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**A Blessing and a Curse: Divine Names in Jewish Textual  
Tradition**

Diplomová práce

Olomouc 2021

Vedoucí diplomové práce  
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## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla v ní předepsaným způsobem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne 6. 5. 2021

## **Acknowledgement**

My deepest gratitude belongs to the amazing supervisor, but most of all true leader, of my thesis Tamás Visi who helped me immensely in the process of thinking and writing and essentially also existing in the currents of this reality. Every consultation full of brainstorming, ideas and inspirations was truly an exceptional and wonderful experience. I am very thankful to my family and friends for all the support, kind words, advice and simply for listening to my spontaneous attempts to share new knowledge and rather miscellaneous associations.

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## Introduction

*“But we consist of everything the world consists of, each of us, and just as our body contains the genealogical table of evolution as far back as the fish and even much further, so we bear everything in our soul that once was alive in the soul of men. Every god and devil that ever existed, be it among the Greeks, Chinese, or Zulus, are within us... gods and demons, paradises, commandments, the Old and New Testament.”<sup>1</sup>*

My first encounter with Abraxas was rather random through popular culture, in that time not so known pop music group took an inspiration in Herman Hesse’s novel *Demian* and used Hesse’s symbolism and existential theme. Prompted by the idea of one god being good and evil in its nature who unifies the light and the dark reflecting the duality of human life, I read the story vigorously with much personal existential inquiry accompanied by Buxtehude’s brooding *Passacaglia*. And so, I met with Abraxas who stayed on the periphery on my mind until I met him again while researching Jewish divine names in several ancient sources. The question arrived: how did a 20<sup>th</sup> century literary divine entity appear in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century magical papyri? During the search of details, I, of course, realized that this is not a moment when I am proving that time travel is possible, but that I am witnessing a colorful and fruitful process tried by history – the transmission of tradition between cultures in time and space. Transmission of tradition is a core process in the development of human history and society; thus, it intrigues researchers and gives impetus to historical, cultural, and anthropological research.

The quote above is a part of an existential monologue uttered by one of Hesse’s characters. In this monologue he presents the entirety of human history, culture, philosophy, and religion as belonging to everyone, as being a part of everyone’s subconsciousness. By this thought Hesse calls the reader’s attention to the richness of history that we share as its heirs and successors continuing the course of life built on remains of all preceding peoples and their cultures connected and interwoven. And as the monologue continues it highlights the importance of knowledge – that having roots means

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<sup>1</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair’s Youth* (New York: MJF Books, 2010), 91.

nothing if one is not aware of them if one does not know them. That is in my opinion may be the beginning of scholarship and research and thus shall be an august beginning of this thesis.

The first chapter explains the terms syncretism and translatability and addresses their aspects and issues which one may encounter when dealing with those topics. Simultaneously, the chapter illustrates several of the aspects and issues on historical and cultural examples. This part of the thesis should establish categories and elements within the two considered topics to enable reflection of the subsequent Abraxas study. The following chapter introduces Abraxas as seen by scholars from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present day to show the comprehensive path of how the perception of Abraxas developed and how modern research changed this perception by using newly found ancient sources. Other aspects that appeared in the focus of scholars, and are also presented in this introduction to Abraxas, involve the etymology and assumption of Abraxas's origin. The description of historiography is ensued by the research of primary sources – the Gnostic literature, Greek magical papyri, amulets, and Jewish magical texts *Harba de-Moshe*, and *Sefer ha-Razim*; which delves into the history of the sources and the sources themselves to show the orthographic forms in which Abraxas's name was preserved, context in which the name appeared, and the concept that Abraxas represented. The main goal of the thesis is thus to show one subject present in the set of sources, the changing conditions and context in each source that was show signs of syncretism; additionally, the thesis should show the limitations of the search for syncretic process that manifested during the Abraxas presence research.

# 1 Syncretism and Translatability

Two processes interwoven in human history are subjected to analysis – syncretism and translatability reflected on the cultural, religious, and magical background. Syncretism is perceived as a process of one culture (religion, society, or tradition) adapting symbols and meanings originally belonging to a different culture (religion, society, or tradition). Syncretic processes might be traced through a substantial part of human history and as a term it often appears in debates on world religions and their possible relations, similarities and oppositions which might be based on borrowings, or on the contrary, on demarcation from each other. There are two opposing approaches to the perception of syncretism: negative approach talks about the contamination of original pure tradition, positive approach considers syncretism to be an element enriching the tradition.<sup>2</sup> The term appears in context of other sociological and anthropological terms such as “acculturation”, “culture-contact”, and perhaps also “melting pot”<sup>3</sup>, albeit those concepts are thematically relevant, for the purposes of this thesis they remain extant on periphery of our vision.

The meaning of translatability is transparently accessible in the word – the ability/possibility to be translated. Although the name carries obvious linguistic implication, the use may extend to the field of concepts, ideas, motifs, and traditions – the possibility to transfer (translate) the concept into a context of another culture, society, or religion. The definition of both terms introduces important subject of many debates – the relationship between a name and concept that is expressed by the name. This relationship recognized two options: the name is perceived as embodying the concept (form and meaning are inseparable), or the relationship is arbitrary.<sup>4</sup>

Following the dichotomy of positive and negative approach, both syncretism and translatability might pose challenges to doctrinal systems – religions, philosophies, but also magic – in terms of establishing and perceiving identity and its potential difference

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<sup>2</sup> Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, “Introduction: problematizing syncretism,” in *Syncretism / Anti-syncretism: The politics of religious synthesis*, edited by Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Jae Jung Song, “The translatability-universals connection in linguistic typology: Much ado about something,” *Babel* 51, no. 4 (2005): 308-309.; Moshe Barasch, “Visual Syncretism: A Case Study,” in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 37-39.



from other identities and holding the power to identify “true” and “false” motifs, traditions, and practices. The level of self-perception and exercising of power to self-identify might be lost in history translation due to lacking accessible evidence, or ongoing development and borrowing process, posing methodological problem to the research.<sup>5</sup>

An interesting account of syncretism in religious tradition dates to first two decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE during the rule of emperor Antonius Elagabalus (formerly Varius Avitus, in some sources also Marcus Aurelius Antonius) who encouraged and actively participated in the process of religious and tradition syncretism. In his early career Elagabalus served as a priest in Syria to a religion centered around god Elagabalus of Emesa, a solar deity, whose name became permanently associated with the emperor. After the position of emperor was bestowed on him, Elagabalus (the emperor) brought Elagabalus (the god) to Rome and stood him the center of belief. A biographical source *Historiae Augustae*, and other historical sources, does not look upon Antonius Elagabalus kindly, moreover *Historiae Augustae* compares him in escapades and crimes to such tyrants as Caligula or Nero.<sup>6</sup> His attempt to create a syncretic religion was by the same source convicted of desecrating the native Roman religious practice. Rome’s temples were consecrated to Elagabalus, and already worshipped emblems were brought under the worship of the new cult adding other religions and their rites practiced in the Roman Empire – that of Jews, Christians, and Samaritans – for the god to assume all known mysteries of the world, i.e. connecting the traditions under one umbrella religious worship.<sup>7</sup> *Historiae Augustae* accuses the emperor of a deliberate suppression of traditional gods to assume Elagabalus as the highest and only correct god; however, archaeological evidence suggests that the traditional gods were not simply deleted but remained as parts of the new cult worship.<sup>8</sup> Concerning the origin of the Elagabalus cult, it is not considered to be an original Syrian worship of the Sun, but it was already syncretic or appropriated idea of how local Syrian cult was perceived through the lenses of newly

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>6</sup> David Magie (trans.), *The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*, Volume II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 104-105.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 110-113, and 116-119.

<sup>8</sup> Adam M. Kemezis, *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans: Cassius Dio, Philostratus and Herodian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 84-85.; Martijn Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome’s Decadent Boy Emperor* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 35-36, and 113-114.

local Emesan Greeks who created the Elagabalus cult.<sup>9</sup> The exchange and development then give an impression of chain syncretic process.

Elagabalus was a member of the Severan dynasty of Roman emperors that ruled from 193 to 235 CE – turbulent 42 years under five emperors. The period of Severan rule followed and further endowed cultural and social changes within the Roman Empire – the relationship between diverse parts of society opened to communication; another change took place in the individual’s relationship to the emperor, to social hierarchy, to fashion and style that could (and did) show social status, to education and art, and also relationship between oneself and the empire.<sup>10</sup> Among the formal ordinances that might have instigated a certain set of changes was the extension of the Roman citizenship on presumably all citizens living on the territory of Roman Empire.<sup>11</sup> The Severan dynasty preceded the radical transformation of the Roman Empire, a phenomenon referred to as “third-century-crisis”. Economic, political, cultural, and social structures were transformed while influencing the mentality development of citizens and elites. These substantial amendments affected people’s attitude towards religion, and so the traditional Roman religion along with established cults were abandoned possibly giving space to either establishment of new religious systems, or fundamental transformation of already existing religions and cults.<sup>12</sup> The examples of emperor Elagabalus, Severan dynasty and the transformative 3<sup>rd</sup> century reflect viable approaches leading to syncretism – planned, forced, and encouraged, or as a consequence of either gradual or abrupt change in society.

The development during the Severan rule and subsequent radical changes in Roman society are events taking place in context of Hellenization, spreading and absorption of the Greco-Roman culture, in the conquered territories from the 4th century BCE to approximately 5th century CE. The territory of Near East was during this period exposed and actively participated in Hellenization to some degree. In the first stages of Hellenization, under the Greco-Macedonian rule, Greek language and culture were accepted and not vehemently rejected, to show an example, there is not much evidence in Jewish textual sources that would majorly oppose the Greek culture. Moreover, a certain

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<sup>9</sup> Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC – AD 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 531.

<sup>10</sup> Kemezis, *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC – AD 337*, 529.

