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Queen Christina's Esoteric Interests as a Background to Her Platonic Academies

In 1681 the blind quietist, Francois Malaval, stated that Queen Christina of Sweden late in life had 'given up' [Hermes] Trismegistos and the Platonists, in favour of the Church fathers. The statement does not explain what role the Church fathers were to play in her last years, but it does show that Christina really had been interested in the rather elitist and esoteric doctrine of Hermetic Platonic Christianity. In this paper I shall look at her library to show the depth of this Hermetic involvement. Her interest serves as a background to her life as ex-queen in Italy after her famous abdication from the Swedish throne in 1654, when she was 27 years old.

Christina styled herself as the Convert of the Age, and she set up court in Rome where she held a series of scientific and cultural academies in her palace. Her Accademia Reale was staged briefly in the Palazzo Farnese in her first year in Rome, 1656, but was revived in 1674 and was held for a number of years in her own Palazzo Riario.¹ Also, Giovanni Ciampini's Accademia dell'Esperienze, also called Accademia Fisico-mathematico, gathered there for their first founding meeting in 1677. Furthermore, she was protectress of the Accademia degli Stravaganti in Collegio Clementina from 1678 and in Orvieto for the Accademia dei Misti. (*Christina* 1966: 377, cited below as *NMU*.) Her inspirational presence and resources were valued by many literary figures. After her death in 1689, she was chosen to be a symbolic figurehead, Basilissa (Greek for Empress), by the poets that formed the Accademia dell'Arcadia (D'Onofrio 1976).

At her death Christina's library contained *ca* 4500 printed books and 2200 manuscripts from the medieval and renaissance periods. This collection has been worked on by modern scholars, but it has not been

1 There were eighteen volumes of proceedings placed in the Biblioteca Albani. Only one volume has survived, now Ms. Ottoboni 1744, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. *NMU* 378.

considered how intensely Christina collected texts from various esoteric traditions. The texts are scattered in her book inventories and do not immediately signal that they belong to the same tradition. In a sense, therefore, the esoteric material has become invisible. A careful study of the registers shows, however, that Christina was actively collecting Hermetic, Neo-Platonist, alchemical, kabbalistic and prophetic works. Her collecting does not seem to be grounded in a historic-nostalgic interest for buying books with beautiful covers or images, nor of uncontroversial humanist subjects. When her esoteric books are brought together one realizes that with her knowledge of several languages, including Latin, Greek and Hebrew, she understood these fields of knowledge. It is highly probable that as a rule she had a good knowledge of the contents of her books. Also, her aim does not seem to have been to merely orientate herself among heresies; instead her esoteric books could deepen her understanding of the universal, inner and invisible Church in an expanding world.

Christina's academy was started in Stockholm, in a sense, although it was never termed as such there. Her scholarly gatherings in Stockholm were originally arranged in 1649 by the Dutch Greek scholar Isaac Vossius. He brought in colleagues such as the classical humanists Nicholas Heinsius and Johann Freinshemsius. The French humanists Claude Saumaise, Samuel Bochart, Gabriel Naudé and Pierre Daniel Huet also soon appeared at the Swedish court. Later, the amusing freethinker Pierre Michon Bourdelot took over the role of court master. There is no record showing what subjects were approached in the scholarly meetings, but we know that one of the themes discussed in Stockholm, was Bochart's thesis on the northern cruises of the ancient Phoenicians. He presented evidence from antiquity that Phoenician sailing ships certainly reached the British Isles and perhaps even farther north. At this time, Vossius wrote to Bishop James Ussher of Armagh in Ireland that he and the Queen planned a centre in Stockholm, for research into the history and languages in the places of the Bible. In a similar move, the Hebrew Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel presented the idea of getting Christina to sponsor a *Bibliotheca Hebraica*, starting with a catalogue describing the central Hebraic writings (Åkerman 1991: 109–11). However, Christina abdicated before either an academy or a book series of this kind was created.

Descartes vs. Pico and the Greeks

There are many reports of Christina's conversations that include references to her having intellectual opinions in a philosophical context. There is ample evidence that in her searching period, before her conversion to Catholicism, she read intensely in the field of philosophical and religious material. It is symptomatic that she was reputed at court often to take an absurd or extreme stand in debates in order to test the opponent (Åkerman 1991: 27). Testifying to her wide reading are the Jesuits' statements based on their secret meetings with her in 1651, reporting that Christina had searched among the views of the ancients, of the Jews, and of the heretics before making her decision to convert to Catholicism (Åkerman 1991: 30–1).²

Although Christina started out her meetings with Descartes during his visit to Stockholm in 1650 by reading his newly finished exposition *The Principles of Philosophy* (1644), Descartes in fact had to admit that Christina's interest in reading Greek manuscripts, through the help of scholars such as Isaac Vossius and Claude Saumaise, left her little time to read and discuss his own philosophy. Christina did not like his advice that she should abandon these Greek readings and learn how to think methodically. She responded that she had already encountered his opinions in the texts of the Greek skeptic Sextus Empiricus and in Plato (Blok 2000: 316). By contrast, Christina is described as 'trembling with joy' when she received a copy of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis aegyptiorum, chaldeorum et assyriorum* describing methods and practices of theurgy and divination, the ascent of the soul and how to come into contact with gods and demons (Åkerman 1991: 96–7; Blok 2000). Although Christina later declared that Descartes gave her 'the first lights' on Catholicism (Åkerman 1991: 55–6; Blok 2000: 301–24),³ his philosophy appears really not to have influenced her. There is only one echo of Descartes in her maxims, the statement that: 'Before one can come to believe, one must doubt' (Cassirer 1939: 185; Åkerman 1991: 96–7).

