The Cebes' Tablet ("Tabula") is deemed a not widely scrutinized text among the remaining works of ancient philosophy. This dialogue demonstrates an ethical teaching for finding happiness by describing a painting that is claimed to be the allegory of human life. The artwork is interpreted to young men by an old exegetes. This work was given a high reputation and popularity from the first printed edition\(^1\) to the publishing of the critical edition,\(^2\) but in the 20th century the interest of scholars decreased. Modern scholarship attempted to determine the date of creation by analysing possible influences of philosophical ideas that could be identified in the text of the Tabula. Nevertheless, there is no accordance in this question, but at the same time most of the scholars accept that there is a lot of influence from Socratic philosophy in the Tabula Cebetis. The thematic element that eminently underlines the evocation is the discussion about life and death, health and richness.\(^3\)

Although the thoughts of Platonism\(^4\) and Pythagoreanism\(^5\) are noticeable, the Stoic influence is the most important point. It is beyond dispute that the Tabula incorporated the most influential preceding ancient philosophical ideas, yet modern scholarship seldom focuses on the probable inspiration of early Christian tradition. In this study it is assumed that revealing the correspondent elements between the Tabula and early Christian tradition could enable not only to specify more accurately the date, but also to give a deeper and more detailed interpretation of the work. The aim of this paper is to take into account

---

3. Tab. Ceb. 36-41.
and analyse motifs, which had not been discussed yet provide new aspects on
the Christian explanation of the work.

First, the Christian theological interpretation of humanist commentaries will
be presented. The hypothesis that the Tabula had been influenced by the early
Christian tradition is not a recent issue. The scholars of the Renaissance had
proposed it for the first time. At the end of the 15th century the Greek opus had
been reinvented. Due to its translation into Latin made by Ludovicus Odaxius,6
in the middle of the 16th century the Tabula became widely known and popular
across Europe and commentaries were published. The first one was written by
the rhetorician Huldrichus Fabri7 with a slight pursuit to interpret the Tabula
in the light of Christian ideas.

The most remarkable author of the Christian interpretation was Joannes
Camers, a minorite monk and theologian.8 His commentary,9 published in 1524
in Cracow, is probably the best example how to interpret an ancient philosophical
work in the aspects of Christianity. In the summary of the commentary he
mentioned that the content of the Tabula i.e. such description of human life
comes not only from the anonymous author, but also the Sacra Scriptura (Holy
Bible): In universum, hac tabula Cebe, humanae naturae cursum mire quadam insi
sinuatione adamussim (quod dicitur) exprimit ferme totum. Sunt qui tradant hunc
humanae naturae cursum, non primum a Cebete excogitatum, sed eum ex sacris litteris
desumpsisse.10 Although Camers does not clarify explicitly that the Tabula is
tightly bound to Christianity, he never misses a chance to interpret the work
with regard to this view. He draws a parallel between many points of the
Tabula and the Holy Bible, and the thoughts of the Church Fathers. By the
analysis of the motif of penitence, he emphasises the influence of Lactantius11
who claims that it is an important moment in human life as the mercy of God

Ancient philosophical and literary parallels were involved in the interpreta-
tion of many places where it seemed plausible in order to achieve a deeper and
more accurate explanation. As it can be detected from the large amount of the
cited authors, his awareness about Greco-Roman philosophy was outstanding.

---

7 Cebetis Thebani Philosophi Excellentissimi Tabula, in qua breviter totius vitae humanae ratio, hoc est ingressus, medium et exitus, nec non alia quaedam haud minus iucunda, luculenter, ut pictura indicat descripturum, Cum scholiis per Huldrichum Fabri non inepte marginibus adeictis. Viennae 1519.
8 L. Wadding, Scriptores Ordinis Minorum quibus accessit syllabus illorum qui ex eodem ordine pro fide Christi fortiter occubuerunt. Romae 1906, 150.
10 Camers, Commentaria, 426.
11 Camers, Commentaria, 444-445.
Nevertheless, the most important and peculiar point of his commentary is the emphasis on the elemental influence of Christianity on the work. In my judgment Camers claims correctly that the Tabula must be interpreted allegorically, therefore his interpretation focuses on the metaphoric aspects of some phrases. After all, the most significant methodical failure of his commentary is that the analysis had not been based on the original Greek text, but on Odaxius’ Latin translation. Thus, not every conclusion is deemed sound and utterly acceptable.