<sup>12</sup> Wolf Leibeschutz, “Was there a crisis of the third century?” in *Crises and the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Seventh Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Nijmegen, June 20-24, 2006)*, edited by Olivier Hekster, Gerda de Kleijn and Daniëlle Slootjes (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 17-19.

acceptance appeared between the religious and pious Jews, the Bible was being translated to Greek and possibly traces of Greek philosophy were found in Qohelet and Ben Sira which suggests at least a certain degree of conscious syncretism.<sup>13</sup> However, to say that Hellenism was fully accepted and supported would be an exaggeration. A possible reason for a rather non-problematic attitude toward the Greek culture might have been the scarce presence of Greeks in the territory which might also be a reason for a rather slow process of language adoption.<sup>14</sup> For the topic of cultural syncretism named Hellenization it is necessary to consider the element of the culture's will to adapt or to adopt. Although there might have been an internal rejection to subject oneself to a foreign rule, the acceptance of foreign cultural motifs on the other hand might have been less strict and prone to rejection.<sup>15</sup>

Varying attitude toward the reception of foreign cultural influence within one society may result into an internal struggle. Such case may be illustrated by the Near Eastern events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE; the growing tension in Jewish society, between the supporters and opposers of social and cultural adaptation, added to other local problems escalated into the Maccabean Revolt.<sup>16</sup> The revolt is often perceived as a symbolic event of one culture (religion) protecting itself from foreign culture.<sup>17</sup>

Moving forward several centuries, to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, after the two anti-Roman revolts – the Great Revolt and the Bar Kokhba Revolt, the local administration organization changed, and the Roman influence strengthened which led to a significant decline and disintegration of Jewish society in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.<sup>18</sup> The people faced the choice of belonging either to the Greco-Roman cultural and religious hub with its prosperity, or to keep Jewish identity and religion which was preserved by rabbis. Most people chose the combined path of internalized Jewish identity perhaps keeping the basic commandments (not eating pork, circumcision) with external life firmly based in the Greco-Roman surroundings.<sup>19</sup> The authority of rabbis began to increase at the beginning

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan A. Goldstein, "Jewish Acceptance and Rejection of Hellenism," in *Semites, Iranians, Greeks, and Romans: Studies in Their Interactions* (Brown Judaic Studies, 2020): 3-13, accessed May 5, 2021, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvzpv55g.5](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvzpv55g.5).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 32.

<sup>17</sup> "Judas Maccabeus: Jewish leader," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Judas-Maccabeus>.

<sup>18</sup> Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 110-114.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 175-176.

of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, albeit it remained limited and marginal to the major society.<sup>20</sup> The rabbinical movement resisted the imperial Greco-Roman syncretism imposed from the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE onwards, supported Judaism through the disintegration of Jewish society, and took part in the opposition to Greco-Roman culture and preservation of the religious system.

Translatability often appeared in discussions of philosophy, religion and magic while two aspects were majorly implemented: linguistic and conceptual, i.e. whether the tradition may be translated to another language and whether it is possible to translate the concept into another culture. Positive attitude, pro-translatability, is attested in the work of Greek historian Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) who wrote *Histories* – a concise text about the history of both Greeks and non-Greeks. While introducing the religions, cults and worship of non-Greek cultures Herodotus freely translates the foreign divine names to Greek divine names without a failure – Zeus Belus is Assyrian god Baal<sup>21</sup>, Theban Zeus is Egyptian Amun<sup>22</sup>. Herodotus himself addresses the translatability of divine names, “Aphrodite... is called by the Assyrians Mylitta, by the Arabians Alilat, by the Persians Mitra.”<sup>23</sup>

Herodotus’s deliberate translation technique might be based on a theory which claims that gods, their names, and their theologies were firstly recognized by one culture from which other cultures drew, thus, to use the name outside of that one original language is already a translation and further interconnections between diverse cultures are just sensible. One of such theories denotes the Egyptians as the original culture that presented the world with the gods; it is mentioned in several ancient sources, such as *On the Syrian Goddess* by Lucian<sup>24</sup> or in Herodotus’s *Histories*<sup>25</sup>. For the Egyptians there apparently was quite logical and correct to translate Re as Helios, or Thoth as Hermes. Said theory presents the answer to the basic question of syncretism research – the question of the tradition origin; albeit it was suggested that the story might have originated in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 113-120.

<sup>21</sup> Herodotus, *Herodotus, With an English Translation by A. D. Godley*, Volume I, translated and edited by Alfred Denis Godley (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1920), 225.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>24</sup> Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess*, Being a translation of Lucian’s “De dea Syria,” with a life of Lucian by Herbert A. Strong, edited with notes and an introduction by John Garstang (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1913), 42-44.

<sup>25</sup> Herodotus, *Herodotus, With an English Translation by A. D. Godley*, 337-338.

a pragmatic attempt of trying to compete with other cultures.<sup>26</sup> Following the theory, one may deduce the opinion of Herodotus and other ancient thinkers on the question of the conceptual translatability – the entity is truly translated as the identic entity but under a different name; in Shakespearean fashion: “*What’s in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet.*”<sup>27</sup> Hence, it seems that Herodotus agreed and employed both aspects of translatability – linguistic and conceptual.

Fierce opposition to translatability is present in the response of Origen (2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, in Alexandria) to anti-Christian treatise by Celsus. Origen’s *Contra Celsum* presents Celsus’s opinion on one entity (God) being worshipped under various names, notwithstanding the origin of the entity and the name used for it, thus the entity being addressed by the names of foreign god, i.e. the name is not substantial and may be translated directly or indirectly into another language and/or culture. Origen profoundly opposed Celsus’s claims stating the importance of the name and its untranslatability; the names are not arbitrarily chosen by people and so they are significant in their own nature. In his explanation of the matter Origen delves into magic and magical practices arguing the inability of names to be translated when referring to specific entity for the magical spell is then ineffective if other name is used, thus only the name in its native language functions properly as the magical practice desires.<sup>28</sup> Origen further explains the name’s form importance on the example of human names by indicating the impossibility to translate one’s name, i.e. addressing a person by translated version of their name would not set them in action as it is not their name; the untranslatability of human names Origen compares to divine names.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Origen adds another quality that determines the potential power of the name – sound of the pronounced name, therefore the form of the name is essential, if used for magical purposes, to see the desired impact.<sup>30</sup> The inability to translate divine names then deems impossible to call the God (as understood by Jews and Christians) by the name of Zeus or any other divine name.

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<sup>26</sup> Jan Assmann, “Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability,” in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 34-35.

<sup>27</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Cedric Watts (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2000), 59.

<sup>28</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, translated with an introduction & notes by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 23-25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 299-300.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

The dispute of *Contra Celsum* over divine names and their untranslatability includes not only linguistic aspect but also the aspect of conceptual translation. Origen considers the nature of the relationship between the name and the entity signified by the name; he sees the assumed power being channeled through the name itself, i.e. the name is the entity rather than being a representative of the entity.<sup>31</sup> Origen thus directly contradict Herodotus by refusing both aspects, linguistic and conceptual, of translatability. Concordant opinion rejecting the translatability of any god's name was promoted by Syrian philosopher Iamblichus (3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century); he sees the divine name as a symbol that cannot be translated sharing Origen's thought that the name is significant only in its original form or language.<sup>32</sup>

The dual perception of translatability and untranslatability was not only a matter of varying opinion, but it may be traced in the course of history. Early cultures (from 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE) communicated with each other and for that purpose mutual understanding was essential, especially in the core values where religion definitely belonged. The endeavors to preserve communication led not only to linguistic translations but extended also to cultural translation including the religious structures and divine names, for easier comprehension foreign god were likened to each other based on their characteristics. Jan Assmann offers an example of such intercultural translations found in Ugarit archives – a list of four language (Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurritic, and Ugaritic) translations including divine names, though belonging to different religious systems. The mutual knowledge of divine names and their place in the religious hierarchy was used when crafting bilateral (or multilateral) treaties as signifying their commitment; and accepted grave consequences if the agreement was breached. The intercultural translation between the gods and divine names suggests that the religions were perceived as being built on similar structures which allowed for the connection. Change in these relations came with the change in religions, or rather development of a religion with individual self-perception as distinct to all other religions surrounding it. Assmann uses the term “counter-identity” which is an identity that developed as a reaction to resistance against the over-ruling identity, e.g. developing Judaism in the hands of rabbis under the Roman rule.<sup>33</sup> In view of Assmann's claim, translatability of the divine names served for the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 23-25.

<sup>32</sup> Assmann, “Translating Gods“, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 25-29.

purpose of understanding in communication between cultures, specifically among the cultures that believed in their religions sharing form and structure; on the other hand untranslatability appeared when religions reject their perceived similarities and refuse for their divine names to be translated.

In the grey zones between culture and religion, magic and magical practices bloomed. The syncretism in the context of magic seems to have more fluid boundaries being less influenced by the intercultural differences, especially concerning the deliberate transmission and use of divine names. Much evidence suggests borrowing and adopting of divine names within the magical practices, for example, Jewish elements started to enter Greco-Egyptian magical tradition and simultaneously Greco-Egyptian elements, magical structures and practices entered Jewish magical tradition.<sup>34</sup> The field of magic research considering syncretism cannot avoid the struggle to assess the origin of individual practices. Such struggle is usually not the issue with the divine names; their origin is oftentimes known or might be deduced from its form and context in which it appears. However, there are of course exceptions, various divine names appear in magical texts whose origin might not be traced, or it is opaque as the syncretism within magic is more benevolent and divine names were being transferred unapologetically between cultures without preserving the notion from where they originated. The intercultural exchange in magic may be aptly illustrated on the example of Greco-Egyptian culture rooted in the environment of Greco-Roman presence in Egypt which gave an impetus to social, cultural, and religious syncretism supported by the shared language of practice. For example, religious cult of Serapis (Greco-Egyptian god), Hermeticism (philosophy built around the Greco-Egyptian syncretic god Hermes Trismegistus), Hermanubis and other syncretic Greco-Egyptian gods, Gnosticism (religious movement of Jewish and Christian sects originating in Egypt) etc.; these examples show the influence of variety cultures exchanging ideas and thoughts while residing together in Egypt. The Greco-Egyptian magic interconnected diverse cultural and religious traditions, evidence shows the employment of Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Jewish, Christian, and other Near Eastern divine names, techniques, and processes in the magical practices.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 196-214, 341-350.

<sup>35</sup> Amin Benaissa, "The Onomastic Evidence for the God Hermanubis," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Congress of Papyrology, Ann Arbor 2007*, *American Studies in Papyrology* (Ann Arbor, 2010), 67-76.; *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic*

The linguistic aspect of translatability becomes less of a problem in the magical syncretism and the divine names are often only transliterated in letters of the intended language, sometimes the names undergo transformations to adjust to the forms common in the intended language. However, the conceptual translatability might pose a challenge when being studied as the syncretic intention might be to adopt the name without any concept behind it to be placed into a newly created narrative, or it might be adopted solely for the perceived power that the name constitutes.<sup>36</sup> Albeit in the intercultural magic relations the boundaries are more fluid, voices against the translatability appear respectively in the context of magic claiming the magical potential dwells in the divine name and in the name in the original form only and so it should not be translated for it loses the potency.<sup>37</sup>

History facing the social, cultural, and religious syncretism experienced various attitudes and approaches by respective societies, cultures, and religions; be it positive or negative approach, utilization or rejection, deliberateness or natural development, or the ability to translate and convey the tradition in language and concept. This chapter attempted to concisely illustrate the variety of aspects and approaches on several examples, although I realize the topics of syncretism and translatability are complex and deserve the scholars' attention as these subjects are not limited by numbers, times, and places.