From the correspondence of Isaac Vossius we learn instead that Christina read the Neo-Platonist Olympiodorus, Proclus and Hermias and their commentaries on the dialogues of Plato, such as Olympio-

2 Casatis report reprinted in Ranke 1906: 351–71. Appendix no. 131.

3 For a close view of the Jesuits' activity and Descartes' role see also Garstein 1992.

dorus' on the *Phaedo* and the *Philebus* (Blok 2000: 314, 365n).⁴ Proclus was first to formulate the vision of a *Golden Chain* binding higher ideas to individual enlightened intellects through all time. The Swedish poet and philosopher Georg Stiernhielm at court further framed Proclus' idea of a chain of intellects reincarnating eternal ideas, by dubbing it *Minerva's Necklace*. The Swedish Queen was eager to obtain from Paris Proclus' commentaries on the *Alcibiades* and the *Parmenides* (Blok 2000: 365n, 315n). Christina's teacher Isaac Vossius writes that she was led to Platonism early through readings of the Florentine Renaissance Platonist and Christian Kabbalist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Blok 2000: 315n);⁵ but he does not say which work. He may have been referring to Pico's entire collected works that were available in Stockholm. The most read text by Pico is his programmatic *Speech on Human Dignity*, setting out the theme of 900 Hermetic, philosophic, magical and kabbalist theses that he wanted to debate. The list was banned by the Church, but the ban was rescinded in 1493 by the hermetically interested Pope Alexander VI (Borgia). In vivid imagery Pico explains that seraphs and thrones always watch over us. The goal for human beings is to climb Jacob's ladder all the way up to God's throne and stand there together with seraphs, cherubs and thrones. One is to emulate the Seraphic fire of love, the Cherubic intelligence and the Thrones' steadfastness of judgement.

Another important text is Pico's kabbalist interpretation of the Creation story, *Heptaplus*, a work on the seven days, symbolizing the regeneration of human beings. Christina's concern for Pico's philosophy is also concretely shown in that she shipped a portrait of Pico to Antwerp, and then to Rome, when she left Stockholm. Further, the antiquarian Fortunio Liceto compares Christina with Pico in his book on ancient inscriptions on gemstones, *Hieroglyphica sive antiqua schemata gemmarum anularium* (Padua, 1653). If Pico's intellect was seen as Phoenix-like, Liceto argues, so our time admires Christina for having, like the ruler in Plato's Republic, combined politics and philosophy. The dedication to her in the introduction to Liceto's discussion points to Pico, Pythagoras

4 These writings are now in Christina's Greek Manuscript collection in the Vatican library. Reg. gr. 131, 159, 110. Blok 2000: 252, 313–14, 365n. Christina's collection also includes Michael Psellos' 'psychogonia', on the animation of spirits, Reg. gr. 131 and his commentary to the categories, Reg. gr. 136, and Plotinus' collected works, Reg. gr. 97.

5 Christina owned a smaller text by Pico, *Duodecim regulae arma spiritualis pugne*, Ms. Reg. lat. 853. ff. 219.

and the latter's biographer Porphyry (Liceto 1653: 400).⁶ Pico wanted to show, along with his colleagues in the Platonic Academy in Florence, that the original revelation of God had been handed down as an eternal philosophy, a *philosophia perennis*, by the pre-Christian sages of antiquity: Hermes, Zoroaster, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Philolaus and Plato. Christina was probably enthused by Pico's Renaissance view of the ancient philosophers: that they had argued for a concordance of principles and that a single universal doctrine lies behind appearances—the Platonic vision (cf. Blok 2000: 365n).⁷

Christina could follow the defence of Pico's 30 kabbalist theses more closely in her copy of Archangelus de Borgonuovo's book of debate, *Apologia pro defensione doctrinae Cabalae sub voce Petrum Garciam* (Basel, 1600).⁸ Pico's doctrine of the great context, on the connection between the hierarchies of angels and the Divine emanations in the kabbalah, led to a strong belief in *magia naturalis*, on the possibility of intervening in natural chains of cause and effect, but also on the art of calling down angels, and the presupposition that everything in the universe vibrated as a living creature, all flowing forth with the same natural power.

Before her abdication in 1654, Christina persuaded the specialist in Greek, Johannes Schefferus, to write a history of the Pythagoreans, the first modern history of its kind, which was published a decade later as *De natura et constitutione philosophiae Italicae seu pythagoricae* (Upsala, 1664). It is here explained that the philosophy of Pythagoras developed into a religion with a belief in reincarnation, presented to the many in the form of myths and musical theory and to the initiated as a demanding mathematical doctrine and ritual cult (Åkerman 1991: 97).⁹

Christina read such texts, not as a language exercise, but from her deep interest. Vossius explains that Christina was able to translate Greek prose into Latin, but that she was annoyed by the pedantry involved in translating Greek poetry (Blok 2000: 319). When she bought

6 Johan Nordström notices this in his 6 boxes of unpublished papers at Uppsala UB for a volume *Kristinatidens lärde* that was never written. On Christina's portrait of Pico, see Steneberg 1955: 86.

