Gianfrancesco's terms, an illicit phenomenon. To prove his idea, Gianfrancesco adds that philosophers, specifically Aristotle and his followers, tried to reconcile these two forms of foreknowledge and to raise the status of *praenotio*.<sup>552</sup> This is the reason why

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<sup>549</sup> On Gassendi and his interpretation of the Epicurean *prolepsis*: Leen Spruit, *Species intelligibilis. From Perception to Knowledge. Vol. 2. Renaissance Controversies, Later Scholasticism, and the Elimination of the Intelligible Species in Modern Philosophy* (Leiden; New York; Cologne: Brill, 1995), pp. 413–14. See also: Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, eds Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), I, CIX, pp. 85–86.

<sup>550</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, I, p. 100.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid., I, III, p. 9: 'Prophaetia autem esse non potest nisi praenotio sit. Praedici enim quomodo possunt quae praenota non fuerint'.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., I, III, p. 9: 'Perlegant quaeso commentaria Averrois de somno et intelligent absurdum minime putari debere ut praenoscantur praeterita nec remotum esse quin ea quae praesentis et praeteriti temporis sunt praesciantur in somnis

*praenotio* and its forms are so widespread is human curiosity. Gianfrancesco supposes that originally every form of divination was created in ancient Eastern societies, which had been deprived of true religion – that is, of Christianity.<sup>553</sup> In this long passage on the religious falsity of Eastern and theurgical doctrines, Gianfrancesco clearly argued against the idea of *prisca theologia*, which had become popular in Italy and Europe thanks to Marsilio Ficino. It is also worth noting that an almost identical passage on the gap between true religion and divination can be found in the twelfth book of Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes*.

The *De rerum praenotione* was not the only text written by Gianfrancesco against astrology. In 1510, he completed a short piece entitled the *Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae*.<sup>554</sup> It had not been published during Gianfrancesco Pico's life and did not circulate in manuscript form. The only surviving copy of the *Quaestio* is in a Ferrarese seventeenth-century codex, originally kept in the Strozzi Library, and now in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.<sup>555</sup> The Italian scholar Walter Cavini discovered the text and published it in 1973, convincingly arguing that the *Quaestio* was an epitome for the fifth book of the *De rerum praenotione* concerning astrology. Hence, the *Quaestio* of Gianfrancesco Pico is in line with the anti-astrological discourse of his uncle. Additionally, in this text of 1510 Gianfrancesco for the first time referred to the works of Sextus Empiricus. This makes the *Quaestio* the forerunner of the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* and of the Renaissance sceptical tradition itself.<sup>556</sup>

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modo ignota ea apud nos fuerint. Apud Aristotelem quoque in Rhetoricis me legisse memini divinationem quoque de praeteritis dici tamen sub ipsa praenotione perinde ac ipsa prophetia concluditur'.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., I, VII, pp. 16-18.

<sup>554</sup> Walter Cavini, 'Un inedito di Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola. La *'Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae'*', *Rinascimento*, 13 (1973), 133–71.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 135–36.

The *Quaestio* is dedicated to one of Gianfrancesco Pico's mentors, the humanist and physician Giovanni Mainardi.<sup>557</sup> The latter participated in the publication of Giovanni Pico's *Opera Omnia*, including the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*. Mainardi was among the most radical opponents of astrology. It is not surprising that Gianfrancesco addressed his short anti-astrological text to Mainardi showing that the publication of the *Disputationes* was not the final step in the dispute with astrologers. According to Gianfrancesco Pico, their task is to jointly opposing all forms of occult knowledge.

### The Controversial Use of (Anti-)Astrological Authorities in the *De rerum praenotione*

Gianfrancesco's polemical strategy is clearly exposed in the sixth chapter of Book V, which is focused on those prominent thinkers who opposed astrology, and where he finds himself in a rather complicated position. On the one hand, he seeks to reproduce his uncle's anti-astrological and historiographical arguments, maintaining as his main source the first book of the *Disputationes*, dedicated specifically to the history of astrology. On the other hand, this effort went against his criticism of the philosophical tradition dealing with astrology, especially that of Plato and Aristotle. This visible contradiction between his personal views and his loyalty to his uncle's anti-astrological text explains the peculiar nature of the *De rerum praenotione*.

Moreover, Gianfrancesco Pico wished to establish a strong opposition between pagan philosophy and Christian religion. Although Ficino is never explicitly named, as we will see, Gianfrancesco Pico's aim is to dismantle the ideal of *prisca theologia* and *pia philosophia* that Ficino had developed in the previous century, and which was based on the notion that philosophy and religion had to be in fundamental harmony for Christian piety to be restored. Gianfrancesco

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<sup>557</sup> Zambelli, 'Giovanni Mainardi e la polemica sull'astrologia'; Eadem, *L'apprendista stregone. Astrologia, cabala e arte lulliana in Pico della Mirandola e seguaci*, pp. 74–122.

Pico develops the completely opposite view: only the strict separation between philosophy and religion, and an exclusive focus on Christian religion can bring faith. His use of scepticism allows him to claim that pagan philosophy cannot bring true knowledge. In this respect, Gianfrancesco Pico uses Giovanni Pico's deconstruction of the *prisca theologia* concept in a totally different context.

At the beginning of his examination, Gianfrancesco Pico remains generally faithful to the *Disputationes*. Citing word for word his uncle, he enumerates the main opponents of astrology among the ancient philosophers. He lists Pythagoras, Diogenes Laertius, Plutarchus and Theodoret of Cyrus, whose anti-astrological views were mentioned in the *Disputationes*.<sup>558</sup> He refers to the phrase on Democritus, which described the philosopher's position on astrology, first stated in the *Disputationes*, and then in Savonarola's *Contro gli astrologi*.<sup>559</sup> The Stoic philosopher Panetius also reappears. The only significant difference between Gianfrancesco Pico's and his uncle's texts is that the name of Seneca is not mentioned either in Giovanni Pico's or in Savonarola's writings.<sup>560</sup>

The general aim of his work – to reject all forms of paganism – leads him to some difficulties when turning to Plato and Aristotle. According to his text (which in some ways contradicts his preceding radical statements against philosophy), Gianfrancesco admits that Plato

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 122: 'Alii nec dignam putaverunt de qua verbum aliquando facerent silentio eam magis quam non nulli verbis condemnantes Pythagoram Astrologiae fidem non praestasse ex Diogene Laertio et Plutarcho et Theodereto compertum est'. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 46.

<sup>559</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, VI, p. 122: 'Democriti illud vulgatum est: Quod ante pedes nemo spectat coeli scrutantur plagas'. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, pp. 46–48; Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, II, I, p. 54.

<sup>560</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, VI, p. 122: 'Astrologia tametsi universae magiae putetur magistra quam et irridet et confutat Panetius Stoicus et illam ipsam incessuit ex eadem porticu Seneca cuius paulo ante fecimus mentionem'.

and Aristotle did not overtly support astrology.<sup>561</sup> He suggests that his readers thoroughly study their writings to discover that both philosophers did not write any texts specifically dedicated to astrology. Thus, according to Gianfrancesco Pico, Plato separated necessity from fate, while Aristotle's interest was not in fate but in exploring natural phenomena, laws and causes of the world. Gianfrancesco also adds that even during his travels to the East Plato escaped the influence of astrologers and magicians, though he would have had the opportunity to learn the fundamental astrological techniques there. It is impossible to determine whether Gianfrancesco had assumed that the works of Plato and Aristotle had subsequently been made to legitimise astrology by their disciples. In any case, his attitude towards these ancient Greek philosophers is ambivalent.

After exploring the position of Plato and Aristotle, Gianfrancesco rather unexpectedly turns to the works of Boethius.<sup>562</sup> In Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes*, Boethius, known as 'the last of the Romans', was not mentioned among the other ancient opponents of astrology. By placing him in this sequence of philosophical authorities, Gianfrancesco reveals his assessment of Boethius: the author of *De consolazione philosophiae* is undoubtedly regarded as a pagan writer by Gianfrancesco.

Following his uncle, Gianfrancesco proceeded by proving that astrology was not supported by any influential philosophical school. He mentions Porphyry, who in the biography of Plotinus insisted on the critical reaction of his teacher towards any form of predictions. However, Gianfrancesco does not forget to refer to Firmicus Maternus who criticised Plotinus in general, and Porphyry's interpretation of the Plotinus' ideas in particular.<sup>563</sup> A significant difference from

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 122: 'Didicisses profecto Platonem inter adrastiam necessitatem et fatum distinxisse et unum ab alio dirimisse. Didicisses Aristotelem et eius expositores praesertim inter graecos praestantiores non aliter de fato quam de natura loqui consuesse'.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 122: 'Didicisses et ipsum Severinum Boetium cum plura de fato loqueretur dixisse illud rebus mobilibus inherere et illud quoque subinde hausisses naturae auctorem nec naturam ipsam nec eius operationes proprias demoliri solere'.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 123. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, pp. 52–54.

Giovanni Pico is that, unlike his uncle, Gianfrancesco attributes a rejection of astrology to another famous Neoplatonic philosopher — namely, Proclus.<sup>564</sup> At the same time, Gianfrancesco's decision to include this author in his argument seems rather strange, considering his pro-religious stance in philosophy, when Proclus took a radical position against Christians, causing difficulties for Renaissance scholars in quoting his writings or commenting on him. In any case, Gianfrancesco repeats, usually word for word, his uncle's notions on Carneades, Cicero and Epicurus (whose status among philosophers remains extremely low despite his anti-astrological views). With the same aim, Gianfrancesco recalls Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>565</sup> These names, generally taken from the *Disputationes*, allow Gianfrancesco to conclude that all major philosophical schools of Antiquity opposed astrology.

Gianfrancesco also turns to other important philosophers, both Eastern and Western. He refers to Averroes, 'the famous commentator of Aristotle and the first among the Arabs who criticised, condemned and denounced astrology',<sup>566</sup> and Avicenna, who censured divinations in

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<sup>564</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, VI, p. 123: 'Quem annumerare Platonicis vel hac de causa hoc in negotio placuit quod ipse illius nosterque hostis Porphyrius fatetur assecutum eum omnia sensa Platonis Proclus platonicus quanque omnis mathematicae studiosissimus fatetur multa in coelo fingi quae ibi non sunt'.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., V, VI, pp. 123–24.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 124: 'Averrois in Aristotelis philosophia celebrer explananda et inter Arabes primus ubique Astrologiam lacerat, damnat, insectatur'.

several of his treatises.<sup>567</sup> The names of Origen<sup>568</sup> and Eudoxus of Cnidus<sup>569</sup> are mentioned as well. The latter, already praised in the *Disputationes* and the *Contro gli astrologi* as an expert in astronomical studies, obtains the same status of authority in Gianfrancesco's text. The *moderni* are also cited in accordance with the *Disputationes*: Nicolas Oresme, 'the acutest philosopher and the most skillful mathematician', is presented side by side with Henry of Hesse, William of Auvergne, also known as William of Paris, and others.<sup>570</sup> Gianfrancesco does not omit his uncle's contemporaries, including, Paolo Toscanelli, Giovanni Marliani and even the unknown Luchinus, already mentioned in the *Disputationes*.<sup>571</sup> At the same time, he leaves out two of the most important thinkers of Giovanni Pico's milieu: Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano. Such an omission raises many questions, which, unfortunately, have to remain unanswered, as there are no sufficient or precise arguments to elucidate Gianfrancesco's motivation. It is only possible to conjecture that Gianfrancesco's attitude towards Ficino and Poliziano was determined by the 'bad' influence they had on his uncle during his 'heretical' period.

Turning to the main supporters of astrological speculation, Gianfrancesco does not add new names to Giovanni Pico's list. After his uncle, he represents like his uncle Claudius Ptolemy as

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 125: 'In commentariis vero canticae Avicennae contrariam esse philosophiae testatur et falsa omnia astrologorum dogmata praedicat. In libris praeterea adversus Algazelis destructiones artificiosas astrologorum imagines asseverat'. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 56.

<sup>568</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, VI, p. 123: 'Origenes Adamantius in omnibus disciplinis praecellens etiam gentium testimonio multis rationibus astrologicam vanitatem sugillavit'. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 54.

<sup>569</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, VI, p. 125.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 125: 'Nicolaus Oresinus philosophus acutissimus et peritissimus mathematicus astrologiam peculiari commentario damnavit. Guilielmus Arvernus episcopus Parisiensis, Ioannes Caton Henricus ex Sassia et alii viri celebres eam ipsam infestarunt'.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., V, VI, pp. 125–26.

the most influential and competent astrologer, whose legacy was later misunderstood and distorted by his followers. He adopts the same framework as his uncle, quoting the same passage from the beginning of the *Almagest* where Ptolemy commented on Aristotle.<sup>572</sup> A separate passage addresses Abu Ma'shar's false identification of Ptolemy as belonging to the Egyptian royal family.<sup>573</sup> The level of Gianfrancesco's dependence on his uncle's text is proved by the fact that he spells the name of Manilius as *Mallius*, exactly the same as in the *Disputationes*.<sup>574</sup> In addition, Gianfrancesco falsely attributes some astrological writings to prominent philosophers and theologians, as his uncle did. A simple enumeration of philosophical texts reveals Gianfrancesco's main source. Thus, his polemical strategy comprises both Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes* against astrology and his own views on the subject. There are some contradictions in this section, as Gianfrancesco Pico is not entirely successful in his attempt to combine the philosophical arguments of his uncle with his own radical anti-astrological and anti-philosophical rhetoric.

In the next chapter of the *De rerum praenotione*, entirely devoted to the rejection of astrology by means of theology and law, both ecclesiastical and civil, Gianfrancesco manages to avoid such contradictions.<sup>575</sup> Although he still follows the arguments of the *Disputationes*, he obviously feels much more comfortable to engage in the discussion through his own approach. He

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 127.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., V, VI, p. 128: 'Primus fere ab eo habetur Albumasar. Is nec philosophus nec dialecticus fuit et in mathematicis imperitus qui grammaticae artis et historiae scribendae professor ab eis ad astrologiam se convertit non minus falsa quem in historiis dicturus in quibus scripserat Ptolemaeum astrologum ex regibus fuisse Ptolemaeis Alexandro successerunt'. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 72.

<sup>574</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, VI, pp. 128–29. Cf.: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, I, p. 74: 'Iam Mallium, nisi esset poeta, bone Deus, quo risu prosequemur, qui caelestes illas quas fingit imagines, paucis stellis inchoatas potius dicit quam absolutas, ne pluribus ibi ignibus accensis incendio mundus flagraret'.

<sup>575</sup> With the title: 'Quod divina lex eiusque interpretes theologi lex item pontifica et lex civilis astrologiam damnarint', this chapter is one of the largest chapters in that section: Ibid., V, VI, pp. 129–39.



is more confident in working with the sources quoted throughout the passage and does not limit himself to retelling his uncle's ideas, but rather adds original thoughts to expand upon biblical quotations. After having demonstrated the religious grounds for opposing astrology, Gianfrancesco does not lose an opportunity to criticise those Christian writers who shrugged off what he saw as the fundamental contradictions between Christianity and astrology.

*Prisca theologia as prisca haeresis*

Book VII of the *De rerum praenotione* is devoted to magic, and here Gianfrancesco Pico refers specifically to Pierre d'Ailly and Roger Bacon. In this part of his anti-astrological treatise Gianfrancesco Pico is not only drawing on his uncle's work, which as we have seen above, devoted a substantial section to the two authors, but also to Marsilio Ficino's *De religione christiana*, a work that is alluded to numerous times in the *De rerum praenotione*. In defining magic, Gianfrancesco Pico asserts that for him magic is a dangerous form of idolatry related to incantations and demons.<sup>576</sup> According to him, like other occult sciences, magic first appeared in Persia, and then was disseminated in Egypt, Babylon and Greece.<sup>577</sup> Explaining the significance of magic in ancient cultures, he provides the same quote from Porphyry, which his uncle used in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* to legitimise magical speculation.<sup>578</sup> Gianfrancesco points out that

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid., VII, I, p. 187: 'Servata est magia ut Septimo hoc libro confutaretur cuius cultores et foedus cum daemone quandoque pepigerunt ut divinent quod in evocationibus umbrarum inferorumque colloquiis in controversum est et eo etiam non vocato id satagunt pro noscendis occultis ex aliis compluribus aere, aqua quae supra cum divinandi vanitate reprobavimus'.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., VII, I, p. 187: 'Magiae nomen sua moneta latium non percussit ut magus quasi magnus dicatur sicuti Horatiano placuit interpreti non a magis particula deducitur non Graecum, non Chaldaeum, non Aegyptium sed Persicum est. Magorum nomine apud Persas auctore Porphyrio divinorum interpretes et cultores indicabantur: apud alios scriptum invenimus eos a Persis magos appellari qui elementis numen tribuerent'.