## 2 Abraxas

Engraved gemstones and amulets were the media that introduced the character Abraxas to the European history discourse. During the cultural development of the 15<sup>th</sup> century engraved gemstones were considered a relic of the classical past of Ancient Greek and Roman Empire, therefore, they received a major attention of collectors and men interested in the research of history.<sup>38</sup> Antiquarians used the technique of comparison

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*Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trimegistus*, Volume I, edited and translated by Walter Scott (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), 1-15.; Charles William King, *The Gnostics and their remains: Ancient and Mediaeval* (London: David Nutt, 1887), 158-175.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 229-230.

<sup>37</sup> The arguments of Origen and Iamblichus, see page 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Giada Damen, "Antique Engraved Gems and Renaissance Collectors." *The Met*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, published March 2013, accessed May 5, 2021, [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gems/hd\\_gems.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gems/hd_gems.htm).



to study the history – physical objects and available texts that dealt with the phenomena; Abraxas amulets were compared with late ancient text by early Christian theologians such as Irenaeus (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), Epiphanius (4<sup>th</sup> century CE), and St. Jerome (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> century CE) who ascribed Abraxas to a heretic religious movement, Gnosticism; according to their writings Abraxas amulets served as ideological representation as well as a token of religious advertisement. Antiquarians of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century drew from these ancient texts and put Abraxas on the border of Christianity and Egyptian paganism; however, they included also other possible local cults and movements that might have been involved in the creation of Abraxas amulets – they majorly considered Basilidean and Valentinian heresies, or native Egyptian idolatrous tradition. Prominent antiquarians Pierre-Antoine Rascas de Bagarris (1562-1613) and Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609) were both concerned with the amulets’ content and purpose for which they served; Scaliger deduced amulets to have complex philosophical content presumably serving for religious representation, Bagarris presented the thought of magical content, thus, possible magical use of the amulets.<sup>39</sup>

Jean L’Heureux Macarius (1540-1614) wrote for that time the most comprehensive study of Abraxas gems that presented complex syncretic picture of Abraxas, “*like a Trojan Horse, for just as the Greek heroes emerged from its womb, so Abraxas hides in its womb all the family of the gods, whether Egyptian, Greek, Latin or Persian.*”<sup>40</sup>; Macarius presumed a mixture of paganism, Christianity, Gnostic theology, and cult of Mithras – Persian solar deity. Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580-1637), a correspondent acquaintance of Macarius, Bagarris and other antiquarians, continued the syncretic narrative and added a new perspective based on the Greek inscriptions that were engraved in the amulets. Peiresc presented the idea that there was one common divine being from which other traditions were drawing; to these traditions Peiresc included the amulets, Gnosticism, Tetragrammaton from both Judaism and Christianity, Near Eastern Baal and Roman Jupiter. Peiresc’s theory was based on a single gemstone and its imagery, however, he was not the first scholar who came up with such proposition. The theory was built on the idea of John Selden (1584-1654), Peiresc’s friend and important jurist and

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<sup>39</sup> Roey Sweet, “Antiquarianism and history,” *Making History*, The Institute of Historical Research, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/antiquarianism.html> ; Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc’s Orient: Antiquarianism as Cultural History in the Seventeenth Century*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2012), 50-55.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, *Peiresc’s Orient*, 59.

Hebraist, that various pagan gods were only versions of one supreme god that was worshipped under various names in various territories in various periods of time.<sup>41</sup>

Another peak of Abraxas amulet research came at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century in the work of Charles William King (1818-1888) who focused on Gnosticism; he put Abraxas amulets directly to the Gnostic religious context. King attempted to create wide syncretic picture of Abraxas amulets and their depiction; he connected Egyptian, Near Eastern and Greco-Roman divine traditions, also including traditions of Hinduism as a possible co-factor in the development of Abraxas amulet imagery.<sup>42</sup>

Most of the studies, except for Bagarris, put the amulets solely to the role of religious representation; this perception began to change when the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri were being found, studied, and published continuously since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> The papyri arose scholars' interest in the history of magical traditions of the Greco-Egyptian culture, which was prevalently developed after Egypt's conquest by Alexander the Great in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE and subsequent Hellenization; and withal helped in research of the ancient magical practice and amulets. Substantial role in the development of the papyri research was played by Karl Preisendanz (1883-1968) who translated, edited, and published larger number of papyri in two book volumes in 1928 and 1931.<sup>44</sup> Clear rejection of the religious role of Abraxas amulets was presented by Armand Delatte (1886-1964) in 1914; he refused the connection of amulets to the Gnostic tradition and attributed them to the Greco-Egyptian magical practice. Based on the papyri, it was interpreted that Abraxas amulets were connected to pagan instruments of magical practice. This interpretation demonstrated the varieties of the name Abraxas, and similar fashion in which the papyri and amulets were written, i.e. textual content.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid; John Selden, *De Dis Syris: Syntagmata II* (London: Guilielmus Stansbeins, 1617).

<sup>42</sup> Charles William King, *The Gnostics and their remains*.

<sup>43</sup> Hans D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xliii.

<sup>44</sup> Simone Michel, "(Re)Interpreting Magical Gems, Ancient and Modern," in *OFFICINA MAGICA: Essays on Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, edited by Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 143.; Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. I (Leipzig, and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1928) and Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. II (Leipzig, and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1931).

<sup>45</sup> Orit Peleg-Barkat and Yotam Tepper, "Engraved Gems from Sites with a Military Presence in Roman Palestine: The Cases of Legio and Aelia Capitolina," in *'Gems of Heaven': Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in Late Antiquity, c. AD 200-600*, edited by Chris Entwistle and Noël Adams (London: British Museum, 2012), 99-100.; Simone Michel, "(Re)Interpreting Magical Gems, Ancient and Modern", 143.

Professor Morton Smith (1915-1991) published an influential article concerning the relation of the amulets and magical papyri in 1979.<sup>46</sup> Smith's theories and reflections inspired recent scholarship to continue the research of amulets, which brought new evidence for his theories. Furthermore, the new research substantially advanced the study of ancient religions. Paolo Vitellozzi, parallel to Árpád Nagy, analyzed and upheld Smith's theory about the nature of magical practice in both amulets and papyri – the magical practice, in which amulets were used, has its roots in the magical practice of the papyri; however, the papyri were most probably not the source of amulets' rich imagery.<sup>47</sup> Vitellozzi supports Smith's idea that although the amulets were not engraved and processed based on papyri instructions, they follow some of the papyri patterns mainly in the recurring textual content used in similar contexts. Smith further proposed the papyri to not to be the original source of the magical texts but to be compilations of much older source, which is not known yet. Vitellozzi agreed with Smith's proposition, however, he introduced a methodological problem related to the study of relationship amulets – papyri: the known papyri come by a majority from one source, the Theban Magical Library, contrarily the amulets are assumed to have diverse origin, and so theorizing about their relations might be complicated by not being able to establish their shared origin with evidence.<sup>48</sup>

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought another media in which the name Abraxas appeared – Jewish magical text of *Harba de-Moshe* (*The Sword of Moses*) which was studied and translated by Moses Gaster (1856-1939). The text is concerned with recipes for magical remedies and other magical practices affecting oneself or others, on several occasions the text employs the character of Abraxas as a part of potent magical formulas.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Morton Smith, "Relations Between Magical Papyri and Magical Gems," in Actes du XVe Congrès international de papyrologie, III. Problèmes généraux. Papyrologie littéraire. Papyrologica Bruxellensia 7. Edited by Jean Bingen and Georges Nachtergaele, 129-136 (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1979).

<sup>47</sup> Paolo Vitellozzi, "Relations Between Magical Texts and Magical Gems Recent Perspectives," in Bild und Schrift auf 'magischen' Artefakten, edited by Sarah Kiyannrad, Christoffer Theis and Laura Willer (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 181-183, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110604337-008>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>49</sup> Yuval Harari, "Moses, the Sword, and The Sword of Moses: Between Rabbinical and Magical Traditions," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2005): 294-296, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40753384>.

In the study preceding the text of *Ḥarba de-Moshe* Gaster addresses a serious methodological problem of ancient texts' research, specifically the problematics of transliteration of proper names. Although Gaster did not focus particularly on Abraxas, he assigned Abraxas to a group of deities whose names appeared in variety of transliterations across ancient texts. Gaster stated that researchers should be cautious in this matter as any addition, omission or exchange of one letter in proper names might be misleading in two directions: in every such case either assuming that the difference in spelling is significant and so the name does not signify the same entity, or assuming that any similarity is significant and so the name in variations signifies the same entity; both directions Gaster denotes as dangerous and urges researchers to proceed with caution when working with ancient texts.<sup>50</sup>

New opportunities for the research of magic appeared with the discovery of the Cairo Genizah in 1896 as the Genizah presented numerous textual materials of various topics and content.<sup>51</sup> The Genizah contained not only fully preserved texts but also a vast number of fragments which scholars have tried to assemble since their discovery. One of those scholars was Mordecai Margalioth (1909-1968) who assembled the text of Jewish magical treatise *Sefer ha-Razim (The Book of Secrets)*<sup>52</sup> based on newly found fragments from the Cairo Genizah and from already known and accessible manuscripts in Hebrew, Arabic and Latin; the final text was edited and published in 1966. Margalioth's *Sefer ha-Razim* is considered to be highly significant in enabling modern researchers to access and understand Jewish culture of the Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages.<sup>53</sup> The text of *Sefer ha-Razim* involves a description of mystical celestial system, referring also to Abraxas, and a variety of magic practices, incantations, and magical remedies.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Moses Gaster, "The Sword of Moses. An Ancient Book of Magic, Published for the First Time, from an Unique Manuscript (Cod. Heb., Gaster 178), with Introduction and Translation." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1896, 165-166, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25207779>.

<sup>51</sup> Alden Oreck, "Modern Jewish History: The Cairo Genizah," *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-cairo-genizah>.

<sup>52</sup> Mordechai Margalioth, *Sefer Ha-Razim: Hu' Sefer Keshafim mi-Tequfat ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966).

<sup>53</sup>"Sefer Ha-Razim," *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed May 5, 2021,

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/razim-sefer-ha>; Reimund Leicht, "Some Observations on the Diffusion of Jewish Magical Texts from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages in Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah and Ashkenaz," in *OFFICINA MAGICA: Essays on Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, edited by Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 214.

<sup>54</sup> *Sefer Ha-Razim*, *Jewish Virtual Library*, Michael A. Morgan, *SEPPER HA-RAZIM: The Book of the Mysteries* (Chico: Scholar Press, 1983).