7 According to Blok, Christina also owned Michael Psellos' Byzantine commentary on Plato's doctrine of 'psychogonia', the generation of the souls, in Ms. Reg. Gr. 131; note also Psellos on the operations of daemons in Ms. Reg. Gr. 136.

8 Borgonuovo's defence is listed in Vat. lat. 8171, f. 10v. 'Cabalae, Basel, 1600'. Thanks to Carlos Gilly for identifying the book.

9 The book opens with thanks for Christina's commission.

manuscripts from Paris she asked for classical texts, but did not want novels, tragedies or comedies (Blok 2000: 319). Instead, she wanted to buy Proclus' commentary to Plato's *Alcibiades*, speaking of the blind *eros*, that is, the ecstatic vision of the brightest light, the soul's drunkenness by it, and longing thereto (Blok 2000: 365n; cf. Lawe 2002: 24–41).

The Jesuit Mission in Stockholm and Athanasius Kircher

In what manner was Christina drawn to convert to Catholicism? It is well known that Christina's abdication and conversion to Catholicism was preceded by secret talks with undercover Jesuits. Little is known of these conversations. New and previously unstudied sources reveal, however, that before the arrival of the Jesuits, whom she had specifically asked to be skilled in mathematics, Christina was in secret contact with the Roman Jesuit and polymath Athanasius Kircher. His crucial move came in 1651, when he sent her his encyclopaedia of music, with comments on acoustics, musical harmonies and the scale of tones forming the Soul of the World, that is his *Musurgia Universalis sive ars magna consoni et dissoni* (Rome, 1650).¹⁰ In his letter, Kircher also spoke briefly of his work *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1653–5) where he tried to interpret the hieroglyphs with Egyptian-Hermetic mysticism. Here, Kircher also presents ancient Egyptian revelations, Jewish mysticism in the form of kabbalah and oriental magic. Kircher in his Hermetic fervour even addressed Christina in November 1651 as 'Regina serenissima, potentissima, sapientissima, vere trismegisti—A Queen most exalted, most powerful, and most wise, truly belonging to the three times great', thus suggesting to her to contemplate further the three spiritual crowns of the revealer of light from Alexandria, Hermes Trismegistos.¹¹

Christina mentioned in her answer to Kircher that her letter was carried by Macedo,¹² the Jesuit who was the first to respond to Christina's

10 Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. Kircher wrote her for the first time in June 1649, APUG, f. 54r–54v. Also Kircher to Christina, no date f. 50r–50v. Available at the Kircher correspondence project on the web (<http://www.Pinakes.org>). For Kircher and Christina in Rome see Findlen 1994.

11 Kircher to Christina 11 November 1651. APUG 561, f. 52r–52v. Cf. Athanasius Kircher's Ms. Vat. Arab. 8. Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, 'The Psalms of David, De Templo Hierosolimitano a Salomone constructio'.

12 Christina to Kircher, no date, APUG 555, 172r–173v, transcription and translation at 276r–276v and APUG 556, 174r–174v. Kircher replies that Macedo has handed him the letter in APUG 50r–50v.

desire to discuss Catholicism. He carried an oral message from her to Kircher. Macedo had arrived in disguise in Stockholm in 1650, as part of the suit of the Portuguese Ambassador. In September 1651, he reported to the Jesuit General Goswin Nickel that Christina wanted to have secret discussions on Catholicism (Garstein 1992: 543–5, cf. p. 664). Paolo Casati, a mathematician and colleague of Kircher at the *Collegio Romano*, and Francesco Malines were chosen to travel incognito to Sweden for conversion talks with her. The connection to Athanasius Kircher, and his first letter to Christina in June 1649, point to the philosophical background of a perennial philosophy showing the ascent of the soul to the One that these Jesuits probably addressed theologically with the young Queen.

The contact continued. On her arrival in Rome on Christmas day 1655, Kircher dedicated to Christina his book *Itinerarium exstaticum coeleste*, the ecstatic journey through the heavens; a dialogue between the angel Cosmiel and the pupil Theodidactus on a fictional journey through the Solar system as proffered by Tycho Brahe in a compromise version. Kircher tells of how he had fallen asleep while listening to three lutenists and how he then dreamt of this ecstatic journey through the solar system. The travel through the planetary spheres is based on Cicero's speech on the Dream of Scipio, a text that Christina had three versions of in her library. Theodidactus finds that space is full of ether and understands that the stars are directed by intelligences. He learns of their function, hears the music of the spheres and reaches the heaven of the fixed stars, before he returns to earth.

During Christina's visit to the *Collegio Romano* in January the same winter, she was shown the Spanish Jesuit Villalpando's model of the Temple in Jerusalem. She received as a gift Kircher's handwritten translation into Arabic of the Psalms of David, with Solomon's temple as a theme: *De templo Hierosolomitana a Salomone constructo*. As a linguist and mythological expert, Kircher was to present her with an obelisk bearing Egyptian hieroglyphs and an inscription in 32 languages of 'Iside rediviva' (Isis revived). The obelisk was seen by Kircher as a cascade of light from the eternal sun in Egyptian tradition. (Priorato 1956: 283.)¹³ Christina seems to have been taken by the Jesuits' enthusiasm for historical-cultural studies and their travels to far away countries such as Japan and China, highpoints in their activity on behalf of a universal and global process of Christianization.