<sup>578</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 'De hominis dignitate', p. 148.

in all ancient societies magicians obtained an important status in social and cultural hierarchies. Their official titles could differ, but their functions remained the same. In this passage, he implicitly refers to the *De religione christiana* of Marsilio Ficino. Unlike the Florentine philosopher, however, Gianfrancesco does not praise the similarities in magic doctrines within various ancient societies. On the contrary, he focuses on their common fallacies.<sup>579</sup>

In contrast to his contemporaries and Thomas Aquinas, who often underlined the dual nature of magic,<sup>580</sup> Gianfrancesco distinguishes three forms of magic. Two of them had originated in Persia. The first, created by prominent Persian magicians, remained within Persia without being disseminated outside its borders. The second form of magic listed by Gianfrancesco Pico deals with incantations and necromancy. Finally, the third form, known as ‘natural magic’, eventually spread abroad to the East and also to the West.<sup>581</sup> His understanding of ‘natural magic’ presumes that this form of magic was later supplemented by other doctrines outside of Persia. Hence, ‘natural magic’ received an ‘international’ status. Gianfrancesco assumes that the Greeks were introduced

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<sup>579</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, VII, I, p. 187: ‘Alii Persas eo nomine suos intelligi voluisse sapientes quemadmodum Egyptii et Hebraei sacerdotum prophetarumque nomine significabant qui divina nossent et Graeci philosophorum nomenclatura quod sapientiae vacassent, et Aethiopes Gymnosophistas et Assyrii chaldeos et Indi Brachamanas et Galli druidas’. Cf.: Ficino, *Opera*, I, p. 1: ‘Philosophi a Persis, quia sacris praeerant, magi, hoc est, sacerdotes, sunt appellati. Indi Brachmanas de rerum natura simul, atque animorum expiationibus consulebant. Apud Aegyptios Mathematici et Metaphysici sacerdotio fungebantur et regno. Apud Aethiopas gymnosophistae philosophiae simul magistri erant ac religionis antistites’.

<sup>580</sup> On this: Paola Zambelli, *L’ambigua natura della magia: filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1991).

<sup>581</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *De rerum praenotione libri novem*, VII, II, p. 188: ‘Hinc triplex magia suborta: prima quae Persarum esset peculiaris et in Perside nata: hec auctorem habuit Ormacem et Zoroastrem, sed non eum fortasse qui vulgo etiam doctioribus persuasus, sed alium Oromasi filium hanc postea Thraicius Zamolxis excoluit. Secunda quam incantatores venefici necromantes profitentur. Teriam quam naturalem vocaverunt cuiusmodi haberetur prima illa Persarum Magia persicis monumentis minime nobis constitit’.

to magic during their wars against the Persians, while the Romans adopted magic from the Gauls and their magicians, druids, and often sought various means of prediction.<sup>582</sup> Augurs, haruspices and dream interpreters became especially influential in Roman society.

Unlike his uncle, Gianfrancesco Pico focuses on the origin of astrology at the beginning of his treatise. He insists that curiosity is particular to human beings, but it may have a negative impact on people who are far from objective knowledge. These people can easily fall under the malign influence of astrologers and other magicians. Thus, Gianfrancesco Pico repeats the main arguments formulated in Book XII of the *Disputationes*, which, as we have seen, can be regarded as the most doubtful in terms of Giovanni Pico's authorship. In addition, Gianfrancesco reframes the geographical and cultural boundaries of the *prisca theologia*. Under the banner of pagan antiquity, which he opposes as a concept, Gianfrancesco Pico unites several ancient doctrines widely known in Florence and in the rest of Italy during the late fifteenth century. Along with the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Arabs, he also cites the Assyrians.<sup>583</sup> The Assyrians were considered to be very close to the Chaldeans and Ficino translated Iamblichus's *Reply to Porphyry's Letter to Anebo the Egyptian* with the title *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians*. This reference to the Assyrians proves that already in the early sixteenth century the doctrine of *prisca theologia* was subject to modification. Renaissance historiographers during the sixteenth century typically made additions to the general list of historical states. Thus, for example, in his *De perenni philosophia*, Agostino Steuco da Gubbio included in the list of the *prisci theologi* the Armenians.<sup>584</sup> Gianfrancesco, who, contrary to Agostino Steuco, did not support the doctrine of

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid., VII, II, pp. 188–89.

<sup>583</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, I, VII, p. 16: 'Apud assyrios ariolorum consulta et traiectiones motusque stellarum observatos multifariam invenimus praenoscenti cupidine. Eisdem astrorum praecognitionibus chaldei et aegyptii pariter incubuere cuius vanitatis inventum ex Caria legimus'. See also: Ibid., I, VII, p. 18.

<sup>584</sup> Maria Muccillo, *Platonismo, ermetismo e 'prisca theologia'*. *Ricerche di storiografia filosofica rinascimentale* (Florence: Olschki, 1996), pp. 17–19.

*prisca theologia*, includes the Hebrews in his list of ancient theologians. He states that instead of listening to their prophets, the Hebrews got embroiled in magical speculation.<sup>585</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico's opposition to the Jews appears to be radical. There are two possible explanations for his attitude. On the one hand, he clearly refers to the ancient tradition of Jewish mysticism, which Giovanni Pico supported in his early writings and which, according to Gianfrancesco Pico, caused his uncle's break with the Church. On the other hand, Gianfrancesco might have been suggesting that the Hebrews included some preaching practices in their mysticism. The passage in question is similar in nature to Savonarola's preaching strategies, which contrasted superstitious people to those who listened and followed true prophets. In any case, Gianfrancesco Pico's negative attitude towards Jewish philosophy and Kabbalistic mysticism finds its firm confirmation in this fragment. His main objective remains, however, to reject the philosophical validations of astrology. It is worth noting that at the beginning of the *De rerum praenotione* he mentions two thinkers who criticised various forms of superstition. First, he refers to Tatian the Assyrian who reproached the Romans for being loyal to divination. It is difficult to understand how Gianfrancesco overlooked Tatian's heretical status, focusing instead solely on his anti-astrological views. Along with Tatian, he also mentions a Christian writer, the 'blessed Saint Jerome from Florence'. Under that name, he evidently meant his teacher Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>586</sup>

Gianfrancesco Pico insists that his intention was to rid true religion of pagan superstitions, divinations and other dangerous heretical elements. Declaring that his treatise is based on Giovanni Pico's arguments, he does not fail to indicate his uncle's significant errors. It is difficult to understand whether Gianfrancesco Pico 'forgave' his uncle for his interest in occult sciences, but

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<sup>585</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, I, VII, p. 18: 'Tanta enim praenotionis cupidine humanum genus ab ipsa antiquitate estuavit ut quibus veri prophetae deerant israelitico populo peculiariter dati demonum oracula consulenda placuerit. Sed divinationem aliunde sibi multifariam procuravere'.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., I, VII, p. 17.

he nonetheless remained faithful to his biography of Giovanni Pico's life, in which he considered there was no place for the radical and magical *900 Conclusiones* and the Kabbalistic *Heptaplus*.

Gianfrancesco Pico's main interest obviously lied in countering natural magic, which had its supporters in various intellectual circles in Renaissance Italy. Undoubtedly, Gianfrancesco was familiar with his uncle's contribution to this question and with the idea of natural magic being a 'servant' to theology so widespread in medieval and Renaissance texts. By outlining a gradual development of magic from Near Eastern societies to the Greece of Plato and his disciples, Gianfrancesco reformulated the myth of *prisca theologia* in a negative light. He admits that magic took roots within the European philosophical and religious discourse, though several Christian writers such as Origen, Augustine and John Chrysostom had warned of its destructive character. Referring again to Giovanni Pico, he does not criticise his uncle's favorable views regarding natural magic, ascribing to him the important role of being a 'historiographer' of magic.<sup>587</sup> Thus, he accurately analyses the magical views of three prominent medieval thinkers, al-Kindi, Roger Bacon and William of Paris. This approach echoes Giovanni Pico's *Oratio de hominis dignitate*,<sup>588</sup> but Gianfrancesco develops a completely opposite argument. In the two chapters directed specifically against al-Kindi and Roger Bacon,<sup>589</sup> Gianfrancesco reconsiders their status within the medieval tradition, disproving their arguments to unite magic with philosophy and, in the case of Roger Bacon, with Christian theology. His anti-magic attack also aims at other thinkers. Along with a critique of the brahmans and gymnosophists, Gianfrancesco Pico intends to revise the Jewish legacy as well.<sup>590</sup> As the word 'Kabbalah' does not appear in the chapter against Jewish philosophy, it is obvious that Gianfrancesco's main target are the Talmudists, who, in his opinion, contaminated the tradition of interpreting the Bible with magical elements. Gianfrancesco's attack

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid., VII, II, pp. 189–90.

<sup>588</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, pp. 150–52.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., VII, VII–VIII, pp. 203–12.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., VII, VIII, p. 212.

on the Talmudists testifies to his lack of knowledge regarding the Jewish religious tradition, in which commenting sacral texts has nothing to do with practical magic. Moreover, it is not unlikely that despite his declaration of the non-Kabbalistic aim of his critique, Gianfrancesco had in fact in mind only the Kabbalistic tradition.

### Aristotle and Natural Arguments against Astrology

The general structure of Gianfrancesco Pico's arguments differs from that of the *Disputationes*. Unlike his uncle, Gianfrancesco did not focus on natural arguments against astrology in any specific chapter. He first presents pro-astrological natural arguments, which he then proceeds to reject. From the beginning of his examination, Gianfrancesco Pico makes Aristotle responsible for the philosophical foundations of astrology. This makes for the most significant difference between Gianfrancesco Pico and his uncle. While in the *Disputationes* Giovanni Pico della Mirandola chooses Aristotle over Plato as his major authority in eliminating the possibility of all astral influences, his nephew's attitude towards Aristotle seems to be far more negative – Gianfrancesco considers Aristotle to be the main vehicle for the dissemination of astrological superstitions. This is because, as mentioned above, Gianfrancesco Pico's aim is to establish a strict separation between paganism, which is considered as the vehicle of either superstitions or philosophy, and Christian religion. In his opinion, no one can reach divine truth by relying solely on pagan philosophy.

Thus, he states that in his writings Aristotle legitimised astrological speculation after determining the close links between its superior and inferior effects.<sup>591</sup> Such a dependance on celestial influences and their impact on the terrestrial world opened the door to a philosophical

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<sup>591</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, II, p. 101: 'Peripateticorum princeps Aristoteles in primo meteororum libro scribat necesse esse mundum hunc inferiorem superioribus lationibus esse contiguum ut omnis eius virtus inde gubernetur'.

justification of astrology. Aristotle thus had a significant influence on the subsequent philosophical tradition, causing the dissemination of astrology, which then gained a high position among the other sciences. Gianfrancesco also accuses the subsequent philosophical tradition of the diffusion of Aristotle's ideas, but his main attack is directed against the entire body of Aristotle's works; it is also worth noting that he does not distinguish the Stagirite's original writings and those falsely attributed to him.

Gianfrancesco Pico additionally enumerates the primary fields in which astrology could be applied. Agriculture, medicine and navigation were quite common areas of application. He also adds several natural phenomena, which could be predicted on the basis of astrological calculations. If Aristotle created a philosophical basis for astrological speculation, then Ptolemy adapted and adopted his ideas and introduced further practical astrological techniques. In this passage, Gianfrancesco reiterates his uncle's idea that Ptolemy had intended to comment on Aristotle and had tried to reconcile his philosophy with astrology.<sup>592</sup> However, rather than considering Ptolemy as an erroneous interpreter of Aristotle as Giovanni Pico had done in the *Disputationes*, Gianfrancesco Pico states that Aristotle's philosophy was responsible for sowing the seeds of superstition in Ptolemy's system.

In order to reject all attempts by astrologers to justify their doctrine, Gianfrancesco Pico borrows from his uncle's arguments and, in some cases, uses ideas from Girolamo Savonarola. He decisively rejects the main astrological question of celestial causality, repeating the notion that heaven must be considered as a universal cause, which cannot produce particular effects. Here Gianfrancesco Pico remains loyal to his teachers and to the long-standing anti-astrological tradition, which includes the writings of medieval scholastics. In addition, he reproduces Giovanni Pico's central polemical strategy of highlighting that astrologers are not competent in their subject, since they contradict each other in their description of the main astrological techniques. Such

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid., V, II, p. 102.

contradictions, according to Gianfrancesco Pico, do not allow astrologers to make accurate horoscopes and predict any sort of future events.<sup>593</sup>

Referring to the second point, which deals with the inconsistencies within the astrological tradition, Gianfrancesco alludes to Book III of the *Disputationes*. He distinguishes between astrological speculation and real natural events, which can be predicted through mathematical calculations. From Giovanni Pico's text, he derives the notion that the Sun and the Moon produce the only significantly effective influence on the sublunary world. Any other potential impact, such as that of zodiac signs or celestial bodies and planets, is nothing but the product of speculative assumption. Gianfrancesco argues that natural events like the changes of the four seasons are not defined by astrological means but depend exclusively on natural causes.<sup>594</sup>

To prove this, Gianfrancesco Pico follows Giovanni Pico and Girolamo Savonarola, and considers the central notions of natural philosophy, such as light, motion, and heat. Using his uncle's arguments, he rejects the possible lunar influence on the tides. Borrowing from Giovanni Pico, he mentions among the opponents of the 'astrological' theory of tides a certain Adelandus, who is also referred to as the first disciple and follower of Ammonius.<sup>595</sup> The identities of both Ammonius and Adelandus remain unknown. Giovanni Pico used the name 'Adelandus' to denote the famous medieval astrologer and translator Adelard(us) of Bath. It is not unlikely that Gianfrancesco Pico repeated the error of his relative. Trying to prove his acquaintance with the astrological tradition, Gianfrancesco argues against its other significant proponents. Thus, he

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid., V, III, p. 103.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., V, IV, pp. 106–13.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., V, IV, p. 107: 'Estus autem maris et fluxus refluxusque in aliam causam quam in lunam referunt non nulli quod si lunae ipsa quoque reciprocatio feratur accepta nihil minus inde Astrologia iuvabitur. Adelandus quem discipulum Ammonii fuisse opinor causam reciprocationis putat quod partes maris quas terra dirimit in unum confluere locum et se contingere properent quae obiectu terrenae molis repulsae iterum quo naturalis impellit motus revocentur, et confirmari vel hac ratione Adelandi opinio potest cum partes elementi ad suam integritatem ad locum proprium atque congenitum naturali propensione ferantur'.



criticises Alpetragius for his explanation of celestial motion and rejects Roger Bacon's interpretation of the influence of the lunar light. However, despite all these attempts to demonstrate his expertise in the subject, Gianfrancesco Pico clearly draws upon the information provided in his uncle's writings.<sup>596</sup>

Gianfrancesco also claims that astrologers falsely attributed a considerable power to the Moon. As an example, he refers to the ancient and medieval physicians (Galen, Pierre d'Ailly and others) who determined the critical days of an illness by the position of the Moon.<sup>597</sup> Gianfrancesco comes to the conclusion that astrologers are completely unable to predict the future. Their calculations are far from being precise and the disagreements between astrologers in practical matters only reinforce his doubts.

In addition, Gianfrancesco rejects the doctrine of animated spheres, as well as the practice of creating zodiac signs and giving them personalised characteristics.<sup>598</sup> He severely opposes the attempts to correlate astrology with the four seasons or with the four types of bile. He claims that the geometrical figures of celestial bodies are not substantiated either. Gianfrancesco states that all these astrological practices are speculative and cannot be proved with exact calculations, and, therefore, should not be considered scientific. The application of this kind of false mathematical data is extremely dangerous in all the three main domains related to astrology: medicine, agriculture and travel. It is worth noting that apart from astrologers, Gianfrancesco also places a responsibility on philosophers whose concepts gave rise to further astrological speculations. Thus,

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., V, IV, p. 107: 'Alpetragius in motum diurnum eam rettulit quo movent omnia sed inferiora minus, ita ignis spheram rotari in orbem, in aere autem inordinatum nec omnino circularem gigni motum qui in aqua desinat finiatque in accessum atque recessum... Rogerius Baccon ex lunae lumine id voluit conjicere quam opinionem multis validisque rationibus Picus patruus confutavit atque vanam omnino ridiculamque monstravit'.

<sup>597</sup> Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis de rerum praenotione libri novem*, V, IV, pp. 108–9.

<sup>598</sup> He dedicated to that problem a long chapter: Ibid., V, V, pp. 113–22.

in marked contrast to his uncle, he repeatedly emphasises the negative role of Plato, Aristotle and their disciples in the development and dissemination of astrology.

While focusing on the theoretical and practical elements of astrology, Gianfrancesco consistently discusses these questions with clear references to the relevant chapters of the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*. He refers to various debates on the number of spheres, uncertain properties of celestial bodies and other theoretical questions that have not been solved by astrologers over the centuries in order to question the possibility for astrology to formulate reliable predictions about future events. In the end, Gianfrancesco comes to the conclusion (already articulated in the *Disputationes*) that human life is not an appropriate subject for celestial influences or astrological calculations and that it is in reality conditioned only by natural phenomena. Life is not strictly determined and leaves space for individual freedom. Gianfrancesco rejects fate as a philosophical concept, denying the Platonic notion of fortune and other interpretations by ancient philosophers.