The research of Jewish magical texts flourished considerably during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the directions was a research of Aramaic magical texts that studied Aramaic manuscripts, along with the Aramaic incantation bowls, also called Aramaic magical bowls. The bowls as media of magical practice could have been previously found in hands of private collectors; however, only the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century brought them to attention of scholars. Significant source in the study of Aramaic magical bowls was the Schøyen Collection, which was the primary focus of Shaul Shaked (b. 1933), professor at the Hebrew University and the authority in the field of magical bowls<sup>55</sup> who participated in the publication of incantation bowls' collection to public with commentary and linguistic and historical background.<sup>56</sup>

As it was already mentioned, Abraxas was an entity that appeared in the research until the 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly in religious context, and from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward primarily in the context of magical practices. Exceptions to these premises were the writings by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) and Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), written at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which drew from the former, standing on the verge of religion and mysticism. In the 1910s Jung started to record his dreams and visions and later partially compiled them into manuscript known as *The Red Book* (or also *Liber Novus*) which was in its entirety published only in 2009 by Sonu Shamdasani with detailed analysis and translation to English. Only one part of *The Red Book* was to a certain extent known to public – *Seven Sermons to the Dead* (*Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*) was privately published by Jung in 1916 and distributed among the chosen ones, close family members, friends, and colleagues.<sup>57</sup> *Seven Sermons* were inspired by Gnosticism as Jung studied it in preparation for his psychoanalytical studies of libido; the text directly refers to Abraxas as the Gnostic supreme deity and assigns him the qualities of both good and evil (symbolic unity of God and Satan). Jung's perception of Abraxas was based on Abraxas as a symbol of Gnosticism and on the earlier works by Albrecht

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<sup>55</sup> Shaul Shaked, "Form and Purpose in Aramaic Spells: Some Jewish Themes (The poetics of magic texts)," in *OFFICINA MAGICA: Essays on Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, edited by Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 1-30.; "Introduction: Magical Literature," *The Schøyen Collection*, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.schoyencollection.com/magical-literature-introduction>.

<sup>56</sup> Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford and Siam Bahyro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, Volume One (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> Lance S. Owens, "The Hermeneutics of Vision: C. G. Jung and Liber Novus," in *The Gnostic: A Journal of Gnosticism, Western Esoterism and Spirituality*, no. 3 (July 2010): 24-25, accessed May 5, 2021, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261672933\\_The\\_Hermeneutics\\_of\\_Vision\\_C\\_G\\_Jung\\_and\\_Liber\\_Novus](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261672933_The_Hermeneutics_of_Vision_C_G_Jung_and_Liber_Novus).

Dieterich (1866-1908)<sup>58</sup>, that focused on the Greek religion and Greek magical papyri and Ch. W. King<sup>59</sup>, who studied the magical amulets as relics of Gnosticism.<sup>60</sup> Jung created a separate narrative founded on previous scholarship of Gnosticism and the discussion of his consciousness and unconsciousness. Interpretation of Hermann Hesse's literary universe is seemingly not possible without recognizing the influence of Jung and his psychological theories, particularly Jung's archetypes were of Hesse's interest. Hesse's novel *Demian* is often analyzed on the basis of Jung's archetypes and symbols from his earlier writings; it is assumed that Hesse had the access to Jung's *Seven Sermons* as Hesse participated in the psychoanalytical treatment in the care of Dr. J. B. Lang, one of Jung's colleagues, in 1916, and afterward came in contact with Jung himself in 1917.<sup>61</sup> *Demian* was written in 1917 and published in 1919, which enables the assumption that Hesse's writing was directly influenced by Jung's, by then not published, ideas. Influential and till today often highlighted quotation from *Demian* is: "*The bird fights its way out of the egg. The egg is the world. Who would be born must first destroy a world. The bird flies to God. The God's name is Abraxas.*"<sup>62</sup> Hesse saw Abraxas as an all-mighty deity which in himself is connection of the good and the evil which serves as illustration of two absolutes<sup>63</sup>, a reconciliation of agitated thought and vision of the young protagonist of the novel.

Although Jung and Hesse created the literary momentum for the character Abraxas, they were not the pioneers of such endeavor in the field of philosophical literature. The name, formed as "Abraxa", deemed to be an allusion to Abraxas, was chosen by the humanist Thomas More (1478-1535) as a former name of an island which became the iconic locus of Utopia.<sup>64</sup> In his utopic fiction More employed several motives

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<sup>58</sup> Albrecht Dieterich, *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des späteren Altertums* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1891).; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, xliii.

<sup>59</sup> King, *The Gnostics and their remains*.

<sup>60</sup> Carl G. Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, edited by Sonu Shamdasani (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Emanuel Maier, "The Psychology of C.G. Jung in the Works of Hermann Hesse," abridgement of a dissertation by Emanuel Maier (1953): 1-13, *Hermann Hesse Page*, accessed May 5, 2021. <http://hesse.projects.gss.ucsb.edu/papers/maier.pdf>.; Günter Baumann, "It shakes you to the very core and is painful. But it helps: Hermann Hesse and the psychology of C.G. Jung," paper presented at *The 9th International Hesse Colloquium*, Calw, 1997, accessed May 5, 2021, [https://www.hermann-hesse.de/files/pdfs/en\\_lebenskrise.pdf](https://www.hermann-hesse.de/files/pdfs/en_lebenskrise.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Hesse, *Demian*, 78.

<sup>63</sup> Miguel Serrano, *C. G. JUNG AND HERMANN HESSE: A Record of Two Friendships*, translated by Frank MacShane (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1971), 5.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia: with Erasmus's "The Sileni of Alcibiades"*, edited and translated by David Wotton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), 91.; Thomas W. Africa, "Thomas More and the Spartan Mirage,"

from the antiquity, most prominent of them the entity known as Mithras who appeared in More's fiction as "Mithra", the supreme god of Utopians, taken from the ancient Roman cult of Mithras which was primarily inspired by previous Persian cult of identical name.<sup>65</sup> The humanist society was fascinated by the ancient religions and their relics as it was apparent in previous part discussing the amulet research of antiquarians. Both characters Abraxas and Mithras were of humanists' interest and often associated one with the other, if not considered to be two names for one entity; this relationship was promoted by Macarius in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and later they were both considered to belong to Gnostic tradition by C. W. King. These mutual associations were derived from the shared numerical value of their Greek names, their relations to the Sun, and from the writings of early Christian thinkers, e.g. St. Jerome.<sup>66</sup>

The research of Abraxas as an historical religious and magical entity might be potentially complicated by the variety of name forms under which the entity can be found in the textual sources. The form "Abraxas" is by a majority used in modern scholarship due to its vast use in the Abraxas historiography; this form also entered public's eye in the writings of Jung and Hesse. Another very prominent form of the name is "Abraxax" which was promoted as the original form of the name by C. W. King who, based on his thorough study of amulets, addressed the issue of two varying consonants – King claims that the confusion in the consonants was most probably caused by the similarity of Greek letters *sigma* ( $\Sigma$ ) and *xi* ( $\Xi$ ): ABRAXAS (ΑΒΡΑΞΑΣ) and ABRASAX (ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ); and that this confusion might have been heightened by the quality, preservation, or possible damage of the engraved text on amulets.<sup>67</sup> Other forms of the name often differ in transliteration, moreover the transliteration may vary in several cases in one textual source. The transliteration variations include: ABKSS, ABRSK, ABRKSS, ABRASKS, ABRASAKS etc. The methodological problem of the transliteration of proper names and the concern of correct, incorrect, or misleading identification of entities behind the names was already discussed in the study of Moses Gaster. As the author of this thesis, I am cautious of possible misidentifications; therefore, this thesis includes textual sources that

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*Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 6, no. 2 (1979): 346, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41298725>.

<sup>65</sup> More, *Utopia*, 145.

<sup>66</sup> Miller, *Peiresc's Orient*, 58-59; King, *The Gnostics and their remains*, 113-121.

<sup>67</sup> King, *The Gnostics and their remains*, 276-279.

were either considered as referring to the entity of Abraxas by previous scholars, or the context analysis indicates Abraxas reference.

During the humanist questioning of the amulets and their content Abraxas entered the secondary literature inquiries and remained a part of it continuously until the contemporary research. One of scholars' endeavor was to explore the etymology of the name leading to extensive process of analysis and comparison of accessible ancient textual sources in which similar or identical entities appeared. Widespread and commonly accepted etymology of the name Abraxas was pioneered in 1896 by Moritz Güdemann (1835-1918) who claimed the existence of connection between the name Abraxas and Greek word ARBATHIAŌTH (APBAΘIAΩΘ) which appears in Greek magical papyri. The Greek word Güdemann denoted as a translation of Hebrew phrase "arba otot" (four letters) which is being connected to the Tetragrammaton.<sup>68</sup> In 1898 the allusion of "arba" (four) to the Tetragrammaton was suspected also by Ludwig Blau in his study of Jewish magic.<sup>69</sup>

Güdemann's theory was developed and supported by evidence from Greek sources – amulets, papyri etc. One of the magical papyri text uses the formula ABRA ABRA SABAŌTH (original in Coptic ΔΒΡΑ ΔΒΡΑ CΔΒΔΩΘ, in Greek ABPA ABPA ΣΑΒΑΩΘ)<sup>70</sup> which, according to Preisendanz, refers to the Tetragrammaton deduced from the phrase "YHWH Sabaoth" which is often found in magical texts. Thus, Preisendanz argued, "ABPA" is a variation of "arba". This example also suggests the connection of the name Abraxas to both number four and the Tetragrammaton.<sup>71</sup> Another Greek source suggesting such a connection is found with the amulets, in a number of amulets the word ARBATHIAŌ (APBAΘIAΩ) and its varieties, for example ARBATIAŌ (APBATIAΩ), ABRATHIAŌ (ABPAΘIAΩ) or ABRATIAŌTH (ABPATIAΩΘ), appear as noted by professor Herbert C. Youtie (1904-1980); the variations utilizing the word "arba" were linked on the grounds of orthographic similarity and textual context of the words.<sup>72</sup> Walter Shandruk explains Arbathiao as a construct of

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<sup>68</sup> Moritz Steinschneider, *Festschrift zum achtzigsten geburtstage Moritz Steinschneider's* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1896), 15.

<sup>69</sup> Ludwig Blau, *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1898), 112.

<sup>70</sup> Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. I (Leipzig, and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1928), 66.

<sup>72</sup> "RIB 436. GREEK MAGICAL AMULET," *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/436>.