13 Kircher's manuscript is now Ms. Vat. Arab. 8. On the Obelisk see Partini 2004: 15, 52–8.

The Alchemists

Another topic that certainly would have been provocative to Descartes was alchemy. Christina was very interested in this sacred art and wrote: 'Chemistry is a beautiful science. It is the anatomy of nature and the true key to open all treasures. It gives fortune, health, glory and true wisdom to its possessor.' She continued by saying that alchemy: '. . . is a royal and furthermore, a divine science. It has fallen into disrepute among those who think they know everything, but know nothing' (Wettermark 1990: 61).

Christina was not only a reader of alchemical texts, but also a practitioner in the laboratory. She wrote from Hamburg in 1667 to her close companion Cardinal Azzolino, in answer to his questions concerning the laboratory work of an anonymous alchemist from Majorca:

You are right that the Majorcan knows more than anyone else, and that he has found a great mystery in his iron pot. All I know is that he puts a finely pounded material in this pot and heats it over a low fire, and he keeps the opening closed for some time, and then he opens it and releases the fumes for a time as long as it takes to say *miserere*, then he takes it from the fire, he repeats the procedure three times, see that is all I know. His material is nothing other than mineral of cinober and mineral of mercury [that is reddish mercury sulphide, HgS]: He assured me that the substance enclosed in his little iron pot that he left with me, was mercury of six metals, the common [mercury] was not included, he said. The cooling solid material also was of the same sort, he said, and he had worked on it in order to make a golden mirror from it. He told of its wonderful nature and regarded it as a higher substance than even the [philosopher's] stone. . . He said that when his mirror is perfected, one just has to scrape off some of the material and mix it with the [six metal] mercuries; after a short while it transforms into the real stone of the philosophers, but will then be so powerful and valuable that there are no words to express its virtues, and that this stone can be augmented in quantity through adding the common mercury. You see, this is all I know: I hope it will serve your purposes. (Bildt 1899: 313; cf. Lekeby 2001: 81–3.)

There is no evidence to determine exactly when Christina started with alchemy, but her involvement tended to increase toward the end of her life. Her first acquaintance with alchemy may have been when in 1651, in Stockholm, when she was approached by the alchemist Johannes

Franck. He described her future reign as the fulfilment of Paracelsus' prophecy of a return of Elias Artista and of Sendivogius' vision of the rise of a metallic monarchy of the North (Edenborg 1992; cf. Lindroth 1943: 307).¹⁴ With these visions Franck urged the Queen to start searching for the ruby red powder of the philosophers. He expressed these hopes in the tract that he offered her, the *Colloquium philosophicum cum diis montanis* (Upsala, 1651). (Edenborg 1992: 43 ff.) A year later, there are reports that an Italian alchemist by the name of Bandini had arrived at her court (Åkerman 1991: 86).

Clear evidence of the Queen's own practice of alchemy appears first when the Danish polymath and alchemist Olaus Borrichius met her in Rome in 1665. He reported that he had often talked with her about the study of chemical arcana and experiments and that she, as a 'Palladio virago', dedicated herself entirely to the sacred art.¹⁵

Borrichius was well prepared. In London in 1663 he had discussed the new method of boiling dew with the Catholic Kenelm Digby, who is considered as a Rosicrucian by English scholars. Digby said to the inquiring Dane that he thought it possible to produce the Stone from vitriol and nitre, first by a conjunction of Sol and aerial mercury, and ultimately from salt and aerial nitre. Christina bought Digby's book on the sympathetic powder—which in small quantities was used as a universal medicine. She also acquired Digby's book on the immortality of the soul, *Demonstratio immortalitatis animae* (Paris, 1651). In the English original edition from 1641 Digby concludes his discussion of the flowing impulses with a thoughtful strophe:

By them thou must be first irrigated with the sweet shoures of morninges and eveninges, with the gentle dew, and mannadroppes, which fall abundantly from these bounteous favoures that reside in a higher sphere than nature; and that poure out unknowne and unconceivable blessinges upon prepared hearts: which fructify into that true blisse, in comparison where of, all that we have declared is but shaddow, vanity and nothing. (Digby 1644.)¹⁶

14 Franck's dissertation from 1645, *De principiis constitutivis lapidis philosophici, theses hermeticae*: 37–9. Another expectation was that the transformation would occur around 1658, because of Paracelsus' prophecy of '58'.

15 Borrichius 1697: '. . . saepe ad disserandum cum regina Christinâ, de arcanioris Chemiae studio, veritate, experimentis, quibus tum sacris se Palladio virago devorerat.' I thank Dr Michael Srigley, Uppsala, for this information.

16 The Latin edition is listed in Ms. Vat. lat. 8171, f. 57. BAV.

In Paris, Borrichius also worked with a certain Abbé Boucaud, who finally in January 1665 let him copy a chemical process of making gold included in the manuscript *La Chrysologie chimique*. It begins with a description of the gathering of dew in May and its distillation to saltpetre. The manufacture of this salt was soon presented as a step in producing aerial nitre, i. e. oxygen, in John Mayow's *De salnitro et nitro aereo* (Oxford, 1668), a breakthrough work that Christina had in her library. She already owned other Latin texts by English alchemists: George Ripley's medieval collected works; Edward Bolnest's *De aurora chimica* (Hamburg, 1675) and Eiraeneus Philalethus' (Cosmopolita) *The Open Entrance to the Shut Palace of the King* (Amsterdam, 1667).

