

Chapter Four

How to Read a Jesuit Treatise on the Kabbalah

Although it is the work of a Kabbalist precisely to read one thing but understand it in a different way, nevertheless he will keep to the inviolable rule that good must be understood as good and bad as bad, lest he apply black to white or day to night.

Johannes Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*¹

The *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* cannot be properly grasped by an analysis that takes the text only at its face value. This chapter examines some of the methods and forces that shaped Kircher's work in order better to understand its meaning. It is divided into two independent parts, both of which focus, for the sake of example, on the fourth "class" of *Oedipus II, Cabala Hebraeorum*, Kircher's treatise on the Kabbalah of the Hebrews. The first scrutinizes his scholarly modus operandi, revealing the disparity between the image that he presented of his firsthand study of Jewish authors and his actual dependence on Latin secondary sources. Since Kircher's work was, to a large extent, cobbled together from the texts of unacknowledged early modern Latin authors, it will be misunderstood if it is read with simple, good faith as the ground-breaking exposition of original research that he claimed it to be. A careful examination of its sources is needed to appreciate the mixture of original and derivative learning that Kircher set indiscriminately before his reader. The second part of the chapter assesses the extent to which Kircher's writing was

¹ Johannes Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabblah. De Arte Cabalistica* (1517; facsimile reprint, with English translation by Martin and Sarah Goodman, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 308; English translation, 311: "Ultimo est nobis intentanda universalis haec meta quod tametsi Cabalistae sit officium, aliud legere ac aliud intelligere, tamen inviolabiliter istum quod observet canonem, in bonis bona, in malis mala, ne albo nigrum applicet aut diem nocti."

constrained by censorship and the implications of this for interpreting his discussions of illicit magic and non-Christian beliefs and practices.

These two investigations not only provide insight into the composition of the *Oedipus*, allowing a deeper and more accurate understanding of its significance, but they also throw into relief Kircher's priorities and intentions in writing the work. His creation of an imposing edifice of erudition—composed of bogus as well as genuine learning and supposedly vouchsafed by copious citations to and quotations from primary sources—betrays the influence of the innovative, erudite scholarship that served as his model. His selective response to the demands of the censors likewise reveals the essentially antiquarian purpose of his hieroglyphic studies. This chapter is not intended as a study of Kircher's treatment of the Kabbalah, though it does provide the reader with an idea of how he approached the topic.² Instead, it uses *Cabala Hebraeorum* as the necessarily circumscribed object of a close reading whose conclusions are relevant to understanding the entire *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* and *Obeliscus Pamphilius*.

Part I: An Anatomy of Erudition

Since these sayings are very obscure and scarcely anyone has correctly penetrated them, I judged it my duty to play the faithful Oedipus and attack that intricate Sphinx in order by any means to conquer her.³

Like the rest of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, the *Cabala Hebraeorum* is laden with signs of vast erudition. In keeping with his promise to establish all his claims by adducing evidence from textual authorities, Kircher loaded the treatise with quotations from primary sources, including numerous Hebrew and Aramaic works, which he typically printed in

² I have considered Kircher's treatment of the Kabbalah on its own terms elsewhere: Daniel Stolzenberg, "Four Trees, Some Amulets, and the Seventy-Two Names of God: Kircher Reveals the Kabbalah," in *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, ed. Paula Findlen (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

³ Kircher in the manuscript of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*: BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 122^{rv}. See below, n. 46.

their original language followed by Latin translations. Practically every page is adorned with such quotations or with references to the opinions of various rabbis. Over forty Jewish authors, as well as sixteen texts without specific authors, are cited in the course of the treatise. The bibliography for the volume of the *Oedipus* to which the treatise belongs lists over one hundred Jewish sources.⁴ Kircher also refers to Latin writers on the Kabbalah—typically as places for the reader to find further information on specific points—but there are many fewer such references and the weight of authority falls heavily on Jewish testimony. Kircher’s own declarations about his work reinforce the impression that the treatise was the product of a profound study of primary sources. The Kabbalah, he writes in the preface of the treatise, is like

a secret [that] lies hidden in the darkness of inaccessible antiquity, so difficult is it . . . to arrive at its true sense and determine its meaning. Nevertheless, what it has been granted to the scrutiny of a keen mind to investigate, and what I have been able to dig up from the memorials of ancient authors by combining one piece with another, I think, rather I affirm without hesitation, to be nothing other than that Mosaic doctrine, which, passed on orally by the Judges to those who came after them, the Hebrew theologians call the Kabbalah . . .⁵

⁴ *OA* II.1, Kkk1^r–Kkk2^v.

⁵ *OA* II.1, 210: “Qualis tamen illa fuerit, uti in tam inaccessae antiquitatis tenebris occultum iacet, ita difficile quoque est, ad veram eius rationem, notionemque determinandam, pertingere. Quantum tamen sagaci mentis scrutino investigare licuit, & quantum ex Authorum veterum monumentis, singula cum singulis combinando, eruere potui, puto, imò sine haesitatione affirmo, aliam eam non fuisse, nisi illam doctrinam Mosaicam, quam ore tenus succedentibus sibi Iudicibus traditam, Hebraeorum Theologi Cabalam, id est, acceptionem vocant atque insignibus foecundam sacramentis, Aegyptiorum (teste Clemente Alex.) mysteriis haud absimilibus astruunt.” See also *OP*, b4^v–c1^r, where Kircher discusses his Jewish sources. In the original manuscript of the treatise, Kircher had gone further, referring to his “incredible labors” in studying the Kabbalah and claiming to reveal things that had never been written about before. BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235 (manuscript copy of *OA*), fol. 148^v. He probably deleted the passage in response to the rebuke of the Jesuit censors regarding his boasting. On the censors’ criticism of Kircher’s boasting see Daniel Stolzenberg, “Utility, Edification, and Superstition: Jesuit Censorship and Athanasius Kircher’s *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*,” in *The Jesuits, II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. John O’Malley, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

Kircher's rhetoric, which, following the model for the *Oedipus* as a whole, presents his study of the Kabbalah as a path-breaking foray into uncharted scholarly territory, is, on the face of it, improbable. Although one would scarcely know it from Kircher's presentation, a vast literature on the Kabbalah had become available in Latin (and to a lesser extent also in European vernacular languages) during the century and a half prior to the publication of the *Oedipus*.⁶ Christian knowledge of Jewish mysticism may have been imperfect, but in 1650 the Kabbalah was hardly the inaccessible, as yet undivulged sanctum that Kircher claimed to open for his readers.

Kircher's citation strategies likewise deliberately present the reader with an idealized image of his encounter with his sources that conceals a more checkered reality. If one pries below the erudite surface of the text, by tracking down its cited and—most revealingly—uncited sources, a different, more accurate picture of Kircher's scholarship emerges. Many of his citations to primary sources turn out to have been lifted wholesale—often with ready-made Latin translations—from other early modern Christian writers on the Kabbalah, whom he never mentions. Kircher's use of clearly marked quotations may lead the reader to assume that, where such markers are absent and he speaks with his own voice, he also speaks in his own words. But in fact, Kircher not only took many of his quotations of Jewish primary sources second-hand from uncited modern

⁶ An idea of the quantity and variety of this literature may be had from the exhibition catalog of the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome: Angela A. Cavarra, ed., *Hebraica: il mondo ebraico nell'interpretazione cristiana nei secoli XV–XVIII* (Rome: Aisthesis, 2000), which largely treats Christian responses to the Kabbalah. Also see the relevant sections of Gershom Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalistica: die jüdische Mystik (Gnosis, Kabbala, Sabbatianismus, Frankismus, Chassidismus) behandelnde Bücher und Aufsätze von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart. Mit einem Anhang: Bibliographie des Zohar und seiner Kommentare* (Berlin: Schocken, 1933). For studies of the Christian Kabbalah, see François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens*, Nouvelle édition mise à jour et augmentée (Milan: Archè, 1985); François Secret, *Hermétisme et Kabbale* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1992); Joseph Dan, ed., *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and their Christian Interpreters* (Cambridge: Harvard College Library, 1997); Antoine Faivre and Frédérick Tristan, eds., *Kabbalistes Chrétiens, Cahiers de l'Hermétisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979); Joseph Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

Latin intermediaries, he also liberally borrowed the words of these Latin authors for the body of his text, sometimes copying pages on end, more or less verbatim.

At the same time, however, Kircher's study of the Kabbalah drew first-hand on some little-known Hebrew sources, which he studied and translated himself (although perhaps with assistance).⁷ Not all of Kircher's erudition was a sham, nor all of his rhetoric empty. But the printed text supplies no means to distinguish between those places where Kircher is passing off the erudition of others as his own and those places where he is genuinely erudite and innovative. As a result, the naive reader is likely to assign Kircher more credit than he is due, while the skeptic may unfairly assume that he was no real scholar at all, but merely a braggart and a plagiarizer. This, in large measure, is the root of the strongly disparate assessments of Kircher over the centuries.

In order to provide a more balanced and realistic assessment of Kircher's scholarship, this section looks closely at his use of three of the most important sources for *Cabala Hebraeorum*: two Latin works, Joannes Stephan Rittangel's bilingual edition of the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Formation) and Paulus Ricius's *De coelesti agricultura* (On Celestial Agriculture), which both show Kircher in full plagiarist mode, although the latter also reveals the creative ways in which Kircher reworked stolen material; and one Hebrew work, Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim* (Garden of Pomegranates), whose study by Kircher constituted a significant, original contribution to Christian knowledge of Jewish mysticism based on the consultation of an unmediated primary source.⁸

⁷ Kircher acknowledged having used two Roman rabbis as research assistants: *OA* I, b2^{rv}; see chapter three, n. 50.

⁸ I consider Corodvero's work a primary source in this context since it is a Hebrew work by a practicing Jewish kabbalist. However, as a synthetic, encyclopedic work composed in the sixteenth century, which derives its authority from citing older kabbalistic texts, it could, especially from an early modern Jewish perspective, be considered a secondary work.

1. *The Book of Formation and the Thirty-Two Paths of Wisdom*

Kircher's discussion of the ten sefirot—the divine “numerations” that constitute the kabbalistic godhead—offers a characteristic sample of the treatise's erudite texture. In chapter eight of *Cabala Hebraeorum*, after brief descriptions of the first three sefirot, Kircher explains the so-called “mystery of the chariot.” In the course of a single page, he adduces quotations from Rabbi Isachor Beer's *Imre Binah*, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Moses Botrel's commentary on *Yetzirah* (quoted twice), and a text attributed to Maimonides. Kircher wishes to demonstrate that, although the modern rabbis deny that any of the sefirot exist *within* God, the ancient Jewish sages placed the three supreme sefirot in God and thus had a notion of the Trinity. It is worth quoting Kircher's text at length to provide a taste of the treatise's style. “Although,” he writes, “the more recent Rabbis, blinder than moles, only understand by these numerations certain properties, the writings of the ancients witness that they appointed all three [numerations] distinct modes of really existing in God.” Kircher supported this claim with the following evidence:

R. Isachor Beer son of Moses Pesach, in the book *Imre binah*: “He who is one, he says, in intelligence, discerning, and intellect, [and] glorified with holiness, made the lights emanate, and he arranged them in three orders of emanations, and the intellectual numerations eternally bear witness to the trinity of the King. Their supreme mystery is the emanation of the archetypal world, the creation of the intellectual or angelic world, the formation of the sidereal world, and the crafting of the lower or elementary world.” With this, R. Akiba agrees, *Yetzirah*, ch. 1, sect. 9: **אחד רוח אלהים חיים קול ורוח ודבור והוא רוח הקדש** “One is the spirit of the living Gods [Elohim], Voice, Spirit, and Word, and he is the Spirit of Holiness.” Moses Botrel, p. 50. “Two Spirits from the Spirit, **רוח היוצא מרוח אל הים חיים**, that is, the spirit proceeding from the Spirit of the Living Gods, and in it is created that which is above and that which is below, the four zones of the world, etc.”

Rabbenu Saodias Ha Gaon: “One is the spirit of the living Gods, Voice, Spirit, and Word, which are one. Rambam [i.e. Maimonides]: The primordial supreme crown is the Spirit of the living Gods, and his wisdom is the Spirit from the Spirit, and [his] intelligences are the waters from the Spirit. And although the substances (*res*) of these mysteries are distinguished into Wisdom, Intelligence and Knowledge, nevertheless, there is no distinction between them as far as essence, since his end is bound to his beginning, and his beginning to his end, and his middle is contained by them, for example, the flames and glowing coal, as it [is said], his coals are the coals of the flame of the fire of God, as if to say that all

of these are the image of the flame of the fire containing in itself various colors or kinds, and all of these [are] in one root, since the Lord is supremely one.” Moses Botrel, *loc. cit.*

החכמה היא הספרה השנית כי למעלה ממנה יש כ'ע שהיא המחשבה
והיא נקראת ספירה ראשונה ועל כרחנו מן המחשבה תצא החכמה:

That is, “Wisdom is the second numeration, since the highest Crown is above, which is mind, and is called the first numeration; thus, whether or not we are willing, Wisdom precedes from mind.”⁹

“Who,” Kircher concludes, “does not see from the cited testimonies that the rabbis, willing or unwilling, proclaimed the mystery of the most sacred Trinity through the three supreme numerations?”¹⁰

The reader may be forgiven for thinking that Kircher had in fact consulted Isachor Beer’s *Imre Binah*, Botrel’s commentary, and the unspecified work by Maimonides, as well as the *Sefer Yetzirah*, from which he seems to have extracted the relevant quotations.

⁹ OA II.1, 293: “Et tametsi iuniores Rabbini talpis coeciores per hasce numerationes non nisi proprietates quasdam intelligant, veteres tamen omnes tres in Deo existendi modos realiter distinctos posuisse testantur eorum scripta. R. Isachor Beer filius Mosis Pesach lib. Imre binah: *Qui unus est, inquit, in intelligente, intellectu, & intellecto, glorificatus sanctitate, lucas emanare fecit, easque in tres emanatio[n]um ordines disposuit, numerationesque intellectuales in aeternum trinitatem Regis testantur. Summa mysterii eorum est emanatio Mundi Archetypi, creatio Mundi intellectualis vel Angelici, f[fo]rmatio Mundi siderei, & fabrica Mundi minoris seu elementaris.* Consentit huic R. Akiba, Ietsirah c. I, sect. 9

אחד רוח אל הים חיים קול ורוח ודבור והוא רוח הקדש:

Rabbenu Saodias Ha Gaon: *Unus et spiritus Deorum viventium, Vox, Spiritus, & Verbum, quae unum sunt.* Rambam; *Corona summa primordialis est Spiritus Deorum viventium, & Sapientia eius est Spiritus de Spiritu, & intelligentiae aquae ex Spiritu. Et tametsi res horum mysteriorum distinguantur in Sapientia, Ingelligentia, & Scientia, nulla tamen inter eas distinctio quoad essentiam est, quia finis eius annexus est principio eius, & principium fini eius, & medium comprehenditur ab eis, v. g. flamma & carbo resplendens, iuxta illud, Carbones eius carbones ignis flammae Dei, quasi diceret, quod haec omnia instar flammae ignis comprehendentis in se mutivarios colores ceu species, illosque omnes in una radice, quia Dominus summè unus.* Moses Botrellus loco citato:

החכמה היא הספרה השנית כי למעלה ממנה יש כ'ע שהיא המחשבה
והיא נקראת ספירה ראשונה ועל כרחנו מן המחשבה תצא החכמה:

Id est, *Sapientia est numeratio secunda, quia superior illa est Corona summa, quae est mens, & illa vocatur numeratio prima; an itaque non vel invitis nobis de mente procedit Sapientia.*”

¹⁰ OA II.1, 293: “Quis ex citatis testimoniis non videt, Rabbinos etiam nolentes volentes Sacratissimae Trinitatis mysterium per tres hasce supremas numerationes indigitasse?”

In fact, all of the quotations were taken from a single Latin-Hebrew work published just a decade earlier, whose author Kircher never mentions here or anywhere else in the *Oedipus*. In 1642, Johannes Stephan Rittangel (d. 1652), a Lutheran convert from Judaism and professor of Oriental languages in Königsberg, published in Amsterdam a bilingual edition of selections from the *Sefer Yetzirah*, one of the foundational texts of the Kabbalah, preceded by a Hebrew commentary.¹¹ To help explicate both texts—and to demonstrate that they revealed that the ancient kabbalists knew the doctrine of the Trinity—Rittangel interspersed them with relevant passages from other Jewish sources, as well as his own glosses. The quotations in the above passage from Kircher all appear in Rittangel’s book in precisely the same order on pages 36–39, except for the last and part of the second-to-last, which appear on page 55. The extent of Kircher’s dependence on Rittangel can be seen by comparing the corresponding passages from Rittangel with the one from Kircher.