Let us take into account the following examples. The painting described in the Tabula symbolizes the path of human life as an allegory composed from metaphors. This way consists of three different stages separated by walls in the picture. In the first section there is a crowd of women symbolizing sins and wicked pleasures. Camers claims that sins had arisen from the female principle. This idea can be retraceable to the book of Genesis.12

In Camers’ commentary the second remarkable item among that sort of elements is ignorance (ἀφροσύνη), which is deemed a serious threat in life. It could only be compared to the riddle of the Sphinx.13 Ignorance not only poses a one-time threat, but poisons the mind continuously. Thus, no one is able to make right decisions living ethically bad. If it became recognizable which things are wrong or right and bad and good in human life, ignorance would pass away and the possibility of blissful life would be provided. Ignorance appears in the commentary as one of the greatest dangers. In order to prove this explanation, he cited Cicero, Seneca and Socrates concluding his point by the following statement: to deny the existence of God is the peculiarity of ignorant people.14 Thus, the way of interpretation had turned to theological explanation.

Before one comes to Paideia, Pseudopaideia seduces him. The followers of Pseudopaideia are teachers of liberal arts and adherents of some philosophical school, such as hedonists, Peripatetics.15 Even Camers despises these sciences

---

13 Tab. Ceb. 3, 2-4. ἐστι γὰρ ἡ ἐξήγησις ἐοικυῖα τῷ τῆς Σφιγγὸς αἰνίγματι, ὃ ἔκειν προεβάλετο τοῖς ἄνθρωποις. ἐὰν ὁμόνως συνίεις τις ἑσόξετο, εἰ δὲ μηρονίεις, ἀπόλετο ὑπὸ τῆς Σφιγγὸς. ἔστι γὰρ ἡ ἐξήγησις ἐοικυῖα τῷ τῆς Σφιγγὸς ἰδέα τῆς ἐξήγησις. ή γὰρ ἀφροσύνη τοῖς ἄνθρωποις Σφίγξ ἐστιν. αἰνίττεται δὲ τάδε, τί ἁγαθὸν, τί κακὸν, τί οὔτε ἁγαθὸν οὔτε κακὸν ἐστίν ἐν τῷ βίῳ. ταῦτ’ ὁμοίως ἐὰν ἐὰν μὲν τις υἱὰς ἁγαθὸν, ἀπόλλυται ὑπὸ τῆς Σφιγγὸς, ἀλλὰ κατὰ µικρὸν ἐν τῷ βίῳ καταφθείρεται καθάπερ οἱ ἐπὶ τιµωρίᾳ παραδίδοµεν. ἐὰν δὲ τις γνώ, ἁνάπαλοι ἡ μὲν ἀφροσύνη ἀπόλλυται, αὐτὸς δὲ σῶζεται καὶ µακάριος καὶ εὐδαίµων γίνεται ἐν πάντι τῷ βίῳ.
14 Solius insipientis est, negare Deum esse. Camers, Commentaria, 431.
15 Tab. Ceb. 13, 1-2. Οἱ τῆς Ψευδοπαιδείας, ἐφε, ἔραστα ἤπαθηµένοι καὶ οἴοµεσι µετὰ τῆς ἀληθῆς Παιδείας συνουµένοι. Τίνς οὐν καλούνται οὗτοι; Οἱ μὲν ποιηταί, ἐφε, οἱ δὲ ρήτορες, οἱ δὲ διαλεκτικοί, οἱ δὲ µουσικοί, οἱ δὲ ἀριθµητικοί, οἱ δὲ γεωµέτραι, οἱ δὲ
stating that these do not serve ethical education, but only flatter people. According to Camers the sciences from the circle of Pseudopaideia can be derived from Stoic sources and are deemed insufficient for intellectual development.\textsuperscript{16}