“arba” and “Iao” which is then possible to translate as “four of Yahweh”. Following the translation Shandruk insists on the “genetic relationship” between Arbathiao and Abraxas, ultimately resulting in connecting the number four to the Tetragrammaton.<sup>73</sup>

Following the etymology oriented on Hebrew, Abraham Geiger (1810-1974) presented the word Ha-Brakhah (הַבְּרָכָה) meaning “the blessing” as a probable source of origin. Geiger’s idea was approved by C. W. King; however, it is not widely accepted, moreover it was previously rejected.<sup>74</sup>

Another major source which was inquired for the Abraxas etymology was the Gnostic tradition which was a sensible assumption given to the amount of time Abraxas remained being perceived as a part of Gnostic legacy. The central idea was the number 365, the numerical value of the letters in Abraxas in Greek ΑΒΡΑΞΑΣ (A=1, B=2, P=100, A=1, Ξ=60, A=1, Σ=200). The number should symbolize the number of heavens, to which Abraxas is the ruler, and the number of bones in human body as records by Irenaeus and Hippolytus ascribed to the teaching of Basilides and his followers.<sup>75</sup> The number 365 is also said to signify the solar cycle of the year associating Abraxas with the Sun. Said correlation of the solar attributes and Abraxas manifested in a number of the sources subjected to further analysis in this thesis, therefore the details are discussed in following subchapters concerned with relevant sources.<sup>76</sup>

The examples of Abraxas’s etymology illustrate the inconclusive nature of the research. In his study of Jewish magic Gideon Bohak offers his view on the attempts of Hebrew and Aramaic etymology. He suspects the entity of Abraxas entering the discourse of Jewish magical texts through the tradition of Greco-Egyptian magical practices, rather than the one of pre-ancient assumably forgotten Jewish rituals – that is, Bohak proposes that the source of Abraxas origin was not that of Hebrew language. Bohak comments also the 365 (solar) characteristics of Abraxas and points out that this attribute was not transferred in any of the Hebrew versions of Abraxas name – in gematria Abraxas does

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<sup>73</sup> Walter Michael Shandruk, “A Computational Approach to the Study of Magical Gems,” PhD. diss., (The University of Chicago, 2016), 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ludwig Blau and Kaufmann Kohler, “ABRAXAS or ABRASAX,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, accessed May 5, 2021. <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/633-abraxas>., King, *The Gnostics and their remains*, 251.

<sup>75</sup> Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, Volume I (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), 372.

<sup>76</sup> Attilio Mastrocinque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 24 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 172.; Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 134.

not amount to such a number.<sup>77</sup> Hence a question, which shall be discussed in further source analysis, arises, if the solar property plays a role both in Greek and Hebrew texts, what was its source for the Hebrew use?

Parallel to the complex nature of Abraxas etymology is the origin of the well-known magical formulae “Abracadabra”. One branch of the existing explanations perceives “Abraxas” as a possible source due to the similarity of the opening syllables and perhaps due to the occurrence of both the word and the formula (although only in its perceived renditions ABLATHANALBA (ΑΒΛΑΘΑΝΑΛΒΑ)<sup>78</sup>, or AKRAKANARBA (ΑΚΡΑΚΑΝΑΡΒΑ)<sup>79</sup>) in the Greek magical papyri. The renditions appear either in the context with Abraxas, or in the parallel context without the word Abraxas.

Other theories try to find the etymology in Aramaic deriving from the word “dabrah” meaning “speech or words”; however, the form of the word given in the theory points toward Hebrew rather than to Aramaic, furthermore the theories have no unequivocal supporting evidence in the ancient sources. Although no theory of “Abracadabra” etymology with roots in Aramaic, or Hebrew for that matter, was approved, it is widely spread, and often accepted, notion in diverse texts.<sup>80</sup>

First known use of the formula in the European context was discovered in *Liber medicinalis*, Latin text authored by Quintus Serenus Sammonicus (ca. 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), Roman physician. The book proposed to use an amulet with “Abracadabra” as a treatment of fever; written on a parchment in triangular shape reducing the formula from both directions till only the letter A remains.<sup>81</sup>

Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the word “Abraxas” and the formula “Abracadabra” and their variations were found on variety of amulets and they were comprehended as *voces magicae* – magical words that entered standard knowledge and use in magical practices; the use of various alterations of “Abracadabra” on amulets, similar to Sammonicus’s practice, can be traced at least to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when it was prescribed as a medical

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<sup>77</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 248.

<sup>78</sup> Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, 38.; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, 24.; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels: Including the Fallen Angels* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 4.; Claude Lecouteux, *Dictionary of Ancient Magic Words and Spells: From Abraxas to Zoar*, translated by Jon E. Graham (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2015), 8-9.

<sup>81</sup> Quintus Serenus Sammonicus and Friedrich Vollmer, *Qvinti Sereni Liber Medicinalis* (Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1916), 45.; Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 25.

remedy to cure and protect from plague.<sup>82</sup> Renditions of the formula appeared and reappeared in medieval Italy, in Columbia, in Wiccan culture created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and again in modern pop-culture in books by Dan Brown or J. K. Rowling.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the formula is universally perceived as a stereotypical element introducing magical practices.

From a formula of dubious origin but effective magical use “Abracadabra” became a category of formulas used in magical practices that have a function but do not carry lexical meaning – “an expression which certainly *has* a sense ..., but which does not *make* a sense.”<sup>84</sup> Discussion of the possible or probable origin of such formulas led to various conclusions, one of which presented a theory that the formulas could have a lexical meaning previously but it was lost due to prolonged time period or it comes from forgotten/dead language, or at least a part of the formula could have a previous lexical meaning.<sup>85</sup> Modern linguistics accepted this category and uses it as an exemplary category in the research of reduplicative constructions putting “Abracadabra” on the level of *voces magicae* and *nomina barbara*.<sup>86</sup>

The etymology was not the only essential point that was of interest in the assessment of Abraxas, simultaneously scholars were debating the key character of the name – whether it is a proper name of an entity, or it is a word with magical properties but without a self-evident entity behind it; for example, the Greek magical papyri present combination of both – “for I am Abrasax”<sup>87</sup>, “I, Abrasax, shall deliver. Abrasax am I!”<sup>88</sup>, or Abraxas present in an illegible list of words and/or names.<sup>89</sup>

The essential external dispositions, i.e. how Abraxas was and still is perceived by inquiring scholars, has been explored; and now the question of internal dispositions, i.e. who Abraxas is, remains. The study of internal dispositions does not expect any extent of personification, albeit it strives to assess Abraxas’s identity and origin involving examination of several aspects, e.g. orthographic forms of the name Abraxas, textual

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<sup>82</sup> Skemer, *Binding Words*, 49, and 204; David Darling, *The Universal Book of Mathematics: From Abracadabra to Zeno’s Paradoxes* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 4-5.

<sup>83</sup> Lecouteux, *Dictionary of Ancient Magic Words and Spells*, 8-9.

<sup>84</sup> H. S Versnel, “The Poetics of the Magical Charm: An Essay on the Power of Words,” in *Magical and Ritual in the Ancient World*, edited by Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 108.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>86</sup> Aina Urdze, *Non-Prototypical Reduplication* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2018), 117-118.

<sup>87</sup> Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 297.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 302

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, and 103.

context and co-occurrence of words and names. The sources subjected to this examination include Gnostic literature, Greek magical papyri, Abraxas amulets, *Harba de-Moshe*, and *Sefer ha-Razim*, with a brief mention of Aramaic magical bowls. All of these sources were previously mentioned in the description of Abraxas historiography, with the addition only of three Gnostic texts from the Nag Hammadi library of codices. Following subchapters discuss the sources respectively in more detail of both internal and external dispositions.

## 2.1 Gnosticism and Gnostic literature

Abraxas entered European research as a figure originating in Gnosticism, through the designated amulets as thought by scholars until approximately the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The information about the reality of Gnostic thoughts and practices were not accessible yet as the Gnostics consciously guarded and concealed their rituals and written sources from the outside world. Hence, for a considerable period, information concerning the Gnostics was available solely through the secondhand reports by Christian writers which by a majority saw them as heretics. Modern discoveries of Gnostic literature, e.g. the Berlin codex, *Book of Jeu*, *Pistis Sophia*, or the Nag Hammadi codices; shed light on the rituals and teachings through the original texts used by the Gnostics since the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.<sup>90</sup>

The source text material researched for the presence of Abraxas belongs to the codex collection of the Nag Hammadi library which is considered significant for our knowledge of Gnosticism and Gnostic literature. The discovery of the library of manuscripts close to a city Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in 1945 became an important source for scholars helping to assess the development of Gnosticism through its Jewish and Christian stages/variations.<sup>91</sup> Individual texts have religious nature and vary in time and place of creation, and in authorship; moreover, the individual texts are often compiled

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<sup>90</sup> April D. DeConick, "Introductio," in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichean and Other Ancient Literature*, edited by April D. DeConick, Gregory Shaw, and John D. Turner (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 1.

<sup>91</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), 2.

from several older narratives enclosed into a new framework. Nag Hammadi text collection was presumably compiled under Christian Gnosticism.<sup>92</sup>

The dating of the Nag Hammadi texts is difficult due to perceived fragmentary character of the texts, i.e. individual stories and texts were inserted into newly created frameworks. The assumed collection of Nag Hammadi's texts took place in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, based on the fact the Sahidic Coptic of the texts became a literary language approximately in that period; however, the writing process itself is more complicated to date as the individual texts were originally written in Greek in unknown time and place; this conclusion of the texts being translated from original Greek texts was based on errors and inconsistencies in Coptic vocalization.<sup>93</sup>

In the library of Nag Hammadi codices Abraxas is present in the form ABRASAX (ⲁⲃⲠⲤⲀⲪⲰ) in three codices – *The Gospel of the Egyptians*<sup>94</sup>, *The Apocalypse of Adam*<sup>95</sup>, and *Zostrianos*<sup>96</sup>. A few words of similar form that remind of varieties of the name appearing in other sources, such as the Greek magical papyri, and amulets; may be found in *The Apocryphon of John*, e.g. ARBAO<sup>97</sup> (ⲁⲠⲃⲁⲐⲐ) and DEITHARBATHAS<sup>99</sup> (ⲉⲓⲑⲏⲃⲁⲠⲃⲁⲗⲁⲥ) and DEITHARBATHAS<sup>99</sup> (ⲉⲓⲑⲏⲃⲁⲠⲃⲁⲗⲁⲥ)<sup>100</sup>, although they signify angelic beings, they are not related to Abraxas.

All three codices, in which Abraxas appears, classify as texts belonging to Sethian gnosis. This direction of Gnostic teaching has Seth, son of Adam, in its center. Seth plays

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<sup>92</sup> James M. Robison, "Introduction," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 1, and 9.

<sup>93</sup> Wolf B. Oerter, "Úvod," in *Rukopisy z Nag Hammádí 5*, edited by Wolf B. Oerter and Zuzana Vítková (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2018), 17, and 33.