Kircher does not provide the original Hebrew text of the initial passage from Rabbi Isachor Beer because it is not found in Rittangel, who, to support his claim that the mystery of the chariot signifies that the three highest numerations are “three modes of existing in the Divinity,” quotes R. Isachar Beer only in Latin translation:

<p>Rittangel:</p> <p><i>. . . uti apparet tum ex Rabi Isachar Beer filii Mosis Pesachii, libro IMRE BINAH inscripto, in hanc mentem praefixo carmine quod sequitur.</i></p> <p>1. Qui UNUS est in INTELLIGENTE, INTELLECTU, & INTELLECTO, glorificatus Sanctitate, fecit emanare luces, easque in</p>	<p>Kircher:</p> <p>R. Isachor Beer filius Mosis Pesach lib. Imre binah:</p> <p><i>Qui unus est, inquit, in intelligente, intellectu, & intellecto, glorificatus sanctitate, luces emanare fecit, easque in</i></p>
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¹¹ Joannes Stephan Rittangel, [*Sefer Yetzirah*] *id est Liber Iezirah qui Abrahamo Patriarchae adscribitur, unà cum commentario Rabi Abraham F. D. super 32 semitis sapientiae, à quibus liber Iezirah incipit* (Amsterdam: Apud Joannem & Jodocum Janssonios, 1642). On Rittangel see Secret, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens*, 278; Oliver Shaw Rankin, *Jewish Religious Polemic of Early and Later Centuries, a Study of Documents Here Rendered in English* (1953; n. p.: Ktav, 1970), 89–154, esp. 90.

<p>tres emanationum ordines ordinavit. Testatur id UNAQUAEQUE earum, DECEMQUE NUMERATIONIBUS sepitur.</p> <p>2. TRIA, <i>sunt</i>, PRIMARIA vel PRIMORDIALIA coapta & coaeterna; idque testatur splendor eorum: NUMERATIONESQUE INTELLECTUALES in aeternum TRINITATEM Regis testantur.</p> <p>3. Nomen eius absconditum, est anima NUMERATIONUM absconditarum, & vivum stabilimentum &c.</p> <p>4. SUMMA mysterii earum est EMANATIO mundi archetypi, CREATIO mundi intellectualis vel Angelici, FORMATIO mundi siderei, & FABRICA mundi minoris seu elementaris.</p>	<p><i>tres emanatio[n]um ordines disposuit,</i></p> <p><i>numerationesque intellectuales in aeternum trinitatem Regis testantur.</i></p> <p><i>Summa mysterii eorum est emanatio Mundi Archetypi, creatio Mundi intellectualis vel Angelici, f[or]matio Mundi siderei, & fabrica Mundi minoris seu elementaris.</i></p>
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On the other hand, Kircher gives the passages from *Sefer Yetzirah* and Botrel in the original Hebrew, as well as Latin translation, because in these cases Rittangel provided him with both. Following the quotation from Isachar Beer, Rittangel quotes the *Sefer Yetzirah*, which he ascribes to the patriarch Abraham:

<p>Rittangel:</p> <p><i>... Sic verò dicit cap. I. sectione 9. fol. 49, columna 1.</i> [Hebrew text given in facing column.] Unus est Spiritus Deorum viventium, benedictus ipse & benedictum sit nomen eius qui vivit in secula. VOX & SPIRITUS & VERBUM, & hic est SPIRITUS SANCTUS.¹²</p>	<p>Kircher:</p> <p>Consentit huic R. Akiba, Ietsirah c. I, sect. 9 אחד רוח אלהים חיים קול ורוח ודבור והוא רוח הקדש : <i>Unus est spiritus Deorum viventium,</i> <i>Vox, & Spiritus, & Verbum, & hic est Spiritus Sanctitatis.</i></p>
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Rittangel follows this with a passage from the “great and eminent kabbalist” Rabbi Aharon, which Kircher foregoes, and then the passage from Botrel’s commentary on *Yetzirah*, whose page number Rittangel again provides:

¹² Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 36.

<p>Rittangel:</p> <p>Moseh Botril fol.50.col.1.c.1.sect. 10.libri Iezira: DUO SPIRITUS EX SPIRITU: [Hebrew given in facing column] hoc est, SPIRITUS de SPIRITU vult dicere SPIRITUS procedens de SPIRITU DEORUM VIVENTIUM qui est SPIRITUS SECUNDUS & in eo creatum est superius & inferius & quatuor <i>mundi</i> plagae, sicuti explicetur loco suo.¹³</p>	<p>Kircher:</p> <p>Moses Botrellus, fol. 50. <i>Duo Spiritus ex Spiritus,</i> רוח היוצא מרוח אל הים חיים, id est, <i>spiritus procedens de Spiritu Deorum</i> <i>viventium, &</i> <i>in eo creatum est superius & inferius,</i> <i>quatuor Mundi plagae, &c.</i></p>
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Rittangel also provided his quotation from Saadiah Ha Gaon with facing Hebrew text, but Kircher this time borrows only the Latin translation:

<p>Rittangel:</p> <p>Rabenu Saadiah Ha Gaon Princeps Cabalae seu Philosophiae Divinae Speculativae: Unus est, <i>inquit</i>, Spiritus Deorum Viventium, qui est, VOX & SPIRITUS & VERBUM, absque similitudine & forma. Principii EORUM non est apprehensio seu investigatio, & extremitatis EORUM non est finis. Hac ex parte emanat honor EIUS super Cherubim Unitum, super folio gloriae.¹⁴</p>	<p>Kircher:</p> <p>Rabbenu Saodias Ha Gaon: <i>Unus est spiritus Deorum</i> <i>viventium, Vox, Spiritus, &</i> <i>Verbum, quae unum sunt.</i></p>
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Kircher's attribution of the next quotation to the Rambam, i.e. Maimonides, is an error, as Rittangel clearly identifies the passage as belonging to Nachmanides¹⁵:

¹³ Ibid., 37.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kircher's confounding of Maimonides and Nachmanides requires comment, as there is no obvious reason why he would have deliberately misattributed the quotation. The two authors are known by similar Hebrew acronyms, Rambam and Ramban, respectively, which are easily confused, especially in Latin paleography, in which the final letters m and n are both frequently omitted and indicated by a line over the preceding letter. (Johannes Reuchlin consequently warned the readers of his *De arte cabalistica* to mind the distinction. Reuchlin, *On the Art*, 92–3; 13 in the original pagination.) But Rittangel

Rittangel: R. Moseh filius R. Nachammi dicit: CORONA SUMMA quae est Primordialis est SPIRITUS DEORUM VIVENTIVM & SAPIENTIA ipsa est SPIRITUS de SPIRITU & INTELLIGENTIA AQUAE ex SPIRITU. ¹⁶	Kircher: Rambam: <i>Corona summa primordialis est Spiritus Deorum viventium, & Sapientia eius est Spiritus de Spiritu, & intelligenetiae aquae ex Spiritu.</i>
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Kircher's quotation of this passage is longer than the version given in the corresponding place in Rittangel's text. This does not indicate any independence from Rittangel; he has simply combined the initial quote from Nachmanides with another that appears later in Rittangel's commentary:

Rittangel: R. Moseh Nachmanides fol. 46. Col. 2 cap. 1. sect. 7 libri Iezirah: Quamvis, <i>inquit</i> , res horum mysteriorum, <i>secundum emanationem vel processum</i> , distinguuntur in SAPIENTIA, INTELLIGENTIA & SCIENTIA, nulla tamen distinctio est inter eas, <i>quò ad essentiam</i> : Quia finis eius annexus est principio eius & principium fini eius, & medium comprehenditur ab eis. Exemplum huius rei flamma & carbo resplendens sicuti dicitur: <i>Carbones eius, Carbones ignis flammae Dei</i> , q.d. quod haec omnia instar flammae ignis comprehendentis <i>in se multivarios colores seu species</i> , illasque omnes in radice una, quia Dominus summè unus &c. ¹⁷	Kircher: <i>Et tametsi res horum mysteriorum distinguuntur in Sapientia, Ingelligentia, & Scientia, nulla tamen inter eas distinctio quoad essentiam est, quia finis eius annexus est principio eius, & principium fini eius, & medium comprehenditur ab eis, v. g. flamma & carbo resplendens, iuxta illud, Carbones eius carbones ignis flammae Dei, quasi diceret, quod haec omnia instar flammae ignis comprehendentis in se multivarios colores ceu species, illosque omnes in una radice, quia Dominus summè unus.</i>
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does not use the acronym, instead attributing the quotation unambiguously to Rabbi Moses ben Nachman. Kircher must have collected notes from many sources for his treatise. In transcribing the quotation from Nachmanides out of Rittangel's book, Kircher or an assistant may have used the acronym in place of the full name, which was subsequently misread as Rambam. The confusion is not the result of a printer's error: the manuscript reads "Rambam." BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 192^v.

¹⁶ Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53–4.

Having turned the pages forward in Rittangel’s book to borrow the second part of the quotation from Nachmanides, Kircher concludes his series of evidence, not with a quote from the original section of Rittangel, but rather with another passage from Botrel (explaining the relationship between the first and second numerations in terms redolent of the process of divine procession in the Trinity) that immediately follows the second Nachmanides quotation in Rittangel:

<p>Rittangel:</p> <p>[Hebrew text given in facing column.]</p> <p>SAPIENTIA est NUMERATIO SECUNDA; quia superior illâ est CORONA SUMMA quae est MENS, & illa vocatur NUMERATIO prima & vel invitis nobis de MENTE procedit SAPIENTIA.¹⁸</p>	<p>Kircher:</p> <p>Moses Botrellus loco citato:</p> <p>החכמה היא הספירה השנית כי למעלה ממנה יש כ"ע שהיא המחשבה והיא נקראת ספירה ראשונה ועל כרחנו מן המחשבה תצא החכמה</p> <p><i>Id est, Sapientia est numeratio secunda, quia superior illa est Corona summa, quae est mens, & illa vocatur numeratio prima; an itaque non vel invitis nobis de mente procedit Sapientia.</i></p>
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In addition to the confounding of Maimonides and Nachmanides, there are a few other minor discrepancies between Kircher’s and Rittangel’s texts. In particular, as is clear from the above comparison, Kircher partially elides or abbreviates the quotations as they appear in Rittangel.¹⁹ But the comparison of the two texts leaves no doubt that Kircher has taken his quotations from Rittangel’s book, where the quotations are sometimes longer but never shorter, the Latin translations are almost identical, and the quotations appear in the same sequence, a propos of the same topic. This example represents just a few of the Hebrew quotations and Latin translations that Kircher mined

¹⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁹ Other discrepancies include: Kircher spells the Hebrew number one in the masculine form (אחת), while Rittangel uses the feminine (אחת); Kircher’s text introduces an error in the Hebrew text of the quotation of *Sefer Yetzirah* misspelling אהוה as אהו (probably a typographical error) and omits two Hebrew letters in the second quotation from Botrel. Kircher’s text omits the *yod* (י) in אהוה and prints אהו where Rittangel has אהוה; finally, Kircher adds the phrase “quae unum sunt” to the passage from Ha Gaon.

from Rittangel, which also account for his citations of other Jewish sources such as the *Liber de fide et expiatione* and Rabbi Meir's *Liphne Liphnim*.²⁰ In addition to borrowing Hebrew primary texts and their translations, Kircher occasionally made use of Rittangel's own glosses in the body of the *Cabala Hebraeorum*. For example, Kircher's discussion of the first sentence of *Sefer Yetzirah* in chapter nine of the treatise follows Rittangel's explanation of the same sentence almost word for word.²¹

2. *On Celestial Agriculture*

Indeed, the body of Kircher's text, as much as the quotations from primary sources, is frequently a pastiche of material appropriated from various uncited modern authors. Kircher's use of Paulus Ricius's *De coelesti agricultura*, an influential work of Christian Kabbalah first published in 1541, may serve as an example.²² Ricius, like Rittangel, was a Jewish convert who believed that the Kabbalah confirmed the truths of Christianity. The fourth book of *On Celestial Agriculture* contains fifty "introductory kabbalistic theorems," followed by a number of "appendices" that explain some of the theorems in greater detail.²³ The theorems define the Kabbalah as a kind of allegorical interpretation

²⁰ Kircher attributes the *Liber de fide et expiatione* (whose quotations he takes from Rittangel) to Botrel, though Rittangel does not attribute the book to Botrel or any other author. In Rittangel's text, however, a quotation from Botrel immediately follows the quotation from *De fide et expiatione*, and the citations may have become confused in Kircher's notes. (*OA* II.1, 290: Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 50.) The passage from R. Meir, *Liphne Liphnim* is found at *OA* II.1, 309: Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 148. In addition Kircher took the following quotations and translations of *Sefer Yetzirah* from Rittangel: *OA* II.1, 247: Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 200; *OA* II.1, 308: Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 146; *OA* II.1, 330: Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 153; *OA* II.1, 305 (also given at 332–3): Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 197–8; *OA* II.1, 332: Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 200; *OA* II.1, 334: Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 204.

²¹ *OA* II.1, 308–9 ("quòd tametsi . . . vocatur admirabilis"): cf. Rittangel, *Iezirah*, 146–7.

²² Kircher's use of Ricius has also been noted by Secret, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens*, 92ff.

²³ Paulus Ricius, *De coelesti agricultura* (Excusus Augustae Vindelicorum: per Henricum Stayner, 1541), 74^v–85^r; Johannes Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae, hoc est, Reconditae theologiae et philosophiae, scriptorum, tomus I* (Basiliae: Per Sebastianum Henricipetri, n.d. [1587]), 120–37. (Kircher used the edition of *De coelesti agricultura* printed in Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae*, which contains at least one passage absent from the 1541 edition. I provide citations to both editions.)

of the Mosaic Law and describe the relationship between the Law revealed to Moses and the “eternal divine Law” that serves as its archetype. Ricius goes on to describe the kabbalistic conception of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm, each of which partake in a threefold nature: archetypal (or angelic), celestial, and terrestrial. By means of the correspondences between man and the world, as revealed by the allegorical interpretation of the Mosaic Law (i.e. the Kabbalah), man may “imitate” the divine Law and thereby receive the blessings of divine rewards.

Kircher’s “synopsis” of the Kabbalah in the first chapter of *Cabala Hebraeorum* (pages 212–214) is an extended, uncited quotation of the first thirty-eight of Ricius’s theorems. In appropriating Ricius’s text, however, Kircher has made a number of significant alterations, which reflect his different views about the Kabbalah. For example, Kircher omits a clause from Ricius’s tenth theorem, in which Ricius describes Moses as “the greatest of all the prophets” whose “authority is [therefore] to be placed far ahead of the tradition of other allegorizers.”²⁴ Kircher, unlike Ricius, did not follow the common derivation of the Kabbalah that made Moses its originator, instead tracing the tradition back to Adam and the earliest biblical patriarchs. Thus, privileging Moses in this context did not serve his purpose, and he confines himself to repeating Ricius’s more restricted opinion that “as the first narrator of the divine law, so also [Moses was] doubtless the explainer of its arcane meaning.”²⁵

Kircher also expunges several references in Ricius’s theorems to the Kabbalah’s excellence as a practical technique for “adapting the soul to the powers of heaven (*regna coelorum*).” In his ninth theorem, Ricius had written,

²⁴ Ricius, *De coelesti*, 74^v–75^r; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 120 (Th. 10): “. . . qui cum fuerit omnium prophetarum maximus, constat illius auctoritatem, aliorum allegorizantium traditioni longe esse anteponendam.”

²⁵ *OA* II.1, 212; cf. Ricius, *De coelesti*, 74^v–75^r; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 120 (Th. 10): “. . . Moyse uti primo divinae legis pronunciatore, ita & eiusdem haud dubiè arcanae intelligentiae explanatore.”

This teaching of the Kabbalists, although it is disordered by the ignorance and dullness of mind of the more recent Jews and lies neglected as if [it were covered] with a certain ancient rust, nevertheless in itself surpasses and excels by far the tradition of many allegorizers with respect to authority, erudition, and even the facility of adapting the soul of mortals to the powers of heaven.²⁶

Ricius's twelfth theorem elaborates the meaning of "the facility of adapting the soul to the powers of heaven," explaining that the Kabbalah "opens the way and shows the path by which he who desires a celestial life . . . may conform himself to the nature of superior things and the inseparable image of the Trinity." These theorems allude to the practical aspect of the Kabbalah, and their language—reminiscent of Ficino's famous treatise on "arranging life according to the heavens" (*de vita coelitus comparanda*)—is particularly suggestive of what Kircher elsewhere calls "kabbalistic astrology." Even more than its theoretical dimension, the so-called "practical Kabbalah" had a murky status from the standpoint of Catholic orthodoxy, and Kircher's treatment of these topics (in the final chapter of *Cabala Hebraeorum*) is considerably less positive than that of Ricius.

Although the treatise as a whole gives due attention to both the "genuine" and "superstitious" sides of the Kabbalah, here in the introductory synopsis Kircher wished to emphasize the pious part and therefore suppressed references to these questionable practices. Where Ricius speaks of the Kabbalah's excellence "with respect to authority, erudition, and even the facility of adapting the soul of mortals to the powers of heaven," Kircher changes the words to read, "authority, erudition, and sanctity."²⁷ Instead of Ricius's claim that the Kabbalah "opens the way and shows the path by which he who desires a celestial life . . . may conform himself to the nature of superior things and the

²⁶ Ricius, *De coelesti*, 74^v; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 120 (Th. 9): "Hoc Cabaleorum dogma, tametsi ex iuniorum Iudaeorum inscitia, & mentis hebetudine incompositum, & quasi vetusta quadam rubigine iaceat, id tamen in se multorum allegorizantium traditionem, auctoritate [sic], eruditione, tum etiam facilitate aptandi mortalium animum ad coelorum regna, superat & longè antecellit."