As it can be observed in a note related to the role of virtues, the theological explanation outweighs the importance of ancient literary and philosophical tradition. He disapproved of virtues as goddesses who derived from Zeus. He revised that ancient theory by a citation of Saint Augustin claiming that virtues are not divine beings, but donations of God for mankind.\textsuperscript{17} Although the commentary of Camers does not meet entirely the requirement of modern scholarship in every case, it has inspired my survey to reveal more correspondent points between Christianity and the Tabula.

As it was mentioned above, the popularity of the Tabula was constant from the 16\textsuperscript{th} to the 18\textsuperscript{th} century among the Christian churches and it was deemed an intermediary between so-called pagan philosophy and the Christian ethic. This point is demonstrated most eloquently by Imre Mészárovics in the introduction of his translation: \ldots si quaedam fabulosa, quae interdum insperguntur, et nonnullas Ethnicas loquendi formulas demas, doctrinam Christianam putes.\textsuperscript{18}

Consequently, the Christian interpretation had given the possibility for determining the date of the Tabula more accurately. According to Prächter’s survey\textsuperscript{19} on the phrases it is to be assessed that the Tabula had been allegedly composed in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD. Prächter revealed that the words, phrases, grammatical structures used in the Tabula can be found mostly in the works of the 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD. He composed a vocabulary containing the list of words and phrases that proves the first century dating.

On the basis of Prächt\textsuperscript{er}’s literary analysis I have expanded the scope of the survey. Thus, it can be concluded that phrases with the same semantic content can be paralleled with the context of the Novum Testamentum and early Christian literature.

First, I have scrutinized the phrase of πολὺς ὄχλος occurring frequently in the Tabula, so that it is deemed a thematic motif. It occurs 13 times in the New Testament. As a consequence, it was widely used in the works of the Church Fathers. In the Gospels the crowd surrounding Jesus was described by this phrase. There is also a reference alluding to the crowd of disciples. In the Tabula two crowds are named by this phrase. The first is standing in front of αστρολόγοι, οἱ δὲ κριτικοί, οἱ δὲ ἡδονικοί, οἱ δὲ περιπατητικοί καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι τούτοις εἰσὶ παραπλήσιοι.

\textsuperscript{16} Camers, \textit{Commentaria}, 446-447.
\textsuperscript{17} Sunt qui tradiderunt ex parente Iove virtutes omnes olim fuisse progenitas. Sique germanas inter se, cunctas esse virtutes. Hinc natus gentilitatis error qui virtutes esse deas quasdam putaverint. Verius Augustinus quarto de Civitate Dei libro scribit, non Deas esse virtutes, sed Dei dona potius. Camers, \textit{Commentaria}, 450.
\textsuperscript{19} K. Prächter, \textit{Cebetis tabula quanam aetate conscripta esse videatur}. Marburg 1885.
the gate where they want to enter Life.\textsuperscript{20} The second is the crowd of \emph{inconsulti}, who surround Tyche to partake of her givings.\textsuperscript{21}

Moving on, the interpretation of \textit{σῴζοµενοι} provides a more evident parallelism between the Tabula and Christianity. Several different forms of the verb \textit{σὠζω} can be found in the Tabula strengthening the possibility of the redemption-centric interpretation. According to Robert Joly’s theory the Tabula describes a Pythagorean initiation rite by which the initiated persons acquire peculiar, nowhere else obtainable knowledge in order to reach happiness. Although Joly’s interpretation gives a useful viewpoint, it is not sufficient for the deeper understanding of the Tabula because he selected the phrases arbitrarily to support his argumentation.\textsuperscript{22} According to Prächter’s dating it is obvious that in the prominent use of the verb \textit{σὠζω} the Christian tradition is reflected. Therefore, it should be interpreted as “be saved” in its semantic content. This point is in perfect accordance with the goal of the Tabula to show the way to Happiness.