In the summer of 1667 in Hamburg, Christina experimented with the messianic prophet and alchemist Giuseppe Francesco Borri, but Cardinal Azzolino soon wrote to her that she had to distance herself from Borri because he was being sought by the Inquisition (Bildt 1899: 386–9).¹⁷ Borri was a fascinating figure and focused on St Anne in an attempt to give divine status to her daughter, the mother of Jesus, and claimed that he, as a 'pro-Christ' assisted by the angel St Michael, would lead the Pope to form the Universal Monarchy after defeating the Turks. He had followers in Milan and Rome. Christina at this time also corresponded with Johan Rudolf Glauber, the discoverer of Sal mirabile or Sodium sulphate (Na_2SO_4), who claimed that this was in fulfilment of Paracelsus' prophecy of Elias Artista, the accomplished alchemist who would appear at the end of time, but now decoded in the form of a salt, *Et Artis salia*. Christina posed seventeen apparently simple questions to Glauber on the nature of the various alchemical stages, such as: what colour the material is when it is reduced to its ultimate perfection; whether it is subject to change; whether it is affected by liquors; what doses to take of various ingredients and their colours in the process, etc.¹⁸ She also took an interest in the phosphorus discovered by Hennig Brandt.¹⁹ In a second letter to Glauber she wanted to know 'the quantities of coal, gold and salt' in a certain process.

In her collection of spiritual medieval manuscripts there are some forty alchemical manuscripts by the foremost medieval authors, as well as practical handbooks. They include works by Geber (Yabir Ibn

17 See Salvatore Rotta's article on Borri (1971).

18 Azzolinosamlingen 36, Riksarkivet, Stockholm. NMU 370: no. 900. Glauber died in 1668.

19 Private communication from Anna Maria Partini, Rome.

Hayan), Johan Scotus, Arnold de Villa Nova, Raimund Lull, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Bernard Trevisano, George Ripley, as well as works such as George Anrath d'Argentine's *Jardin des Riches* and *La très précieux Don de Dieu*, Johan Grasshof's *Aperta arca arcani artificiossimi* and the intriguingly illustrated *Rosarium Philosophorum*—with its alchemical images of merging the solar-King and the lunar-Queen into a hermaphroditic union.²⁰

In 1655, Christina gave a large collection of alchemical manuscripts from Prague to her librarian Isaac Vossius. These were once owned by Emperor Rudolph II at Prague and are written in the German, Czech and Latin languages, a collection which now resides as the Codices Vossiani Chymici at the University of Leiden (Boeren 1975).²¹ The Leiden Rudolphine collection is relatively little known, probably because it mostly consists working copies in difficult Czech and German hands.

Christina desired to know more of alchemy and brought a younger woman called Sibylla into the experiments (Anonymous 1697: 279).²² In 1670, she employed a working alchemist, Pietro Antonio Bandiera, to run her laboratory and ultimately bequeathed the equipment to him (Bildt 1900: 174 ff.; *NMU* 370: no. 901). Her own practice of alchemy has left a few marks on paper: a drawing of alchemical vessels with short comments written by Christina on calcination and a query on how many hours the fire should burn.²³ There is a document in her own hand, entitled 'Il laboratorio filosofico – paradossi chimici', which is either her own framing of a presentation of alchemy, or notes from a text with the same title (see Appendix).²⁴ Christina was preoccupied with alchemy to the very end of her life; found by her deathbed in 1689, was a letter on the universal medicine, Glauber's alkahest, and secret fire, by Samuel Forberger (*NMU* 364: no. 305, 370: no. 902).

20 See Christina's manuscript and book catalogue Ms. Vat. Lat. 8171 in the Vatican library, also the register of books made after Christina's death in 1689, Ms. Ottob. Lat. 2543, no. 1320. Cf. Partini 1994: 158–64.

21 Blok (2000) shows that Vossius was not interested in alchemy and wanted to sell the collection, but found no buyer. The texts were mostly in Czech and German, and unillustrated, working copies.

22 Modern edition of the Italian original, Odier & Morelli 1981.

23 Azzolinosamlingen 36, Riksarkivet, Stockholm. *NMU* 369: no. 897.

24 Azzolinosamlingen 36, Riksarkivet, Stockholm. *NMU* 371: no. 904.

Hermeticism

A central manuscript in Christina's collection is the ancient Hermetic dialogue *Asclepius*. Named after the Greek god of healing, the text lets up a song of mourning over the arrival of Christianity in Alexandria. But then follows a prophecy of how, after a period of darkness and ignorance, the Egypto-Hermetic religion will be revived.²⁵ An anonymous volume on the Divine in Plato's *Timaios*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, can probably be traced to a Renaissance humanist from Florence or Venice, perhaps inspired by the Byzantine fugitive Johannes Gemistos Plethon's translations in the mid 1400s. Christina had a portion of a translation by Plethon, entitled 'Plato on the virtues'. His pupil Cardinal Basilius Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis*—a defence of Platonism from an virulent attack by Aristotelians—was also shelved in Christina's library. Bessarion's strategy was to show the many common characteristics of Platonism and Aristotle's philosophy. Bessarion organized a Platonic Academy in Rome that in some respects can be seen as a predecessor of Christina's academies. In the Platonic section she could also count the famous Florentine Hermeticist Marsilio Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* as well as Iamblichus' theurgy with Divine spiritual powers.²⁶ The manuscript of the *Orphic Hymns* that she owned was a rare piece telling of Orpheus healing of the soul through his play of harmonious music on his golden lyre.