²⁷ *OA*, II.1.4, 213: "certè omnium allegorizantium traditionem auctoritate, eruditione, & sanctitate longè superare censerì debet."

inseparable image of the Trinity,” Kircher writes that it “shows the paths to the entryway of eternal happiness.”²⁸

The tenth and final chapter of *Cabala Hebraeorum*, “on the natural Kabbalah or Kabbalah Bereschith,” is devoted to the practical Kabbalah. Now prepared to discuss the practices whose mention he evaded in chapter one, Kircher again borrows his words from *De coelesti agricultura*. At the outset of the chapter, Kircher distinguishes several interpretations of the practical Kabbalah:

Some think that the whole nature of things is hidden under the covering of the sacred letters and the bark of the elements of Hebrew; and they consider this the natural Kabbalah. Some think that it consists in the disposition of natural things and every order; they think that by the analogy and proportion of each thing to another they can perform marvels through the application of actives to passives. There are also those who consider the recondite power of the Kabbalah to be in the conjuration of spirits and the obtaining of favors, by whose use and aid for the greatest and intolerable superstitions, they insolently boast that they can do anything. Others, finally, believe that the whole Kabbalah contributes to the good of eternal life and obtaining the clinging to God; meaning nothing other than that the thought (*conceptus*) of the mind, the simulacra of the imagination, and the gestures of the body—like the openings of the terrestrial channels—may adapt themselves to the divine paradigms and the angelic and celestial virtues—in turn like the openings of the sublime channels—by which means the experienced upholder of faith and piety, with less anxiety and worry, may be able to cling to God himself, the bestower of all good and the father of lights, and may obtain the rewards of this and the future life with life’s greatest fortune and be made subject to them.²⁹

²⁸ Ricius’s 11th and 12th theorems read: “XI. Eruditone quoque praecellit, ex eo quod universa & singula divinarum humanarumque rerum primordia, ac elementa consyderat, eaque sensim nectit, & suo ordine pandit, quod hactenus a nullo allegorizantium interpretum ita exacte traditum cognovimus. [¶] XII. Facilitate etiam aptandi ad coelorum regna, quia viam aperit, & semitam monstrat, qua ille qui coestem vitam desyderat, absque anxia, vaga, & titubante rationis indagine sese conformem reddat superum naturae, & individuae Trinitatis imagini.” Ricius, *De coelesti*, 75^f; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 120. Kircher’s corresponding text reads instead: “Nam cùm dicta haec Cabala, universa & singula divinarum humanarumque rerum primordia ac elementa consideret, eaque sensim nectat, suo illa ordine pandat, viam apertiendo, semitas ad aeternae felicitatis atria demonstrat; certè omnium allegorizantium traditionem auctoritate, eruditione, & sanctitate longe superare censi debet.” *OA* II.1, 212–3.

²⁹ *OA* II.1, 338: “Paucos omninò, imò vix ullos reperio, qui rectè Cabalam hanc tradiderint. Nonnulli totam rerum naturam sub sacrarum tegumento literarum, elementorumque Hebraicorum cortice latere putant; & hanc Cabalam naturalem volunt.

The last of these definitions (beginning with “Others, finally . . .”) is Ricius’s fiftieth and final kabbalistic theorem, which describes the practical teaching of the kabbalists (*actuosum Cabalaeorum dogma*).³⁰ Kircher proceeds to explain these teachings in detail, which he does using Ricius’s words from the gloss to his fiftieth theorem.³¹

In the borrowed passage, which occupies four folio pages, Kircher has once again modified the original text in small but significant ways. The passage concerns a method of kabbalistic prayer, involving a combination of internal and external practices by means of which the kabbalist, having conformed himself to the forms of the sefirot, can achieve a kind of union with God (*adhaesione in Deum*) and receive divine gifts both in this life and the next. While Ricius is unabashedly enthusiastic about these practices, which he considers the culmination of the Kabbalah, Kircher’s feelings about them are mixed. To

Quidam in entium naturalium, singulorumque ordinum dispositione hanc consistere arbitrantur; ex qua analogia & proportione singulorum ad alia per applicationem activorum cum passivis mira se praestare posse putant. Non desunt etiam qui in spirituum adiuratione, & gratiarum impetratione vim Cabalae reconditam existiment, quorum usu & ope ad summas usque, & intolerabiles superstitiones omnia se posse insolentiùs iactitant. Alii denique totam Cabalam ad vitae aeternae bona, adhaesionemque cum Deo consequendam conferre credunt; nihil aliud intendentes, nisi ut mentis conceptus & phantasiae simulachra, corporis quoque gestus, veluti terrestrium canalium orificia divinis paradigmatis, & Angelicis, coelestibusque virtutibus, tanquam sublimium canalium invicem orificiis coaptent, unde solers fidei & pietatis cultor minori sollicitudine & cura ipsi omnium bonorum largitori & Patri luminum Deo adhaerere queat, & huius futuraeque vitae commoda cum summa vitae felicitate consequi, eisque potiri valeat.”

³⁰ Kircher’s dependence on Ricius may be seen by comparing the quotation in the previous note with Ricius’s text: “Actuosum Cabalaeorum dogma (ut rem paucis enunciem) nil aliud intendit, nisi ut mentis conceptus, & fantasiae simulacrha, corporis quoque gestus (veluti terrestrium canalium orificia) divinis paradigmatis, & angelicis coelestibusque virtutibus, tanquam sublimium canalium invicem orificiis coaptet: unde solers fidei & pietatis cultor, minori sollicitudine & cura, ipsi omnium bonorum largitori & Patri luminum Deo, adhaerere queat, & huius & futuri saeculi commoda cum summa vitae foelicitate consequi & potiri valeat.” Ricius, *De coelesti*, 76^v; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 123 (Th. 50).

³¹ *OA* II.1, 338–342 (“Homo cum ad habitum universi . . . Accepistis legem in dispositione Angelorum”): Ricius, *De coelesti*, 83^v–85^f; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 135–7. The full quote is only in Pistorius; the part “Esse verò Cabalisticè . . . Rabi Simeonis,” does not appear in the 1541 edition.

an extent, he believes that they represent licit and effective methods of prayer, but he also believes that later Jews have combined them with superstitious rituals.

The ambiguity of Kircher's opinion of the practices is evident in the way he alters Ricius's text. Ricius, writing in favor of the practices, supports them with numerous references to the New Testament. Kircher suppresses all of these references except one, to which, however, he attaches an attack on the Jews absent in Ricius: "for as long as they [i.e. the Jews] refuse to hear its true sense [i.e. that of the law of the Gospels], enveloped in darkness they deservedly fall into the deepest pit of superstitions."³² Furthermore, whereas Ricius describes the efficacy of these practices in direct, affirmative statements, Kircher distances himself from the opinions he describes, declaring them to be "not according to my opinion but the opinion of the Hebrew theologians," and frequently labeling them as superstitious.³³

But there are also indications that Kircher esteemed at least some aspects of these practices. Ricius, after describing the intermediary role played by angels in achieving *adhaesione in Deum*, makes the terse but pregnant comment: "whence the cult and invocation of saints (if you will reflect) traces its true origin, about which [I will speak] at greater length elsewhere . . ." ³⁴ Inspired by this suggestive remark, Kircher introduces at this same point a discussion of the cult of saints and the use of "external" rituals in the Catholic Church. Although he refrains from stating with Ricius that the cult of the saints

³² OA II.1, 342: "nec abludit ab hoc Evangelica lex, iuxta illud: *Accepistis legem in dispositione Angelorum*; cuius tamen verum sensum audire dum nolunt, tenebris involuti, in ultimum superstitionum barathrum meritò labuntur." The manuscript of the *Oedipus* also preserved a supporting quotation from Augustine, which Kircher later decided to cross out. BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 221^v. Cf. Ricius, *De coelesti*, 84^f; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 136.

³³ Kircher's duty as a Jesuit priest to uphold Catholic orthodoxy and the very tangible pressures of ecclesiastical censorship were factors in his attacks on the superstitious aspects of these practices, but it is difficult to weigh the precise extent to which his negative judgments were motivated by such concerns. See the second part of this chapter.

³⁴ Ricius, *De coelesti*, 84^v; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 136: "unde cultus & invocatio sanctorum veram (si consyderas) ducit originem, de quo alibi (vita comite) latiùs."

had its origin in kabbalistic invocations of angels, his discussion of Catholic practices in this place lends support to the kabbalistic practices by situating them in the orthodox context of intercessory prayer and the sacraments, rather than that of illicit theurgy. Kircher also adds a comparison with the Eucharist to Ricius's discussion of a kind of *matzoh* (*azymam placentulam*) used by Rabbi Ismael, which, when eaten while reciting certain invocations, causes the kabbalist to be filled with the light of supernal wisdom.³⁵ Kircher, worried about the reaction of the Jesuit censors, revised the original text of his manuscript to somewhat soften these comparisons of Catholic and kabbalistic rituals. At the start of the paragraph on the cult of the saints, he added several sentences stating that the Jews transgress the limits of pious ritual and enter the realm of superstition in their belief that external rituals, such as washing the body and making certain motions, are necessary to achieve divine union; and clarifying that, although the Catholic Church employs material means in rituals, such as the sacraments, its theologians declare that these have no "natural efficacy" but only "confer grace because they are elevated through an obedient virtue by a divine ordinance."³⁶ His claim at the beginning of the discussion

³⁵ OA II.1, 341–2: "Tradunt Hebraei R. Ismaëlem Pontificem azymam placentulam divinis quibusdam invocatis nominibus conficiendam docuisse, qua sincerâ fide, & purâ mente sumpta, mox manducantis animam & cor ipsum afflari, supernaeque sapientiae lumine irradiari aiunt. Idem narrant de Eleazaro quodam Kalir ideo nuncupato, quòd cuiusdam placentae seu repentè coelesti spiritu afflatus sublimia & profunda sapientiae oracula hymnis, quae ab universa Iudaeorum Synagoga solemnibus festis diebus passim decantari solent, profuderit; quae quidem imitanda non sunt, nec usurpanda nisi ab Ecclesia priùs approbata, cùm malignus spiritus in lucis figuram transformatus, non solum illicitis, sed & sub specie sacrae actionis licitis, multis modis hominibus illudere soleat. Si tamen haec anagogicè explicare liceat, dicerem profectò placentulam hanc in lege nova aliud non esse, nisi corpus Dominicum quo cibati Sancti Dei homines, divino lumine illustrari, unicam ad aeternae sapientiae penetralia semitam inveniunt." A propos of this and similar practices, Ricius expresses astonishment that the modern Jews nonetheless mock baptism and the Eucharist, but he does not make so explicit an analogy as Kircher. Ricius, *De coelesti*, 84^v–85^f; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 137.

³⁶ OA II.1, 340. Cf. BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 222^f; this entire passage was added to the margin of the manuscript after the initial composition: "Atque hucusque benè quidem philosophantur Hebraei, si inter terminos legitimos consistant. Verùm inter limites contineri nescii plerumque totam hanc philosophiae rationem ad enormes superstitiones adhibent, dum mentis expiationem ad unionem cum Deo necessariam non rectè

to speak “not according to my opinion but the opinion of the Hebrew theologians” was a similar addition to the original text.

In some places Kircher alters Ricius’s words in less substantive ways, in order to spruce up the text. In the synopsis in chapter one, for instance, he supplies Hebrew versions of terms that Ricius had given only in Latin letters and adjusts the Latin transliterations to be more accurate.³⁷ He also converts Ricius’s theorems twenty-nine through thirty-eight, describing the ten sefirot, into a handy table.³⁸ In chapter ten, he adds a reference to the kabbalistic doctrine of the “death of the kiss” (which he mistakenly calls the kiss of death: *osculum mortis* instead of *mors osculi*) to Ricius’s discussion of divine union.³⁹ Ricius, unlike Rittangel, is mentioned once in the *Cabala Hebraeorum*, among a number of authors who may be consulted for further examples of *gematria*.⁴⁰ But his name is nowhere to be found near the passages that Kircher borrowed from *De coelesti agricultura*, nor in the volume’s bibliography, the “Catalog of authors whom we have used in the text.”

The examples of Ricius and Rittangel could easily be multiplied, but they suffice to illustrate how greatly Kircher’s study of the Kabbalah depended on modern Latin authors, both as accessible sources of quotations from Jewish primary sources, and as sources for the parts of his Latin text in which he supposedly speaks in his own voice. As

perficiunt: putant enim frequenti corporis lotione animam à peccatis naturaliter purgari, externisque ritibus & coeremoniis, rebus videlicet materialibus, ut variis gestibus, & sitibus corporum (quod & Aegyptiis in more positum fuisse alibi ostendimus) maximè perfici. Sed Ecclesia Catholica convenientiùs asserit, animam nullà re materiali, cùm nullam ad animam proportionem habeant, naturaliter perfici, sed dispositivè tantùm. Et si quando, ut in sacramentis, materialia adhibeantur, ea non naturali efficientia, sed per virtutem, ut Theologi loquuntur, obedientialem elevata, ex instituto divino, gratiam conferunt. In benedictionibus etiam rerum, quas Ecclesia statutis temporibus adhibet, nulla naturalis actio, sed merè moralis, animam afficit, uti fusè Theologi probant.”

³⁷ *OA* II.1, 213–4; cf. Ricius, *De coelesti*, 75^v; Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae tomus*, 121 (Ths. 26–7).

³⁸ *OA* II.1, 214.

³⁹ *OA* II.1, 339.

⁴⁰ *OA* II.1, 216.

the case of Ricius shows, Kircher did not borrow passively, but manipulated the words of his uncited sources to suit his own authorial agenda and to conform to ecclesiastical censorship. Above all, these examples reveal the great distance that separates Kircher's idealized self-representation of his study of the Kabbalah from his actual scholarly practice—a lesson that is valid for the rest of the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* and *Obeliscus Pamphilius* as well.

3. *The Ethics of Citation*

One should not be too shocked by Kircher's methods. Borrowing primary source quotations from secondary authors was a normal practice in Kircher's day (as it still is today, for that matter). Kircher seems to have collected notes in something like a commonplace book. In his preface to *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, a propos of Kircher's research methods, Kaspar Schott wrote that Kircher, having studied countless books and manuscripts, identified relevant passages (*loca*) and had them excerpted according to designated topics (*in certas quasdam series rerum*).⁴¹ It is possible to imagine that, when it came time to compose the treatise, he no longer knew where some of his quotations came from, or even if he had taken them from the original text or an intermediary work. This practice of composing a new work by pasting together passages borrowed from other authors was a venerable European tradition, still practiced in the seventeenth

⁴¹ *OP*, b4^r: “Multorum itaque annorum labore, tùm hic Romae potissimùm omnes eos Authores sivè manuscriptos, sivè impressos, Latinos, Graecos, Hebraeos, Arabicos, Chaldaeos, Aegyptiacos, Syriacos, Armenos, Aethiopicos, aliisque sub linguis Europae usitatis editos, in Bibliothecis Vaticana, Angelica, Barberina, Sfortiana, Collegiorum Soc. Iesu, alirumque privatis Musaeis latentes, qui aliquam rerum Aegptiacarum mentionem faciebant, perlectos trutinando, loca singulorum intenso studio, & pertinaci speculatione in certas quasdam series rerum, non sine sumptibus excerptenda curavi.” Kircher's reference to the expense of making the excerpts suggests that much of the work was done by hired assistants, as confirmed by his reference to paying two rabbis to make excerpts from Hebrew books. See chapter two, n. 50.

century.⁴² It was also a common practice among early modern scholars to cite ancient sources, but to omit references to modern authors, which was not necessarily an act of bad faith. Kircher's early modern readers were accustomed to such practices, which conditioned the expectations they brought to his books. Better scholars than Kircher covered up their debts to contemporaries in order to increase the appearance of their own work's originality, including Joseph Scaliger, widely considered the greatest classical scholar of the preceding century, and the proverbially scrupulous Robert Boyle.⁴³ One should also allow that Kircher could have had motives for deliberately suppressing references to some of his sources other than a craven desire to exaggerate his scholarly prowess. Ricius, for example, was on the Index of Forbidden Books and citing him could have invited trouble. Indeed, in their judgment of the *Oedipus*, the Jesuit censors asked Kircher not to identify too specifically the sources of certain heterodox material, in order to prevent the reader from looking them up.⁴⁴

Although one must avoid applying an anachronistic conception of plagiarism to early modern authors, it would be equally mistaken to imagine that Kircher's failure to identify his sources was merely the innocent result of seventeenth-century scholarly norms. More scrupulous authors did identify modern authors and the intermediary

⁴² See Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); "The *Politica* of Justus Lipsius and the Commonplace-Book," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998), 421–36; Ann Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), esp. ch. 2. On the tendency of the use of commonplace books to isolate bits of information from their original context, see Ann Blair, "Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 541–51.

⁴³ On Scaliger, see Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983–1993), vol. 1, 109–10, 29, 50, 92, 219, 29. On Boyle, see William Newman and Lawrence Principe, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle and the Fate of Helmontian Chymistry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 18–27.