### Conclusion

To summarise Gianfrancesco Pico's views on astrology, it is worth looking through the *Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae* – a compendium from the *De rerum praenotione* that reproduces the main polemical strategies, as well as the primary questions, posed in his major treatise on the subject. Gianfrancesco repeats his arguments about the Eastern origin of astrology and its close relation to non-Christian practices, which oppose the Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers.<sup>599</sup> His arguments against practical matters remain the same: in the application of astrological knowledge, astrologers usually contradict each other and are unable to determine the number and the motion of celestial spheres, nor to attribute any specific properties and characteristics to

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<sup>599</sup> Walter Cavini, 'Un inedito di Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola. La *'Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae'*', 138–40.

planets, zodiac signs and other celestial bodies.<sup>600</sup> He severely criticises astrologers for their persistent attempts to predict important historical events using the astrological theory of ‘great conjunctions’.<sup>601</sup> His primary aim is to refute the same pro-astrological authorities – i.e. ancient philosophers, Ptolemy, and Eastern magicians – facing them against the traditional set of writers, including Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

However, while considering anti-astrological texts in detail, Gianfrancesco faces the same difficulties as in his *De rerum praenotione*. His position becomes controversial when he supports the authors he had recently fought against. He repeats the structure of Giovanni Pico’s historiographic first book of the *Disputationes*, consecutively enumerating philosophers, theologians and legislators who opposed astrology. At the same time, in his analysis of Plato and Aristotle, Gianfrancesco finds himself in a deadlock trying to reconcile Giovanni Pico’s attitude with his own religious radicalism: all pagan philosophy is to be rejected, and so is every possibility of applying astrology in some domain.

Gianfrancesco’s attitude to astrology and magic is unequivocal: he is a severe critic of every form of occult knowledge. However, the way he stands against it is not free from ambivalence. On the one hand, he insists that philosophical arguments are a good tool for the development of astrology and magic. His opposition to philosophy is obviously conditioned by his interest in scepticism and the position of one of his teachers, Girolamo Savonarola, who had thoroughly studied philosophical texts. On the other hand, however, a complete rejection of philosophy seemed to enter into conflict with the approach of his famous and beloved relative, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. This ambiguity provoked his rather unconvincing attempt to reconcile these two approaches. This inconsistency overreached particular treatises against magic and astrology, and caused the ambivalence in Gianfrancesco Pico’s texts. Being under the

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid., p. 141: ‘Primo, omnis qui ignorat principia scientie alicuius propria, ipsam artem et scientiam proprie nescit’; pp. 143–47.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

influence of the two bright figures equally important to him, Savonarola and Giovanni Pico, Gianfrancesco Pico had to make a final choice either to refrain from glorifying his uncle or to counterbalance Savonarolian religious radicalism with Piconian thought.

### Chapter III

#### With ‘Latins’ Against ‘Latin Vice’: Maximus the Greek on Astrology

As is widely known, the *Disputationes* provoked a great deal of discussion on astrology not only in Italy but also across Europe. The diffusion of Giovanni Pico’s work was accompanied by the transmission of other forms of knowledge from Italy, such as Neoplatonic philosophy and Kabbalistic literature, both of which were often envisaged in the context of the *prisca theologia*. This determined the multi-layered nature of the reception of Giovanni Pico’s thought, including his attack on astrology and other occult sciences. Recent studies have traced the reception of the *Disputationes* in several parts of Europe.<sup>602</sup> At the same time, the penetration of such occult sciences to Russia seems to be rather unexpected.

The reception of Western thought in early modern Russia still remains in the shadows of scientific inquiry. The pioneering studies by William Ryan shed light on the destiny of the *Secretum Secretorum* and its use for medical and magical purposes in the Russian lands during the late fifteenth–sixteenth centuries.<sup>603</sup> The translation of the *Secretum* from Hebrew was tied with the so-called Judaizer heresy that arose in Novgorod in the late fifteenth century. The location of Novgorod and its permanent trade contacts with the Hanseatic League opened the door to the diffusion of European culture.

The *Secretum*, often called in Old Russian manuscripts ‘The Gates of Aristotle’, gave rise to speculations on magic in Russian lands, but was banned together with the heresy of the Judaizers

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<sup>602</sup> Cf.: Steven Vanden Broecke, *The Limits of Influence: Pico, Louvain, and the Crisis of Renaissance Astrology*.

<sup>603</sup> William Ryan, ‘The Old Russian Version of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secreta Secretorum*’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 56, 2 (1978), 242–60; idem, ‘Aristotle and Pseudo-Aristotle in Kievan and Muscovite Russia’, in *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The Theology and Other Texts*, eds Jill Kraye, William F. Ryan and Charles Schmitt (London: Warburg Institute, 1986), pp. 97–109; idem, *The Bathhouse at Midnight. An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1999), pp. 359–72.

in the sixteenth century. The destiny of the *Secretum* also contributed to the negative attitude towards Aristotle in the Old Russian sources.<sup>604</sup> Another example of the Judaizers' influence was the Laodicean Epistle written by Feodor Kuritsyn with the use of Kabbalistic elements.<sup>605</sup> Under the patronage of the Judaizers, some magical and astrological texts, including Sacrobosco's *De sphaera* and Maimonides' texts, were for the first time translated into Russian.<sup>606</sup>

Some scholarly articles have explored specific episodes related to the history of the diffusion of European magical texts and practices in early modern Russia, but they show that this diffusion was restricted to a few cases.<sup>607</sup> It appears that until the second half of the seventeenth century Russian intellectuals did not adopt and adapt Western knowledge in a systematic way.

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<sup>604</sup> Idem, 'Aristotle in Old Russian Literature', *The Modern Language Review*, 63, 3 (1968), 650–58 (pp. 651–52); Татьяна Чумакова, 'Рецепция Аристотеля в древнерусской культуре', *Человек*, 2 (2005), 58–69.

<sup>605</sup> Наталия Казакова, Яков Лурье, *Антифеодальные еретические движения на Руси XIV – начала XVI в.* (Moscow; Leningrad: Akademiya Nauk SSSR, 1955), pp. 265–76; John Fine, 'Fedor Kuritsyn's *Laodikijskoe poslanie* and the Heresy of the Judaizers', *Speculum*, 41 (1966), 500–4; Jack Haney, 'The Laodicean Epistle: Some Possible Sources', *Slavic Review*, 30, 4 (1971), 832–42; Fairy von Lilienfeld, 'Die 'Häresie' des Fedor Kuricyn', *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 24 (1978), 39–64; Moshe Taub, 'The *Poem on the Soul* in the *Laodicean Epistle* and the Literature of the Judaizers', *Rhetoric of the Medieval Slavic World* (1995), 671–85.

<sup>606</sup> Василий Zubov, 'Неизвестный русский перевод "Трактата о сфере Иоанна Сакробоско"', in *Историко-астрономические исследования*, ed. Петр Куликовский (Moscow: Nauka, 1962), pp. 209–21; William Ryan, 'Maimonides in Muscovy: Medical Texts and Terminology', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 51 (1988), 43–65; Моше Тауб, 'Послесловие к "Логическим терминам" Маймонида и ересь жидовствующих', in *In memoriam: Сборник памяти Я. С. Лурье* (Saint Petersburg: Fenix, 1997), pp. 239–46.

<sup>607</sup> Robert Collis, 'Magic, Medicine and Authority in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Muscovy: Andreas Engelhardt (d. 1683) and the Role of the Western Physician at the Court of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, 1656–1666', *Russian History*, 40 (2013), 399–427.

Only starting with Alexey I and then Peter the Great the role and use of European sources in Russian intellectual culture significantly increased.<sup>608</sup>

A similar trend can be observed in the artistic production of the time. Some remarkable examples of European influence can be found in the architecture of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially in the construction of the Kremlin cathedrals.<sup>609</sup> This tendency, however, was not prolonged. But the tradition to adopt Byzantine and post-Byzantine artistic tastes was transformed in the seventeenth century.

In that context, Maximus the Greek, a central figure in Russian intellectual culture in the first half of the sixteenth century and the first intellectual to present a more systematic reception of European Renaissance culture in the Russian lands, attracts a particular attention. Almost thirty years after the publication of the *Disputationes*, Maximus the Greek, who had lived in Italy in the period of astrological controversies of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, settled in Muscovy and wrote his own three *Epistles Against Astrology*, which were directed against some

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<sup>608</sup> Марина Киселева, *Интеллектуальный выбор России второй половины XVII — начала XVIII века: от древнерусской книжности к европейской учености* (Moscow: Progress-Tradiziya, 2011). For some examples regarding magic, see: Robert Collis, 'Andrei Vilnius (1641 – 1716) and Transmission of Western Esoteric Philosophy to Russia', *Aries*, 12 (2012), 191–220.

<sup>609</sup> Сергей Подъяпольский, 'К вопросу о своеобразии архитектуры московского Успенского собора', in *Успенский собор Московского Кремля. Материалы и исследования*, ed. Ангелина Смирнова (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 24–51; idem, 'Итальянские мастера в России XV–XVI веков', in *Россия и Италия. Встреча культур*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Nauka, 2000), pp. 28–53; Андрей Баталов, 'Судьбы ренессансной традиции в средневековой культуре: итальянские формы в русской архитектуре XVI в.', in *Искусство христианского мира*, vol. 5, ed. Ариадна А. Воронова (Moscow: PSTBI, 2001), pp. 135–42; Татьяна Матасова, 'О статусе и правах итальянских архитекторов в России в последней четверти XV — первой половине XVI вв.', in *Собирательство и меценатство в эпоху Возрождения*, eds Андрей Доронин and Олег Кудрявцев (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015), pp. 57–70; Марина Дмитриева, *Италия в Сарматии. Пути Ренессанса в Восточной Европе* (Moscow: Новое литературное обозрение, 2015).

Catholic preachers in Moscow and defined astrology as a ‘Latin vice’<sup>610</sup>. Despite his close connections with Savonarola and Pico’s family, he did not mention any ‘Western’ sources in his polemics. This chapter will show that Maximus used Giovanni Pico’s and Savonarola’s treatises, whilst simultaneously rejecting Italian Renaissance culture. Although at first sight Saint Maximus’s motivation seems to have nothing in common with the astrological polemics taking place in Italy, I argue that his *Epistles Against Astrology* drew upon the astrological disputes in Italy and in Europe in general and therefore are an integral part of them. Moreover, this case study on the diffusion of Giovanni Pico’s and Savonarola’s anti-astrological ideas allows us to expand the boundaries, both geographical and intellectual, of their success.<sup>611</sup> This chapter will also explore Maximus’ strategies to describe the European Renaissance culture for his Muscovite audience, his anti-Catholic position, and his use of Renaissance texts.

Born in 1470 or 1475 in the small town of Arta in Greece, Maximus – or more precisely Michael Trivolis, since at the end of the fifteenth century he had not yet become a monk – came to Italy in 1492.<sup>612</sup> Over a period of twelve years he travelled to various Italian cities, met many prominent Italian scholars and familiarised himself with Italian Renaissance culture. From his own

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<sup>610</sup> These three texts were published in: Преподобный Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, vol. 1, ed. Нина Сеницына (Moscow: Indrik, 2008), pp. 256–94; 311–34; 359–72.

<sup>611</sup> My publications related to this topic: Ovanes Akopyan, ‘With ‘Latins’ Against ‘Latin Vice’: Savonarola, Saint Maximus the Greek and Astrology’, *Rinascimento*, 53 (2013), 269–79; Ованес Акопян, ‘С ‘латинянами’ против ‘латинского нечестия’: Максим Грек, Савонарола и борьба с астрологией’, in *Европейское Возрождение и русская культура XV — середины XVII вв.: контакты и взаимное восприятие*, ed. Олег Кудрявцев (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2014), pp. 92–102.

<sup>612</sup> For the Italian period of Maximus’ biography see: Нина Сеницына, ‘Новые данные об итальянском периоде жизни преподобного Максима Грека’, *Вестник церковной истории*, 1 (2006), 193–99; Она же, *Максим Грек* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2008). No doubt, Prof. Sinitsina is the best specialist in the field. See also: Владимир Иконников, *Максим Грек и его время. Историческое исследование* (Kiev: Tipografiya imperatorskogo universiteta Svyatogo Vladimira, 1915); Élie Denisoff, *Maxime le Grec et l’Occident. Contribution à l’histoire de la pensée religieuse et philosophique de Michel Trivolis* (Paris; Louvain: Desclée et de Brouwer, 1943).



writings, we know that in Florence he became a close follower of Girolamo Savonarola and in 1502 even became a novice of the Dominican order.<sup>613</sup> After the execution of Savonarola in 1498, Maximus became a secretary of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola; he lost his position only because of his patron's exile. Around 1499–1500, Michael also spent some time in Venice and worked with Aldus Manutius: some of the letters he wrote during his time in Mirandola were sent to 'the house of *dominus Aldus Venetianus*'.<sup>614</sup> Finally, already in Russia Maximus composed a short text on Aldus Manutius and his publisher's design.<sup>615</sup>

He also knew Angelo Poliziano and other Italian humanists whose legacy he would later severely criticise in the writings composed in Russia and directed against the 'Western mode of thinking'. Describing the diffusion of astrology and pagan philosophy in Italian society, he respectively refers to two main terms: a 'Latin vice' and a 'Hellenic charm'. Maximus summarised his negative attitude towards Renaissance thought in his *Words against Juan Luis Vives*.<sup>616</sup> Completed around 1530 it represents a severe critique of Vives' interpretation of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. Although from the text itself, it becomes evident that Maximus did not actually read Vives' commentary, which was published after Maximus' move to Moscow. His actual aim was to persuade his Muscovite readers that the Catholic Church was corrupt. Thus, he rejects the very idea of interpreting religious texts with the use of alternative methods and sources. To the humanistic method of reading theological texts, he opposes the example of a true religious reformer, whose teaching does not deal with text but with spirit, that is his Florentine mentor Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>617</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> Синицына, *Максим Грек*, pp. 76–82.

<sup>614</sup> Преподобный Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, vol. 1, pp. 86–97.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., pp. 345–47.

<sup>616</sup> Людмила Журова, *Авторский текст Максима Грека: рукописная и литературная традиция*, 2 vols (Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo Sibirskogo otdeleniya Akademii Nauk, 2008–2011), II, pp. 259–72.

<sup>617</sup> Maximus composed a short hagiographical novella on Savonarola: Ibid., pp. 249–56.

In 1504, Michael returned to Greece, to Mount Athos, where he took the Orthodox monastic vows at the famous Monastery of Vatopedi. In 1515, he was invited to Russia by Grand Prince Vassily III to translate Greek prayer books into Russian.<sup>618</sup> However, at the time of his arrival in Moscow Maximus did not know Church Slavonic and initially had to work in cooperation with his Russian associates. After having learnt the language, Maximus did not limit himself to translating books, but also wrote a number of original treatises on politics, social life, and theology. The reception of European culture is a large part of his legacy. The most interesting example of Maximus' anti-Latin and anti-Catholic position are his *Epistles Against Astrology*.

The dating of these three treatises is uncertain. Two of them, which are of a more theoretical nature, were written before 1524, while the third one is dedicated to the refutation of an astrological prediction of the Deluge of 1524. As my primary task is to show links between Italian anti-astrological treatises and Maximus's works, I will devote less attention to the third treatise, which has already been analysed by Robert Collis.<sup>619</sup>

All these works are dedicated to Maximus's friend and patron Feodor Karpov (1475/80—1540/45), one of the leading Russian diplomats of that time and a well-known intellectual, and are directed against Nicholas Bulev or Bülow (? — 1548), also known as 'Nemchin' (*Бюлев* and *Немчин* in Russian). Little is known about this person who was an astrologer and physician at the court of Grand Prince Vassily III.<sup>620</sup> In Russian sources, Nicholas was mentioned as Lübchanin (*Любчанин*); this means that he was from Lübeck, Germany. This also explains his other nickname, Nemchin, or 'nemets' (*немец*) in modern Russian. This word, meaning 'dumb', now

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<sup>618</sup> For the Moscow period of Maximus' biography, see: Нина Синицына, *Максим Грек в России* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

<sup>619</sup> Robert Collis, 'Maxim the Greek, Astrology and the Great Conjunction of 1524', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 88, 4 (2010), 601–23.

<sup>620</sup> Cf. on Bülow: Татьяна Чумакова, 'Немецкие влияния в культуре допетровской Руси. Медицина', in *Русско-немецкие связи в биологии и медицине*, vol. 4 (Saint Petersburg: Borei art, 2002), pp. 5–14.

applies to Germans and formerly referred to people of most Western nations; even a French or an Englishman could be called ‘nemets’. Nicholas studied in Rostock and then, after a short stay in the large commercial Russian city of Novgorod, spent some years in Rome. On the invitation of Vassily’s ambassador at the Holy See, Nicholas arrived in Russia, where he sought to popularise Western thought, including astrology. His attempts in this direction included a translation into medieval Russian of Johannes Stöffler’s prediction about the Deluge of 1524. He was also responsible for translating from German and disseminating the first Russian medical encyclopedia, the *Blagoprokhladnyi vertograd* of 1534. Nicholas was a Catholic and, according to his opponents, tried to convince the Grand Prince and his milieu of the closeness of Western and Eastern branches of the Christianity. Naturally, such activity was identified by Nicholas’ Orthodox opponents as proselytism. One of the most severe antagonists of Nicholas, as regards not only his astrological speculations, but especially his attempt to unite the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, became the former novice of the Dominican order Maximus the Greek. Thus, the three *Epistles against Astrology* were a part of Maximus’s polemics against the Catholic Church and its doctrine. But as we will see, he uses in this work some arguments against astrology allegedly taken from Giovanni Pico’s *Disputationes* and Savonarola’s *Contro gli astrologi*.

