PART IV

THE BODY IN JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE
In this article I would like to draw the reader’s attention to an interesting feature concerning the not wholly predictable transmission of esoteric lore such as Kabbalah in a Christian environment at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Of the entire phenomenon of Christianizing a specific Jewish doctrine, which lasted several centuries and was fiercely opposed as theologically dangerous, I will concentrate on one issue, trying to show the main turning points of the evolution of this trans-cultural and inter-religious adaptation process. It is my intention to analyze a particular image connected to the fundamental kabbalistical doctrine of the mystical shape of the Godhead in the works of two Christian Kabbalists of the Renaissance, in order to underline the peculiar shift it underwent.

Even before the crystallization of a systematic description of the world of the sefirot, there existed a literary genre called Shi’ur Koma, text fragments that deal with the corporeal shape of the Godhead.¹ These writings were heavily criticized by Maimonides because of their open recourse to anthropomorphism, their concordance with the biblical usage notwithstanding, and because they appeared to be diametrically opposed to the philosophical attempt at allegorizing any biblical reference to the corporeality of God. These ancient, or late-ancient, doctrines were successfully integrated in the emerging doctrine of Kabbalah in the course of the thirteenth century and reached their peak in the sections of the Zohar known as the Idrot (Assemblies).