⁴⁴ ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^f (Judgment of *OA* II.1): "Tandem quidam auctores tum Hebraei, tum Arabes citantur, quos, ob assertas superstitiones, praestaret ne quidem nominari; cum ii curiosis non sine periculo sic exponantur."

sources from which they borrowed quotations. Kircher himself cites many modern authors in the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*—including some, such as Reuchlin, who were prohibited by the Index—which indicates other factors at play in the cases in which he did not. Furthermore, the rules governing the publication of books by Jesuits specifically required that authors “should not seem to be merely repeating what others have already written.”⁴⁵ In reviewing the volume of the *Oedipus* that contained the *Cabala Hebraeorum*, the revisors in charge of enforcing these rules reprimanded Kircher’s tendency to borrow evidence from others’ work without citing the author; and they singled out one case that was so egregious that Kircher felt compelled to delete the section from the printed work.⁴⁶ Early modern scholarly practices were different from modern ones. But when Kircher (or Scaliger, or Boyle) hid his dependence on other authors he violated the accepted norms of his own day.

⁴⁵ *Regulae Revisorum Generalum*, Rule 8; *Institutum Societatis Iesu*, 3 vols. (Florentiae: Ex Typographia a SS. Conceptione, 1892–3), vol. 3, 67: “Quodcumque argumentum tractetur, tale sit, ut aedificationi utilitatisque futurum censeatur; et in eo ita versetur auctor, ut non mera eorum, quae ab aliis scripta sunt, repetitio videri queat, sed sua ipse propria, eaque digna luce habeat . . .”

⁴⁶ ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^r (Judgment of *OA* II.1): “Alias [sc. allegationes] describuntur aliena quasi compendio, neque citatur eorum auctor, ut factum in Archangelo Burgonovensi, praecipuè circa effata Cabalistica, de quibus supra à fol. 163.” The reference is to Kircher’s explanation of some of Pico’s kabbalistic conclusions. In the original manuscript he had boasted, “Quia verò abstrusissima sunt, et vix ab ullo rectè penetrata; mearum partium esse ratus sum, Oedipus fidelem agere, et Sphingem illam perplexam quibusvis modis expugnandam adoriri . . .” (see English translation at head of section) before proceeding to lift his explanations wholesale from a book by Arcangelo da Borgonovo, as the revisors keenly noted. BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 122^v; Arcangelo da Borgonovo, *Cabalistarum selectiora, obscurioraque dogmata, a Ioanne Pico ex eorum commentationibus pridem excerpta, et ab Archangelo Burgonovensi Minoritano, nunc primùm luculentissimis interpretationibus illustrata* (Venetiis: Apud Franciscum Franciscium Senensem, 1569), 1–2. Borgonovo had himself plagiarized many of his interpretations of Pico’s conclusions from the work of his late teacher Francesco Giorgi; see Chaim Wirszubski, “Francesco Giorgi’s Commentary on Pico’s Kabbalistic Theses,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 145–56; François Secret, “Notes sur quelques kabbalistes chrétiens,” *Bibliothèque d’humanisme et renaissance* 36 (1974): 67–82.

Kircher, by means of both his citation strategies and his explicit claims about his studies, deliberately created an image of his research that differed starkly from its true nature. Kircher made strong assertions about the importance of his treatise on the Kabbalah—and the entire *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*—on the grounds that he had brought to light new information from unknown sources in non-European languages. To properly assess Kircher’s work, it is necessary to appreciate the extent to which that claim was exaggerated and that he made the exaggeration deliberately, carefully shaping his text to give the reader a distorted impression about how it had been composed.

The examination of Kircher’s use of the works of Rittangel and Ricius has left us with a diminished portrait of his prowess as a scholar of Hebrew esoteric literature, and by implication of his Oriental erudition in general. A final example from Kircher’s kabbalistic source material will somewhat balance this image. Although he borrowed much of his kabbalistic erudition from uncited, modern Latin intermediaries, some of it was acquired firsthand by means of genuine scholarship.

3. *The Garden of Pomegranates*

Arguably the single most important source for Kircher’s treatise on the Kabbalah was the *Pardes Rimmonim*, a Hebrew work composed a century earlier by the great Safed kabbalist Moses Cordovero (1522–1570).⁴⁷ Kircher cites the work frequently on a variety of topics, often quoting long passages in both Hebrew and Latin and at other times paraphrasing. For an authentic guide to the Kabbalah, he probably could not have done better. A kind of “Summa Kabbalistica,” *Pardes Rimmonim* presents a wide range of kabbalistic material—drawn from both of the main traditions of the Kabbalah, the theosophic tradition, represented by the Zohar, and the ecstatic tradition, based on manipulations of the letters of holy scripture and the chanting of divine names—in a lucid, philosophical style, accompanied by many quotations from earlier kabbalistic

⁴⁷ See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 5, 967–70, s.v. “Cordovero, Moses” (J. Ben-Schlomo).

literature. Furthermore, Cordovero was influenced by Renaissance Italian trends, in which Jewish understanding of the Kabbalah had been affected by Christian Neoplatonic philosophizing, and in the *Pardes* he expounds the doctrine of “the three lights,” which Christian kabbalists found so suggestive of the Trinity.⁴⁸ Thus, Cordovero’s work offered the most comprehensive and accessible overview available of the pre-Lurianic Kabbalah, and did so in an idiom that was particularly attractive to Christian readers trained in philosophy.

Despite these appealing features, and despite the fact that the book circulated widely among European Jews (in Italy in particular), as far as I have been able to determine, Kircher was the first Christian writer to make use of this important work.⁴⁹ His accomplishment, however, has been overlooked. In the fourth, posthumously published volume of his *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica* (1693), the Vatican bibliographer and Hebraist Giulio Bartolucci describes the supposed exposition of the mystery of the Trinity in the *Pardes Rimmonim* and names the Dominican Joseph Ciantes as the first to bring this to light. Bartolucci does not mention Kircher in his article on Cordovero, although the extensive presentation of material from *Pardes Rimmonim* in *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* considerably predates Ciantes’s work, which was published in Rome in

⁴⁸ My description of the *Pardes Rimmonim* (including the descriptive phrase, “Summa Kabbalistica”) follows the comments in Moshe Idel, “Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560 and 1660,” in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 350–1 and passim; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 255. See also: Ben-Schlomo, “Cordovero,” who writes: “The doctrine of Cordovero is a summary and a development of the different trends in Kabbalah up to his time, and his whole work is a major attempt to synthesize and to construct a speculative kabbalistic system.”

⁴⁹ Cordovero’s *Pardes Rimmonim* was referred to as early as 1613 by Johannes Buxtorf, but this is merely a bibliographical entry: “*Pardes Rimmonim*, Paradisus sive Hortus malogranatorum, Liber cabalisticus celeberrimus. Auth. R. Moses Kordvarius, A. 1570.” See Johannes Buxtorf, *Bibliotheca rabbinica nova* (Basilae: Typis Conradi Waldirchi, 1613), 313. Although Cordovero and the *Pardes Rimmonim* were previously known by name to at least one Latin author, none before Kircher appears to have exploited the text.

1667.⁵⁰ Kircher's use of Cordovero's work may have gone unnoticed because he did not know the author's name or even, it would seem, its full title, which he refers to only as "Pardes."⁵¹

Although the work had been published in Kraków in 1592, Kircher was unfamiliar with the printed edition, relying instead on a manuscript, as he indicates in *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, which lists "Pardes, Hebraeus, M.S. Heb. de Cab. Heb." among its sources.⁵² He does not mention the provenance of this manuscript but it can be shown that he consulted the copy of *Pardes Rimmonim* that belonged then to the library of the College of Neophytes and is now owned by the Vatican Library.⁵³ His use of the Neofiti manuscript is testified by numerous Latin marginalia, which appear to be in his handwriting and which correspond to material found in the *Oedipus* (see Figs. 6–7). Kircher cites *Pardes Rimmonim* in chapters four, five, six, nine, and ten of *Cabala Hebraeorum*, relying on it especially for his discussions of the forty-two- and seventy-two-letter names of God and of various facets of the doctrine of the sefirot. These are precisely the subjects that are noted in the Latin marginalia of the Hebrew manuscript. In several cases the correspondences between the marginal notes and the text of the *Oedipus* are so close as to remove any doubt that they were made by Kircher in preparing the *Cabala Hebraeorum*.

⁵⁰ Joseph Ciantes, *De sanctissima Trinitate ex antiquorum Hebraeorum testimoniis evidenter comprobata* (Romae: Typis Varesii, 1667). Bartolucci's assignment of priority is not altogether incorrect, however, in as much as Kircher does not use the sections of *Pardes Rimmonim* that concern the doctrine of the three lights, relying instead on other sources to argue that the ancient kabbalists knew the mystery of the Trinity.

⁵¹ It is unclear why Cordovero's name escaped Kircher. It appears on the first page of the manuscript that he used, although embedded in other text.

⁵² *OP*, h4^r.

⁵³ BAV Ms. Neofiti 28. This is a very fine copy of 575 pages. It is dated 1548 and thus would have been transcribed very close to the time of its composition. See *I codici ebraici della Pia Casa dei Neofiti a Roma*, (Rome: Tipographia della Accademia dei Lincei, 1893). Cordovero, who was born in 1522, was said to have written the *Pardes Rimmonim* when he was twenty-seven. See Ben-Schlomo, "Cordovero."

For example, next to a Hebrew passage in the Neofiti manuscript of Cordovero, the words “3 . 72 fecit 216” (3 □ 72 made 216) have been written in the margin, and higher on the page: “72 nomina habent 216 literas” (the 72 names have 216 letters).⁵⁴ The accompanying Hebrew passage—which describes seventy-two names containing two hundred-and-sixteen letters that are divided into three groups of seventy-two—is printed in chapter nine of *Cabala Hebraeorum*.⁵⁵ The marginalia continue on the same page of the manuscript: “The negative commandments derive from the canal Gebora to Hod, the affirmative commandments are made from the canal Hesed to Nizah.”⁵⁶ In Kircher’s treatise, immediately following the above quotation from *Pardes* a new section begins, “On the affirmative and negative commandments, which are attached to the canals of Gedulah and Geburah to Netsah and Hod,” in which he describes how “the canal that extends . . . from the measure of Gedula or Chesed, i.e. mercy, to Netsah, i.e., victory . . . [and] the opposite canal [that] extends from Geburah or Pechad, i.e. severity and fear, to Hod, i.e. glory, have connected the commandments of the law, the former affirmative, the latter negative.”⁵⁷ Kircher goes on to relate the number of negative precepts, 365, to the number of days in the solar year, suggesting that he is working from another section of Cordovero’s manuscript, which bears the marginalia, “annus solaris 365 dies” (solar year

⁵⁴ BAV Neofiti 28, fol. 101bis^r.

⁵⁵ *OA* II.1, 322: “Iterum Canalis hic trahit secum septuaginta duas potestates comparatas ad 72 nomina, sicuti notum est, & sunt 216 literae, septuaginta duae ex iis sinistrae, septuaginta duae mediae, & est Tiphereth, quae eas educit ex potentia in actum, quae ligantur à septuaginta duabus dexteris, & sic ope canalis huius sit praeponderatio ratione Geburae. Sic Pardes.”

⁵⁶ *OA* II.1, 322: “De praeceptis affirmativis & negativis, quae annexa sunt canalibus Sephiroth Gedulae & Geburae ad Netsah & Hod . . . ex canale Geburah ad Hod ducuntur praecepta negativa / fiunt ex canale Hesed ad Nizah praecepta affirmativa.”

⁵⁷ *OA* II.1, 323: “Canalis, qui à mensura Gedula sive Chesed, scilicet misericordiae ad Netsah, hoc est, victoriam rectè & normaliter tendit, ut & canalis oppositus à Geburah sive Pechad, hoc est, severitate & timore, ad Hod, id est, gloriam tendit, annexa habent praecepta legis, ille affirmativa, hic negativa.”

365 days) and “365 p[rae]cepta negativa” (365 negative commandments).⁵⁸ Kircher does not cite *Pardes* in this section, but there can be little doubt that this is his source.

The calculation of the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton, in which the names of the letters are expanded to give a total value of forty-five, which Kircher prints in the fourth chapter of *Cabala Hebraeorum*, is also found scrawled in the margins of the *Pardes* manuscript (see Fig. 7).⁵⁹ Likewise, a marginal note in the manuscript that reads “Ceremonies / Rites of pronouncing the names of God through vowels” (*Cerimoniae / Ritus pronunciantis nomina dei per vocales*) corresponds to the conclusion of Kircher’s discussion of kabbalistic prayer (the same that began with the recycled text of Ricius), which contains a substantial quotation from *Pardes* describing the “rites and ceremonies” that the kabbalists perform “in pronouncing the name of God through vowels” (*ritus & ceremonias in nomine Dei per vocales ritè pronunciendo*).⁶⁰ In addition, Kircher reproduces several diagrams from Cordovero, which are found in the Neofiti manuscript (see Figs. 7–9).⁶¹ Although further examples could be adduced, these suffice to establish Kircher’s use of the manuscript.

Aside from the reference in the Catalog of Authors of the *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, Kircher does not mention that he knew the *Pardes* as a manuscript. Such silence is surprising since Kircher frequently took pains to emphasize when he worked from manuscripts, especially rare ones, often citing their provenance. This is the case, for example, with his favorite Syriac source, Mor Isaac, which he tells us he consulted in a manuscript from the College of Maronites, and numerous manuscripts from the Vatican Library referred to throughout his work.⁶² Whatever the cause of this uncharacteristic

⁵⁸ BAV Neofiti 28, fol. 218^v; *OA* II.1, 323.

⁵⁹ BAV Neofiti 28, fol. 278^r; *OA* II.1, 237. (At *OA* II.1, 261, Kircher expands the Tetragrammaton without expanding the letter ׀ and gets the more common value of 42.)

⁶⁰ BAV Neofiti 28, fol. 305^v; *OA* II.1, 345.

⁶¹ BAV Neofiti 28, fols. 88^{iv}; 278^v; *OA* II.1, 302; 268.

⁶² On Mor Isaac and Kircher’s consultation of manuscripts at the Vatican and other libraries, see chapter three.

reticence, the important point for our assessment of Kircher's scholarship is that one of the chief sources of his treatise on the Kabbalah was a manuscript of a Hebrew work that he found in the library of the College of Neophytes, which had not previously been exploited by Christian scholars. In contrast with his recycling of pre-digested Hebraica from authors such as Rittangel, Kircher's use of the *Pardes* manuscript required genuine scholarly work, first simply to discover its existence and recognize its significance, and then to read, interpret, and translate it. Even if Kircher had some assistance in these activities, credit is due.⁶³

As the first known exposition by a gentile of one of the major works in kabbalistic literature, Kircher's use of *Pardes Rimmonim* constitutes an important contribution to early modern Christian scholarship on the Kabbalah. Some of the virtues of Kircher's treatise—its relatively comprehensive (if hardly exhaustive) coverage of the range of kabbalistic topics and its relatively clear, systematic explanation of many complicated doctrines—may be attributed in some measure to his reliance on *Pardes Rimmonim*. Unlike Ciantes, who, in the following decade made Cordovero better known to Christian readers (and correctly identified the author and full title of the treatise), Kircher did not focus on Cordovero's discussion of the doctrine of three lights in order to prove that the Kabbalah demonstrates the mystery of the Trinity. Instead, he relied on *Pardes Rimmonim* for technical details about the mechanics of the sefirot, the production of

⁶³ Someone familiar with the contents of the Neophytes' library might have alerted Kircher to the manuscript's presence—perhaps the converted Jew and Vatican *scriptor*, Giovanni Battista Iona. (On Kircher's relationship to Iona, see chapter three.) Ciantes also knew Iona, who contributed a Hebrew eulogy to his aforementioned book on the Trinity, suggesting the tentative hypothesis that Iona might have been responsible for calling attention to the work. The idea of a Roman origin to the diffusion of Cordovero's text among Christians is further supported by its use by the Roman Orientalist, Ludovico Marracci, who drew heavily from *Pardes Rimmonim* to argue for knowledge of the trinity by ancient Jewish sages: see Ludovico Marracci, *Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani*, 4 vols. (Romae: Typis Sac. Cong. de Prop. Fide, 1691), vol. 3, ch. 9. Outside Italy, translations of passages from Cordovero's work also appeared in Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudata, seu, doctrina hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica*, 2 vols. (Sulzbaci: typis Abrahami Lichtenthaleri, 1677–84).

divine names, and ritual chanting, which he reports faithfully, though sometimes with an accompanying denunciation of their superstitious nature.

5. Kircher and the Seventeenth-Century Culture of Erudition

The detailed analysis of Kircher's use of his sources is essential to understanding his work. The *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*—which to a great extent is a collage of materials borrowed from a large number of other, often uncited authors—must be read in the light of its character. Reading Kircher against his sources and noting the changes that he makes when appropriating their words illuminates important features of his studies. The scholarly methods employed in the treatise on the Kabbalah are characteristic of his practices throughout the *Oedipus* and *Obeliscus*, and the lessons of this case study may be applied to the whole work. As we have seen, Kircher's studies consisted of a combination of derivative research passed off as his own and of genuinely original research. Consequently, one cannot know the extent of Kircher's dependence on earlier sources without a thorough investigation of his sources. As a general rule, however, one may assume that Kircher's discussions in the *Obeliscus* and *Oedipus* rely heavily on unnamed sources, and one should be wary of Kircher's representation of his own studies.

These conclusions are all the more important because Kircher staked so much on the originality of his work—in particular, on his use of primary sources that were supposedly difficult both to find and to read, and on the “Herculean labor” that had gone into their collection. He insisted on the reliability—indeed the certainty—of his claims as proved by the textual authorities that he adduced. Kircher was highly self-conscious, if not especially sophisticated, about the practice of citation and its relationship to historical proof, repeatedly addressing the subject in apologetic sections of the *Oedipus* and *Obeliscus*, in which he sought to shore up his claims by convincing the reader of the reliability of his quotations from primary sources.⁶⁴ In the introduction to *Obeliscus*

⁶⁴ See chapter six.