In his anti-astrological *Epistles*, while providing examples of the political application of astrology, Maximus clearly had the Grand Prince as his addressee. Accordingly, Maximus uses some examples to demonstrate the history of the spiritual degradation of Western Christians. He mentions that it was a Roman custom to appeal to various magicians, especially during wars.<sup>621</sup> To these erroneous attempts to predict the future he opposes the ‘great’ examples of the past, with Constantine the Great, Moses and others relying their destiny and deeds on God instead of astrology and magical ceremonies.<sup>622</sup> He also recalls Russian recent history, claiming that Mamai, the leader of the Golden Horde’s army in the legendary battle in Kulikovo appealed for the

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<sup>621</sup> Преподобный Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, vol. 1, pp. 318–19.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267, 321.

astrologers' advice, while the Russian Grand Prince Dmitry Donskoy did not partake at all in magical speculations and remained loyal to the Christian religion. The first victory over the Mongols in Kulikovo in 1380 had had a great spiritual effect of which Maximus and his readers were aware.<sup>623</sup> In addition, Maximus notes that the court astrologer of Duke Lodovico Moro announced to his patron that he would win the war against Charles VIII of France, which started in 1494 and, as it is known, ended in the total defeat of the Milanese ruler.<sup>624</sup> Maximus admits that the cause of the diffusion of magical beliefs was related to the religious crisis in Western Europe, and its radical shift from 'true' Christianity to pagan philosophy. This idea passes through the whole corpus of Maximus' writings.

Many texts written at that time represent astrology as a 'Latin vice', a theme that becomes the central point of the famous political concept of 'Moscow the Third Rome'. Originally coined in the early sixteenth century by the monk Philotheus of Pskov in the context of the anti-Latin and anti-astrological discussions in Russia, the idea was that Moscow would succeed Rome and Constantinople as the third Christian capital, after both cities had been destroyed because of their religious and moral corruption.<sup>625</sup> Philotheus' letter against astrologers was addressed to Mikhail

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., pp. 288–91, 309–10.

<sup>625</sup> On Philotheus and his work, see: Василий Малинин, *Старец Елеазарова монастыря Филорей и его послания. Историко-литературное исследование* (Kiev: Kiev-Pecherskaya Lavra, 1901). The letter against astrologers was published: Ibid., pp. 37–47. The concept of 'Moscow the Third Rome' in its political dimension became popular much later. On its destiny: Нина Синицына, *Третий Рим. Истоки и эволюция русской средневековой концепции* (XV – XVI вв.) (Moscow: Indrik, 1998); Marcello Garzaniti, 'Библия и экзегеза в России XVI века. Новая интерпретация «Послания» старца Елеазаровского монастыря Филофея дьяку Мисюрю Григорьевичу Мунехину', in *Библейские цитаты в церковнославянской литературе* (Pisa: Associazione Italiana degli Slavisti, 2003), pp. 6–17; Don Ostrowski, '“Moscow the Third Rome” as Historical Ghost', in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 2006), pp. 170–79.

Munekhin and was directed against the same Nicholas Bülow, whose influence upon Vassily III Maximus the Greek tried to eliminate with his *Epistles*. Thus, from the sixteenth century onwards anti-astrology in Russia had clear political implications thanks to the contributions of Maximus and Philotheus. In their writings, astrology as an erroneous tool for predictions was strongly related to the question of fate. Maximus claims that by exploring the wheel of fortune, astrologers limit divine omnipotence.<sup>626</sup> The idea of preventing the ruler's interest in predicting the future and, in general, in Western intellectual culture, became widespread in early modern Russian anti-Catholic writings. It received support even though in the sixteenth and seventeen centuries it was common for Russian tsars to have personal astrologers. Maximus' and Philotheus' anti-Catholicism was considered to be an effective strategy in political polemics with other courtiers, while astrology became an important political tool at the court of the first Romanovs.<sup>627</sup>

Despite his clear anti-Latinism, in a number of his arguments Maximus often refers to the tradition he openly opposes. First of all, attention must be paid to the term *divinatrix*, used by all the aforementioned thinkers.<sup>628</sup> From the time of Ptolemy's *Almagest* and *Tetrabiblos*, there was a clear distinction between judicial astrology mired in superstitions and mathematical astrology considered to be a significant and reliable part of natural philosophy. This distinction between the two branches of astrological knowledge was emphasised in various medieval texts; Giovanni Pico

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<sup>626</sup> Преподобный Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, vol. 2, ed. Нина Сеницына (Moscow: Indrik, 2014), pp. 303–6.

<sup>627</sup> See, for instance, Андрей Робинсон, 'Симеон Полоцкий – астролог', in *Проблемы изучения культурного наследия* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 176–83.

<sup>628</sup> This word was inserted by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Maximus into the very titles of their treatises – *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* and *Слово противу тцѣущихся звѣздозрѣнием предрицати о будущих и самовластии челоѡческом...* ('Epistle against those who endeavour to divine the future by the knowlegde of heaven and by human self-will'). As for Savonarola, his criticism seems to be more general, which is reflected in the title of his treatise – *Contro gli astrologi*. He too, however, often used the term 'astrologia divinatoria'.

also referred to it in the *Proemium* to the *Disputationes*.<sup>629</sup> Savonarola used the same idea underpinning the opposition between astrological speculations and the study of real (natural) causes of terrestrial events, which is possible only through divine inspiration,<sup>630</sup> though he did not mention the distinction between the two kinds of astrology. Meanwhile, Maximus's attempt to point out the divinatory character of astrology in his *Epistles* seems rather strange if not useless. In sixteenth-century Russia, Ptolemy's astrological or astronomical texts were scarcely known and the legacy of Western medieval thinkers also remained virtually unknown. The cosmological views were based on religious sources, primarily Byzantine, often modified after they became popular in Russia. The motivation of Maximus, who used the word *предрицательный* (equivalent of *divinatrix*) remains unclear.

Further, it is interesting to compare the structure of all the aforementioned anti-astrological works. As we have seen above, the *Disputationes* overviews all possible arguments against

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<sup>629</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, pp. 38–40: 'Sed in primis hunc sibi titulum vendicavit astrologia, sicut et inter ipsas superstitiones, quarum mater alumnaque merito existimatur, obtinet principatum. Astrologiam vero cum dico, non eam intelligo quae siderum moles et motus mathematica ratione metitur, artem certam et nobilem et suis meritis honestissimam auctoritateque hominum doctissimorum maxime comprobata; sed quae de sideribus eventura pronunciat, fraudem mercenariae mendacitatis, legibus interdictam et civilibus et pontificiis, humana curiositate retentam, irrisam a philosophis, cultam a circulatoribus, optimo cuique prudentissimoque suspectam, cuius olim professores gentilicio vocabulo Chaldaei, vel ab ipsa professione genethliaci dicebantur; mox, ut nominis communione honestarentur, mathematicos se dixerunt et astrologos, quasi haec quoque de liberalibus disciplinis una foret, quae de sideribus cum ratione loqueretur, hoc se tantum discrimine separans ab illa vera mathematica, ut illi astronomiae, ipsi astrologiae nomen daretur, nimis improbo zelo alieni tituli invadendi, siquidem astrologia alterius artis nomen'.

<sup>630</sup> See in particular: Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, pp. 37–38: 'In molti luoghi della sacra Scrittura sono detestati quelli che vogliono predire le cose future senza illuminazione divina... Perroché non si chiamano divinatori quelli chi prenunziano le cose le quali ordinatamente procedono dalle cause naturale o sempre o quasi sempre, perché questo è concesso a l'uomo e è cosa umana; ma quelli che senza speciale illuminazione divina presumano di prenunziare le cose future'.

astrology, in the fields of philosophy, theology, as well as history and law, and is thus structured accordingly. In his vernacular paraphrase of Giovanni Pico's treatise, Savonarola modified this sequence in order to adapt the arguments to his own purpose. However, unlike Pico and Savonarola, Maximus decided to limit himself to religious matters. This is understandable enough: in Russia, no one knew the works of Abraham ibn Ezra or Roger Bacon. Maximus, who spent many years in various humanist circles in Italy, probably knew the works of these thinkers, unlike his Muscovite readers. If he had tried to incorporate their legacy into his own treatises, he would have written another introductory text to the history of Western philosophy.

Conditioned by his focus on religious context, Maximus's main argument is that astrological predictions are at variance with the Christian doctrine of free will. For him, the astrologers' claim to determine the future questioned God's omnipotence. Moreover, since, according to him, astrology was imported to Russia by Nicholas 'Nemchin',<sup>631</sup> this danger acquired a confessional character. Using numerous quotations from the Bible and religious literature, Maximus tried to prove the demonic nature of divination. In this respect, his polemical treatises seem to be rather conventional, and I cannot agree with Nina Sinitsina and Robert Collis, who has largely supported Sinitsina's supposition,<sup>632</sup> that in his anti-astrological motivation Maximus followed Giovanni Pico and criticised astrology with the use of anthropological arguments. Moreover, Sinitsina sought to find some parallel motifs related to the subject of human autonomy in Western and Eastern thought: in her opinion Maximus's attempt to reject astrology can be regarded not only in the context of the *Disputationes* and the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, but also in the context of the *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio*, also written in 1524 by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam.<sup>633</sup> My analysis suggests the opposite: the very character of

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<sup>631</sup> Преподобный Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, vol. 1, pp. 268, 359.

<sup>632</sup> Collis, 'Maxim the Greek, Astrology and the Great Conjunction of 1524', 610–12.

<sup>633</sup> Синицына, *Максим Грек*, p. 151.

Maximus's treatises, their polemical orientation and their sources are quite traditional, while his purpose is to show that Italian Catholic culture is corrupted.

To demonstrate the history of the spiritual degradation of Western Christians, Maximus refers to some examples. In his opinion, the best proof of 'dechristianization' was the work of three contemporary Italian thinkers – Niccolò Lelio Cosmico da Ferrara, Agostino Nifo, and Angelo Poliziano.<sup>634</sup> Against the background of this accusation, some remarks from 'Latin' sources in Saint Maximus's treatises seem to be especially curious.

Unlike Pico and Savonarola, Maximus used only a few sources in his *Epistles*. In his three short texts, he generally quoted the Bible and the works of the Holy Fathers. Moreover, as he was Orthodox and an opponent to the Latins, Maximus preferred to quote Greek Fathers instead of Latin ones, which is of course also linked to the problem of readership, since Maximus' audience was more familiar with Greek sources. He made only two exceptions to this rule, and I think that these two cases prove the influence of Savonarola and, probably, of Giovanni Pico.

The first case is related to a quotation from Saint Augustine, the only Latin Father mentioned in the *Epistles*. In the first *Epistle*, Maximus referred to the *De genesi ad litteram*, which was one of the least known among Augustine's treatises in early modern Russia. In the passage in question Maximus said:

That astrological doctrine is produced by diabolical instigation is attested by Saint Augustine of Hippo who said in the first chapter of the *De genesi ad litteram*:

And if astrologers often correctly predict future events, it is not made through divine inspiration, but through devil's hidden instigation, because human minds that are not sufficiently

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<sup>634</sup> Преподобный Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, vol. 1, pp. 362–63.



prepared for this, become subdued; and thus, through such predictions they find themselves in the devil's hands.<sup>635</sup>

An almost identical text can be found in the *Contro gli astrologi*:

Li sacri teologi ancora tutti detestano questa astrologia divinatoria dimostrando che è falsa e perniciosa, massimamente santo Augustino in molti luoghi, e tra li altri nel secondo libro sopra el *Genesi ad litteram* dice: «Quando li matematici, cioè gli astrologi, predicano qualche cosa vera, dovemo dire che la predicano per istinto occultissimo di demonii, el quale istinto patiscono le mente umane che non se ne avvengano».<sup>636</sup>

It should be emphasised that Savonarola quoted this passage at the beginning of the second book of his treatise. In Russia, Maximus had access to neither a manuscript of the *De genesi ad litteram*, nor a copy of Savonarola's work. He had to make a quotation from memory and it is easier to keep in mind a key phrase from the beginning as it was in the *Contro gli astrologi*. If he had used Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes*, which abound in quotations from a number of Augustine's works, it would be strange that he eliminated all the other possible sources for his own polemics. Moreover, in his treatise Pico had not specifically quoted this passage from the *De*

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<sup>635</sup> Ibid., p. 282: 'А яко сатанискими въдохновении звѣздоблюстителное бѣсоучение съдѣйствуется и состоится, свидѣтель неотмѣтаемъ есть священный Августинъ Иппоненьский, въ первой главѣ Толковании миру бытия сице глаголя: 'Яко астролозѣ убо многжды о будущихъ истинна предвозвѣщаютъ, обаче не толико от небесныхъ знаменій, елико от неявленнаго сатанинскаго совѣщанія, еже бо чловѣческыя разумы нѣкогда и не очющающу терпятъ, и сице вкупѣ сими предрицаніи сложенія всяко со диаволомъ бывають'.

<sup>636</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, I, 2, p. 43. See also the primary source: Augustinus Hipponensis, 'De genesi ad litteram', in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, XXXIV, II, 17, col. 278: 'Ideoque fatendum est, quando ab istis vera dicuntur, instinctu quodam occultissimo dici, quem nescientes humanae mentes patiuntur. Quod cum ad decipiendos homines fit, spirituum seductorum operatio est'.

*genesis ad litteram*. The fact that Maximus quoted from memory is attested by a mistake he made: he was sure that this passage originated from the first book of the *De genesis*, while Savonarola mentioned the right place – the beginning of the second book. It seems quite plausible that in his *Epistle Against Astrology* Maximus memorised not Augustine himself, but Augustine in Savonarola's interpretation.

In the second example, Maximus mentions the philosophical disputes on astrology. As we have seen, Maximus is generally concerned solely with the theological and religious problems concerning astrology. The fact that he makes an exception here, and decides to focus on the philosophical context is therefore significant. In the *First Epistle to Feodor Karpov*<sup>637</sup> he says:

Indeed, astrologers are vain and ignorant and full of every lie and falsehood, because they have lost God and their souls are enslaved by demons; they are not the prophets of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, witnessing piety and salvation, but those of the servants of the Pythian spirit, bad men, supporters of every evil, Chaldeans, Babylonians, Egyptians, Arabians and Phoenicians, who were converted to the evil *ab origine*, and after that everybody followed the lie of Epicurus and Diagoras,<sup>638</sup> who was named impious for this. Because neither Socrates,<sup>639</sup> nor Plato, nor Aristotle, who were considered the most honest among the Greek philosophers and those who loved the truth most of all, as it becomes clear from their writings, agreed with astrological

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<sup>637</sup> In two other *Epistles* he mentioned in passing only Plato and Aristotle.

<sup>638</sup> Most probably, under this name Saint Maximus meant Pythagoras. Maximus did not know in detail the works of Diagoras of Melos, a Greek sophist of the fifth century BC. From other sources such as Cicero, it is still impossible to reconstruct Diagoras' views of astrology. In addition, he had not been mentioned among anti-astrologers before. Hence, the conclusion that Maximus confused the names seems quite plausible.

<sup>639</sup> It is interesting that Saint Maximus mentioned Socrates as an independent philosopher.

falsehood. And Aristotle, who was aware of its falsity and condemned it, despite all the useless efforts of astrology to look like art, mentioned it nowhere in his works.<sup>640</sup>

It seems interesting that in this quotation Maximus, unlike both Giovanni Pico and Savonarola, divides major Greek philosophers into two camps. In the first book of the *Disputationes* Giovanni Pico, on the contrary, tried to show that all the outstanding philosophers had been opponents of astrological speculations; he started with Pythagoras, saying:

That Pythagoras did not believe in astrology, was attested by Theodoret [of Cyrus], Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch.<sup>641</sup>

We can find almost the same text, with the similar expression *praestasse fidem*, in Savonarola's *Contro gli astrologi*, though without any reference to sources.<sup>642</sup> The case of Epicurus seems to be more complicated. Savonarola did not mention him at all, and Giovanni Pico, according to his 'historiographic' idea that all major philosophical schools opposed astrology,

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<sup>640</sup> Преподобный Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, vol. 1, p. 281: 'И воистину суетни и неизвѣстни, и лжа всякиа и льсти исполнени, не имѣють бо Бога, устроившаго ся, но душетлѣтельныя бѣси, ниже пророки Бога Живаго, Духом Святымъ возглашаемыхъ, свидѣтельствующихъ благочестивое и спасительное, но пифоньскаго духа служителии челоувѣковъ скверныхъ и всякого злодѣяния предстателии, хальдеов, и вавилонянъ, и египтянъ, и аравлянъ, и финиковъ, изначала въ нечестии просиавшихъ, и от еллинъ елици послѣдоваша прелести Епикура и Диагора, нареченнаго безбожнаго за нечестие. Ниже бо Сократъ, ниже Платонъ, ниже Аристотель, мнящеися честнѣишии и истиннолюбезнеишии еллинскихъ философовъ, сложишася когда звѣздозрительной прелести, якоже от списании ихъ явѣственъ является. Отнюду же якоже видится, и Аристотель, уразумѣвъ лесь сию, яко вотще себѣ мнить предрицательное художество, и осудивъ ю зазрѣниемъ им лжею, нѣгдѣ глаголетъ въ своихъ списании о имѣющихъ збытися'.