Next, I turn to the analysis of Metanoia (Repentance) that is deemed the crucial motif of the Tabula. According to my judgement this is the most important evidence for the Christian influence: \textit{ἐἶτα ἐνταῦθα πάλιν εἰς τὸν έπερον οἶκον ῥίπτεται, εἰς τὴν Κακοδαιµονίαν, καὶ ὅδε τὸν λουπὸν βίον καταστρέφει ἐν πάσῃ κακοδαιµονίᾳ, ἂν μὴ ἡ Metάνοια αὐτῷ ἐπιτύχῃ ἐκ προαιρέσεως συναντήσασα.}\textsuperscript{23} Metanoia helps to dismiss all sorts of misfortune and agony. The acceptance of Metanoia’s help is a human decision and beginning of purification and journey to a happier life. The appearance of the word is significant in the Novum Testamentum because it occurs 22 times. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the word refers not only to repentance, but also to conversion. Therefore, the cited sentence can be interpreted as a paraphrase for the sacrament of baptism that abolishes sins. In the Biblical occurrences this sentence points out the similarity: \textit{ἐγένετο ᾽Ιωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἔρηµῳ καὶ κηρύσσων βάπτισµα μετανοίας εἰς ἀφεσιν ἁµαρτιῶν.}\textsuperscript{24} The motif-structure can be traced back to the context of the cited sentence proving the Christian influence on the Tabula. In the Gospel John baptized with water, but Jesus, who comes after him, baptized with the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in the Tabula the purifying strength of Eudaimonia is more significant than Metanoia to find real Happiness. Anyway, it should be mentioned that the former value (Repentance) is a prerequisite for the realization of Happiness.

Be that as it may, at the turning point of life depicted in the Tabula, Metanoia stands and liberates from the former sinful life, but it is enough for complete salvation. The \textit{metanoia} is important in scriptural passages, because it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Tab. Ceb. 4, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Tab. Ceb. 4, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Tab. Ceb. 10, 4
\item \textsuperscript{24} Mc. 1, 4
\end{itemize}
ensures admission to Christian community. Regarding the presented thematic and conceptual concordances it is to be concluded that there would have been closer correspondence between the Tabula and early Christian tradition.

The allegory of narrow and broad roads demonstrates evidently the Christian inspiration which is also an ancient philosophical topos (common place) coming from the Prodicus-myth.\(^{25}\) Heracles standing at the crossroads had to choose between Worthlessness calling herself happiness, and Virtue. According to this allegory the way to virtue is claimed harder and rougher than the other, yet it offers fair and valuable prospects. In the Tabula we can see the hardness of the way leading to Paideia:

\[
\text{οὐκοῦν καὶ θύραν τινὰ και ὁδόν τινα πρὸ τῆς θύρας, ἥτις οὐ πολὺ ὑγεῖται, ἀλλ' ὀλίγοι πάνω πορεύονται ὡσπερ δι' ἀνοδίας τινός καὶ τραχείας καὶ πετρώδους εἶναι δοκούσης; Αὕτη τοινῦν ἐστίν ἡ ὁδός, ἐφι, ἢ ἀγώνια πρὸς τὴν ἀληθινὴν Παιδείαν.}\(^{26}\)

However, the Tabula describes just one way, which is narrow and tight and can barely be passed through with a small door at its end. It demonstrates that because of its toughness only a few people choose this path to reach Happiness. Thus, the Tabula clarifies obviously that only one way leads to Happiness. The content seems to be similar to the parable in the seventh verse of the Gospel according to Matthew:

\[
\text{Εἰσέλθατε διὰ τῆς στενῆς πύλης· ὅτι πλατεῖα ἡ πύλη καὶ εὐρύχωρος ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν, καὶ πολλοί εἰσιν οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι' αὐτῆς· τί στενὴ ἡ πύλη καὶ τεθλιµµένη ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωήν, καὶ ὀλίγοι εἰσίν οἱ εὑρίσκοντες αὐτὴν.}\(^{27}\)

These similar thematic elements with regard to the motifs in the second half of the work emphasize the presence of Christianity.