Pamphilius, he went so far as to claim explicitly that he had not quoted any author whose work he had not read first-hand—a claim that we have seen in the case of the *Oedipus* (and it is equally true of the *Obeliscus*) to be false.⁶⁵

The most important lesson to be drawn from this inquiry lies beyond Kircher's text in the scholarly culture that caused him to present his treatise in such a form, regardless of its accuracy. Kircher, who has gone down in history for his credulity, was obsessed with providing evidence to prove his every assertion. Such a commitment to documentary evidence, characteristic of the erudite scholarship of Kircher's day, was a recent development. Beginning in the preceding century antiquarians and ecclesiastical historians championed a historiography rooted in the consultation of primary sources and pioneered the uses of modern (or, at least, proto-modern) citation techniques.⁶⁶ The full-blown emphasis on proof through citation that is visible in Kircher's work—encompassing not only precise references to sources, but also extended quotations from them—emerged only in the seventeenth century. Kircher could have imbibed these methods from many sources, but among the most important was, no doubt, his apprenticeship with the guru of early seventeenth-century antiquarian studies, Peiresc. When Kircher sent Peiresc an early version of his work in 1635, Peiresc responded with constructive but harsh criticism regarding the use of evidence.⁶⁷ Kircher wrote back in the humble voice of a disciple:

You admonish me most wisely concerning the careful use of citations and concerning the accurate demonstration of authorities, and know that it shall be the chief concern of my studies to demonstrate everything accurately by means of

⁶⁵ *OP*, d1^r.

⁶⁶ The best overview of these developments (especially regarding citation techniques) is Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). See also Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," in *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 1–39; Elizabeth Cropper, Giovanna Perini, and Francesco Solinas, eds., *Documentary Culture: Florence and Rome from Grand-Duke Ferdinand I to Pope Alexander VII* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1992).

⁶⁷ Peiresc's letter is lost and its contents must be inferred from Kircher's response.

classical authors; indeed, consider that I am so formed by nature that I would prefer to confess my ignorance a hundred times rather than rashly assert something groundless by pursuing vague and unfounded conjectures.⁶⁸

These words may elicit a guffaw, since Kircher's method often seems to consist precisely in pursuing vague and groundless conjectures. But the concern that he expresses in this early letter for documenting his claims by means of textual authorities is evident on virtually every page of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*. From this angle, his work may be seen as the tragic misapplication of Peiresc's teaching. Kircher took to heart the lesson of the antiquaries and erudite historians about "proving" assertions with detailed citations of evidence, but not the concomitant lesson of the Renaissance philologists regarding the critical assessment of that evidence. Without the latter the former was severely, perhaps fatally, undermined; consequently the best early modern antiquaries were, unlike Kircher, also critical philologists. Furthermore, even Kircher's application of the first lesson was often more apparent than real. Having chosen to practice a style of erudite scholarship whose essence was a preference for substance over form—in terms of the classic opposition between erudition and eloquence—he sacrificed substance to form, lavishing more care on the outward appearance of his imposing (though, by the standards of humanist style, inelegant) scholarly apparatus than on the solidity of its internal supports. This is the central irony of his project. It will not do to see Kircher as an anachronism, a latter-day Renaissance magus, who failed to keep up with the scholarly developments of his day. On the contrary, the most conspicuous shortcomings of his work were the result of his attempt to practice state-of-the-art erudite scholarship without the support of a critical approach to his sources.

⁶⁸ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 8 February 1635, BNP NAFr 5173, fol. 25^{rv}; cf. FF 9362, fol. 13^{rv} (copy): "Et primùm quidem quod me admonet de cautelà in citationibus adhibendis, et de fideli auctoritatum exhibitione, omnino prudenter monet, sciatque me in hoc principalem studiorum meorum curam hactenus ponere, ut omnia fideliter per authores classicos ostendantur; imò ita meum natura comparatum esse, existimet, ut ignorantiam meam centies fateri malim, quàm vagis coniecturis aut leviusculis persuasionibus insistendo, aliquid temerè ac sine fundamento asserere."

The flaws and contradictions of Kircher's scholarship—once appreciated in this way—throw into relief aspects of early modern learned culture, some of which otherwise might appear less clearly. On the one hand, we may view Kircher as shedding a distinctive light on seventeenth-century erudite scholarship by aspiring to its ideals and yet missing the mark so badly. On the other hand, his case should make us pause to ask if the actual practices of the majority of seventeenth-century scholars more commonly resembled the normative ideal—whether expressed by early modern actors or their modern historians—or Kircher's practice. A study such as this one, focusing on a single individual, cannot provide an authoritative answer. But, whatever the correct measure of Kircher's scholarly methods in comparison to those of his contemporaries, his failure to live up to his avowed ideals was certainly not unique. Such discrepancies between ideal and practice—if on a less heroic scale than in Kircher's case—were more likely the rule than the exception.⁶⁹

Putting aside practice to consider the ideal on its own terms, Kircher stands out for the volume at which he trumpeted the necessity of supporting historical claims with extensive documentary evidence. He was as emphatic as any early modern scholar in championing the seeking out of new manuscript sources, especially those in the Near Eastern languages then being discovered by Europeans. Indeed, one may wonder if anyone before Ranke ever expressed the dusty pleasures of archival research with as much visceral pleasure as Kircher.⁷⁰ "I consider there to be . . . no art," he wrote in the introduction of the *Oedipus*,

so thoroughly extinct or lost, of which no vestige glimmers in some corner of the world unknown to us, or in some foreign library buried under the covering of a foreign language, as if under ashes and cinders, among the dusty cadavers of half-eaten codices; or which, broken up and dispersed in many pieces by the neglect of time, may not be discovered scattered among the ancient authors . . . Oh, how numerous, how excellent, and incomparably valuable are the memorials of books which on this account waste away in famous libraries, struggling against worms

⁶⁹ See Grafton, *Footnote*, 179, 212, 7.

⁷⁰ On Ranke, see *Ibid.*, 34–93.

and cockroaches, amid squalor and decay; which, if they were brought to light by men expert in languages—O immortal God!—in a brief time how exceptional an increase we would see in the instruments of learning, so long neglected and unpolished in many [areas], above all from the treasures of the Hebrews and Arabs.⁷¹

Kircher's mission to recover lost knowledge admittedly owes something to the dreams of Renaissance Hermetists. But his encomium to archival research also vividly expresses a vision informed by the latest developments in antiquarian research—a vision of the heroic scholar, in search of knowledge of antiquity, recovering forgotten, worm-eaten manuscripts and publishing them for the collective benefit of the Republic of Letters. He intended the *Oedipus* not only as a solution to the hieroglyphs, but as a compendium of rare Oriental knowledge, extracted from unpublished sources in Near Eastern languages, and made available to the public.⁷² Kircher's genuine study of newly discovered Oriental manuscripts, as well as his misrepresentation of his derivative research to fit the same mold, were products of this ideal.

⁷¹ *OA* I, b1^v: “Nulla scientia tam ardua, sublimis, & incognita, quam non humani ingenii subtilitas penetrare possit; nullam quoque artem extinctam penitus aut perditam existimem, cuius non vestigia in aliquo Mundi nobis incognito angulo, seu Bibliotheca quapiam peregrina, sub peregrini idiomatis tegumento, veluti sub favillis & cineribus, inter semesorum Codicum pulverulenta cadavera, sepulta fulgeant; aut quae in varias partes iniuria temporum dissipata & discerpta, apud antiquos Authores sparsim non reperiantur. Quòd autem sepulta iaceant, contingit partim incuriâ & negligentîâ, partim invidiâ & ignorantîâ eorum, qui huiusmodi librorum thesauros possident. O quot, & quàm egregia, ac nullis opibus comparanda librorum monumenta hinc inde in celebrioribus Bibliothecis cum tineis & blattis luctantia situ pereunt & squalore; quae si lumini per viros linguarum peritos committerentur, Deum immortalem! quàm eximium incrementum brevi tempore suppellicili literariae, adeò incultae ac impolitae in multis, videremus accessisse, potissimùm ex Hebraeorum & Arabum thesauris.”

⁷² See the end of the next part of the chapter, in which evidence is presented that indicates that the *Oedipus* was originally conceived with such explicit intentions.

Part II: Kircher vs. the Censors

They are buried so that they may rise again more full of life; they hide so that they may be revealed more clearly; they perish so that they may not perish.⁷³

The first part of this chapter revealed a significant gap between the rhetoric and the reality of Kircher's scholarship, which must be assessed before his work can be properly understood. This section looks at another factor that requires us to read the *Oedipus* with a degree of skepticism vis-à-vis its author's declarations. Like all early modern authors, Kircher was constrained by the pressures of censorship. For a member of a religious order living in Rome—the seat of the Catholic Church, including its chief instruments of intellectual discipline, the Congregations of the Holy Office of the Inquisition and of the Index of Prohibited Books—the specter of censorship was especially tangible. In addition to the ecclesiastical censorship imposed on all Catholic authors, the Society of Jesus practiced its own form of internal censorship, requiring all books by Jesuit authors to be approved before publication. Not long after arriving in the holy city, Kircher wrote to Peiresc about the prospect of publishing certain Arabic works dealing with magic and about the attendant difficulties that he anticipated on the part both of his Jesuit superiors and of the Holy Office. Such works “will never be permitted to be published,” he opined, “especially here in Rome, where the censorship (*censura*) of all books is so strict that not even the least straw of error or false opinion is tolerated.”⁷⁴

As a Jesuit writer in Rome, Kircher was bound to have his works approved first by the Jesuit censors and then by the Master of the Sacred Palace, whose imprimatur was

⁷³ *OA* I, a4^v: “Sepulta sunt igitur, ut vividius resurgant; ut luculentius pateant, latent; nè pereant denique pereunt.”

⁷⁴ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 3 December 1636, BNP FF 9538, fol. 236^r: “ea certè nequaquam permittentur nec permitti possunt; praesertim hic Romae, ubi tam rigorosa librorum omnium censura, ut vel festuca minima erroris aut erroneae opinioni[s] non toleratur.” See below for further discussion.

required for all books published in the papal state.⁷⁵ Even after a book was so approved and published, it might be found *post facto* to contain unorthodox material and consequently be banned, or even confiscated and destroyed, by the Holy Office. Given the subject matter of the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* these were not idle worries. Kircher's treatment of the non-Christian beliefs and rituals by whose exposition he sought to illustrate the "hieroglyphic doctrine" was often more positive than strict Catholic doctrine would allow, and, most audaciously, long sections of the *Oedipus* described illicit magical practices with the detail of an instruction manual. Works containing similar material had been banned, such as Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*, which appeared in the first Tridentine Index of Prohibited Books of 1564 and remained in subsequent editions. More recently, as Kircher recounted to Peiresc to justify his fear of the censors, an Arabic book called *The Garden of Marvels of the World and its Regions* (precisely the kind of work he would be using as source-material for the *Oedipus*) had been found, following its publication in Rome in 1585, to contain "superstitions and errors," on which account all copies were confiscated and burned.⁷⁶

Unlike Agrippa's encyclopedia of magic and the Arabic *Garden of Marvels*, however, Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* never ran afoul of the Holy Office or the Congregation of the Index. On the contrary, it was printed with the permission of his Jesuit superiors and of the Master of the Sacred Palace. Nonetheless, the pressures of censorship left their mark on this text in ways that condition how we must read its expositions of heathen wisdom and magical practices. The problems raised by Kircher's presentation of such material are documented in the Jesuit censorship reports that survive concerning the manuscript of the *Oedipus*. The treatise on the *Kabbalah of the Hebrews* embodies most of these problems and thus may serve as an example of how the

⁷⁵ See *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Appleton, 1907–12), vol. 10, 39–40, s.v. "Master of the Sacred Palace" (R. Walsh).

⁷⁶ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 3 December 1636, BNP FF 9538, fol. 236^v. See chapter five for more details.

theologians in charge of maintaining Jesuit orthodoxy responded to Kircher's expositions of magic and non-Christian wisdom in general—and how Kircher in turn responded to them. Because of the constraints that ecclesiastical censorship placed on the free expression of early modern authors, interpreting texts that treat potentially heterodox subject matter is inherently difficult. The case of the *Oedipus*—for which, in addition to the printed text, there survive censors' reports and the manuscript of half the work (including the entire *Cabala Hebraeorum*)—allows us to see concretely and in detail how one such work was shaped by the pressures of censorship, thereby offering insight into how to read the published work.⁷⁷

1. Censoring the Mysteries of the Hebrews

Like every Jesuit author, Kircher was required to submit his works to superiors for internal review prior to publication.⁷⁸ After 1601, this task was entrusted to the College of Revisors, a panel of five theologians that made recommendations to the General of the Society, who ultimately decided whether a book could be printed. Although non-doctrinal concerns such as scholarly quality and authorial decorum constituted an essential dimension of the revisors' work,⁷⁹ the primary purpose of Jesuit censorship was to maintain the “soundness and uniformity of doctrine” required by the Society's

⁷⁷ I have published the complete texts of the censorship documents pertaining to *OP* and *OA* in Daniel Stolzenberg, “Oedipus Censored: *Censurae* of Athanasius Kircher's Works in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 73 (forthcoming 2004).

⁷⁸ On Jesuit censorship and its institutional and doctrinal context, see Ugo Baldini, *Legem impone subactis. Studi su filosofia e scienza dei Gesuiti in Italia 1540–1632* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1992), ch. 2 (originally published as “Una Fonte poco utilizzata per la storia intellettuale: le ‘censurae librorum’ e ‘opinionum’ nell’antica Compagnia di Gesù” in *Annali dell’Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento* 11 [1985]: 19–67); Marcus Hellyer, “‘Because the Authority of My Superiors Commands’: Censorship, Physics and the German Jesuits,” *Early Science and Medicine* 1 (1996): 319–54; Marcus Hellyer, “The Construction of the *Ordinatio Pro Studiis Superioribus* of 1651,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 72 (2003): 3–44.

⁷⁹ See Stolzenberg, “Utility, Edification, and Superstition.”

constitutions—in other words to police doctrinal orthodoxy, represented by Aquinas in theology and Aristotle in philosophy. The Rules of the Revisors General,⁸⁰ which defined the parameters of Jesuit censorship, instructed the revisors especially to observe the *Ratio Studiorum* (the official Jesuit educational code); but familiarity with papal bulls and briefs, decrees of the Holy Office, other congregations, and the Master of the Sacred Palace, as well as opinions of inquisitors and universities, was also deemed necessary for judging the orthodoxy of prospective publications.⁸¹ Nothing was to be allowed that did not agree with the common sense of the schools and doctors, was “not entirely congruent with Christian faith and piety; or which might rightly offend others, or which seems inappropriate for the reputation of the Society.”⁸² Thus, in theory, no “new opinions disagreeing with common doctrine” or anything that “overturns the common reasons which theologians confirm about Christian dogma” were permitted.⁸³ In particular, theological matters could not diverge from St. Thomas. Furthermore, Jesuit books were required to be “edifying and useful.”⁸⁴

The heterodox, non-Christian beliefs and practices that constituted the subject matter of the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* and *Obeliscus Pamphilius* could be discussed, but the revisors required that such topics be presented in a particular manner and within certain limits, which varied for different kinds of heterodox material. The principal distinction visible in the judgments of these books is between the treatment of erroneous *beliefs* and that of magical *practices*, with the latter perceived as a greater danger and thus in need of

⁸⁰ “Regulae Revisorum Generalum” in *Institutum*, vol. 3, 65–8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Rules, 6, 12.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Rule 9: “. . . Atque, in universum loquendo, non solum admitti nihil debet, quod fidei pietatique christianae non prorsus congruat; sed neque aliud quidpiam, quod alios merito possit offendere, vel Societatis existimationem religiosamque circumspectionem dedecere videatur.”