<sup>641</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, p. 46: 'Pythagoram astrologiae fidem non praestasse, tum auctor est Theodoretus, tum Laertius quoque Diogenes et Plutarchus indicaverunt'.

<sup>642</sup> Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, II, 1, p. 54: 'Pitagora non le prestò mai fede'.

mentioned Epicurus among those philosophers who had rejected astrology. However, he did not miss the opportunity to condemn the Greek thinker's views, saying:

How great the astrological madness should have been, if even Epicurus, who affirmed so many delusions, did not support it!<sup>643</sup>

As for the status of Plato and Aristotle as opponents of astrology, Maximus, Giovanni Pico and Savonarola were unanimous. Probably, refuting the philosophical foundations of astrological speculations, Maximus opposed the idea of close relations between ancient philosophy and religion, so widespread in Renaissance Italy under the banner of *prisca theologia*, and thus in that respect followed Giovanni Pico and Savonarola. It is also quite possible that the Orthodox monk, who had quoted this passage from memory already in Russia, simply kept in mind the principal piece of information, namely the fact that the leading Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, were inclined against astrology. Maximus was probably not an expert in philosophical matters – this can be confirmed by his mention of Socrates and Plato as two separate and independent philosophers. Recalling the names of Pythagoras and Epicurus he probably intended to show to his Russian readers the degree of diffusion of astrological ideas in Europe.

Finally, the passage on Aristotle's silence over astrology could have been taken either from Giovanni Pico's Book I of the *Disputationes* or from Savonarola's *Contro gli astrologi*:

Giovanni Pico's <i>Disputationes</i> (I, p. 48-50)	Savonarola's <i>Contro gli astrologi</i> (II, 1, p. 54)
Plato et Aristoteles, philosophiae principes, indignam putaverunt de qua verbum aliquando	Certo Aristotele, che si sforzò di non lasciare imperfetta o intatta alcuna parte

<sup>643</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, p. 48: 'Quantum insaniae continet astrologia, cui nec multa delirans assentiri potuit Epicurus'.

<p>facere, tota sua philosophia plus eam silendo quam quisque voce scriptisve condemnantes...</p> <p>Cur igitur Aristoteles libros suos <i>de caelo</i> tam ieunos reliquit, ubi tam multa, tam splendida dicere potuit et, si potuit, debuit de stellis, de planetis, eorum efficientiam, proprietates, conditionem indicans nobis?</p>	<p>della filosofia, in questa parte, se la fusse vera, averia troppo dormito, massime avendo scritto el libro <i>de caelo et mundo</i>, nel quale non ne fa parola alcuna, né in alcuno libro ne fa menzione; e questo è segno che lui non la reputò degna delle sue parole, cioè né di approvazione, perché è vanissima, né di reprobazione, perché è per sé manifesto che è una fabula.</p>
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Obviously, Savonarola adopted Pico's passage on Aristotle's *De caelo*, and it is possible that Maximus recalled this passage from the *Contro gli astrologi* and for this reason did not mention Plato.

To sum up, the three *Epistles Against Astrology* written by Maximus the Greek about 1524 are a perfect example of anti-Latin polemics in medieval Russia. Their author, who had earlier intended to become a Catholic monk, turned into an ardent opponent of Catholicism and, in general, of the Western mode of thinking. Having based his attack on astrology, considered as a 'Latin vice', on the Bible and on the works of Greek Holy Fathers, he tried to underline the gap between the true Christian religion and a corrupted Catholic Church mired in superstitions, false faith, and heresies. To show his orientation towards the Orthodox theological tradition and to preserve the doctrines of human free will and God's omnipotence, which, according to him, are undermined by the astrological speculations, he quoted Greek Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus and many others), while among Latin Fathers he mentioned only Augustine. Unlike his Italian predecessors, Maximus the Greek limited his anti-astrological polemics to theological aspects, all but omitting philosophical and natural arguments against predictions. Nevertheless, in some situations, when he needed to quote Latin Fathers or

ancient philosophers like Aristotle, he referred to the works of Savonarola and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola without mentioning their names. Thus, Maximus' wish to discredit astrological ideas in Russia forced him to appeal to the legacy which in fact he fought against.

## Chapter IV

### Lucio Bellanti and the Return to ‘Christian Astrology’

As was said in the previous chapters, Giovanni Pico’s attack on astrology found the support of several well-known thinkers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Their motivations to reject astrology were related to their religious intentions. Such a movement of anti-astrological literature was building up on previous traditions, but it receives additional impetus after the publication of Giovanni Pico’s *Disputationes*. However, Pico’s influence and mythical status of the greatest intellectual of his day did not prevent some intellectuals from opposing his ideas. The list of Giovanni Pico’s critics includes several prominent Renaissance philosophers and humanists. In what follows, I will focus on two most important figures who did not share Giovanni Pico’s opinion on astrology, Lucio Bellanti and Giovanni Gioviano Pontano. Both read the *Disputationes* before its publication in 1496. Thus, their reaction to Giovanni Pico’s treatise was immediate, which allows us to place their writings into the context of anti-astrological polemics without taking into consideration the subsequent political, philosophical, or scientific interpretations.

The documents related to Bellanti’s biography are scarce.<sup>644</sup> We know that he came from a noble Sienese family. The exact date of his birth is unknown, and so is his university and intellectual background. We only know for certain that Bellanti called himself a ‘*magister artium et medicinae*’, although the place where he had obtained his degree is unknown. In 1483, he finally comes to light in the sources describing political conflicts in Siena. Bellanti took an active part in those political controversies, but the party he belonged to was defeated, and Bellanti was forced to leave his hometown. It seems that his exile did not last very long, as in 1487 Bellanti reappeared in Siena. During those four years, the political situation changed, and the new political regime was

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<sup>644</sup> On Bellanti’s biography, see: Cesare Vasoli, ‘Lucio Bellanti’, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 7 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1965), pp. 597–99.

favourable to Bellanti's family. In the subsequent period, Bellanti played an important role in Sienese politics: he was involved in the battle against Florence, as well as in the political struggle between the previous government and Pandolfo Petrucci, the future ruler of Siena. After Petrucci's victory over Bellanti's party the latter had to leave Siena. Though Bellanti's brother asked Petrucci to show mercy, and Petrucci seemed to be inclined to do so, Bellanti refused to yield to Petrucci and never returned to Siena.

In 1495, he appeared in Florence for a brief period of time. There he participated in some debates on the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, which was being prepared for publication and was largely disseminated among Florentine intellectuals. By then, Bellanti had become a famous astrologer. In particular, he made Giovanni Pico's horoscope and correctly predicted that Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's life would only last thirty one years. The accuracy of the prediction granted him a honourable place among Renaissance astrologers. In Florence, he learned for the first time that Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and other thinkers from the circle of Savonarola intended to publish Giovanni Pico's anti-astrological text and expressed his extremely negative attitude to such an initiative. It is not known whether Bellanti's first intention was to re-establish the status of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola as an anti-astrologer or to oppose his attack on astrology in general.

His appearance in Florence in 1495 caused a mistake in scholarly studies.<sup>645</sup> The idea that Bellanti completed his *Responsiones in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos* during his short stay in Florence was first promulgated in the eighteenth century; it was believed that he had decided to print it in Bologna. However, there is no text with that date among the books printed in Italy in the fifteenth century. The first confirmed publication of the *Responsiones* is dated 9 May, 1498, that is four days after the incarceration of Girolamo Savonarola and fourteen days before his execution. This suggests that Bellanti's *Responsiones* was primarily directed against Savonarola and his influence upon Florentine intellectuals such as Giovanni Pico rather than against Giovanni

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<sup>645</sup> Pompeo Faracovi, 'In difesa dell'astrologia: risposte a Pico in Bellanti e Pontano', p. 47.



Pico himself. Such a coincidence points to the political rather than intellectual significance of Bellanti's treatise and to its relation to the persecution of Savonarola. In 1502, four years after Savonarola's execution and three years after Bellanti's mysterious death in Venice, the *Responsiones* was re-published along with another pro-astrological treatise by Bellanti, the *De astrologica veritate*. Several decades later, both treatises were published for the third time in Basle under the following titles: the *De astrologica veritate* and the *In defensio astrologiae contra Ioannem Picum Mirandulam*.<sup>646</sup>

Both texts are of great importance within the astrological polemics in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries inasmuch as they are devoted to the legitimisation of astrology. At the same time, only the second treatise, the *Responsiones in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos*, is explicitly directed against Giovanni Pico's attack on astrology. In contrast, in the *Liber de astrologica veritate* Bellanti deals with the general and theoretical questions concerning astrology. Though it is not possible to ignore the essence of Bellanti's pro-astrological arguments in the latter book, it should be regarded as a supplementary source for a study of his anti-Piconian views. The structure of both treatises proves that Bellanti was not a fervent supporter of new humanistic and intellectual trends. His Latin is far from being elegant and refined, particularly when measured to the writings of Giovanni Pico, Marsilio Ficino or Giovanni Pontano. The *Liber de astrologica veritate* consists of twenty 'quaestiones', which partly adopts the structure of medieval 'disputationes', although it does not follow the structure of 'propositiones' and 'oppositiones', which was typical of both medieval scholastics and many Renaissance writers, including Pietro Pomponazzi. The *Responsiones in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos*, which will be the focus of this chapter, is divided into twelve parts, which correspond to the books of Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes*. This approach allows him to consider Giovanni

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<sup>646</sup> I refer to the edition of 1502: Lucius Bellantius, *Defensio astrologiae contra Ioannem Picum Mirandulam*. Lucii Bellantii Senensis mathematici ac physici liber de astrologica veritate. Et in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos responsiones (Venice: per Bernardinum Venetum de Vitalibus, 1502).

Pico's main anti-astrological arguments in succession, showing his readers to what extent and which of his arguments were wrong. In contrast to the *Liber de astrologica veritate*, the *Responsiones* seems to be modelled after the medieval scholastic practice of 'oppositiones'. Judging by the structure of both writings, Bellanti stood closer to medieval philosophical tradition rather than to humanism, Neoplatonism, or other innovative movements of that period. Such preliminary observations about the form of Bellanti's treatises and his medieval background are confirmed by Bellanti's pro-astrological argumentation.

To understand why Bellanti devotes so much time to medieval astrologers, in her recent article Ornella Pompeo Faracovi convincingly argues that Bellanti was attempting to restore the concept of 'Christian astrology'. She states that Bellanti's astrological views developed within the context of the medieval tradition of 'Aristotelianised astrology', based on the distinction between two crucial aspects of ancient philosophy: fate or predestination (severely criticised due to its incompatibility with Christianity) and the chain of physical, natural causes.<sup>647</sup> The latter concept, being close to Stoicism, was largely developed within subsequent philosophical schools, first in ancient Greece and then among the Arab Peripatetic philosophers. According to Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, Bellanti tried to reconcile such a doctrine with the critique thereof formulated by Alexander of Aphrodisias in the *De fato*. He does so by insisting that the Stoic causal chain may be compatible with the Christian notion of human free will. Pompeo Faracovi also argues that another major source for the legitimisation of astrology in Bellanti's writings was the Christian Aristotelian tradition: This explains Bellanti's regular references to Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scot throughout his *Responsiones*, when he insists on the similarity between their concepts of predestination and the earlier Aristotelianised astrology.

Thus Bellanti's polemical strategy is determined by his main goal and consists of reconsidering two main points of Giovanni Pico's arguments. First, Bellanti admits that the 'historiographical' sketch about astrology and its sources in the *Disputationes* has nothing to do

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<sup>647</sup> Pompeo Faracovi, 'In difesa dell'astrologia: risposte a Pico in Bellanti e Pontano', pp. 52–55.

with the actual interpretation of astrological texts. Secondly, Bellanti strives to re-establish the agreement between astrology and theology that Pico had sought to destroy. To do so, he works through the same philosophical categories – such as light, natural and particular causes, and some others – which were central in Book III of the *Disputationes*. Finally, Bellanti takes into account the problem of textual distortion in the *Disputationes*.

Bellanti starts answering to Giovanni Pico with the question of astrological authorities. His aim is to disprove Giovanni Pico's arguments one after another. He begins with Homer and Caecilius, whose names are mentioned at the beginning of the introduction to the *Disputationes*. He even uses the same quotation from the Bible, pointing at the 'wolves in sheep's clothing' who seduce fellows under the guise of close friends, specifically with elegant speeches.<sup>648</sup> Although the citations from ancient poets and the Bible were used in the *Disputationes* to demonstrate the corrupt nature of astrology, Bellanti turns Giovanni Pico's argumentation against Pico himself. Having radically changed the direction of Pico's rhetoric, Bellanti admits that those who pass themselves as virtuous and caring people, and criticise astrology and astrologers are actually guilty of confusing everybody.<sup>649</sup> Bellanti insists that their attempts are inappropriate and may be made only by those who are unfamiliar with the subject. Astrology, he adds, was never repugnant with both civil and ecclesiastical law and during several centuries proved to be useful and almost necessary in various fields of human activity, including medicine, travels and agriculture<sup>650</sup> – all the three being traditionally listed in this context.

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<sup>648</sup> Lucius Bellantius, 'In disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos responsiones', *ibid.*, proemium, p. 176. Cf. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes*, I, proemium, p. 36.

<sup>649</sup> Lucius Bellantius, 'In disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos responsiones', proemium, p. 176: 'Eos presertim intelligendo qui sub religionis obtentu indoctis illudentes (quum cunctas scientias profiteantur quo facilius ab imperitis dictis eorum maior fides adhibeatur) quae aio conceperint perniosa licet religioni adversantia primum ordiri deinde texere possint. Siquidem hoc genus inimicorum est quod nec averti nec everti facile possint quando quidem ignara plebs non hos superare sed ultro occurrere exosculari simbri ac tangere contendit'.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.*, proemium, p. 178.

Bellanti then points to the transformation of Giovanni Pico's views of astrology. For him, discrepancies and contradictions within Giovanni Pico's works lead to serious doubts about the authenticity of the *Disputationes*. According to him, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's assertion that his uncle did return to the fold of the Church was a proof that the text of Giovanni Pico's treatise had been distorted to serve the interests of Savonarola and his disciples. Bellanti reproduces several figures of speech from the *Disputationes* and shows to his reader that he generally follows the structure Giovanni Pico's treatise. Thus, he opens the paragraph on the development of Pico's astrological views with the figure of *primum omnium scire lectorem volo*, which introduced readers to the history of astrology and its sources in Book I of the *Disputationes*. Bellanti refers to Pico's earlier works and identifies several contradictions between them and the *Disputationes*. He mentions the *Apologia* addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici and the 'speech to the cardinals' (that is the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*) who would later condemn the *900 Conclusiones*. In Bellanti's opinion, in these treatises Giovanni Pico supported astrology, while his radical volte-face can only be caused by either Savonarola's intervention in the text or his 'negative' influence on Giovanni Pico.<sup>651</sup> Obviously, Bellanti, whose treatise was published just when Savonarola was thrown to prison, was determined by the political context in which it was written. However, such an explanation seems to have gained popularity in the late fifteenth century onwards and to give birth to the notion that Giovanni Pico's last treatise might be spurious. In any case, the main goal of Bellanti's text was to put forward new charges against Savonarola, who, in Bellanti's opinion,

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<sup>651</sup> Ibid., I, pp. 178–79: 'Primum omnium scire lectorem volo quanta sit Pico in detestata ab eo astrologia fides adhibenda quippe facile potest unusquisque cognoscere si ea que paulo ante mortem in Apologia ad Laurentium Medicem et in oratione ad Cardinales diligenter inspexerit. Ibi quidem comperiet quantum virtuti caelorum tribuat, multa quoque cognoscet quae huius libri dictis penitus adversantur. Mirum autem est ut tam brevi temporis spatio astrologiam falsam abiciendamque deprehenderit nisi forte veri luminis particeps factus ab eo (quem sepiissime consulebat) fratre Hieronymo Savonarola omnem veritatem sit complexus cuius suasu hoc opus scripsisse credendum est cum eiusdem consilio impressum fuerit tum quoniam vulgari sermone non doctis sed populis (quos seducere studebant) libellum edidit'.

had distorted the text of the *Disputationes* or, at least, appropriated Giovanni Pico's arguments to serve his own ideological agenda.