In the esoteric collection there is also a copy of Johannes Trithemius' *Steganographia*, where encryption is said to work by angelic communication. Christina also owned a copy of John Dee's tract on his mystical planetary sign, *Monas Hieroglyphica*.²⁷ Another volume contains Al-Magritti's *Picatrix*, explaining the preparation of magical talismans and describing the utopian Hermetic city *Adocentyn*. Founded by Hermes Trismegistos, the city is ruled by a priest-king in perfect harmony with the cosmos. Two rare manuscripts on angelic magic belongs to Christina's collection and stem from the Castilian court of Alphonso X the Wise in the thirteenth century: first the anonymous *Libro de las formas en del las ymagenes que son en los cielos* (Ms. Reg. lat. 1283) and second the Latin translation of the Hebrew work *Sefer-ha-Raziel*—*Liber Razielis seu volumen secretorum*

25 *Asclepius* appears in two copies: Ms. Reg. lat. 1352, ff. 172–89, Reg. lat. 1572, ff. 1–14.

26 Mss. Reg. lat. 1572, 1099, 1619, 1344.

27 Mss. Ottob. lat. 2543, f. 21, nr. 972. Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana.

Dei (Ms. Reg. lat. 1300), a text recording the hidden wisdom of Adam and King Solomon, especially writing out the names of the 72 angels that taken together form God's unspeakable name.²⁸

The Esoteric Section of Christina's Library

Christina's now scattered collection of printed books counted to over 4,500 titles and included, besides many books in pure medicine, also Paracelsus' collected works and a wealth of alchemical tracts. A selection of them are Joseph Duchesnes' (Quercetanus) *Des plus rares secrets* (Paris, 1641), Bernard Trevisano's *Opuscula Chimica* (Leipzig, 1605), Martin Ruland's *Lexicon Alchymiae*, Isaac Hollandus' *Opera mineralia* (Middleburg, 1600). The firm theoretical base on which Christina could build her alchemical understanding was Andreas Libavius' systematic overview *Alchimia* (Frankfurt, 1597). She also followed Libavius' research into classical medicine in relation to the Hermetic, in his *Novus de medicina veterum, tam hippocratica quam hermetica* (Frankfurt, 1599). She collected Oswald Croll's compendia of alchemical processes, *Basilica Chymica* (Frankfurt, 1620), Nicolas Lemery's course on the practical work on antimony, *Cours de Chimie* (Geneve, 1675) and several volumes of the collection of texts, *Theatrum Chemicum*, published in 1613 by Zetzner.²⁹ These volumes reprint some one hundred works by the most influential alchemists. Thus, Christina had access to the whole field of alchemy, including the most sought for works by her contemporaries.

The Paracelsian Gerard Dorn shows his 'alchemistical' philosophy of nature in his *Chymisticum artificium naturae* (Frankfurt, 1568). In this work, which was in her possession, Christina could follow Dorn's extension of Paracelsian concepts, as well as in his *Clavis philosophia chymisticae* (Herborn, 1599). Christina was surely aware that this group of Paracelsians saw alchemy as an alternative spirituality based on Paracelsus' theological programme: his respected role as spreader of the word of 'Theophrastia Sancta' in opposition to the established churches. It is interesting that Christina in her maxims even takes over Paracelsus' personal motto: He who can belong to himself, should not belong to another—*Alterius non sit qui suus esse potest*.

28 On Sefer Raziel see Åkerman 1999.

29 Ms. Vat. lat. 8171. ff. 74–81. BAV, Vat. lat. 12 637, f. 84–5.

Another work, Heinrich Noll's *Naturae sanctuarium quod est physica hermeticae* (Frankfurt, 1619), also contributes to this spiritual understanding of natural processes. Important to the spiritual understanding of nature is the work represented in Christina's library by the English esotericist Robert Fludd, his review of mathematical, musical, technical and occult sciences, the *Microcosmi historia*, part II, (Oppenheim, 1618). Correspondences between the macrocosmos and microcosmos, the parallels between the order of heaven and the world of humans, are central to the Hermetic worldview. Christina of course owned several copies of *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes*: 'As above, so below. . .'.

Christina collected editions of alchemical emblem series, the 20 images of the *Rosarium philosophorum*, Michael Maier's 50 emblematic scenes in *Atalanta Fugiens*, and the 61 alchemical emblems in Johan Daniel Mylius' *Philosophia reformatata* (Frankfurt, 1622). It is interesting that Christina owned Stephan Michelsbacher's illustrated work on the Kabbalah as the mirror of art and nature. *Cabala speculum artis et naturae, in alchemia*. . . The first edition was printed in Augsburg in 1615, but was republished there in 1616 with the same images. It was now dedicated to the wisdom-seeking Rosicrucian brotherhood: '. . . a strenus sapientiae culture rosae crucis fraternitate dedicata'. One of its emblems shows a scene that many initiated readers find fascinating: a blindfolded man seeks to step up the seven alchemically labelled stairs to a well-adorned Temple of Wisdom.