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Rule 7: “. . . 1. Ne in libris Nostrorum novae, et a communi doctrina discrepantes opiniones inducantur. 2. Ne communes ratione, quibus Religionis christianae dogmata confirmant Theologi, convellantur. Ne a D. Thomae doctrina, iuxta Constitutiones et Congregationum Decreta, in theologicis discedatur. . . .”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Rules 7, 8.

more aggressive censorship. That there should be such a distinction is not obvious, as the Tridentine Church considered questions of belief as important as those of practice. The relative permissiveness shown toward the discussion of heterodox beliefs was likely due to the Church's well-established tradition of opposing heresy by exposing and refuting it. Kircher himself cannily invoked this tradition in the preface of *Oedipus II*, defending his discussions of unorthodox doctrines by comparison to the writings of Irenaeus, Father of the Church, against the Gnostics.⁸⁵ No comparable tradition supported the pious exposition of illicit magical practices.⁸⁶

Kircher's dependence on Jewish and Arab sources was especially problematic, not only because of their content, but due to their very provenance. Such texts did not describe the beliefs and practices of extinct pagan peoples, but those of living infidels whose presence was all too closely felt, whether in the form of Europe's barely tolerated Jewish minority or that of the Turkish empire that threatened Christendom from the east. In his judgment of *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, the revisor Honoré Fabri complained that Kircher gave too much credence to Jewish and Arab authors, even seeming to prefer them to familiar Christian authors—a criticism that ignored, or at least called into question, the whole rationale of Kircher's study, which was explicitly to bring to light

⁸⁵ *OA II.1, 3*. See Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, tr. D. Ungar (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

⁸⁶ Such practices were not a merely theoretical issue. In this period, the Holy Office and other authorities actively prosecuted illicit magic, both popular and learned. For examples in Rome, see Thomas V. Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1993); Luigi Fiorani, "Astrologi, superstiziosi e devoti nella società Romana del seicento," *Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma. Studi, documenti, inventari* 2 (1978): 97–162; Germana Ernst, "Astrology, Religion and Politics in Counter-Reformation Rome," in *Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, ed. S. Pumfrey, P. Rossi, and M. Slawinski (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 249–73; Brendan Dooley, *Morandi's Last Prophecy and the End of Renaissance Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). See also Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) on Venice.

knowledge hidden in “Oriental memorials,” especially those of the Arabs and the Jews.⁸⁷ When they reviewed the second volume of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, the revisors commanded Kircher completely to rewrite the treatise on the Kabbalah, as well as the following section devoted to Arabic magic (*Cabala Sarcenica*), which he was then to resubmit for a new judgment.⁸⁸

The status of Jewish literature was vexed due to the 1592 bull of Clement VIII, included in the 1596 edition of the Tridentine Index of Prohibited Books, which removed the exceptions to the ban on the Talmud that had been granted in the previous edition of the Index and forbade outright all books by “Talmudists, Kabbalists, and other impious Jews.”⁸⁹ But, despite its sweeping language, the ban was generally interpreted in more nuanced terms. Catholic theologians widely acknowledged that there was a good Kabbalah and a bad one, and that the ban applied only to the latter. Within the Society of Jesus there was a literary tradition that sought to clarify this question, which found its most authoritative expression in the work of Jacques Bonfrère, to whom the revisors appealed as a guide.⁹⁰ Thus the revisors were not opposed in principle to Kircher’s positive assessment of parts of the Kabbalah, but they were dissatisfied with his definition of good and bad Kabbalah. They called on Kircher

⁸⁷ Fabri excluded from this censure “philosophers, physicians, and mathematicians,” who had long formed part of the Scholastic canon. ARSI FG 668, fol. 394^r.

⁸⁸ ARSI FG 668, fol. 391^v.

⁸⁹ *Index Librorum Prohibitorum . . . Clementis PP. VIII* (Rome: 1596); facsimile printed in J. M. de Bujunda, ed., *Index de Rome 1590, 1593, 1596, avec étude des index de Parme 1580 et Munich 1582*, 9 vols. (Sherbrooke: Centre d’études de la Renaissance, 1993), vol. 9, 930.

⁹⁰ See Jacques Bonfrère, *Pentateuchus Moysis commentario illustratus; praemissis, quae ad totius Scripturae intelligentiam manuducant, praeloquiis perutilibus* (Antwerpiae: Ex Officina Plantiniana, Apud Balthasarem Moretum, et Viduam Ioannis Moreti, et Io. Meurisium, 1625), ch. 21. Other influential Jesuit works dealing with the Kabbalah were Antonio Possevino’s *Apparatus sacer* (Venice, 1603, 1609); Nicolaus Serarius, *Rabbini et Herodes* (Mainz, 1609), idem, *Iosue* (Mainz, 1609); and the biblical commentaries of Cornelius à Lapide. See François Secret, “Les Jésuites et le kabbalisme chrétien à la renaissance,” *Bibliothèque d’humanisme et renaissance* 20 (1958): 543–55.

to show clearly which Kabbalah is legitimate and which prohibited; so that he may not seem to contravene the Bull of Clement VIII . . . and also the Index of Prohibited Books itself; which includes the Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin (or Capnion) however much Pietro Galatino tried before to defend him in *de Aracan[is] Catholicae Veritatis*. Therefore let the author distinguish, with Bonfrère in *Praeloquiis de Pentateuchum*, ch. 21 and with others, between a good kabbalah, an indifferent kabbalah, and a bad kabbalah.⁹¹

The more substantive problem, however, was not that Kircher failed to distinguish adequately between the good and bad Kabbalah—though he was inconsistent on this matter—but that he improperly discussed many beliefs and practices that by his own assessment belonged to the illicit variety. The revisors demanded that Kircher omit, or at least greatly abbreviate, substantial sections of the treatise whose subject matter fell into this category. With regard to kabbalistic beliefs, including erroneous ones (as with the pagan theologies of Zoroaster, Hermes, Orpheus, and Pythagoras) there was room for discussion so long as the material was presented in the correct way. In their judgment of the first volume of the *Oedipus*, the revisors reprimanded the author for “repeatedly . . . cit[ing] too respectfully the Talmud and other Jews, which are despised names or persons, as is to be seen in the Index of the Council of Trent.”⁹² The problem, then, was not that Kircher cited the Talmud and other Jewish authors despised by the Index, but that he did so too respectfully. The revisors advised Kircher to treat these authors in the

⁹¹ ARSI FG 668, fol. 391^v: “Ostendat auctor clarè, quae Cabala sit legitima, quae prohibita; ne videatur contravenire Bullae Clem VIII. relatae post reg. 10. Indicis Concil. Trid.¹ et ipsi quoque Indici librorum prohibitorum; in quo continetur etiam Cabala Ioannis Reuchlini (seu Capnionis) quidquid illum antea conatus fuerit defendere Petrus Galatinus de Arcan. Cathol.^{ac} verit.^{is}. Distinguat igitur Auctor, cum Bonfrerio praeloq.^{is} ad Pentat.^{um} c. 21. et cum aliis, inter cabalam bonam, indifferentem, et malam.” Cf. ARSI FG 668, fol. 390^v (on the *OP*): “Indicandum quid auctoritatis tribui possit libro Talmud et Cabalae Hebraeorum et quibusdam Rabbinis; tum ut satisfiat iis qui pleraque Rabbitorum praesumunt esse fabulosa; tum verò maximè ob reverentiam Clementis VIII cuius mens exprimitur in Indice Trident. observatione circa 4^o. regul.”

⁹² ARSI FG 668, fol. 398^r: “Subinde nimis honorificè citat Thalmud et Hebraeos alios, quae sunt exosa nomina, seu capita, ut videre est in Concil. Trident.^o post regul. 10.^{am} Indicis. Rectissimè auctor faciet, si circa tales id observet quod circa Averroem <etc.> observare iubentur professores philosophiae reg. 3. 4. 5.”

circumspect manner that the *Ratio Studiorum* prescribed for teaching Averroes and other theologically problematic interpreters of Aristotle.⁹³

2. *Language and Superstition*

There were linguistic rules that a Jesuit author had to obey if he wanted to discuss certain topics. Already in his initial manuscript, Kircher accompanied his discussions of pagan, Jewish, and Moslem beliefs and practices with refutations of their superstitious errors and stern warnings to the Christian reader “not to try this at home.” The revisors accepted the principle that some heterodox ideas could be presented if they were framed with such language, but they found the author negligent for not distinguishing adequately between his own convictions and the false opinions of his sources, for not condemning superstitions forcefully enough, and for sometimes even seeming to endorse them. They called on Kircher to remedy these problems by modifying the tone of his presentation, by making more frequent use of expressions such as “inquiunt” (“they say”) to better distinguish the opinions of his sources from his own,⁹⁴ by augmenting his refutations of falsehood, and in certain cases by abbreviating his discussions of superstitious material.⁹⁵

There is no way to know to what extent Kircher believed in the perfidious, superstitious character of the beliefs and practices that he so condemned.⁹⁶ It is evident, however, that he was not much troubled by the danger that such material posed to the

⁹³ The rules for philosophy professors in the *Ratio Studiorum* instructed the teacher to be extremely discriminating in teaching such authors in order to protect his students from the peril of their influence; anything good taken from such authors should be presented without praise, and if the same teaching could be demonstrated from a different source that was deemed preferable; the errors of such authors and their followers should not be concealed but rather their authority should be sharply denounced. See “Regulae Professoris Philosophiae,” 3–5, in *Institutum*, vol. 3, 189–90.

⁹⁴ See especially, ARSI FG 668, fol. 396^v.

⁹⁵ These linguistic strategies parallel those used by Jesuit authors to discuss unorthodox natural-philosophical theories, as discussed by Hellyer, “Because the Authority,” 336ff., who calls attention to the importance of the judicious use of words such as “true,” “false,” “probable,” and “hypothesis.”

⁹⁶ This point is discussed at greater length at the end of this section.

reader and that he used such language because censorship required him to do so. There was a tradition of early modern writers on heterodox subjects employing such expressions in an effort to inoculate themselves against the charge of unorthodoxy: a classic example is Agrippa's preface to *De occulta philosophia*, in which the author protests that the views expressed in the book are written "more narratively than affirmatively."⁹⁷ Savvy early modern readers understood these tactics and knew to take such expressions with a grain of salt. As we have seen, Agrippa's disclaimers did not save his work from the Index.

Kircher's use of similar expressions often rings hollow and may seem like a linguistic trick to smuggle illicit material past the gate. But the revisors did not view it this way. In the case of heterodox beliefs, they were willing to take such language at face value and accepted its efficacy, even offering Kircher advice on the kind of phrases that he needed to insert in order to receive their stamp of approval. In his judgment of *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, Nicolaus Wysing (probably the most scrupulous revisor of these works) accepted the inevitability that such a work would contain "some things, not only contrary to the intention of the author, but also contrary to truth, which nevertheless are to be tolerated by a certain necessity on account of the goal of proving things in that same context."⁹⁸ To mitigate the danger posed by such material Wysing gave instructions for a series of disclaimers to be placed at the beginning of the work, which would explain to the reader how to understand such material. Among these was to be a declaration defining precisely what authority should be granted to the Talmud, the Kabbalah, and other Jewish authors, both in order "to satisfy those who consider most of the [writings]

⁹⁷ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, ed. V. Perrone Compagni (1533; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 66.

⁹⁸ ARSI FG 668, fol. 390^{rv}: "Demum, quia tot in hoc opere, tamque diversorum auctorum, adferuntur allegationes, ut fieri non possit quin aliqua incidenter, non solum contra mentem auctoris, verum etiam contra veritatem admisceantur; quae tamen ob rerum probandarum intentum in ipso contextu, necessitate quadam, toleranda sunt: idcirco iudico lectorem initio operis de sequentibus admonendum."

of the rabbis to be false (*fabulosa*)” and out of respect for Clement VIII’s ban.⁹⁹ Another prefatory disclaimer was to warn the reader that authors cited in the course of the work were to be granted authority “only to the extent that they demonstrate that on account of which they are cited, although they may happen to mix in something inconsistent.”¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, the reader was to be told that:

In that way of speaking used sometimes by the ancient authors, it is not to be thought from this that in matters so obvious (in the light of faith . . .) the author believes otherwise than is received in the Church. But he uses the very words of the authors, even those far from the truth, both so that it may appear how far they attained in such secret matters, and because it would be too difficult and irksome to reduce those ways of speaking, repeated so many times, to the words customary today. Examples include where there is discussion with the ancients about the soul of the world . . . about the shape of the trinity, about the triform God . . . For although they may sometimes have a sound meaning, they nevertheless sometimes seem to be wrongly understood by these authors, and can draw into similar suspicion those who may read them without an attached disclaimer (*animadversio*).¹⁰¹

Wysing was no doubt sincere in his effort to maintain orthodoxy and protect readers. But, while the careful use of language that he prescribed would keep a work technically orthodox, it risked sending an ambiguous message to the reader, who might perceive the

⁹⁹ ARSI FG 668, fol. 390^v: “Indicandum quid auctoritatis tribui possit libro Thalmud et Cabalae Hebraeorum et quibusdam Rabbiniis; tum ut satisfiat iis qui pleraque Rabbiorum praesumunt esse fabulosa; tum verò maximè ob reverentiam Clementis VIII cuius mens exprimitur in Indice Trident. observatione circa 4^o. regul.”

¹⁰⁰ ARSI FG 668, fol. 390^v: “Quo ad alios quoque auctores praemonendum, illis auctoritatem tribui eatenus tantum, quatenus faciunt ad probandum id pro quo citantur; quidquid forte incongruum aliquid iuxtà admisceant.”

¹⁰¹ ARSI FG 668, fol. 390^v: “In modo quoque loquendi, ab auctoribus antiquis quandoque usurpato, non putandum quo auctor in tam apertis (praesentia fidei, quae subinde occurrunt) rebus aliter sentiat quam in Ecclesia receptum sit. Usurpat verò ipsa auctorum verba, etiam à vero aliena, tum ut appareat quousque illi in rebus tam occultis pervenerint, tum quia nimis operosum foret, molestumque modos illos loquendi, toties repetitos, ad voces hodie usitatas reducere. Exempla sunt, ubi cum antiquis sermo est de anima mundi, coeli, solis. <Etc.>. de forma Trinitatis, de triformi Deo, de dependentia in divinis, de secunda in Deo substantia, quod in divinis unum parit duo, quod personae sint congenitae. <Etc.>. Haec enim et similia licet sanum aliquando sensum habere possint, ab auctoribus tamen illis videntur quandoque sinistrè intellecta, possentque in similem suspicionem quosdam trahere, qui ea sine adiuncta animadversione legerent.”

author to be speaking from both sides of his mouth. Kircher's treatment of chronology, for example, which assembled evidence that implied a heretical view of antediluvian history, was allowed to stand unchanged so long as the introduction of the work informed the reader that statements about chronology and genealogy "should be understood as things said only in passing," unless they agreed with opinions that Kircher explicitly endorsed as his own.¹⁰²

There was other material, however, that posed such danger to "curious souls" that, in the opinion of the revisors, no language could render it safe for publication. The revisors demanded that Kircher's discussion of the "practical Kabbalah" be entirely omitted from the *Cabala Hebraeorum* since it was "filled with dangerous superstition."¹⁰³ They permitted him to preserve a semblance of the section on Arabic magic called the "Kabbalah of the Saracens" (because it constituted an entire subdivision of the work, deleting it entirely would have upset the book's order), but demanded that he drastically shorten it, removing all specific details of magical practices. Thereby, they said, the reader might have a taste of the Saracenic Kabbalah without entering into it in depth.¹⁰⁴ A

¹⁰² ARSI FG 668, fol. 390^v: "Quae circa Genealogiam, aut Chronologiam variè adferuntur, habenda sunt tantum incidenter dicta, nisi conveniunt cum ea chronologia, quem auctor ex sua mente apponit." On Kircher's heterodox chronology, see Anthony Grafton, "Kircher's Chronology," forthcoming in Findlen, *Athanasius Kircher*.

¹⁰³ ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^v: "Cabala practica, à fol. 334. usque 357. prorsus ommitenda est; utpote plena periculosus superstitionibus. Et haec ipsa cabala haud dubiè damnata est in Reuchlino, seu Capnione, de quo supra, et consentit Sixtus Senensis apud Bonfrer. l. 1. s. 4."

¹⁰⁴ ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^v: "Saracenicam etiam Cabala, à fol. 358. usque 386. validè castiganda est, cum planè sit in Alcorano fundata; adeoque vel merè inutilia, vel prorsus fabulosa, ac superstitiosa contineat. Imò, cum auctor passim ostendat quo pacto singula practicè ordinentur ad superstitionem et magiam, idcirco non apparet quid in iisdem tutò vulgari possit: non enim sufficit dicere quid sint superstitiosa et vitanda, ut curiosi ea non amplectantur. Hac ergo in re plus quam satis fuerit, si Cabalae Saracenaè modus praecisè in genere et speculativè, absque applicatione ad usum, idque brevissimè, delibetur potius quam pertractetur."

similar verdict was pronounced regarding the lengthy treatment of Arabic planetary magic seals in the treatise on “Hieroglyphic Astronomy.”¹⁰⁵

3. *Useless Knowledge*

The linguistic strategies for discussing heterodox subjects that the revisors sanctioned in the case of superstitious beliefs were deemed insufficient in the case of Jewish and Arabic magical practices. In the manuscript submitted to the revisors, Kircher had already wrapped his discussions of magical practices, including the practical kabbalah, in all manner of disclaimers, reprobation, and invective, but the revisors were not persuaded. In assessing the permissibility of questionable material, they frequently invoked the principle of utility laid out in the eighth rule of the Revisors General, justifying their decisions by weighing the potential danger of the material in question against its usefulness. “In the correction of [the treatises on the Hebrew and Saracenic Kabbalah],” they wrote, “it will be enough (for the author’s purpose) if the whole thing contains much less, seeing as it is undoubtedly for the most part useless, if not also dangerous.”¹⁰⁶ While Kircher’s discussion of practical Kabbalah was to be deleted in its entirety, his discussions of the names of God and the doctrine of the sefirot were to be abbreviated by removing sections that were, by Kircher’s own account, false and thus, by the revisors’ account, useless. For example, in his initial discussion of the kabbalistic techniques for manipulating the alphabet known as *gematria*, *notarikon*, and *temurah*, Kircher had described them as the foundation of the bad kind of Kabbalah. On this basis, the revisors

¹⁰⁵ ARSI FG 668, fol. 396^f: “Plura ex Arabibus transcribit vana et superstitiosa; praecipue dum tractat de Aritmetica [sic] Astrologia et Medicina Aegyptiorum sive Arabum; quae nobis videntur non posse satis tuto vulgari cum valde probabile sit in illis contineri pactum implicitum imo (ut ipse Auctor fatetur Clasi [sic] 7.^a pag. 62;) apertum cum demone [sic]: Unde non videtur permittendum auctori ut ostendat quomodo singula sigilla superstitiosa practice componantur et ordinentur ad superstitionem et magiam.”