As Bellanti's task is to reconsider, step by step, Giovanni Pico's arguments against astrology, he begins with analysing the legacy of those authors who, according to his opponent, rejected astrological speculation. Without paying much attention to chronology, he shows that Giovanni Pico's attribution of most prominent thinkers to the camp of anti-astrologers was false. First of all, he discusses the two greatest thinkers of Antiquity, Plato and Aristotle. In the *Disputationes*, as we have seen, Pico argued that none of them took the question of astrology into consideration. For him, such a silence was the best evidence of their opposition to astrology. According to Bellanti, this argument is far from being convincing, even if it was widely accepted over the centuries. Bellanti does not deny that Plato and Aristotle did not elucidate the problem of astrological influence upon the world in their writings, but he looks at this fact from another standpoint. He recognises that Plato did not mention astrology along with many other topics anywhere in his dialogues. In his opinion, though, such a silence proves that both Aristotle and Plato involved in studies of the nature and natural effects identified astrology with astronomy. This allowed astrology to obtain mathematical apparatus, as well as a honourable place among other sciences in the Ancient world.<sup>652</sup> The argument used by Bellanti echoes the medieval and Renaissance traditions that Pico had tried to dismantle, and which tended to equate astrology and astronomy.

As regards other authors mentioned in the *Disputationes*, Bellanti uses the same polemical strategy. He recognises that Pythagoras and Democritus did not approve of astrological speculation as it was shown in Giovanni Pico's treatise. However, he adds that it was Pythagoras and Democritus who first incorporated magical, occult studies into ancient philosophy.<sup>653</sup> But he does

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., I, p. 179.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., I, p. 179: 'Deinde quoniam complures philosophos adducit in medium quorum nullus astrologiae scientiae credidisse dicit Pythagoram et Democritum et alios a quo queratur an caeterorum philosophorum sentiitiis

not go in depth explaining their possible pioneering contribution. It is likely that here Bellanti refers to the works falsely attributed to Pythagoras, such as the *Golden Verses*, which were central to the *prisca theologia*. He also assumes that Seneca, though an opponent to astrology, could not leave aside the problem of fate and fortune due to his orientation towards Stoicism.<sup>654</sup> It seems that Bellanti ties together ancient philosophical discourses on fate with the highest, philosophical level of astrology. According to Bellanti, another famous opponent of astrology, Cicero, did not criticise astrology as such, but unprofessional and ungifted astrologers who apparently were unable to provide accurate prognoses.<sup>655</sup> In a similar way, Bellanti insists on reconsidering Giovanni Pico's words on Plotinus' critique of astrology. He states that Firmicus Maternus and Porphyry are more competent and more objective towards Plotinus than Giovanni Pico's radical interpretation.<sup>656</sup> Besides, Bellanti acknowledges the legacy of the Aristotelian tradition, assuming that both Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes were involved in philosophical debates on fate and necessity related to the question of astrology and predestination. It is worth noting that his phrase about Averroes' doctrine of the unity of the intellect, officially prohibited in the Middle Ages is obscure. From Bellanti's own words, it is not clear whether he sought to re-establish the doctrine or criticised Giovanni Pico of referring to the philosopher whose false theory had been completely

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Democritus adhereret aut Pythagoras aliorum, quare quanvis quisque alterius philosophiam spreverit non ob eam causam spernendam esse concludit, ita nec astrologiam velle suum cuique est. Verum quo nam pacto Pythagoras et Democritus astrologiam damnare potuerunt quum ipsi non modo inter magicos connumerentur sed magicæ artis inventores ab antiquis scriptoribus habiti sint'.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., I, p. 179: 'Seneca quantum astrologiæ detrahare possit quisque consideret quum stoicus præceteris sui temporis fuerit, nosque semper fati agi dicat fatisque credendum'.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., I, p. 179: 'Cicero quid contra astrologos vel pro astrologis scripserit ipse videat excepta enim eloquentiæ in caeteris sepius cespitat'.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., I, p. 180.

rejected.<sup>657</sup> Bellanti rejects the opinion that Ptolemy's philosophical interpretation of Aristotle was rather superficial and essentially poor. The Sienese physician affirms the highest place of Ptolemy among his fellow astrologers without having particular doubts in regard to his astronomical or philosophical studies.<sup>658</sup> Thus, while working through the same sources and authorities Giovanni Pico della Mirandola referred to in the *Disputationes* and deconstructing Giovanni Pico's deconstruction of *auctoritates*, Bellanti intends to restore the high position of astrology by considering all these texts in a completely opposite way.

Bellanti then proceeds to mention the Florentine humanists and scientists who wrote in favour of astrology, and the way Bellanti reconsiders their contribution to astrology or anti-astrology confirms his intention to restore the positive status of astrology. Aside from Giovanni Marliani and a certain Luchinus, both mentioned in the *Disputationes*, Bellanti refers to Paolo Toscanelli. Toscanelli, whose calculations influenced Christopher Columbus to take a new route to the Orient, was named among the anti-astrologers in the *Disputationes*. Bellanti, in contrast, recalls that Toscanelli obtained the status of a professional astrologer and even made horoscopes for the Medici family members. He supposes that even Leon Battista Alberti supported astrology and described its possible positive impact in the *De architectura*.<sup>659</sup> Finally, Bellanti mentions Marsilio Ficino's *De vita libri tres*, where Ficino sought to adopt astrology and magic for medical purposes, as well as Nicolò Leonicensi, whose medical treatises, according to Bellanti, abounded in astrological elements. The most complicated case Bellanti has to face is Angelo Poliziano. In order to reject Poliziano's critique of astrology or, at least, to show the lack of his astrological knowledge, Bellanti claims that Poliziano was not familiar with astrological/astronomical techniques and his expertise in astrology was not far from superficial notwithstanding his attempts

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid., I, p. 180: 'Necessitate tollit Averroi credendum non est qui falso unici intellectus bestialem positionem se invenisse affirmat'.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., I, pp. 180–81.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid., I, p. 180.

to improve it. Bellanti argues that such an assessment of Poliziano's astrological knowledge demonstrates that Giovanni Pico's attempt to ascribe his close friend to the team of anti-astrologers is erroneous.<sup>660</sup>

Bellanti's polemical strategy perfectly fits with his recognition of several astrologers of Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Manilius, Guido Bonatti, or Pierre d'Ailly. His main purpose here is to show that, contrary to what Pico argued, ecclesiastical decrees were not at variance with astrological speculation.<sup>661</sup> Bellanti claims that the Church only prohibited those forms of magical practices that contradicted the essence of the Catholic doctrine. Astrology at its highest level could, however, be used to prove and establish Christian dogmas. Following the 'theological' apology of astrology, Bellanti establishes a list of early Christian and medieval thinkers who supported this notion. His aim is to challenge and invert the 'historiographical' component of Pico's argument, by giving a new status to the authors who were declared anti-astrologers in the *Disputationes*. Generally remaining within a Christian Aristotelian framework, Bellanti intends to restore the astrology's high position. With reference to Aristotle and medieval *doctores*, namely Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scot, he tries to create powerful grounds for the legitimisation of astrology: the doctrine of Christian astrology still remains his ideal. Thus, unlike Giovanni Pico, who dedicated the most part of his *Disputationes* to controversies on astrological calculations, Bellanti keeps a balance between theological arguments and natural philosophy.

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid., I, p. 180: 'Marsilius Ficinus Platonius cuidam amico meo eius inspecta genitura quoddam futura affirmavit, nihilque adversus astrologiam scripsisse audivim at sepe intentu legimus in libro de triplici vita quem iam plures sunt anni edidit pro astrologica facultate ubi non modo de astrologia sed medica quod maius est diffuse tractat... Nicholaum Leonicensem astrologiae detraxisse non creditur tum quam falso quinque testimonia citant tum quam si astronomia tam preclara scientia est (sicut ipse testatur) circulatores reddere non poterat... 'Politianus vero vir quidem litteratus neque astrologiae neque eius quam astronomiam appellant partem ullam didicerat sed paulo ante mortem complures apud se habebat huius scientiae peritos a quibus aliquid intelligere sperabat'.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., I, p. 183.



To disprove Giovanni Pico's philosophical arguments against astrology, Bellanti refutes Giovanni Pico's central thesis according to which the heavens cannot simultaneously be the universal cause and determine particular terrestrial events. This led Giovanni Pico to deny all possible causal relationships between celestial and terrestrial elements with which astrologers worked. Bellanti is using his opponent's weapon against Giovanni Pico himself. In the *Responsiones*, he refers back to Aristotle, whose authority supports him in advancing two assumptions opposite to Giovanni Pico and his naturalistic views.

First, the Sienese physician claims that the heavenly bodies contain *in se* specific qualities through which they may produce a large variety of effects. Therefore, he assumes that each planet affects the world in a characteristic manner of its own. Such influences of celestial bodies are caused by the prime mover, which defines the movement of the heavenly spheres. The correspondence between the celestial spheres and the action of the prime mover was taken from Thomas Aquinas and other medieval scholastics.<sup>662</sup> At the same time, Bellanti admits that some of characteristics are to be common for all heavenly bodies. As an example, he recalls that not only the Moon and the Sun can produce light rays and celestial heat: according to Bellanti, these virtues are typical to other planets and stars as well. To make his argument more solid, Bellanti refers to the Aristotelian tradition and even names Aristotle and Ptolemy among those who expressed similar opinions on the nature of celestial influence. His intention is clear: in Book III of the *Disputationes*, Giovanni argues that the only celestial bodies to have an influence on earth are the Moon and the Sun. Bellanti intends to disprove Giovanni Pico's words with the same arguments

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<sup>662</sup> Ibid., III, p. 197: 'Quamlibet stellam virtute continere sublunarem regionem. Siquidem una stella profectior est altera. Et cum hoc sublunaris regio quocumque stella improfectior sit. Sed re vera caeli non parum deficiunt ab angelica profectionem. Ideo exemplum de scientiis variis in angelis unitis non est ad propositum, sunt igitur stellarum vires diversae diversis effectibus producendis deservientes. Cuncta corpora alterantes et disponentes quomodo (cum Aristoteles et Thomas) primus motus est causa omnis motus'.

and even with the use of similar passages from Aristotle and Ptolemy.<sup>663</sup> Against Giovanni Pico, Bellanti insists that other planets and stars produce effective influences on the terrestrial world. Following the arguments developed in the *Disputationes*, Bellanti compares the size of various celestial bodies to their potential impact. At the same time, Bellanti wonders for what reason the author of the *Disputationes* ascribed a significant influence to the Moon and the Sun if their sizes differ with respect to Saturn or Jupiter in hundreds of times. It should be noted here that Bellanti refrains from addressing the more complex philosophical considerations Pico developed in the corresponding passages in the *Disputationes*, but focuses instead in what he sees as the weakest point in Pico's doctrine available for immediate critique.<sup>664</sup>

The second point addressed by Bellanti is strongly related to the first one. As it has been pointed out, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his followers, including Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico, accused astrologers of explaining terrestrial effects through celestial influences. The main point of Giovanni Pico's argument concerned the mutability of celestial influences when they come into contact with the matter. Thus, according to Pico and his followers, the real impact of celestial bodies penetrating the matter could not be clearly explained. To refute this claim, Bellanti tries to reconcile his belief that the heaven is both a universal and a particular cause (rejected by Pico), and his need to acknowledge that no element, including matter, could distort or modify the powerful and divine influence of the heaven.<sup>665</sup> To give his arguments some credibility, he refers again to the works of Aristotle, and specifically to the *Meteorologica*, which he interprets through the Arabic tradition of commenting on Aristotle. Thus, Bellanti insists that the universal influence is above all obstacles and cannot be reduced to anything accidental or

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<sup>663</sup> Ibid., III, p. 197: 'Primum lunam esse calidam nihil aliud significare quod caliditatis esse per se productiva quam per accidens frigiditas caliditatem generat et quam qualitates istas virtute tum in stellis contineri secundum Aristotelem et Ptolemaeum diximus'.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., III, p. 191.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid., III, p. 195.

particular. Heavenly bodies, which are at the heart of the universal order of the world, are full of ‘friendly forces’, the term taken from Averroes. This also shows that Bellanti did not limit himself exclusively to Aristotle or his Greek commentators. His arguments also lie in the tradition of Aristotelianised astrology and its medieval religious adaptation.

Bellanti tries to prove the compatibility of astrology and religion referring to Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus.<sup>666</sup> It is worth mentioning that he does not find any contradictions between Scotism and Thomism regarding this specific doctrine. In the light of the philosophical debates between these two schools in the fourteenth century, Bellanti’s conclusion looks rather controversial. In his *900 Conclusiones*, along with Plato and Aristotle, Averroes and Avicenna, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola intended to reconcile these two prominent scholastic *doctores*. After the failed dispute in Rome, Giovanni Pico focused exclusively on Plato and Aristotle omitting at all the two other pairs of thinkers. Bellanti undoubtedly knew about Giovanni Pico’s attempt to reconcile Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus; thus, his decision to unite Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus within his polemical strategy can be regarded as a response to Pico’s failed reconciliation idea.

Bellanti starts by exploring the theological arguments to support astrology with a quotation from Thomas Aquinas. He admits that the heaven has to be considered as the natural cause for people to reach God.<sup>667</sup> According to him, if it is so, a human being, ‘in accordance with his body’, corresponds to celestial spheres and therefore depends on their influences on it. God, in turn, governs upon the position of these celestial bodies and their movement through angels to promote

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<sup>666</sup> Ibid., III, p. 196.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid., IV, p. 198: ‘Thome Aquinatis III contra Gentiles dicentis caelum esse causam naturalem quae tendit ad unum’.

His will in the terrestrial world.<sup>668</sup> Actions produced by human beings are determined due to their correspondence with the highest, celestial spheres.<sup>669</sup> This allows Bellanti to come to the conclusion that such a link between the two worlds, terrestrial and celestial, is similar to the relationship between man and heaven, i.e. between macrocosm and microcosm.<sup>670</sup> Thus, the idea of microcosm is transferred to an astrological level; this opens the door to the combination of the traditional medieval view of man, its theological aspects, and its further astrological interpretation.

Similar arguments are found in Bellanti's second major pro-astrological treatise, the *De astrologica veritate*. Here, Bellanti first of all calls astrology a science, which recognises the laws of natural effects and their celestial causes.<sup>671</sup> According to him, the main task of astrologers is to observe, applying mathematical methods, the depth of the divine will. He argues that the use of mathematics allows astrologers to provide accurate and verified predictions and to avoid potential problems and mistakes.<sup>672</sup> In the *De veritate astrologica*, the liaison of celestial spheres and their terrestrial analogies is also described with the use of an image of microcosm.<sup>673</sup>

Lucio Bellanti's response to the *Disputationes* is an interesting example of the reception of medieval 'Christianised' astrology. Though Bellanti tried not to limit himself to medieval scholasticism and to draw upon a large range of pro-astrological arguments, the basis of his

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid., IV, pp. 198–99: 'Igitur homo sit ordinatus secundum corpus sub corporibus caelestibus secundum intellectum vero sub angelis, secundum voluntatem sub deo potest contingere aliquid propter intentionem hominis quod tamen est secundum ordinem caelestium corporum vel dispositionem angelorum vel etiam Dei'.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., IV, p. 199: 'Sic ergo aliquid fortuitum bonum vel malum potest contingere homini et per cooperationem ad caelestia corpora et per cooperationem ad angelos non autem per cooperationem ad Deum'.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid., IV, p. 201.

<sup>671</sup> Lucius Bellantius, 'Lucii Bellantii Senensis mathematici ac physici liber de astrologica veritate', in idem, *Defensio astrologiae contra Ioannem Picum Mirandulam. Lucii Bellantii Senensis mathematici ac physici liber de astrologica veritate. Et in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos responsiones*, I, I, p. 8.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid., I, III, pp. 16–17, 21.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid., II, VII–VIII, pp. 35–39.

response was deeply rooted in the Aristotelian tradition and its medieval followers. After having proposed his version of the creation of Pico's *Disputationes*, Bellanti sought to refute one after another all the main notions of his opponent and his followers, especially Girolamo Savonarola. Finally, Bellanti came to the conclusion that astrology was not at variance with theology and might become an important field of knowledge able to confirm Christian dogmas. In this respect, Bellanti remained loyal to the medieval view of astrology.