<sup>94</sup> "Nag Hammadi Archive: Codex III, papyrus page 52," *The Claremont Colleges: Digital Library*, line 26, <https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/nha/id/2970/rec/119>; "Nag Hammadi Archive: Codex III, papyrus page 53," *The Claremont Colleges: Digital Library*, line 9-10, <https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/nha/id/2978/rec/120>; "Nag Hammadi Archive: Codex III, papyrus page 65," *The Claremont Colleges: Digital Library*, line 1, <https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/nha/id/3006/rec/133>, accessed May 5, 2021.

<sup>95</sup> "Nag Hammadi Archive: Codex V, papyrus page 75," *The Claremont Colleges: Digital Library*, line 22, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/nha/id/2600/rec/168>.

<sup>96</sup> "Nag Hammadi Archive: Codex VIII, papyrus page 47," *The Claremont Colleges: Digital Library*, line 13, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/nha/id/3511/rec/253>; the reading is worsened by the damaged papyri material; the first and the second letter alfa are missing, however, the rest of the letter matches ABRASAX, .BP.CⲁⲪ.

<sup>97</sup> Frederik Wisse, "The Apocryphon of John (II, 1, III, 1, IV, 1, and BG 8502, 2)," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 114.

<sup>98</sup> "Nag Hammadi Archive: Codex II, papyrus page 17," *The Claremont Colleges: Digital Library*, line 13, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/nha/id/2783/rec/63>.

<sup>99</sup> Wisse, "The Apocryphon of John", 115.

<sup>100</sup> "Nag Hammadi Archive: Codex II, papyrus page 17," line 34.

the role of originator and redeemer of his generations (of people in the material world, our world) through the revelation of knowledge. The Nag Hammadi library comprises of several sources of said Sethian gnosis, e.g. *The Apocryphon of John*, *The Hypostasis of Archons*, *Melchizedek*, *The Thought of Norea* etc.<sup>101</sup>

*The Gospel of the Egyptians*, also known as *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, is a mythological Gnostic story, and similarly to all Nag Hammadi texts, the *Gospel* is difficult to date. It is assumed to be approximately one century older than the collection process of the Nag Hammadi texts, so assumably the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, although individual parts might be significantly older than this assumption. The roots might probably go back to earlier stages of Gnosticism development, possibly to pre-Christian Gnosticism. Said individual parts/stories were put into Christian framework by inserting Christian motifs into the story, mainly reinterpreting the narrative with Christ as a central figure, and perhaps also by naming the text a “gospel” which does not characterize the genre of the text but points toward the Christian interpretation of the redaction of the individual parts into a given Christian framework.<sup>102</sup> The authorship is assumed to the great Seth, the father of the “incorruptible race”<sup>103</sup> of men, who is in one part of the text identified with Christ.<sup>104</sup> The original author is not known, and the search is complicated by the text being a compilation of individual stories whose origin is not traceable. Same challenge is posed by the question of the location where the text was written, the title suggests connection to Egypt, however, this might be simply a reflection of where the text was spread and read.<sup>105</sup>

In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* Abraxas appears three times, in two distinct passages. During the description of the cosmology, the “four great Lights” are created. These Lights – Harmozel, Oroiael, Davithe, and Eleleth<sup>106</sup> – are often identified as angels and archangels, that reappear throughout the Gnostic texts, e.g. in the *Apocryphon of*

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<sup>101</sup> Pavel Ryneš, “Svatá kniha velkého neviditelného Ducha (Evangelium Egyptanů) (NHC III/2, 40, 12-69, 20 and IV/2, 50, 1-81, 2),” in *Rukopisy z Nag Hammádí 5*, edited by Wolf B. Oerter and Zuzana Vítková (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2018), 153.; Robison, “Introduction“, 2-3.

<sup>102</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, “Christian Motifs in the ‘Gospel of the Egyptians’: Method and Motive.” *Novum Testamentum* 23, no. 3 (1981): 242, and 259-260, accessed May 5, 2021, [www.jstor.org/stable/1560684](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1560684).

<sup>103</sup> Alexander Böhlig and Frederik Wisse, “The Gospel of the Egyptians (III, 2 and IV, 2),” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 216.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 208.; Ryneš, “Svatá kniha velkého neviditelného Ducha“, 152.

<sup>106</sup> Böhlig and Wisse, “The Gospel of the Egyptians“, 212-217.

*John*<sup>107</sup>, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*<sup>108</sup>, *Zostrianos*<sup>109</sup>, *Melchizedek*<sup>110</sup>, *The Thought of Norea*<sup>111</sup>, *Hypsiphron*<sup>112</sup>, and *Trimorphic Protennoia*<sup>113</sup>. After the birth of these Lights their complements were born which was immediately followed by the birth of ministers to whom complements were added as well. The four fours are: Harmozel – Grace – Gamaliel – Memory; Oroiael – Perception – Gabriel – Love; Davithe – Understanding – Samblo – Peace; Eleleth – Prudence – Abrasax – Life.<sup>114</sup>

In the first passage Abraxas is introduced as a minister to the light Eleleth who is also identified as an angel; furthermore, the angelical context is expanded by other names which are perceived as that of angelic origin<sup>115</sup> – names with a suffix “-el”<sup>116</sup>, here Harmozel, Gamaliel, Oroiael, and Gabriel. The name Abraxas appears twice within this section. The context is a list of the Lights, powers and other creatures and values which are named in hierarchical order.<sup>117</sup> In the other passage Abraxas follows the other three ministers of the Lights – Gamaliel, Gabriel, and Samblo; the immediate textual surroundings involve the Lights and other entities marked as helpers, attendants, guardians, and rulers over motifs of baptism, eternal life, the Sun etc.<sup>118</sup> that are going to be the guardians of people from Seth’s generations, and that are going to lead the people through the process of salvation.<sup>119</sup>

The story narrated in *the Apocalypse of Adam* is an apocalyptic revelation as a retold vision by Adam to his son Seth, thus indicating the text to be a part of Sethian

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<sup>107</sup> Wisse, “The Apocryphon of John”, 109, and 110.

<sup>108</sup> Only one of the lights – Eleleth; Roger A. Bullard and Bentley Layton (trans. and intro.), “The Hypostasis of the Archons (II, 4),” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 167.

<sup>109</sup> John N. Sieber, “Zostrianos (VIII, 1),” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 412, 417, and 429.

<sup>110</sup> Søren Giversen and Birger A. Pearson (trans. and intro.), “Melchizedek (IX, 1),” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 441, and 443.

<sup>111</sup> The four helpers seem to imply the four lights; Giversen and Birger, “Melchizedek”, 446.

<sup>112</sup> One of the lights – Eleleth – is implied; John D. Turner (trans. and intro.), “Hypsiphron (XI, 4),” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 501-502.

<sup>113</sup> John D. Turner (trans. and intro.), “Trimorphic Protennoia (XIII, 1).” In *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 515.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 212-213.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>116</sup> Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Behrman’s Jewish Book House, 1939), 260-261.; Gaster, “The Sword of Moses”, 157.

<sup>117</sup> Böhlig and Wisse, “The Gospel of the Egyptians”, 213.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 217.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 216-217.

gnosis library. The absence of an explicit Christian motifs and names alludes to a possible pre-Christian origin of the text; the presence of apocalyptic themes points to Jewish tradition inspiration, thus insinuating that the text might have been written between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century. A debate about the figure of “illuminator”<sup>120</sup> in the story was led in which the character was compared to Christ; however, there was no unequivocal evidence found during the debate.<sup>121</sup>

In *the Apocalypse* Abraxas is followed by other ministers of the Lights – Sablo (the same entity as “Samblo” in *the Gospel*<sup>122</sup>), and Gamaliel. In this story they are saviors of people who were not corrupted by desires of the mortal world, descendants of the great Seth; these three figures are considered to be the salvaging angels when people are being destroyed by fire.<sup>123</sup> The passage includes only the proper names of Noah and his sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth), Seth and the three ministers of Lights.<sup>124</sup>

*Zostrianos* belongs to the group of apocalyptic Sethian texts showing signs of mythological and philosophical borrowings from other texts of Nag Hammadi’s library, but also from Neoplatonist philosophical categories, and superficially implies also Christian motifs. The protagonist Zostrianos, who is often being seen in relation to Zoroaster, is taken on a journey through the spheres above the mortal world while he is being introduced to angels, powers, and creatures which are kept in the hierarchical order. The text is one of the most extensive texts among the Nag Hammadi codices, although the codex was considerably damaged, and some sections were preserved only in fragments.<sup>125</sup>

Abraxas is in *Zostrianos* text surrounded by Gamaliel and Samblo<sup>126</sup>, also ministers to the Lights, and other names with “-el” suffix, e.g. Loel, Audael, Seisauel<sup>127</sup>, later the names of the four Lights join – Armmosel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth<sup>128</sup>. The context contains also other names, e.g. Eurios, Akramas, Sumphtar etc.<sup>129</sup> This context

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<sup>120</sup> George W. MacRae, “The Apocalypse of Adam (V, 5),” edited by Dougl’s M. Parrott, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 282.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>122</sup> Böhlig and Wisse, “The Gospel of the Egyptians“, 212-213.

<sup>123</sup> MacRae, “The Apocalypse of Adam“, 281-282.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 282.

<sup>125</sup> Robison, “Introduction”, 9.;Sieber, “Zostrianos”, 402-403.

<sup>126</sup> Sieber, “Zostrianos”, 416.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 417.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 416.



enumerates various helpers, guardians, and angels who are supposed to be of assistance in the process of salvation of the people. Although Abraxas is not identified with any characteristics, the figure is presumably connected to angelic attributes.

Before the discovery of the Gnostic texts, history and teaching of Gnosticism was available only in the writings of thinkers who considered the Gnostic ideas as heretic; most known of them were early Christian sources *Adversus haereses* by Irenaeus of Lyons from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, *Elenchos Against All Heresies* written by Hippolytus of Rome Hippolytus probably from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and the work of Epiphanius of Salamis *Panarion* written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>130</sup> An interesting finding in Latin works written by Irenaeus and St. Augustine: they both preserve the Greek transliteration of the name in the form ABRAXAS (ΑΒΡΑΞΑΣ).<sup>131</sup>

Irenaeus and Hippolytus comment on Abraxas and link him to the Gnostic thinker Basilides who was active during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE in Alexandria establishing a direction within Gnosticism that drew from Greek philosophy and Christian theology; only fragments of explicitly Basilides's thoughts were preserved partially in the works of Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria.<sup>132</sup> According to Irenaeus and Hippolytus, Basilides placed Abraxas into the center of importance as a the most powerful being, a ruler of 365 heavens constituted by the system of 365 angels; even though neither of them explains details of this claim, other than making the connection between the numerical value of the name Abraxas, which is 365, to the number of days in a year. Abraxas, according to them, represents a powerful deity within the Gnostic system of belief.<sup>133</sup> Epiphanius elevated Abraxas to a higher level – Abraxas as a supreme deity within Gnosticism.<sup>134</sup> The question of Abraxas's role in the Gnostic belief was asked and answered frequently during the scholars' research resulting in the endeavors of

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<sup>130</sup> Gérard Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>131</sup> Saint Irenaeus, *Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis Libros quinque adversus haereses*, edited by William Wigan Harvey (Cantabrigiae: Typis Academicis, 1857), 203.