¹⁰⁶ ARSI FG 668, fol. 391^v: “In eorundem verò emendatione sufficiet (pro auctoris instituto) rem omnem tanquam nimirum magnà ex parte inutilem, si non etiam noxiam, multò paucioribus comprehendere.” See also ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^f.

instructed Kircher to remove his discussions of the forty-two- and seventy-two-letter names of God, which are based on these techniques. Even if such techniques were merely indifferent rather than bad—although Kircher asserted the latter—the revisors argued that

they are hardly of any genius or significance, and thus nothing of substance can be concluded [from them] . . . Hence it is clear that the work spent by the author in explaining this kind of kabbalah so exhaustively is useless; it will be even more useless to print it, unless the whole thing is shortened within much narrower limits.¹⁰⁷

Likewise, the revisors claimed that Kircher’s discussions of the inner workings of the sefirot “have no great utility and in addition contain a great deal of obscurity and fantastical rubbish.”¹⁰⁸ Similar calculations of utility versus danger were made concerning Kircher’s treatment of other non-Christian traditions. The judgment of the first volume of *Oedipus II* (which includes *Cabala Hebraeorum*) concluded with the warning:

Finally, the author must carefully beware, lest in this work, whatever he has drawn from the Platonists, Pythagoreans, Kabbalists, Talmudists, and other authors of similar character, he recklessly spills it all onto the paper and thrusts on the world things long buried, and which should always remain buried. Therefore let him adduce these authors in such a way, where it is necessary, that he may explain doubtful things clearly, condemn blameworthy things, not assert magical or superstitious matters in detail, establish a definite purpose for his allegations, and let him be convinced that from the treatment of such things, by no means may

¹⁰⁷ ARSI FG 668, fols. 391^v–392^r: “Imò licet tres illas species ex se sint indifferenter (quod non advertit auctor) nihilominus, ex ipsius etiam auctoris confessione, fol. 226. et 256. citt.^{is}, nullius ferè ingenii sunt, vel momenti, nec inde aliquid solidi concludi potest. Unde etiam Bonfrer. l. 1. s. 3 15.^o antepen. ait; nil ferè solidi, quo ad sensum scripturae, ex tali Cabala elici posse, praeter illa (paucissima) quae apud PP. aut in ipsa scriptura reperiuntur. Hinc patet inutilem ab auctore operam in Cabala tam fusè explicanda, collocatam: inutiliorem quoque in eiusdem impressione collocandam, nisi tota angustissimis terminis coarctetur.”

¹⁰⁸ ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^r: “Non maiorem utilitatem habent, et insuper multum obscuritatis, ac fabulosae nugacitatis continent, quae à fol. 287 usque 334. afferuntur de canalibus sephiroticis, de 32. semitis sapientiae, de 50. portis intelligentiae, de 30. dextris potestatibus, et similia.¹⁰⁸ Speciatim verò de Sephirot malè introductis videri potest Genebrard. apud Bonfrer. l. 1. s. 3. fi.”

so much of utility among the general public be expected, compared to the danger that must be feared among some curious men.¹⁰⁹

For his part, Kircher tried to establish the pious utility of his descriptions of certain superstitious practices, such as kabbalistic amulets, by claiming that they would teach the Christian reader, who might happen on such an object, to recognize its dangerous character. He even asserted that for this reason the Holy Office had requested him to publish such a description.¹¹⁰ Kircher probably hoped that invoking the authority of the Inquisition would lend his discussion of magical seals a sheen of propriety in the eyes of the revisors. It did not. “It is not enough,” the revisors insisted, that, after describing minutely how such things are used in practice, he “reproves them as superstitious and to be avoided, since overly curious and insufficiently pious individuals might esteem them and put them into use.”¹¹¹

In a sense, there was a scholarly culture-clash between Kircher and the revisors regarding the utility and edification to be had from studying ancient superstition. Kircher believed it was worthwhile to investigate such matters in detail in order to gain knowledge of antiquity, an endeavor that was inherently valuable, i.e. useful and edifying. Like other antiquarian scholars, he was dedicated to as total a recovery of knowledge of antiquity as possible: no part of the past should remain buried. As he wrote

¹⁰⁹ ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^v: “Denique auctor diligenter cavere debet, ne in hac opere, quidquid ex Platonicis, Pythagoricis, Cabalisticis, Thalmudicis, similisque farinae aliis auctoribus hausit, id omne temerè in chartam effundat, orbique obtrudat dudum etiam sepulta, semperque sepelienda. Hos ergo auctores ita adducat, ubi opus est, ut dubia dilucidè exponat, improbanda improbet, superstitiosa vel magica in specie non afferat, allegationibus certum finem statuatur, sibique persuaudeat, ab harum rerum tractatione haud tantum utilitatis apud universos expectari posse, quantum apud curiosos aliquos periculi timeri debet.”

¹¹⁰ *OA* II.2, 474. See also *ibid.*, 211.

¹¹¹ ARSI FG 668, fol. 396^f: “Unde non videtur permittendum auctori ut ostendat quomodo singula sigilla superstitiosa practicè componantur et ordinentur ad superstitionem et magiam. [¶] Nec satisfacit auctor dum praedicta sigilla reprehendit ut superstitiosa et vitanda cum aliqui curiosi et parum timorati possint illa amplecti et experiri; nam ut fatetur ipse auctor clasi [sic] 7.^a pag. 61. haec aeternis tenebris suppressere quam luci dare pressaret.” Cf. ARSI FG 668, fol. 392^r.

about the lost teachings of the hieroglyphic doctrine, “They are buried so that they may rise again more full of life; they hide so that they may be revealed more clearly.”¹¹² The revisors, on the other hand, thought that much of this kind of material, because false and superstitious, was *ipso facto* useless and unnecessary. At best, they allowed that some of it might have a certain value for scholars, but this was easily outweighed by the danger it posed to curious souls—a danger that did not overly worry Kircher.

4. *The Limits of Censorship*

It was one thing for the revisors to request changes to Kircher’s manuscript and quite another to make him obey. Comparison of their judgments with the printed book and the surviving sections of the manuscript¹¹³ reveals that Kircher did not comply with many of their most serious demands. For the most part, he dutifully carried out specific requests for minor changes. He added, for example, more of the kind of language (already present in the original draft) requested by the censors to distinguish his own opinions from those of his impious sources, inserting phrases such as “so say the Rabbis,” “as the Platonists

¹¹² *OA* I, a4^v. See above, n. 73.

¹¹³ BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235. This consists of the fair copies of parts 1 and 2 of *OA* II that were submitted to the revisors and subsequently corrected and sent to the printer. (It also includes a few loose, unidentified sheets from the otherwise lost manuscript of *OA* III.) Some parts are missing but the majority of the manuscript is intact. The text is in the hand of an amanuensis, with corrections added by Kircher. A note deposited with the manuscript, signed by Boleslaw Szczniak in 1952, erroneously describes it as a post-publication copy from “ca. 1670,” “evidently prepared for the second edition of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*.” (To my knowledge, no such reprint was ever projected, much less carried out.) Unfortunately this mistake has been carried over into bibliographies, such as that in Lo Sardo, *Museo del Mondo*. The manuscript bears page numbers corresponding exactly to the revisors’ judgments and printer’s marks corresponding to the signatures of the printed edition, demonstrating beyond doubt its true identity. Ms. Ges. 1235, which is unbound, currently bears three different foliations: the original foliation of the individual treatises (“*classes*”) that make up the two volumes; the foliation of the complete volumes in the state in which they were sent to the printer; and the foliation given in pencil by the modern collator of the codex at the Biblioteca Nazionale, which corresponds to the current imperfect state of the manuscript. The citations given by the revisors refer sometimes to the first of these, sometimes to the second. The citations given here employ the last, unless otherwise indicated.

say,” or “according to the opinion of the Arabs.”¹¹⁴ In many cases, particularly in the treatise on the Kabbalah, he merely inserted an asterisk next to an opinion that had been singled out for correction and placed a note in the margins labeling it a “ridiculous Rabbinic superstition” or something similar. He added numerous passages refuting specific errors and more general disclaimers (in the spirit of Wysing’s aforementioned instructions for the *Obeliscus Pamphilius*), such as, “if anything heterodox occurs in these things, I wish the reader to know that it is not asserted by my judgment, but from the opinion of the ancients.”¹¹⁵

But, while Kircher generally complied with requests for such small alterations to his text, the revisors’ most urgent demands—most notably their order to delete large portions of the treatises on the Kabbalah and on Arabic magic—went unheeded. The “useless” sections on the forty-two- and seventy-two-letter names of God remained in the printed text, essentially unaltered, as did the problematic parts of his discussion of the doctrine of the sefirot, despite the revisors having called for their removal. Kircher responded to the demand that he completely delete descriptions of magical practices (including the entire chapter on the practical Kabbalah) by doing more of exactly what the revisors had declared inadequate. That is to say, he left these sections entirely intact but added additional disclaimers and reproachful phrases to those already present in the original text. The section on the practical Kabbalah remained as long and detailed in the printed book as in the original draft; but Kircher added marginalia and new phrases in the body of the text stating that he spoke “not according to my own opinion, but according to

¹¹⁴ When I say that Kircher changed the text, I mean that, in the manuscript, the text in question appears in Kircher’s hand as an addition to the original text, which was written by an amanuensis. One may not assume that all such additions necessarily were made after the judgments of the revisors; but when the changes deal with material that the revisors asked to be changed and address their criticisms, I make this assumption.

¹¹⁵ BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 85^r; cf. *OA* II.1, 130: “. . . ut proinde si quid heterodoxum in iis occurrerit, non meo id sensu, sed è mente Veterum assertum esse, Lectorem scire vulerim.”

the Jewish theologians.”¹¹⁶ In the same way, he inserted new phrases to the unabridged discussion of the forty-two-letter name of God, emphasizing that the doctrines discussed were the superstitious beliefs of the Jews; and he added marginal headings describing the unaltered body of the text as “vain efforts of the rabbis.”¹¹⁷

Not only the treatise on the Kabbalah, but all four volumes of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, as well as *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, were sent to press in a form much closer to Kircher’s original drafts than to that commanded by the revisors in their judgments.¹¹⁸ Evidently, the constraints placed on Kircher by ecclesiastical censorship were not so great in practice as the letter of the law—and the will of the Father Revisors—might suggest.¹¹⁹ Why was Kircher allowed to print these works without making the important revisions required by the revisors?

If the books were published with many of the revisors’ orders disregarded, this seems to have happened with the blessing of the General of the Society, who gave the works his imprimatur. In this case, one cannot rightly say that Kircher evaded the censorship system, since according to the rules governing that system, the reports of the revisors were simply recommendations addressed to the General, who had complete discretion in making a final decision. It was the duty of the Father Revisors rigorously to apply the rules governing Jesuit publications to submitted texts. It was then the duty of the General to make a decision, which took account of the revisors’ judgments, but which also could be based on other factors. Although the Jesuit Constitution contained rules for the Father Revisors (which make reference to the ultimate authority of the General), there were no such rules laying out the criteria by which the General should make his decision.

¹¹⁶ BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 335^r: “. . . non ex mea, sed ex mente Theologorum Hebraeorum.”

¹¹⁷ BNVE Ms. Ges. 1235, fol. 187^r: “. . . vanus labor Rabbinorum.”

¹¹⁸ For a more complete analysis, see Stolzenberg, “Utility, Edification, and Superstition”; idem “Oedipus Censored.”

¹¹⁹ About Kircher’s experience with the Master of the Sacred Palace we know little, other than that he approved the *Oedipus*, which was printed with his imprimatur.

One assumes that the guidelines laid out in the Rules of the Revisors General were implicitly understood to be those criteria, and that in most cases the General was intended to follow the recommendation of the revisors, especially when their opinion was unanimous. But ultimately, in granting permission to publish books as in other matters, the General was at liberty to consider extenuating circumstances and to make exceptions.¹²⁰

If this is the correct way to understand what happened, it is interesting that formally the scenario did not play out with the General overriding the revisors. Rather, the revisors attested to the adequacy of Kircher's revisions before the General signed a standard imprimatur stating that the work could be published because it had been approved by the revisors. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that the decision to approve Kircher's manifestly inadequate revisions was made by the revisors without the General's knowledge.¹²¹ Indeed, at the time of the review of the first volume of the *Oedipus*, one revisor wrote the General to warn him of the likelihood that Kircher would ignore the revisors' instructions, as he had done before.¹²² The censorship process did not take place entirely on paper, at least for an author like Kircher who was a colleague of the revisors at the Collegio Romano. There may have been conversations and negotiations, involving the author, the revisors, and the General, between the time of the initial judgments and

¹²⁰ My interpretation here is in line with Baldini, *Legem*, 87, who remarks that the Generals often possessed a greater "political-cultural" sensitivity than the revisors, and thus were relatively more tolerant of innovative propositions, sometimes mediating between authors and revisors and occasionally even permitting works that the revisors had condemned.

¹²¹ Based on the appearance of the revised manuscript of *OA II*, I do not believe that Kircher could have hidden his disobedience from the revisors by playing with the manuscript (e.g. removing sections and then reinserting them before sending the text to press) and thus conclude that the revisors knew that Kircher had not made all the changes that they had required. For additional evidence that the revisors may sometimes have approved works against their better judgment because of pressure from above, see Duneau's dutiful approval of the corrections of Kircher's *Iter Extaticum II* (ARSI FG 661, fol. 32^r), following his plea to the General not to allow the work to be published (ARSI FG 661, fols. 30^r, 34^r). See Stolzenberg, "Oedipus Censored," n. 162.

¹²² See the letter from Wysing to Gottifreddi quoted below.

the approval of the corrected manuscript.¹²³ (A glimpse of the face-to-face dimension of the process, which by its nature has left few traces in the archive, can be caught in Nicolaus Wysing's judgment of *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, which refers to the changes requested in his report as being "in addition to those which I have discussed in private with the author."¹²⁴) This leaves the question, why would the General have allowed Kircher to publish the books in the form that he did?

The Society of Jesus had various goals, which could conflict with each other, and in such cases one had to be chosen over the other. The author Athanasius Kircher brought advantages and disadvantages to the Society of Jesus, which put up with the latter because it valued the former. If his works often contained arguably heterodox material, they simultaneously supported the Society's cause in other respects. In the case of the *Obeliscus* and *Oedipus*, one may suppose that the affinity of their central argument—that a common spiritual past united all mankind—to the Society's missionary goals and, more generally, to the universal claims of the Catholic Church may have mitigated the reaction to the questionable means by which Kircher supported that argument. Apart from the specific content of his books, the Society no doubt valued Kircher's prominence as a Jesuit author widely recognized in the world of European learning, and, in particular, a favorite among princes. Kircher's megalomania may have been unbecoming to a Jesuit priest, but it played quite well in the aristocratic culture that the Society so consciously sought to engage. Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III underwrote and received the dedication of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*; Pope Innocent X played a similar role with *Obeliscus Pamphilius*. Whether or not there was direct communication between these mighty patrons and the General of the Society, knowledge of their support for Kircher's

¹²³ See Hellyer, "Because the Authority," 339–41, on cases of authors appealing to the General to override the revisors.

¹²⁴ ARSI FG 668, fol. 390^r: "Re reliquo, ut ea cum estimatione liber prodeat qua dignus est, animadvertenda quaedam hoc loco duxi, praeter ea quae cum auctore privatim contuli."

enterprise likely influenced his attitude toward the revision of the manuscripts. Upon receiving news that Emperor Ferdinand would provide money for the very costly printing of the *Oedipus*, Kircher wrote to one of his protectors at the imperial court, the Grand Burgrave Bernard Martinic: “The Father General was stunned by the Emperor’s largesse in offering so much help, and he earnestly instructed me to put all other things aside and apply myself exclusively [to the preparation of the *Oedipus*], so that his Holy Roman Majesty shall be completely satisfied by the said work.”¹²⁵

The revisors themselves were all too aware of the limits of their power and their dependence on the support of the General. In a postscript to the judgment of the first volume of the *Oedipus*, the revisor Nicolaus Wysing addressed a poignant personal plea to Father General Alessandro Gottifreddi: “I fear,” he wrote,

that the work expended by the Father Revisors in the judgment of this book may be of little use with Father Athanasius; for even recently in that Synopsis, he followed the judgment of these fathers only as much and in the manner that he wished. Then, he once said to me that he had significantly enlarged the book on the *Pamphilian Obelisk* after the judgment; and I even hear elsewhere that he boasted, on account of experience in these matters, that he can safely [engage in] practices of this sort. Further, I know from personal experience that things in a work to be printed (i.e. at the time of printing) are sometimes changed by Father Athanasius, at least with respect to order, so that it cannot easily be determined whether he has followed the judgment or rather has neglected it.¹²⁶ Indeed, as these things seem to me capable of highly prejudicing our judgments, I have decided they should be deferred to the providence of your paternity . . . I entrust myself most humbly to your Father’s paternal benevolence.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Kircher to Bernard Ignac Martinic, Rome, 30 December 1650 (draft), APUG 561, fol. 70^r: “P. N Generalis certè tanta in oblato subsidio Caesareae mentis amplitudine stupefactus, seriò mihi praecepit; ut omnibus sepositis rebus huic uni incumberem, ut S. Caes. M. tas dicto in opere plenam habeat satisfactionem, ad quod ea qua per est perfectione complendam, et ipse operam suam conferre omnibus modis laborat.”

