

AN UNKNOWN CANTEMIR: THE KABBALIST. AN ATTEMPT TO RECONSTRUCT A SPIRITUAL MAPPING

Narcis ZĂRNESCU*

Abstract. Until now no researcher, Romanian or foreign, had the curiosity to explore an ‘alternative’ hypothesis to the Cantemirian historiography tradition, especially the ideas, the symbols of Kabala, diffuse, discrete in the work of the encyclopedic writer, of the novelist, of the philosopher and theologian who was Cantemir. Our study, *An Unknown Cantemir: The Kabbalist. An Attempt to Reconstruct a Spiritual Mapping*, relies on indirect sources, but its central argument is solid: the interpretations and the contemporary scholars of Cantemir are inscribed in a secret universe of the Kabala, of alchemy, of secrets’ initiation. It is possible that the Prince read in Latin or in Arab the texts of the great Kabala scholars, Jews or Arab, and especially the Italians. He knew van Helmont and through him Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, the friend of Leibniz, and he knew Ficin and Mirandolle. Within the Russian circles they studied Kabala; they practiced mason rituals, Cantemir himself was an initiate encyclopedic scholar, and thus, complete. Evaluating several cultural directions and hypotheses, this study proposes to sketchily map the Cantemirian spirit, this way challenging the inertia of the critical tradition.

Keywords: *Kabbala denudation, Adam Kadmon, Picatrix, Sefer Yezirah, Zohar.*

1. Cantemir was probably initiated into Kabbalah by studying the Neoplatonic philosophy; under the influence of van Helmont¹, who, in turn, was influenced by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth. Later, another reading could be Polish “cultural space”²: Lurianic ideas are also prominent in the 17th century messianic movement surrounding Sabbatei Zevi in Poland.³ But Leibniz seems to be the Secret Master of Cantemir. He was a radical gnostic, whose philosophy was profoundly influenced by the Lurianic Kabbalah. Isaac Luria (1534-72) was perhaps the greatest of Kabbalistic visionaries. Living and teaching in the community of Safed, which had produced such luminaries as Moses Cordovero

* PhD, Associated member ARS.

¹ Dimitri (Demetrius) Cantemir, *Ioannis Baptistae Van Helmont physices universalis doctrine et christianae fidei congrua et necessaria philosophia*, Wallachia, 1709.

² G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1973, chapter I.

³ G. Ibrăileanu, *Spiritul critic în cultura românească*, ch. „Momentele introducerii culturii apusene, înainte de veacul al XIX-lea”. See also Petru Vaida, *Dimitrie Cantemir și umanismul*, Bucharest, 1972; Alexandru Duțu, *Umaniștii români și cultura europeană*, Bucharest, 1974.