<sup>132</sup> Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 202-204.

<sup>133</sup> Paul Corby Finney, "Did Gnostics Make Pictures?" in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, edited by Bentley Layton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 452-453.

<sup>134</sup> Winrich Alfried Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule: Eine Studie zur Theologie- und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996), 273.

etymological analysis of the name – connection of Abraxas and the Tetragrammaton; thus, Abraxas was associated with the Jewish supreme God.<sup>135</sup>

The obvious association of the number 365 with the solar year, thus with the Sun, was not reserved for Graeco-Egyptian narrative, it appears also in philosophical and theological concepts and systems. As reported by the Jerusalem Talmud 365 windows were created for the Sun, and other celestial bodies, to use during the year.<sup>136</sup>

The Nag Hammadi accounts put Abraxas into context of angels, simultaneously ascribing angelic attributes to Abraxas. The angelic dispositions might be inferred also from Abraxas's role as one of the “ministers of the Lights”; assuming a certain governing role the notion corresponds to “ministering” actions of angels in another analyzed source of Jewish magical tradition *Sefer ha-Razim*<sup>137</sup>. The Christian commentators, whose opinions were widely followed before the discovery of the Gnostic texts, assumed to Abraxas angelic context as well, however, Abraxas obtained a higher place in the hierarchy above the angels, moreover some of the Christian thinkers ascribed divine attributes to character identifying Abraxas as supreme God.

## 2.2 Greek Magical Papyri

Supposed earliest use of the name Abraxas was discovered in two curse tablets (originally in Latin as *Defixionum tabellae*) from Carthage that were dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE; however, this theory was under discussion and should be approached tentatively.<sup>138</sup> Thus the first accepted attestation is set to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE in the Greek magical papyri.

Magical papyri are a part of a magical literature body that dates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, with a substantial growth period from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, in this period of growth magical formulas and the

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<sup>135</sup> Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature & History of Gnosticism*, translated by P. W. Coxon, K.H. Kuhn and R. McL. Wilson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 311.

<sup>136</sup> Heinrich W. Guggenheimer (Ed.), *The Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order: Mo'ed. Tractates Šeqalim, Sukkah, Roš Haššanah, and Yom Tov (Besah)* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 417-418.

<sup>137</sup> Morgan, *SEPHER HA-RAZIM*, 57, and 80.

<sup>138</sup> Auguste Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae Quotquot Innotuerunt: Tam in Graecis Orientis Quam in Totius Occidentis Partibus Praeter Atticas in Corpore Inscriptionum Atticarum Editas* (Lutetia: A. Fontemoing, 1904), 303, 348, and 556.; Lucien Janssens, “La Datation Néronienne De L'isopsépie: Νεῖλος (=Osiris) = Ἀβραάξ = ἅγιον ὄνομα = Μείθρας,” *Aegyptus* 68, no. 1/2 (1988): 105-106, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41216715>.

“vocabulary” of magical practices were developed and in following two centuries standardized to specific forms. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century the production of magical literature began to decline.<sup>139</sup>

The papyri, as relics of the Greco-Egyptian culture, carry the signs of both cultures; the papyri were written in Greek, Demotic and Coptic, oftentimes one text includes more than one language. The texts of papyri show a significant influence of Egyptian magical recipes and formulas, albeit they were found not to be simply copied from previous Egyptian magical texts.<sup>140</sup> Similar observance applies to the influence of previous Greek literature which seems to be interpreted through the lenses of popular folklore tales, thus implying the influence but not simply a copy of older Greek literary and folklore sources. The papyri display richness and complex merging and interweaving of cultures, traditions and religions present in the ancient Egypt, to name to most prominent ones – Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, and Babylonian; this evident syncretic approach led to the creation of an intricate magical practice with new perceptions of the former traditions.<sup>141</sup> Morton Smith talks about the homogenous treatment and assimilation of magical entities, or deities, such as Persian deity Mithras, Jewish God in form of Tetragrammaton, and simultaneously also Jewish divine names Sabaoth, Elohim, Adonai, and Jewish angelic names Ouriel, Gabriel, Michael. Smith highlighted the use of Greek form of Tetragrammaton IAΩ̅ in the magical papyri as it is frequently present.<sup>142</sup>

For the analysis of Abraxas presence in the magical papyri in this thesis two major corpuses were studied: Karl Preisendanz’s compilation *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, and *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* edited by Hans Dieter Betz, latter of which contains not only greater number of the magical papyri written in Greek (PGM) but also several papyri written in Demotic (PDM). Abraxas appears in the studied PGM as well as in PDM in various forms and variations, in various contexts, with various identities, in various use; this richness is being subsequently discussed.

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<sup>139</sup> Roy Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets: The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae Part I Published Texts of Known Provenance*, Papyrologica Coloniensia, Vol. 22 (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1994), xvii-xix.; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, xli.

<sup>140</sup> Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked, “Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition: A Jerusalem Symposium and Its Wider Contexts,” in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, edited by Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 4-5.

<sup>141</sup> Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, xlv – xlvi.

<sup>142</sup> Morton Smith, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, Volume One (Leiden, New York, and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996), 210.

Standardly Abraxas appears in the papyri as ABRASAX (ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ), only in one instance as ABRAXAS (ΑΒΡΑΞΑΣ)<sup>143</sup>; the papyri also contain Abraxas form, as seen in previous chapter, ABRAIAŌTH (ΑΒΡΑΙΑΩΘ)<sup>144</sup> and its variations ABRAIAŌ (ΑΒΡΑΙΑΩ)<sup>145</sup>, ABRAŌTH (ΑΒΡΑΩΘ)<sup>146</sup>, and others<sup>147</sup>. Abraxas appears in one of the demotic papyri and is transcribed to Latin letters as ABRASAKS<sup>148</sup>.

In the magical papyri context Abraxas is by majority accompanied by other names and words of magical potency of various identity and origin, only in rare occasions, namely in three PGM, Abraxas appears as the sole proper name present<sup>149</sup>. The most frequent context contains divine and angelic names with roots in Jewish tradition; divine names such as IAŌ (ΙΑΩ)<sup>150</sup> and its variations, SABAŌTH (ΣΑΒΑΩΘ)<sup>151</sup>, ADŌNAI (ΑΔΩΝΑΙ)<sup>152</sup>, ELŌAI (ΕΛΩΑΙ)<sup>153</sup>, and angelic names GABRIĒL (ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ)<sup>154</sup>, MICHAĒL (ΜΙΧΑΗΛ)<sup>155</sup>, SOURĒL (ΣΟΥΡΗΛ)<sup>156</sup>, and RAPHAĒL (ΡΑΦΑΗΛ)<sup>157</sup>. Another word oftentimes in close context to Abraxas or other Jewish divine names is SEMESILAM (ΣΕΜΕΣΙΛΑΜ)<sup>158</sup>. Semesilam, also in forms Semesielamp or Semesielamps<sup>159</sup>, is a divine name whose origin was a subject of debates – either as coming from Aramaic phrase “Shemi Shelam” (שמי שלם) meaning “my name is peace”<sup>160</sup>, or from Semitic phrase “Eternal Sun” or “Sun of the World” (שמש עולם)<sup>161</sup>. The etymology origin accepted by most scholars leans toward the “Eternal Sun” theory<sup>162</sup>,

<sup>143</sup> Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 282.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 57, and 58.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 61, 96, and 103.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 193, and 261.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 121, 297, and 302.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 11, 20, 22, 24, 26, 30, 57, 62, 67, 101, 103, 107, 132, 136, 146, 150, 155, 161, 163, 174, 218, 245, 262, 270, 286, 292, 309, and 314.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 17, 20, 22, 24, 26, 30, 36, 45, 57, 62, 67, 101, 103, 136, 146, 148, 150, 155, 161, 163, 174, 245, 265, 266, 270, 286, and 296.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 11, 20, 22, 24, 26, 36, 45, 67, 103, 136, 146, 150, 155, 174, 265, 266, 282, 286, 296, 303, and 309.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 11, 99, 110 270, and 282.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 11, 22, and 150.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 11, 17, 22, 24, 150, and 299.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 22, and 150.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 22, 24, and 150.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 107, 136, and 277.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 155, 185, 187, and 192.

<sup>160</sup> Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 134.

<sup>161</sup> Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith (Eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 390.

<sup>162</sup> Reimund Leicht, “Qedushah and Prayer to Helios: A New Hebrew Version of an Apocryphal Prayer of Jacob,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6 (1999): 159.

the relevant evidence for this leaning shows the phrase being present already in Phoenician inscriptions<sup>163</sup>, signifying Phoenician deity.<sup>164</sup>

Divine names and presumably various *voces magicae* make strings of names and words, one of the recurrent members is the word/formula ABLANATHANALBA (ΑΒΛΑΝΑΘΑΝΑΛΒΑ), or also ABLATHANALBA (ΑΒΛΑΘΑΝΑΛΒΑ)<sup>165</sup>. The name was a popular palindrome spread across the magical literature<sup>166</sup>, the papyri not being an exception – it is used in the context of Jewish divine names either with Abraxas<sup>167</sup>, or without Abraxas<sup>168</sup>; in Egyptian context<sup>169</sup>; and in the strings of *voces magicae*<sup>170, 171</sup>.

Abraxas is also found surrounded by names and words of Egyptian origin, divine names of Thoth<sup>172</sup>, Osiris<sup>173</sup>, Anubis<sup>174</sup>, and Horus<sup>175</sup>. Other notable Abraxas's surroundings comprise of Greek divine names, e.g. Helios<sup>176</sup>, Hermes<sup>177</sup>, Harpocrates<sup>178</sup>, Zeus<sup>179</sup>, Apollo<sup>180</sup>, and Hades<sup>181</sup>. There are several unique contexts in which Abraxas appears, specifically Persian, Gnostic, and Christian. The name MITHRA follows Abraxas in a few instances referring to Persian god Mithras who stands in the center of the cult of Mithras<sup>182</sup>. In the supposedly Gnostic context Abraxas is accompanied by the names SABĒLE (ΣΑΒΗΛΕ) and ĒLĒL (ΗΛΗΛ)<sup>183</sup> which might be translated as Sablo and Eleleth who are perceived as angelic entities present in previously discussed Gnostic

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<sup>163</sup> Shandruk, “A Computational Approach to the Study of Magical Gems”, 68.