¹²⁶ In his denouncement of Kircher’s *Iter Extaticum II*, Duneau later likewise stated that “it is known from experience” that Kircher often had not corrected his books as instructed. ARSI FG 661, fols. 30^r, 34^r.

¹²⁷ ARSI FG 668, fol. 399^r: “Timeo ne labor, à PP. Revisoribus in censuram huius libri impensus, parum apud P. Athanasium profuturus sit: nam etiam nuper, in Synopsi illa, censuram eorundem patrum secutus est non nisi quantum ipse, et quomodo voluit. Deinde ipsemet mihi aliquando dixit, se librum de Obelisco Pamphilo [sic] post censuram, notabili parte auxisse; atque etiam alibi gloriatum audio, se eiusmodi praxi, ob harum

Wysing knew that Kircher knew that he need not follow all of the revisors' demands. And he knew that real power lay with the Father General, whose intervention alone could compel Kircher to obey. All evidence indicates that General Gottifreddi (like Vicar General Florentius de Montmorency, with respect to *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, and General Goswin Nickel, with respect to the subsequent volumes of the *Oedipus*) chose not to exercise that power. A week after the original judgment was submitted with the above plea, Wysing and the other revisors dutifully signed a statement attesting that Kircher had satisfactorily corrected the manuscript and the first volume of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* was sent to the press.¹²⁸

5. How to Write a Jesuit Treatise on Magic and Superstition

Despite Kircher's relative victory over the Father Revisors, this should not be taken as evidence that the censorship of material pertaining to magic and superstition was not a serious business in seventeenth-century Rome, or that censorship did not leave its mark on Kircher's texts. On the contrary, Kircher not only made significant concessions to the censors—though fewer, as we have seen, than they had ordered—but the threat of censorship also seems to have played an important role in the genesis of the *Oedipus*.

In the first years after his arrival in Rome, when Kircher was studying several Arabic manuscripts relating to Egypt and the hieroglyphs, the threat of censorship weighed heavily on the young scholar's mind. In 1635, he wrote to Peiresc about the difficulty of publishing such works. "It is sure," he declared with regard to the Barachias manuscript, "that the whole [text] cannot be published, since it treats many magical

rerum experientiam, securè uti posse. Denique expertus quoque sum, res in opere imprimendo (id est tempore impressionis) à P. Athanasio, saltem quo ad ordinem, aliquando ita immutari, ut non facile deprehendi possit, an obsecutus censurae fuerit, an verò illam neglexerit. Quae quidem uti mihi videntur censurae nostrae plurimum praeiudicare posse, ita iudicavi ad paternitatis vestrae providentiam deferenda: privato id quidem nomine, cum haec ab aliis rescivi nihil ad modum attineret. Paternae benevolentiae P. N.^{ae} me perquam humillimè commendo."

¹²⁸ ARSI FG 668, fol. 397^f (attestation to the satisfactory revisions of *OA I*).

things, and in many places entirely concerns incantations, which neither the Holy Office nor our Society will permit, because of the scandal that they could cause to souls.”¹²⁹

Peiresc continued to insist that he proceed with publication, and in 1636 Kircher explained the situation at greater length:

Since books of this sort are full of superstitious magical seals and other opinions condemned by the church . . . [and] the magic arts are so mixed up with the hieroglyphic works . . . that [the authors] seem not to recite but to teach, indeed they seem to pave the way to revive the necromancy of the ancients . . . surely these things will never be permitted and cannot be permitted . . .¹³⁰

It will not do, he continues, to publish an expurgated version that removes the controversial parts, since “these books are by their nature such that they can serve me nowhere better than where they treat the worst things. For, in books of this sort I do not seek Catholic truths, which infinitely many other authors may provide, but the errors of the ancients, and teachings or whatever opinions are expressed in hieroglyphic notes, and their use.”¹³¹ Kircher explains that to overcome these obstacles he devised the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, in which

all the said authors are introduced in such an order that the authors’ words may be sincerely and faithfully alleged, but, the scandalous parts having been prudently

¹²⁹ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 8 February 1635, BNP NAFr 5173, fol. 25^v; cf. BNP FF 9362, fol. 13^v (copy): “Certum est eum totum lucem aspicere non posse, cum multa magica tradat, et totus in incantationibus multis in locis sit, quae nec sanctum officium, nec societas nostra, ob scandalum quod inde animabus accedere posset, permittet . . .” Extended excerpts from this and the following letter from Kircher to Peiresc are printed in Stolzenberg, “Oedipus Censored.”

¹³⁰ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 3 December 1636, BNP FF 9538, fol. 236^r: “Cum huiusmodi libri pleni sint superstitionum magicarum sculptarum, aliarumque opinionum iam dudum ab Ecclesia damnatarum; magicae artes Authoris ita hieroglyphicis operibus permistae sint, ut eas non recitare sed docere, immo viam ad antiquorum necromantiam rescuscitandam sternere videantur; easque non uno loco tantum, sed et per totum passim librum interserere soleant. veluti erroneas opiniones de s. scriptura, de generatione Angelorum & daemonum; ea certè nequaquam permittentur nec permitti possunt.”

¹³¹ Ibid., fols. 236^v–237^r: “Sed dicet D. V. edantur illa quae bona sunt, relinquenda scandalosa; R[espon]deo. eos libros eius naturae esse, ut nullibi melius mihi inservire queant, quam ubi pessima tractant. nec enim ego in huiusmodi libris quaero veritates catholicas, quas infiniti alii authores suppeditare possint. Sed errores quorum antiquorum, et placita seu opiniones qualescumque hieroglyphicis notis expressas earumque usum.”

and discretely refuted, the errors of the ancients may be like witnesses, and nothing which may be of use for emending antiquity may be omitted from the cited authors . . . I have shared this plan of mine with excellent friends and most learned men . . . And all judiciously proclaim this to be the only way that these authors may be delivered from eternal darkness, perhaps even the flames . . . For in this way hidden truth shall be made known, the dangerous rocks of scandal shall be avoided and, what I wish most of all, greater gain will be added to the Republic of Letters.¹³²

As Kircher tells it in this letter, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* was originally conceived as a means to publish certain Oriental texts about pagan religion and magic in a manner acceptable to the organs of ecclesiastical censorship. He argues that the texts will never be permitted to be published on their own because of their superstitious content and that the only way around this is to present passages from these texts within a larger interpretative work so that he can properly contextualize them and refute their errors—in other words to employ the linguistic strategies that we have examined. When Kircher finally executed this plan years later, the censors intimidated him rather less. And when the revisors found Kircher’s “refutations of the scandalous parts” insufficient to render certain parts of his books innocuous, he ignored them, confident that he could prevail over their judgments.

¹³² Ibid., fol. 237^r: “Ne igitur e dictis Authoribus fructus speratus periret quid feci? Oedipum Aegyptiacum condidi, cui omnes dictos authores ita ordine inseruntur, ut verba Authorum sincere et fideliter allegarentur, scandalosa vero prudenter et discretè refutata, errori priscorum veluti testimonia essent, nihilque quod antiquitatibus emendis usui esse posset, ex citatibus authoribus ommitteretur . . . Communicavi hoc meum consilium cum optimis amicis et viris literatissimis; qui vehementer laudant illud et aliter fieri nec posse nec debere. et hanc unicam hosce Authores ab aeternis tenebris forsan etiam flammis vindicandi viam esse omnes prudentes indicant . . . Nullus igitur modus securior erit et latior, quam, quem hucusque proposui, interserendo videlicet eos Oedipo meo cum refutatione scandalosorum. Sic enim veritas latens manifestabitur scopuli et petrae scandali evitabuntur et Reip. I[ite]rar[ia]e, quod maximè intendo, maius inde emolumentum accedet.”

6. *How to Read a Jesuit Treatise on Magic and Superstition*

Although Kircher was unwilling to excise his expositions of magical practices and “useless” heterodox doctrines, he readily furnished them with the language of reprobation that Catholic censorship, at a minimum, required—first placing such phrases in his original manuscript and then adding even more of them in response to the revisors. When we read the *Oedipus* we must be sensitive to these conditions. But, while there is thus good reason to be skeptical of the negative value judgments that Kircher attaches to various heterodox traditions, including many parts of the Kabbalah, we cannot simply assume that, because Kircher had to say certain things whether he believed them or not, he did not believe them. In places where Kircher appears inconsistent, wavering between positive and negative opinions of certain beliefs or practices, we may reasonably give less weight to the opinion that orthodoxy required. Likewise, his willingness to publish detailed descriptions of illicit magical practices (such as the “astrological Kabbalah”) suggests that he did not consider them to be as dangerous as he felt compelled to state. But what Kircher really thought about these matters cannot easily be determined. Did he believe, for example, that planetary magic seals were dependent on demonic powers—as he stated—but simply did not care as much about weak-willed readers’ souls as he did about his own scholarly need for the evidence they provided? Or did he believe, despite his declarations to the contrary, that they were not demonic but naturally efficacious? Or did he consider them inefficacious but harmless? The evidence does not allow us to answer such questions with certainty.

The anti-Jewish invective that occurs frequently in Kircher’s discussion of the Kabbalah may likewise seem to be a sop to the revisors. Indeed, some of it was demonstrably added in response to their judgments, as a means to counter-balance the suspicions that might arise from his heavy reliance on Jewish sources. But, even in the absence of such external pressures, Kircher partook of his share of Christian bigotry, as we know from his encounter with the Rabbi Solomon Azubi in 1633. Kircher and Azubi,

who had been introduced to each other by Peiresc, had a brief correspondence, which degenerated when Kircher took offence at the way Azubi responded to what appears to have been an attempt by Kircher to convert him. Afterward Kircher wrote Peiresc:

Regarding the letters that relate to Rabbi Solomon, I would find in them incivility, obstinacy, palpable arrogance, and hard-headedness, in a word, the mark of the Jewish character. But I could not fail to send them to you, translated from Hebrew into Latin, so that your lordship may see for himself the perversity of the character of the Jews, who, when we labor for their benefit that they may be converted and live well, due to a certain innate hostility to our holy law, would rather remain perverted.¹³³

When Kircher describes the modern Jews as “blinder than moles”¹³⁴—however conveniently that opinion may seem to satisfy the censors’ concern to respect the spirit of Clement VIII’s bull—there is no reason no to doubt that he is expressing his genuine opinion.

The lesson to be drawn, then, from an appreciation of the effect of censorship on Kircher’s text is that—in the absence of conclusive evidence from other sources—we must be skeptical, but ultimately agnostic, in judging the relationship between Kircher’s expressed judgments and true opinions about heterodox material. Even so, awareness of the pressures of censorship and the manner in which Kircher responded to them can help us to understand some inconsistencies in his work. For example, the great difference in tone between the preface and conclusion of the treatise on the Kabbalah—both of which express almost blanket condemnations—and the body of the text—which is much more ambiguous—can be understood as an effort by Kircher to mitigate the reaction to controversial parts of his exposition by surrounding them with firm expressions of

¹³³ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 9 August 1633, BNP FF 9538, fols. 227^v–228^r: “Ad literas porro Rabbi Salomonis quod attinet, nescio quid in iis inhumanitati, contumaciae, & manifestae superbiae, uno verbo, signa Iudaïci ingenii, & durae cervicis deprehenderim. Verùm omittere non potui quin eas ex hebraeo in latinam translatas vobis transmitterem; ut D.V. aspiciat coram perversitatem ingenii Iudaïci, ut dum ad eorum bonum laboramus, ut convertantur et vivent, illi magis, ex insita quadam virulentia in sanctum legem nostram, pervertantur.”

¹³⁴ *OA* II.1, 293. See above, n. 9.

Catholic orthodoxy. A similar strategy may be seen at work in other parts of the *Oedipus*, notably the section on “hieroglyphic astrology,” whose denunciatory preface hardly prepares the reader for the mostly neutral, descriptive treatise that follows.

Kircher’s response to censorship offers insight into the overall nature of his enterprise. As we have seen, Kircher was very willing to accommodate the censors when it came to the value judgments that accompanied his discussions of unorthodox beliefs and practices, but he refused to compromise on the details of his descriptions. To an extent, this may reflect the limits of what even an author as powerful as Kircher could get away with. But Kircher’s priorities in resisting the censors are also a reflection of fundamental priorities of his studies. Unlike many Christian writers on subjects such as the Kabbalah and learned magic, Kircher was not primarily concerned with rehabilitating suspect traditions by convincing his readers of their probity. His chief interest in this material lay rather in finding support for his interpretation of the hieroglyphic inscriptions and, more generally, in displaying his erudite mastery of “recondite antiquity.” While Kircher’s treatment of the practical Kabbalah, for example, is ambiguous (he seems to have thought that at least parts of it were licit and even pious), there is no evidence that he was interested in practicing such theurgical techniques himself. Kircher applied his knowledge of kabbalistic theories by explaining the Jewish amulets that were sent to him for interpretation by perplexed admirers, not by fabricating and using them. The same may be said with regard to his discussion of Arabic image magic. For all his attention to the minute details of the construction of planetary talismans, there is no evidence—and no reason to suspect—that he employed them. Consequently, it is not surprising that Kircher was relatively untroubled by the requirement that he accompany his discussions of such subjects with statements condemning their moral probity. But expunging such discussion altogether—or even eliminating the technical details—would have deprived him of the tools to practice the esoteric antiquarianism that lay at the heart of his enterprise.

שער שם כהן לשמירת כהן

ההודו ישמעחו השמים וה בחוק ההוד ותתן החוק עכל על חת השמים
 הם והיה הנה שמים ומלבית הנה חת כחשר נכחז בשער עלת הפנייה
 זה יחזיק תמלה היות זה בחוק ויה בשמים פ הכוונה פ בשמים הורח
 שפנה חכמה ענה שחם יה והוא מקבל משה ומשפיע מבוא שפנה
 ושפנה הדאוי לה וחס זה וקדוב לבנות מה נמצא כדכלב הנמונים בסוד
 כתבת שם כן ד חקיקתי אל הוראת הנחם להלמעהו פאכרבת כל חוק
 וחוק כצורה נקודות ומחולקו לך השם וחלק כל ריש וריש לך נקודות
 ועד אשר יעלה כל משפר הנקודות לבד כלשטר כד צורת רישות מ
 פנימיות לשטר כד ספר הכוונה יב משפיע יב מעשבים ויב מעשבים יב תיפסי
 ויב מקבלים והם כוד שפני יה עבית לש מה צורה
 וכל נקודה נקודה שלש טלזן כתב עצמו וכל נקודה
 ונקודה יש לה לראשין וך בשבעה הקולה שלש כיתה הם לשטר השם השטר
 שחם משה ושב כחה חיות האחרון שלש כולם לשטר השם הכבוד הנקוב
 עב עב לשונו חנה מתוך דבה הם משמנו ודמי שחם השם מקבל שבע
 מחציו כדק זכר וצדקה ושאר דבריהם יתבחרו מתוך מנה שבעה כש
 פרוי השמות כשם עב עבלי וחזור לבנינו פ שם הכרנה כתיבה הוא גיה
 חד לח טלס השם כן ל הנה בשער הקלם ככד פ איותו השם הוא נקוד
 בחולף ושם הלבוש שלו הוא שם כן ל הנה כתיבה ונקודות חשך והשם חזיר
 לבוש ליו ותשם הוא שער השמית לבואים ל שם כן ל וממצא רחוק
 לשה כתיבותם אל לת פתייה דלת רשם יהיה יוד הח חו הח והפ ציה
 למתכנסא פזם כולם פה בכל חדר דכל שמחן חובו פבוין לה עבל ופי שחן
 ספיה שחין בה שם כן ל עפ במעלמו לישו ל הכל וא הפל כעל שפתייה
 בשער הקולם ככד ל ולפי חוייב היבנון לבפח כוערה בכל מלת התפלה
 א שם כן ל כחשר נכחז בשער הטיפה ככד וזה רצה בחשירו והפ ציה
 למתכנסא וכן פ ונתן טעם לשר פ חתי שר השמית הם פבוים ל שם
 כן ל וכן שם כן ל שבתה מתלבש כשם כן ל בקולות חשך והוא פבוין ליו חו
 תימלג חק חשך שחיה שם כן ל פבוין ל שם כן ל כהיות שאותיותיה שורה
 כע שלם כתיבה על ה ראשונה כבה והשנית כתיבת עם היות שציה ח

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Fig. 7. Another page from *Pardes Rimmonim* with annotations by Kircher calculating the numerical values of the divine names. Corodvero's figure of the Tetragrammaton written with twenty-four circles emitting seventy-two rays is reproduced in *OA* II.1, p. 268. BAV Neofiti 28, fol. 278v. ©Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican).



Fig. 8. Another page from the *Pardes* manuscript with diagrams. BAV Ms. Neofiti 28, fol. 88^v. ©Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican).

Fig. 9. Kircher's version of the diagram places the *alef* in the circle of names that were drawn separately in the manuscript of *Pardes Rimmonim*. Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Romae: Ex Typographia Mascardi, 1652–4), II, part 1, 302. By permission of Stanford University Libraries.