The esoteric sphere in Christina's library springs from the fourteen books of the ancient *Corpus Hermeticum*; in her collection we find Marsilio Ficino's Latin translation of them from 1471. She also owned individual texts, such as the Hermetic *Pimander* and other writings by Hermes Trismegistos in the *Corpus*. Christina's possession of the Cappucin monk Annibale Roselli's multi-volume commentary on the *Pimander*, in an edition from Cracow, 1585, shows that her interest was not sporadic. Roselli wanted to see the shepherd Pimander as parallel to Christ and he could place Hermes in the Catholic tradition through seeing him as an ancient theologian (a practitioner of *prisca sapientia*), from whose principles one could derive the Trinity, through Aristotelian-Scholastic concepts.

A more unexpected pearl among the printed books is Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's controversial description of constructing magical seals and of the hidden spirits living in the dark; his infamous *De occulta philosophia* (Antwerpen, 1533). Agrippa tries to control the heavenly influences through staring into the dark and conjuring the spirits there. He explains that he builds on important Renaissance works: Ficino's magic,

Pico's astronomy and Reuchlin's kabbalah. Agrippa then presents a trinitarian cosmology: an earthly, a heavenly and a super-celestial sphere through which the souls can pass after a specific seal has opened the gates and the magician has gained power.

Among the books influenced by the Hermetic texts is Francesco Giorgi's *De harmonia mundi totius cantica tria* (Venedig, 1525). Giorgi describes the cosmos as a tuning octave, tuned in a universally sounding musical harmony. In Christina's library, there was also Petrus Galatinus' defence of Christian kabbalah, *De arcanis catholica veritatis* (Basel, 1550), which included a reprint of Johannes Reuchlin's famous *De arte cabalistica*. The Christian kabbalah worked on the idea that the luminous emanations of the original Jewish kabbalah in fact explained Christian truths, as with the descent of Christ, regeneration, and the relations within the Trinity. The tendency was that Christians only learned the Jewish kabbalah as a preparation to understand the Christian tradition.

In her library we find Borri's writing *Due lettere sul commercio cabalistico col mondo elementare della Chiave del Gabinetto* (Two letters on the kabbalistic commerce with the elemental world by the key to the cabinet, Cologne, 1681).³⁰ Borri here describes how Paracelsus' elemental spirits (salamanders–fire, sylphs–air, undines–water, gnomes–earth) can be contacted and controlled in a cabalist-magical-alchemical way. Christina also bought Borri's source, Nicolas-Pierre-Henri Montfaucon de Villars' *Le Comte de Gabalis: Entretiens sur les science secretttes* (Paris, 1670), a tract where the four elemental spirits are investigated as effective principles in the esoteric secret sciences.³¹

Christian kabbalism also occurs in a manuscript given to Christina in 1676 by the little known priest Bonaventura Pellegrini: *Immenso et nascoste tesoro dell' ineffabile Tetragrammaton*.³² This shows the tremendous, hidden and unspeakable treasure collected by Jewish mystics through studying the 22 names and 72 attributes describing God in the *Psalms*. The Jews were convinced that these attributes will be recognized when the Messiah comes to save the world. Pellegrini instead argues that this is not true, but rather that these attributes can be experienced in the

30 Ms. Vat. lat. 12 637, f. 82 (83). BAV.

31 Ms. Vat. lat. 12 637, f. 68. BAV. The second edition, printed in London 1690, was dedicated to the Rosicrucian brotherhood.

32 Ms. Reg. lat. 474, 'Tal funtione di benedir il populo col nomine delle quatro lettere che implicamente conteneua il mistero della Trinita, poiche e venuta il Messia, a cui solera riservato. . . gli Arcani', f. 96–7.

mystery of the Trinity. Pellegrini studies the Old Testament in order to prove that the Catholic Church has already been predicted at the beginning of time, the divine attributes are listed and said to especially characterize the Old Testament Kings.

Her interest in the Hermetic worldview explains why Christina also owned a volume by Giordano Bruno, condemned by the Church, his *De triplico minimo et mensura* (Frankfurt, 1591). Bruno here discusses the 'minima' of matter, which he calls monads, or ensouled atoms, and he adds a number of mysterious geometrical diagrams, intended to show possible combinations of surfaces.³³

Hebrew Kabbalah

The most intriguing aspect of Christina's library is that in her section of Hebraica there are more than a hundred titles, of which no less than 38 are commentaries on Jewish mysticism and kabbalah—and not the Christian kabbalah, but the original Jewish. The kabbalist source texts *Sefer Jezirah* (The Book of Creation) and parts of the *Zohar* (The Book of Splendour) are accompanied by Messianic writers with great ambitions, such as Rabbi Aquiba and Isaac Abarbanel, and followed by commentaries of the Messianic kabbalists active in Italy: Moses Almonsini, Menahem Recanati, and Salomon Molkho. The latter had visited Pope Clemens VII in 1535 to explain to him that the Jewish expectations of a Messiah had now been fulfilled. Molkho was prophet, visionary and interpreter of his own statements and he pointed to the tradition which argued that the Messiah resided in the quarters of the poor in Rome. Other more reflective kabbalist authors are represented in Christina's collection through texts on the function of the Divine attributes, that is, on the role of the ten luminous emanations of the sephirotic Tree of Life. They are described and related to one another and to the Divine human in texts by genuine kabbalists such as Bahya ben Asher, Shem Tob Ibn Gaon, Abraham Gallico, Salomon Alkahetz and Menachem Azariah. Christina could read Hebrew and actually met Spinoza's teacher, Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, who travelled to see her in Antwerp in 1655. She received his book *Nishmat Hayim* (Amsterdam, 1652), where he defends

33 Ms. Ottob. lat. 2543. nr. 1286, 143, 573. Ms. Vat. lat. 8171, f. 68. Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana. Cf. Yates 1964 on Bruno and Hermeticism.

the transmigration of souls and retells stories of spiritual possession, attributed to malign spirits called *dibbukim*.³⁴

The Swedish Queen as Empress of Science?