## Chapter V

### Poet, Astrologer, Courtier:

#### Giovanni Gioviano Pontano versus Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

Unlike Lucio Bellanti, another opponent of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, needs no introduction.<sup>674</sup> His contribution to humanist culture was largely recognised during his lifetime. As the head and the most famous member of *Porticus Antonianus* also known as ‘Accademia Pontaniana’, he was responsible for the cultural politics at the court of Neapolitan kings of the Aragonese dynasty. Though Pontano was born in Umbria, he was never associated with the northern branch of the humanist movement. In 1447, while Alfonso I of Naples moved into Tuscany to attack Florence in the papal cause, his favourite humanist, the Sicilian Panormita (whose real name was Antonio Beccadelli), accompanied him. When Pontano presented himself at Alfonso’s camp, Panormita recognised the young man’s promise and took him under his wing. They began a close friendship, which lasted until Panormita’s death in 1471. Panormita created the first Neapolitan academy, the *Porticus Antonianus*, which was later renamed after Pontano. This underlines the status of Pontano at the court of Neapolitan rulers: he was considered to be Panormita’s successor as the leading ‘court’ humanist. Pontano was also actively involved in the ‘real’ political life of Naples. In 1487, he was appointed first secretary to the king, which corresponded to today’s position of prime minister. Pontano’s duties at his new post included diplomatic negotiations with Italian states and foreign policy as well as the administration of justice, finance and army. Pontano’s fame as an astrologer also contributed to his promotion to first secretary: for Renaissance rulers, it was typical to bring their political decisions into correlation with astrological predictions.

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<sup>674</sup> On Pontano’s biography, see first of all: Carol Kidwell, *Pontano. Poet & Prime Minister* (London: Duckworth, 1991).

The list of Pontano's writings is impressive. It consists of several treatises on moral and political philosophy, literary writings and poems, philosophical dialogues. Astrology played a crucial role in Pontano's intellectual interests. He did not limit himself to interpreting astrology and its relationship to philosophy, but also served as a translator and commentator of numerous ancient astrological texts, such as Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium* and Firmicus Maternus' *Mathesis* mentioned above.<sup>675</sup> His interest in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* is also worth mentioning. Pontano's astrological poems, the *Urania* and the *De meteore*, abound in mythological motifs, are clearly influenced by Aratus' *Phaenomena* and Manilius' *Astronomica* on Pontano.<sup>676</sup> It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Pontano chose to respond to Giovanni Pico's anti-astrological attack, especially since Pico had criticised his Latin translation of Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium*. However, Giovanni Pontano did not devote a special treatise to oppose Pico's anti-astrological polemics. As Benedetto Soldati justly remarked, Pontano's very legacy is an entire opposition to Giovanni Pico and, I would add, in general, the Florentine Platonic, Kabbalistic and hermetic interests.<sup>677</sup> The aim of this chapter is to examine Pontano's reaction to the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* in Pontano's two major astrological writings, the *De rebus coelestibus* and the *De fortuna*. I argue that Pontano's aim was to reconcile newly rediscovered ancient astrological texts and ideas with medieval scholasticism, and thus to restore the Christianised tradition of astrology. In this respect, both Pontano and Bellanti pursued the same goal, but with the use of different sources.

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<sup>675</sup> On Pontano's place among 'astrological humanists', see: Michele Rinaldi, 'L'astrologia degli umanisti', in *Il linguaggio dei cieli. Astri e simboli nel Rinascimento*, pp. 73–89.

<sup>676</sup> Mauro De Nichilo, *I poemi astrologici di Giovanni Pontano: Storia del testo* (Bari: Dedalo, 1975).

<sup>677</sup> Soldati, *La poesia astrologica nel Quattrocento. Ricerche e studi*, p. 231.

Pontano started working on the *De rebus coelestibus* in the 1470s.<sup>678</sup> This period was marked for Pontano by a number of other astrological projects. Thus, the *De rebus coelestibus* was supposed to be a systematic presentation of astrology in prose, whilst at the same time Pontano composed a corresponding astrological poem, the *Urania*. After the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* spread across Italy Pontano added a specific chapter to the main body of the *De rebus coelestibus* devoted to refuting his opponent's position concerning astrology.<sup>679</sup> It seems that Pontano read the *Disputationes* in a manuscript: he completed his response to Pico's anti-astrological arguments some time in 1495, that is a year prior to the Benedictus Hectoris publication of Giovanni Pico's *Opera omnia*. The twelfth book of the *De rebus coelestibus* devoted to the refutation of the *Disputationes* is not long, especially in contrast to other parts of Pontano's enormous treatise, and not openly addressed to Giovanni Pico. It mostly deals with his opponent's natural philosophical arguments against astrology; all other issues including practical astrology and astrological techniques are out of Pontano's main interest. Neither does he pay any attention to Pico's reconsideration of the *prisca theologia* concept, which Pontano himself never supported. This strategy to respond specifically to Pico's philosophical position on astrology echoes the rest of the treatise: by rejecting the main argument of Book III of the *Disputationes* Pontano could open the door to further explanation of other aspects of astrological speculation already fully described in the twelve other books of the *De rebus coelestibus*. Thus, he had no need to react to all Piconian accusations, but just to the sections devoted to natural philosophy. However, the way this intention was fulfilled leaves much to be desired. As is shown below, Pontano was only partly responsible for this failure.

At the beginning of this chapter, Pontano addresses Paolo Cortese, a friend of Giovanni Pico and Marsilio Ficino, who was largely responsible for Pico's discharge from prison after the

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<sup>678</sup> I refer to this edition: *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani de rebus coelestibus libri XIII* (Basle: apud Andream Cratandrum, 1530).

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 337–46.



failed dispute in Rome. Cortese used Pico as a model for his handbook on cardinals and praised him to be ‘the most learned of the Latins’ and ‘source of knowledge’.<sup>680</sup> The close relationship between Pico and Paolo Cortese might be the reason why Pontano remained cautious towards Pico: he praises Pico as an extremely gifted thinker, but states that he will nonetheless oppose some of his views, even if Pico is already dead.<sup>681</sup> He compares Pico with other prominent thinkers of the past including Priscian and Lorenzo Valla: for them, Pontano says, it was typical to criticise those with whom they were working in the same field. He also recalls the debates between the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical schools. Pontano’s point is that astrological controversies should not be left aside and deserve further discussion.<sup>682</sup> However, the character of the short chapter does not correspond to such an ambitious intention. Its anti-Piconian motif also remains in shadow.

Pontano’s tactful attitude towards Giovanni Pico and his *Disputationes*, officially presented in the late published version of the *De rebus coelestibus* is contradicted by the examination of the autograph copy of the treatise.<sup>683</sup> The full text of the *De rebus coelestibus*, together with a number of other Pontano’s writings, was published posthumously in 1512. It seems that the editor Pietro Summonte largely modified several controversial passages of the treatise. In the autograph, there

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<sup>680</sup> John D’Amico, ‘Paolo Cortesi’s Rehabilitation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 44 (1982), 37–51.

<sup>681</sup> *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani de rebus coelestibus*, XII, p. 337: ‘Ioannes Picus, vir summa nobilitate, maximo etiam ingenio, Paule Cortesi, dum et nobilitati plurimum et ingenio suo non iniuria tribuit, in astrologiam acriter est invectus. Verum enim qui viventem illum ego laudandis extollendisque ingenii eius viribus honestaverim, insecter ne increpando mortuum?’

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 337–38: ‘Priscianus grammaticae artis professor et doctor egregius, veteres adversum Grammaticos multa quidem et sensit acute et contra eos disseruit... Nuper Laurentius Vallensis multa adversus Priscianum, non pauca adversus Ciceronem cum disseruisset, nam contra Aristotelem pleno quidem locutus est ore, nec minore quidem vehementia in quibusdam adversus Theologos nostros locis’.

<sup>683</sup> Trinkaus, ‘The Astrological Cosmos and Rhetorical Culture of Giovanni Gioviano Pontano’, p. 349; Giovanni Desantis, ‘Pico, Pontano e la polemica astrologica. Appunti sul libro XII del *De Rebus Coelestibus* di G. Pontano’, *Annali della facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell’ Università di Bari*, 29 (1986), 151–91.

are clear interpolations, which suggest that Summonte added Paolo Cortese as the addressee of the twelfth book of the *De rebus coelestibus*. Moreover, Summonte simply deleted a large section where Pontano accused Pico of heresy in his early writings, and of following Savonarola at the late stage of his career. Summonte did a similar thing with regard to another Pontano's astrological treatise, the *De fortuna*.<sup>684</sup>

The question of fate and fortune attracted a particular attention in Renaissance thought in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While having a significant medieval background in theological texts and in *The Consolation of Philosophy* and other philosophical treatises, these concepts received new interpretations during the Renaissance period. This was partly due to a renewed interest in Cicero's treatises, as well as in Alexander of Aphrodisias and Stoic philosophy. On the other hand, the question of fate and fortune seems to be closely related to religious disputes of the sixteenth century. For instance, a reconsidered version of Augustine's interpretation of the concepts of divine providence and free will formed the basis for the Calvinistic theological tradition.

Giovanni Pontano kept off theological and philosophical novelties. Little is known about Pontano's involvement in contemporary philosophical trends. Despite the fact that Marsilio Ficino's ideas and writings circulated in fifteenth-century Naples, Platonic philosophy in its Ficinian interpretation remained on the margin of Neapolitan intellectual interests.<sup>685</sup> Pontano was largely responsible for that. It seems that his philosophical and literary project dealt with the restoration of other sources within the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic intellectual framework. The *De fortuna* clearly reveals his strategy. Combining the astrological tradition of interpreting fortune and fate with Aristotelian philosophy, Pontano uses Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scot to confirm an anti-deterministic background of astrology and *fortuna* with the use of theological

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<sup>684</sup> Giovanni Pontano, *La fortuna*, ed. Francesco Tateo (Naples: La scuola di Pitagora, 2012).

<sup>685</sup> Matteo Soranzo, 'Reading Marsilio Ficino in Renaissance Italy. The Case of Aragonese Naples', *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 33, 1 (2012), 27–46.

arguments. There is no clear evidence whether Pontano's reconciliation of Aquinas with Duns Scot in his exploration of the fortune concept was a response to early Piconian theological project initiated in the *900 Conclusiones*. However, the fact of Pontano's intense use of John Duns Scot noticed by Francesco Tateo does not seem to be accidental.<sup>686</sup> The idea to restore an ancient notion of *fortuna* and reinterpret it in a Christian theological context faced severe criticism on the part of Egidio da Viterbo, who was involved in numerous debates with his rival humanist and poet on different topics.<sup>687</sup>

Pontano's *De fortuna* was not only a philosophical but a political text. As one of the best known late fifteenth-century political theorists and the author of the *De principe*, in the *De fortuna* Pontano gives a political dimension to his discussion of *fortuna*. It becomes clear from the dedicatory letter. Its destiny is controversial; its first draft was addressed to Antonio Guevara, the count of Potenza, who was close to Pontano's patron, Alfonso the Magnanimous. However, a radical change in the political situation in Italy, and the start of the Italian wars forced Pontano to look at other possible addressees in search of a new, trustworthy and influential patron. Consalvo of Cordoba was his final choice.<sup>688</sup> Appointed by Ferdinand of Aragon and his wife Isabella of Castile commander of Spanish troops in southern Italy, he became the effective governor of Naples. Thus, Pontano's intention to secure Consalvo's patronage is central to the text. As Jerry Bentley has pointed out, after Ferrante's death and Alfonso II's abdication in 1494, Pontano briefly served as secretary to Ferrandino and tried to prevent the French invasion.<sup>689</sup> After the French troops entered Naples Pontano's regular political service came to the end. He delivered the keys to the city to Charles VIII and sought guarantees that the French troops would not demolish the

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<sup>686</sup> Francesco Tateo, 'Introduzione', in Giovanni Pontano, *La fortuna*, pp. 35–36, 52–53.

<sup>687</sup> On the Egidius-Pontano controversies, see: Idem, *Umanesimo etico di Giovanni Pontano* (Lecce: Milella, 1972) pp. 189–210.

<sup>688</sup> Pontano, *La fortuna*, pp. 76–80.

<sup>689</sup> Jerry H. Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 130.

city. Francesco Guicciardini indicated that Pontano had welcomed Charles VIII and even pronounced an oration proclaiming the French king. Although there is no firm evidence of such a proclamation, by the time the Spanish crown regained Naples Pontano's reputation was spoiled. Through the dedicatory letter to Consalvo Pontano, already an old man in his sixties, intended to protect himself from any possible persecution and in addition to confirm his loyalty to the Spanish reigning couple. This explains a number of passages flattering his patrons in the introduction and main body of the *De fortuna*, where Pontano explores the manifestations of fortune in the deeds of ancient political leaders clearly referring to his contemporaries. The philosophical arguments with numerous quotations from Cicero, Aristotle and scholastic *doctores* had to justify Spanish political success. In that case, Summonte's decision to cut out the passages on Giovanni Pico seems reasonable: the posthumous publication of the *De fortuna* had to restore Pontano's political and philosophical authority in his contemporaries' opinion, and the attack against one of the leading Renaissance philosophers might not have been considered as the best means for that.

Thus, the *De fortuna* represents a mixture of political and philosophical arguments used to justify the Spanish crown's success in Southern Italy. Italian Renaissance discussions on the *fortuna* concept were widespread since the writings of Coluccio Salutati and Poggio Bracciolini. After the rediscovery of a number of Cicero's treatises and the revival of Stoicism, the question of *fortuna* had a new life in the Renaissance.<sup>690</sup> Petrarca and Salutati both admired Stoic philosophy and tried to Christianise many of its aspects including the *fortuna* concept. These attempts to combine Stoic elements with Christian teaching led to a new understanding of *fortuna* within fifteenth-century Italian moral and political thought. Although the revival of Stoic philosophy faced some opposition, expressed, for instance, in the writings of Lorenzo Valla and Marsilio Ficino, its reception became widespread throughout the entire Renaissance period. Both Salutati whose the *De fato et fortuna* was briefly discussed earlier and Poggio played an important role in

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<sup>690</sup> In general, on Italian Renaissance Stoicism, see: Jill Kraye, 'Stoicism in the Philosophy of the Italian Renaissance', in *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, ed. John Sellars (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 132–44.

the Christian reading of Stoicism.<sup>691</sup> Their interpretation of the *fortuna* concept combines the notion of *virtus* in its moral dimension with the Christian teaching on divine providence and free will both dating back to Augustine. The acceptance of any effect of fortune, either positive or negative, seems to be fundamental and represents a human being's humility in front of God, whose omnipotence cannot be called into question. For those who manifest moral *virtutes* fortune as an act of God's will is more benevolent. While Salutati touches upon the fortune concept in its relation with astrological predestination, Poggio examines its political application claiming that *virtus moralis* has a clear correlation with *virtus politicus*. This interpretation was widely accepted in Italian Renaissance political thought.<sup>692</sup>

Remaining completely loyal to this Stoic-Christian reading of *fortuna*, Pontano, on the other hand, enriched it with an astrological element. Having his Spanish patrons in mind as addressees, he claims that fortune is favourably disposed toward impeccable and good rulers. For Pontano, there is no conflict between fortune and free will, since a human being who has intellect *per se* is free and able to act in accordance with his personal intentions. God's will determines if a person receives a positive or negative influence; if good fortune accidentally goes to a scoundrel, it does not contradict the concept of divine omnipotence and omniscience as, Pontano says, everything is in God's hands.<sup>693</sup> He adds though that in most cases fortune comes to those who deserve its favour by their moral and ethical excellence. To prove this notion, Pontano mentions a number of political leaders who went from very bottom to top.<sup>694</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> On Salutati, see n. 62. For Poggio's writings, see: Poggio Bracciolini, *De infelicitate principum*, ed. Davide Canfora (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1998); Le Pogge, *Les ruines de Rome: De varietate fortunae. Livre I*, ed. Jean-Yves Boriaud (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999).

<sup>692</sup> James Hankins, 'Machiavelli, Civic Humanism, and the Humanist Politics of Virtue', *Italian Culture*, 34, 2 (2014), 98–109.

<sup>693</sup> Pontano, *La fortuna*, pp. 88–90, 94.

<sup>694</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96–98.

From a philosophical and theological perspective, Pontano accepts the Stoic concept of the casual chain supplementing it with typical Augustinian arguments on free will and divine providence.<sup>695</sup> To support the notion of necessary causes, which were established according to God's order and thus determine particular terrestrial effects, Pontano generally refers to ancient philosophers and some medieval scholastics. However, I argue that all the references to ancient philosophers or poets are nothing but a tribute to the tradition Pontano admired for many years. In general, his arguments about the *fortuna* concept are within a very classical Ciceronian, that is Roman, Stoic tradition; other sources intended to impress Pontano's readers with their variety add almost nothing substantial to this traditional framework. Explaining the compatibility of *fortuna* with astrology, Pontano makes a step forward in comparison with Salutati, Poggio and the entire first-half-century tradition. Thus, with reference to the medieval scholastic tradition, mainly to John Duns Scot, he introduces the medieval notion of *impetus* ('impulse'). Although the *impetus* theory is originally linked with Aristotelian physics and dynamics,<sup>696</sup> Pontano gives it a theological explanation. Combining it with a number of ideas of Thomas Aquinas, he claims that the influence of celestial spheres with the help of *impetus* determines natural effects. In that context, Pontano supposes that fortune fundamentally belongs to the celestial spheres from which through astrological influences it disperses over the terrestrial world and along with a natural impulse provokes natural effects.<sup>697</sup> It is surprising that despite Pontano's apparent fascination with the ancient heritage and his ambitious idea to restore 'real' Antiquity, he took most of his arguments from two main sources: from a well-known by his time and classical concept of *fatum* developed in Cicero's writings, and medieval scholasticism.