According to the ideas of the Tabula, ignorance is the worst thing, because people are not able to decide properly whether certain things have a good or bad nature. Ignorance is instilled into man by Ἀτη (Deceit) at the moment of birth. As a consequence, the perfect Good remains hidden from them.\(^{28}\) Paul the Apostle names ignorance as the cause of the sinful way of life: εσκοτωµένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ ὄντες, ἀπηλλοτριωµένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ, διὰ τὴν ἀγνοίαν τὴν οὖσαν ἐν αὐτοῖς, διὰ τὴν ποροσιν τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν, οἵτινες ἀπληγηκότες ἐως τούς παρέδωκαν τῇ ἀσελγείᾳ εἰς ἐργασίαν ἀκαθαρσίας πάσης ἐν πλεονεξίᾳ.\(^{29}\) In the letter to Titus Paul claims that all of us follow sinful desires before the experience of God’s mercy: Ἡµεν γὰρ ποτε καὶ ἡµεῖς ἀνόητοι, ἀπειθεῖς, πλανώµενοι, δουλεύοντες ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ἠδοναῖς ποικίλαις, ἐν κακίᾳ καὶ φθόνῳ διάγοντες, στυγητοὶ, μισοῦντες ἀλλήλους.\(^{30}\)

The way leading to happiness is presented as a competition in the Tabula. Happiness crowns the winner with a wreath that has power to make someone happy (εὐδαιµονικὴ δύναµις). Then one can live in the state of constant and perfect happiness, which depends on him not on others. In the first letter to the

\(^{25}\) Xenophon, Memorabilia 2, 1, 21-34.

\(^{26}\) Tab. Ceb. 15, 2.

\(^{27}\) Mt. 7, 13-14.

\(^{28}\) Tab. Ceb. 6, 3.

\(^{29}\) Eph. 4, 18-19.

\(^{30}\) Tit. 3, 3.
Korinthians Paul attributes a similar role to the wreath as a metaphorical personification of virtue:

Οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι οἱ ἐν σταδίῳ τρέχοντες πάντες μὲν τρέχουσιν, εἰς δὲ λαμβάνει τὸ βραβεῖον; οὕτως τρέχετε ἵνα καταλάβητε. πᾶς δὲ ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται, ἐκεῖνοι μὲν οὖν ἴνα φθαρτὸν στέφανον λάβωσιν, ἥμεις δὲ ἄφθαρτον. Therefore, the wreath symbolizes in both cases the prospective and ideal happiness. There is only one different element between the Tabula and the scriptural tradition. In the Tabula Happiness gives the wreath, whereas it is to be gained from God in the Sacra Scriptura.

Following the crowning scene Virtues take men back to the location of earlier sinful life and demonstrate how badly they were living under the slavery of sins. The Tabula names four of them: incontinence, pretentiousness, avarice, vanity. The phrase κενοδοξία i. e. vain glory had been applied mostly by the Church Fathers according to Saint Paul’s prohibition: µηδὲν κατ’ ἐριθείαν µηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν..., µὴ γινώµεθα κενόδοξοι, ἀλλήλους προκαλούµενοι, ἀλλήλοις φθονοῦντες. To sum up, it can evidently be concluded that the Tabula is an eclectic work containing most of the contemporary philosophical ideas and trends. The importance of the Tabula is that it had built a bridge between the philosophical tradition of antiquity and Christianity. The next step of my survey will be to demonstrate this linking function between two worlds: classical antiquity and Christianity.

31 1Cor 9, 24-25.
32 Phil 2, 3.
33 Gal 5, 26.