The esoteric interests of the Swedish Queen seems now to have been forgotten, but it was not so in her own time. For example, Christina has been suggested as the model for the main character 'The Empress' in her contemporary, much read scientific utopia, *The Description of a New World, called the Blazing World* (1666), written by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. The Empress of this Utopia is an atomist and works with alchemy and kabbalah, activities that are closely described. 'The Empress' arranges an academy in her palace for all sorts of humanists and scientists. Margaret Cavendish is reported to have met Christina in Antwerp in 1654–5, when Cavendish and her husband were in exile from Cromwell's England. The young Duchess, a talented writer, is assumed to have received a strong impression of the queen, who in Cavendish's eyes was an unbelievably free and talented woman.³⁵

According to the register for Christina's estate her private library of smaller bindings, her 'librariola', contained 233 volumes 'in philosophy, medicine, alchemy, astrology and mathematics'—this was a complement to her deposit of 1,385 'theological or philological works' in the same shelves.³⁶ Looking at this, she appears to have had a strong interest in the cosmological sciences. She probably did not want to have the books stand silently on the shelves, but rather wanted to lend them to suitable readers. This is shown by her acquisitions of central books in

34 BAV, Ms. Vat. Lat. 8171. ff. 74–81, f. 57v, 64, 58, 62, 63 Hebraica at ff. 124–30, kindly identified for me by Professor Elliot Wolfson, New York. Menasseh's text is partly in Latin. For Christina's meeting with him in Antwerp, see Katz 1983. In 1653, Father Alexander Manderscheidt says of Christina: 'Pour l'Hebreu et Arabe elle le sait lire, et du moins elle entend un peu', Arckenholtz 1751, II: 430.

35 I am indebted to Professor Judith Zinsser, Department of History, Miami University, Ohio and Professor Hilda Smith, Department of History, University of Cincinnati, Ohio, 1997. Hilda Smith reports of a doctoral student in the Netherlands who has put forward the hypothesis of Christina as model for Cavendish's utopian figure. Others have suggested that 'the Empress' draws upon the character of Margaret Cavendish herself.

36 Ms. Vat. Lat. 12 637, f. 84. BAV.

algebra by difficult and advanced mathematicians that she could not possibly read on her own; works by Christopher Clavius, Simon Stevin, Seth Ward, John Napier, Rudolph Goclenius and Girolamo Cardano, not to mention Descartes' *Geometry* which was also in her possession. Furthermore, there were exclusive works by astronomers and astrologers such as Ptolemaios, Alkindi, Albohaly, Abu Ma'shar, Alfraganus, Albohazen, Mesahala, Copernicus (*De revolutionibus*), Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Christoph Scheiner, Johannes Regiomontanus, and Gallileo (his smaller work on the patterns on the face of the moon). These books laid the ground for the arithmetical and musically constructed doctrine of Harmony that we have been able to show shaped Christina's philosophical viewpoint. It is clear that her library was an effort to create a centre around old and unusual texts in order to present them to visiting scholars. Perhaps one can conclude that she wanted to create a *Bibliotheca Esoterica* dedicated to the study of Western Esotericism.

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Appendix*

Il laboratorio (processi – [crossed out]) filosofico – Paradossi chimici

Proemio

1. della antichità delle arte alchimica
2. della sua semplicità
3. della sua brevità
4. della sua nobiltà
5. delli errori (communi che si cominciano in questi arte – [crossed out]) che si commettono in essa
6. della potenza solfa di (chimici[?])
7. delli fornelli
8. dell fuoco (delli vasi – [crossed out])
9. della materia un oggetto dell alchimia
10. delli vasi
11. del studio delli Autori (del fornello – [crossed out])
12. tempo
13. predicamenti vari che si lavorano dalli tre regni animale, vegetabile e minerali, modi di farsi
14. della medicina universale
15. della opera (filosofico – [crossed out]) grande
16. delle virtù lustro e virtù che si ha [?]
17. del Magnete

If these notes in Christina's hand are her own thoughts, they show that she knew the art of alchemy and was prepared to present it to an audience, probably a limited one. The crossed out parts show, I suggest, that Christina is not copying, but rather sketching on some subtitles. The paradoxes of the title appear to be influenced by Robert Boyle's *The Sceptical Chymist* which Christina owned in a Latin translation. The book deals with what Boyle calls chemical paradoxes: *Chymista scepticus vel dubiae et paradoxae chymico physica* (1662, second edition 1668). (Ms. Vat. Lat. 12 637, f. 84. BAV.)

* Azzolinosamlingen 36, Riksarkivet, Stockholm.