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid., pp. 300–2.

<sup>696</sup> For some general information on the concept, see: Jürgen Sarnowsky, 'Concepts of Impetus and the History of Mechanics', in *Mechanics and Natural Philosophy before the Scientific Revolution*, eds Walter R. Laird and Sophie Roux (Boston: Springer, 2007), pp. 121–45.

<sup>697</sup> Pontano, *La fortuna*, pp. 308–14.

Pontano's views of astrology and *fortuna* contradicted those of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. His intention to respond to the *Disputationes* within the *De fortuna* seems evident. A passage preserved in two manuscripts identified by Francesco Tateo (Vat. Lat. 2841 and Marc. Lat. VI, 233) indicates that Pontano was openly opposing the *Disputationes*. By that time, Pontano was already familiar with the work of Lucio Bellanti, 'a man well known for his extraordinary acuteness in all sciences', and his *Responsiones*.<sup>698</sup> In fact, Pontano explicitly states in this passage from the *De fortuna* manuscripts that he will not address Pico's arguments against astrology, because the matter had already been with by Bellanti. Instead, he will focus on Pico's motivation to reject astrology. Although Pontano acknowledges Pico's contribution to contemporary philosophy and calls him 'a man of great fame, talent, and knowledge', he admits that Pico fell under influence of three major authorities at the later stage of his career: Pyrrho, Lorenzo Valla, and Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>699</sup> The presence of Lorenzo Valla, whose writings seem not to have been among Pico's favourites, is unclear. Pyrrho's name in this list reveals that Pico's contemporaries were aware of his interest in scepticism. Pontano's mention that Pyrrho influenced Pico's decision to attack astrology as an important part of the whole natural and moral philosophy can be considered to be an additional proof of Pico's close reading and use of Sextus Empiricus. Moreover, the passage in question supports the supposition that for Pico's contemporaries Sextus was one of the sources, which determined the transformation of his philosophical orientation. According to Pontano, the second source was Savonarola. Pontano blames Pico and Savonarola

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<sup>698</sup> Ibid., p. 288–90: 'Nec nos deterrebit Ioannes Picus magna tum nobilitate, tum etiam ingenio ac doctrina vir, qui nuper diruere prorsus sideralem conatus est disciplinam. Cui quominus ipsi respondeamus, labore eo nos omni liberavit vir in omni disciplinae genere clarus ac perquam acutus Lucius Bellantius, cui aetas nostra multum profecto debet, debituri autem longe amplius posteris, ne ad eos maledicentia perinvidentis hominis penetraret'.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., p. 290: 'Videlicet Picus noster (voco eum nostrum, quia magna mecum benevolentia coniunctus fuit, quodque doctissimum quunque maxime mihi familiarem atque amicum stato) tractus ipse quidem exemplo est aut Pyrronis, qui physicam et moralem omnem doctrinam evertere conatus est olim, aut Laurentii Vallensis, qui nuper vel decem praedicamentorum seriem, ne dialecticam dicam omnem, ut subverteret, quid non tentavit?'

for their intention to introduce certain novelties to the Christian religion; in the case of Pico, he adds, this caused an accusation of heresy, which did not lead to execution exclusively thanks to the clemency of Pope Innocent VIII.<sup>700</sup> Savonarola is pictured as pure evil, a liar who tried to be glorified as a saint; Pontano even claims that the senate and the Florentine people issued a special decree on the glorification of Savonarola.<sup>701</sup> This ‘liar’ persuaded Giovanni Pico to compose the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam*. Another, more personal, motive was that a certain astrologer had predicted that Giovanni Pico’s life would be short.<sup>702</sup> Here Pontano clearly refers to a well-known episode from Lucio Bellanti’s biography, however, without naming the author of Pico’s horoscope. Pontano concludes that along with his philosophical and theological motivation Pico attacked astrology as he hoped to convince himself of its falsity and, thus, fled from his own destiny. For Pontano, Pico’s sudden and early death proves that the mathematician’s calculations and predictions were correct.

The same accusations against Pico are present in the passage from the *De rebus coelestibus* that Pietro Summonte cut out. Taking the failed Roman dispute as a starting point of his polemics with Pico, Pontano insists that the grounds of Pico’s attack on astrology lie in his heretical theses.

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<sup>700</sup> Ibid., p. 292: ‘Iniit comitatem studiorum cum fratre Hieronymo, qui multos annos in re publica florentina primarium tenebat locum, eiusque suasu in astrologiam accerime illatus est. Uterque enim tentabat mova quaedam christiana in re moliri; facileque sacerdos versutissimus inter alia persuaserat eum, et quidem haud multo post obitum resurrecturum. Nam et Picus parum abfuit quo minus Romae ab Innocentio octavo haereseos damnaretur; sed praevaluit laenissimum apud Pontificem nobilitatis respectus atque humanitatis ratio’.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.: ‘Qualis autem esse debuerit Hieronymi suasio docere eventus ipse rerum eius potest: decreto enim senatus populi que florentini, cui multos annos sanctitatis opinione praescripserat, severissimo maximoque infami supplicii affectus est genere’. *Senatus populi que florentini* is a reference to a typical ancient Roman formula *senatus populusque Romanus*.

<sup>702</sup> Giovanni Pontano, *La fortuna*, p. 292: ‘Eidem etiam mathematicum consulenti Pico responsum cum esset brevioris eum vitae functurum muneribus, tulit ipse adeo indigne (volebat enim concanescere invitis astris), ut, quod astrologorum maxime opservatione niteretur, inopservabile cumprimis vellet quod a stellis portenderetur ostendere, et ipse quidem aliquot annos in eo laboravit’.



He recalls how his opponent intended to propose a series of theses on every discipline including theology; reformulating Christian dogmas led Pico to a number of philosophical and theological errors. His conclusions were prohibited by Pope Innocent VIII as they ‘had almost nothing in common with Christian religion’.<sup>703</sup> For Pontano, Pico rejected astrology as a discipline useful for Christian religion and helpful in various fields, such as medicine or agriculture, because he was still under the influence of his heretical beliefs over his late years developed by his acquaintance and friendship with Savonarola. Pontano recognises Pico’s exceptional talent in philosophy, which, however, does not prevent him from criticising the *Disputationes* even though its author could not have had a chance to respond to this criticism.

In the passages not modified by his editor Summonte, Pontano develops his pro-astrological arguments by claiming that there is no need to refute astrology, because it can be of use to common people. He reminds that astrology can be applied to many disciplines, and insists that no great philosopher could ever deny its positive and helpful effect.<sup>704</sup> To prove that particular events can be reliably predicted, Pontano refers to the passage from Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* Pico used in the *Disputationes* for disproving the same idea.<sup>705</sup> Pontano agrees that while preparing the horoscopes it is hard to take into account every little detail and therefore astrologers usually face numerous issues in their work. But a good and professional astrologer can avoid this kind of inaccuracies if he/she is aware not only of the position of spheres in any particular period of time but also of their potential effects, the nature and qualities of things upon which the stars produce

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<sup>703</sup> Desantis, ‘Pico, Pontano e la polemica astrologica. Appunti sul libro XII del *De Rebus Coelestibus* di G. Pontano’, pp. 184–85.

<sup>704</sup> *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani de rebus coelestibus*, pp. 338–39, 341.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340: ‘Quo effectum est, ut in universum modo spectare rerum cognitio et ea quae proprio nomine scientia dicitur, a peritis iudicetur existimatoribus. Quocirca Ptolemaeus coelestium significationum diligentissimus observator, atque inspector bene acutus, particularem futurorum praedicationem ad numine afflatus relegavit, qui Graeco sunt nomine sive ἑνθεοί, sive δαμονιακοί. Motus enim ipse, cui mundus hic rerumque natura omnis paret ac subiecta est, ita quidem agitat, convertitque elementa, ac rerum omnium semina’.

their influence. The astrologer has two approaches to acquire this knowledge: through either experience or inspiration and fortune.

Regarding the first approach, Pontano points to a number of practical aspects saying that astrologers from previous generations already confirmed the effects of astrological influences.<sup>706</sup> Medicine and agriculture serve to be the most typical examples of how an accurate calculation could prevent a bad harvest or heal a patient. Pontano concludes by calling astrology/astronomy the exact science based on approved calculations and experience. He also has no arguments against the presence of astrologers in a city or at a court of a ruler. On the contrary, in Pontano's opinion, an astrologer's expertise is helpful in governing the state – he can give a piece of advice on a favourable start of war campaigns, on a date of construction of a ship or building, on proposing new legislation. It is clear that claiming all this Pontano refers to his own experience as a high-ranking courtier.

Pontano examines the second approach, through inspiration, in several treatises. In particular, he revealed his position in the Commentary to Ptolemy's *Centiloquium*.<sup>707</sup> While commenting on the first conclusion of the *Centiloquium*,<sup>708</sup> on the possibility to predict the future, Pontano claims that astrology has the same value as other important and recognised disciplines as medicine and philosophy. Pontano distinguishes two approaches to astrology. The first, which deals with demonic powers, he calls insane and mad.<sup>709</sup> The second, however, in accordance with

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<sup>706</sup> Ibid., pp. 340–42.

<sup>707</sup> It was first printed in 1512. I use its later edition *Ioanni Ioviani Pontani Commentariorum in centum Claudii Ptolemaei sententias, libri duo* (Basle: apud Andream Cratandrum, 1531).

<sup>708</sup> In Pontano's translation, it is: 'A te et a scientia. Fieri enim nequit, ut qui sciens est, particulares rerum formas pronunciet: sicuti nec sensus particularem, sed generalem quandam suscipit sensibilis rei formam: oportetque tractantem haec rerum coniectura uti. Soli autem numine afflati praedicunt particularia'.

<sup>709</sup> *Ioanni Ioviani Pontani Commentariorum in centum Claudii Ptolemaei sententias*, I, p. 2: 'Nec medici, nec moralis philosophi sola est cognitio, sed quaedam etiam operatio: et medici quidem curatio, moralis autem philosophi actio, eaque et honesta et secundum virtutem rectamque videtur rationem esse. Idem etiam de astrologo dicimus: siquidem

Ptolemy's notion, operates by means of mathematical calculations. It belongs to a long tradition of exploring celestial configurations that dates back to Antiquity. Pontano adds that in the Roman period not only mathematicians but also poets were responsible for providing predictions. Hence, he comes to the conclusion that predicting future events is open only to those who acquire divine inspiration. In that context, poetical art, which is impossible without similar divine influence, and astrology become closely and fundamentally related.<sup>710</sup> In the *De rebus coelestibus* Pontano develops his argument by saying that poetry is a substantial part of theology, moral philosophy, and astrology, and a poet must investigate the positions of stars in order to succeed in his art.<sup>711</sup> As Matteo Soranzo has shown, Pontano's notion of 'divine frenzy' generally based on ancient poetry can be regarded as his response to Ficinian doctrine on the same subject.<sup>712</sup> This supposition is clearly supported with a number of additional arguments. Throughout the whole corpus of his writings, Pontano refrains from mentioning the Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and Kabbalistic sources that had been revived in Florence. When mentioning Plato and the Platonists, he usually refers to the *Timaeus* dialogue and Calcidius' commentary on it; he does not express any kind of apparent

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non modo coelestium corporum cognitio, sed eorum quoque quae ab illis portendantur, praedictio ad eum pertinet... Quocirca duplex videtur esse futurorum praedictio: altera ad vim quandam homini insitam, atque ad naturales quosdam eius motus solutos ac liberos, omni carentes arte, referenda: altera ad disciplinam, quae ratione constet atque observatione. Et prior illa videtur a stellis excitari, nulla eorum quae dicantur, quaeque coelestibus motibus indicentur, habita ratione aut consilio. Hos motus inconsultos, ac nulla humana arte rationeque temperatos, appellare solemus fanaticos: et eos ipsos qui sic moveantur, tum fanaticos, tum lymphatos dicimus: quidam etiam daemonicos, vulgus spiritatos appellat'.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid., p. 3: 'Sed ut bonos poetas ars sola non efficit, plurimumque in iis natura valet, sic neque sola disciplina mathematicum perficit, in quo, quum coelestium significationum interpret sit, multo etiam magis quam in poeta necesse est, uti natura ipsavires suas exercean, quando medicum quoque et imperatorem asseverent fortunatum esse oportere'.

<sup>711</sup> *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani de rebus coelestibus*, p. 67.

<sup>712</sup> Matteo Soranzo, 'Giovanni Gioviano Pontano (1429–1503) on Astrology and Poetic Authority', *Aries*, 11, 1 (2011), 23–52.

interest in contemporary Neoplatonic philosophical trends. Another taboo for Pontano is Arabic astrological tradition. The idea to which Pontano devoted many years of his work seems to be a restoration of an ancient heritage, a virtual return *ad fontes* of Roman and Greek origin, and its combination with Christian teaching in its traditional, mostly scholastic form. Pontano's response to the *Disputationes*' accusation of astrology in the *De fortuna* and the *De rebus coelestibus* were important parts of this project.

## Conclusion

In his biography of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Fernand Roulier claims that after the failed Roman dispute of 1486–1487 Pico lost all his philosophical ambition and eventually by the time of writing the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* became a religious radical under the influence of Girolamo Savonarola. This vision of Pico's *itinéraire philosophique* was later reproduced in many studies and thus contributed to the formation of a popular image of Giovanni Pico.

Instead, in this thesis I argue that after the Roman affair Pico continued to develop his method and philosophical arguments. In my opinion, the particular issue of Giovanni Pico's astrological views illustrates the development of his *itinéraire philosophique* from his early Neoplatonic writings and ambitious theological projects to later Biblical commentaries and then the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*. First fascinated by newly discovered sources, namely the Kabbalah, Plato and Neoplatonic writings, at the early stage of his career Pico relied on them while interpreting astrology. But in tracing his earlier views on astrology before the *Disputationes*, I show how he moved from strong attachments to the doctrines of Neoplatonism and Kabbalah to an interest in the 'natural science' of Aristotle. Between 1489 and 1491 Pico for the first time put forward the question of the communication between two essential astrological and philosophical entities, light and matter. For Pico, the problem in question was a part of his major philosophical project on the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle, an issue which was central for fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance thought. It is also worth noting that his treatise *De ente et uno* devoted specifically to the Plato-Aristotle question appeared in the same period. But Pico did not succeed in combining the notion of celestial light interpreted within a Neoplatonic framework, with Aristotelian physics. The failure ended his reconciliation attempts, while the *De ente et uno* marked the reconsideration of his philosophical method which from that moment on addressed his intention to purify major figures such as Plato and Aristotle from subsequent

interpretations and go back *ad fontes*. Thus, Pico's deviation from Neoplatonic and Kabbalistic sources and his return to Aristotle and other "classical authors" in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* had clear philosophical reasons, while the development of his astrological views over the period from 1486 through 1493 sheds light on the general evolution of his philosophical career.

In the *Disputationes*, Pico developed his method first postulated in the *De ente et uno* and deconstructed the notion of tradition in its philosophical, theological and astrological dimension. This approach determined his arguments on Ptolemy and the astrological tradition, and the *prisca theologia* concept. Finally, in Book III of the *Disputationes*, Pico proposes a natural philosophical compromise between the Platonic and Aristotelian theories of celestial light and matter – the problem, which was crucial for Pico at the earlier stage of his career. By doing so, he intends to demonstrate that astrology contrasts with fundamental principles of natural philosophy understood in the *Disputationes* within the Aristotelian framework. According to his main polemical strategy, he also insists that the legacy of Aristotle was distorted by subsequent pro-astrological interpretations and needs to be restored to its fullest and purity.

Pico's reading of sources leads him to three primary arguments against astrology. First, judicial astrology, which deals with predictions, is a false form of knowledge. To it, Pico opposes 'mathematical astrology', which observes natural effects without pretending to predict the future. Secondly, astrological techniques are also false because of the erroneous nature of astrology itself and due to numerous contradictions and errors in astrological calculations. Pico insists that most astrological authorities were at variance with each other regarding the usage of astrological practices. According to Pico, a lot of such cases are associated with Ptolemaic terminology, which was misunderstood by his successors. Thirdly, astrology has no natural philosophical grounds, while all celestial effects are of accident nature and do not depend on the position of stars and planets.

Apart from giving a detailed analysis of Pico's astrological views, the thesis also sheds light on the reception of the *Disputationes* in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Although the *Disputationes* was published posthumously in 1496 and since then has been suspected to be a forgery, I argue that we still do not have enough evidence to accuse Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Girolamo Savonarola or their associates of distorting the text of the *Disputationes*. At the same time, it becomes evident that Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico appropriated Pico's ideas in order to represent them in a different ideological way and serve their own polemical agenda. The publication of the *Disputationes* and its ideological appropriation in the works of Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico gave rise to heated discussions on the place of astrology within Renaissance intellectual culture in Italy and abroad – the example of Maximus the Greek clearly reveals the importance of the astrological debates across Europe. Thus, this thesis provides for the first time a comprehensive study of Giovanni Pico's *Disputationes* and its immediate reception.

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