<sup>164</sup> Gideon Bohak, “Hebrew, Hebrew Everywhere? Notes on the Interpretation of *Voces Magicae*,” in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, edited by Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 82.; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 197.

<sup>165</sup> Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 22, and 28.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 136, and 152.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 110, 125, 145, 146, 155, 268, and 281.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 158, and 253.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 96, 102, 157, 160, 255, 267, and 274.

<sup>171</sup> The formula was previously discussed as a rendition of formula “Abracadabra”, see page 21.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 296, and 299.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 59, 136, 262, 272, and 292.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 262, and 277.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, 58, and 245.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 30, 132, 161, 174, 262, 266, 291, 292, and 299.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 146, 262, and 296.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 57, 58, 59, and 291.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 24, 110, and 262.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 25, and 175.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 262, and 309.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, and 30.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

literature. In a few instances clearly Christian word co-occur with Abraxas, namely the Christ as Jesus or Jesus Chrestos<sup>184</sup>.

The question of Abraxas identity is in many instances answered by the text itself, classifying the character directly as a holy or divine name<sup>185</sup>, god<sup>186</sup>, angel<sup>187</sup>, and once as a daimon<sup>188</sup>. In the opposite situation, when the identity is not explicitly stated, it is either possible to evaluate the identity based on the surroundings, or it is not possible as the name oftentimes stands in a list of names or words – according to the context it has magical potency; however, it is not possible to state whether it has a specific meaning or it can be recognized as *vox magicae*<sup>189</sup>. In two papyri, already mentioned as papyri in which Abraxas stands alone without any other divine names or words, the character is mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular, “I, Abrasax, shall deliver. Abrasax am I!”<sup>190</sup>; the identity is not stated, albeit the context suggests strong magical potency. In several instances the notion of Abraxas is assimilated with other divine entities from both Greek and Egyptian tradition: Hermes, and Thoth.<sup>191</sup>

### 2.3 Amulets

Amulets are understood as protective measures designed to shield the carrier from numerous illnesses, evil influences, and other negative inflictions through their magical potency; their form varies from engraved gemstones and metal objects to writing on a parchment or papyrus.<sup>192</sup> The topic of Abraxas and amulets includes a variety of amulets of different origin, form, and language. Here the amulets under discussion are engraved gemstones with Greek inscriptions and/or images being identified or associated with Abraxas; it is difficult to date these magical amulets, the earliest specimen were dated to 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, and by approximately 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century they were in common possession

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 62, and 96.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 20, 24, 30, 57, 67, 103, 110, 262, 292, and 299.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 22, 57, 62, 146, 155, 174, 176, 245, 286, 296, 299, and 309.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 11, 176, and 184.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 17, 26, 36, 45, 96, 101, 107, 122, 132, 136, 148, 152, 161, 163, 187, 193, 218, 233, 265, 266, 270, 276, 282, 291, 302, 303, and 314.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 297, and 302.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 146, and 299.

<sup>192</sup> Claude Lecouteux, *The High Magic of Talismans and Amulets: Tradition and Craft*, translated by Jon E. Graham (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2014), 15-16.

of people.<sup>193</sup> Abraxas amulets are often being viewed in connection to the Greek magical papyri, as it was mentioned in previous chapter; hence, they are assumed to be produced in Egypt corresponding to the archaeological findings of Abraxas amulets majorly from Egypt and Syria.<sup>194</sup>

Amulets mediated Abraxas to the European research enterprises becoming virtually the sole source of information concerning Abraxas's existence and purpose, except the ancient texts which put Abraxas in relation to Gnostics and their system of belief. Alas, the misconceptions related to Abraxas's perception that lasted as an assumption for a significant period of time, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The specialist focused on gemstones and even more so on engraved gemstones of the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, C. W. King, drawing from the formulation by J. J. Bellermand, works with three groups of amulets which seemed to relate to Abraxas. King's contemplation was directly associated with the Gnostic teaching and in this assumption his idea of classification was rooted: in the first group there were amulets said to be created by Basilides himself, these amulets were the original and true ones. The second group covered presumed impostors that were thought to be influenced by Basilides, however, they were rather employed in syncretic machinations of astrologers and contained borrowed gods and divinities from Egyptian and Greek tradition. The third group was in fact not connected to Basilidean Gnosticism; these amulets were heavily inspired by older Roman, Egyptian, and Babylonian deities and used to represent new ideas Gnostic Christian sects.<sup>195</sup> Although classification often serves as a steppingstone in research, King's characterization does not find support in the modern research of amulets, which may be linked to the lack of evidence suggesting connection between the amulets and Gnostics.

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<sup>193</sup> Peleg-Barkat and Tepper, "Engraved Gems from Sites with a Military Presence in Roman Palestine", 100.; Yvan Koenig, "Des 'trigrammes panthéistes' ramessides aux gemmes magiques de l'Antiquité tardive: le cas d' Abrasax, continuité et rupture," in *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 109 (2009): 311-313, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bifao/109/15/>; Janssens, "La Datation Néronienne De L'isopsépie, 105-106.;" Árpád M. Nagy, "Figuring out the Anguipede ('Snake-Legged God') and His Relation to Judaism," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 15 (2002): 160, accessed May 5, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/11756148/Figuring\\_out\\_the\\_Anguipede\\_snake\\_legged\\_god\\_and\\_his\\_relation\\_to\\_Judaism\\_Journal\\_of\\_Roman\\_Archaeology\\_15\\_2002\\_159\\_172](https://www.academia.edu/11756148/Figuring_out_the_Anguipede_snake_legged_god_and_his_relation_to_Judaism_Journal_of_Roman_Archaeology_15_2002_159_172).

<sup>194</sup> Peleg-Barkat and Tepper, "Engraved Gems from Sites with a Military Presence in Roman Palestine", 100.

<sup>195</sup> King, *The Gnostics and their remains*, 226-250.

King's work shows the enthusiastic approach of a knowledgeable scholar indulging in eclecticism; he compares and links diverse traditions of ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Indian religions, and thoughts. King's approach can induce more questions than answers; however, some of his interpretations might help to understand how certain allusions worked and came into being. One of such notions reveals his perception of amulets' imagery, specifically the imagery of Abraxas. King presents various facts which suggest that the amulets were inspired by earlier specimens of Egyptian amulets against diseases and misfortunes employing a solar deity in a form of serpent-like character, later King presents a cult of cross-deity Hermanubis who was a mix of Greek god Hermes and Egyptian god Anubis depicted as a human body with jackal's head.<sup>196</sup>

The imagery of Abraxas amulets incorporates an anthropomorphic character with rooster head, human torso dressed in Roman military attire and two serpent-like legs, often called "anguipede"; the character often held a shield and a whip or rod in its hands. This figure was often accompanied by Greek inscriptions of divine names, among which the name Abraxas appeared often enough for the researchers to create a connection between the name and the image, thus the curious character with human body, rooster head and serpent-like legs became Abraxas. This connection was nonetheless firmly disapproved by several scholars as a claim without any evidence, neither in art nor literature in Greece, Rome, and Egypt that would provide the information of the depicted character's identity.<sup>197</sup> The character, called "the Anguipede", or "snake-legged god", referred to the Sun by means of solar attributes imagery – rooster, military attire, the whip, and the serpent/snake association, according to A. Delatte. One part of scholars following Delatte's example tried to dismember the figure and then to subject each part to the examination of origin, another part saw the figure in its entirety and tried to assess its probable origin. Campbell Bonner (1876-1954), who dedicated his research to magical amulets, upheld Delatte's theory and led discussion about viable theories concerning the character Anguipede; Bonner then explored the path of the Anguipede becoming the Gnostic Abraxas – adhering to the Basilidean teaching that Abraxas is the ruler of 365 heavens and should be the representant of the Sun. Bonner proposes a theory linking the Anguipede to Jewish tradition through the Bible and Greek mythology – the Septuagint

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 212-222, and 227-229.

<sup>197</sup> Nagy, "Figuring out the Anguipede", 160.



translates the Hebrew word “gibbor” (strong man) as a “gigas” (giant) in Greek and as the Septuagint was widely used by Jews at the time of amulets’ creation while they were also acquainted with the Greek mythology that used serpent-like attributes for depicting the Giants, and so Jewish adherents of some solar cult could have created the Anguipede as a representation of their beliefs.<sup>198</sup> Although this theory was by Bonner himself marked as an uncertain hypothesis, it influenced modern research that drew on the hypothesis their own assumptions and theories.

Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough (1893-1965) associated the Anguipede and other figures appearing on amulets with the inscription of Jewish God’s name IAΩ̄ (IAΩ), thus assigning the figure to represent God.<sup>199</sup> Árpád M. Nagy reached a similar conclusion by focusing on Hebrew words with the root “GBR” and in Talmud he found the word “gevurah” to stand for God’s power, and in the Bible he found “gibbor” referring to God of Israel, hence Nagy discovered linguistic connection between the Anguipede and Jewish tradition.<sup>200</sup> Another theory built on the root added the word “geber” (rooster) to the explanation of the imagery.<sup>201</sup> A theory that adds another layer of Jewish origin dimension correlates the root with the name “Gabriel”, an archangel originating in the biblical texts who frequently appears in magical texts, e.g. Greek magical papyri.<sup>202</sup> The angel Gabriel was found to be analogous to Zoroastrian angel Sroša who is known to be related to a rooster<sup>203</sup>; although these observations of linguistic and conceptual ideas do not seem credible, the name Gabriel was a bearer of magical properties in a contextual proximity to Abraxas in several sources, e.g. the Gnostic literature, Greek magical papyri, and *Sefer ha-Razim*.

The association of the amulets with Jewish tradition was supported by the engravings in amulets that were studied leading to recognition of name Abraxas which was in most cases co-present with other names, often of Jewish origin.

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<sup>198</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, 128.

<sup>199</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period: (Abridged Edition)*, edited by Jacob Neusner (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1968), 120, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zvg9x>.

<sup>200</sup> Nagy, “Figuring out the Anguipede“, 165-166.

<sup>201</sup> Sencan Altınoluk and Nilüfer Atakan, “Abraxas: A Magical Gem in the Istanbul Archaeological Museums,” *Anatolia Antiqua* XXII (2014): 219-220, published June 30, 2018, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4000/anatoliaantiqua.303>.

<sup>202</sup> Koenig, “Des ‘trigrammes panthéistes’ ramessides aux gemmes magiques de l’Antiquité tardive“, 313-314.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 314.; Stephen Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 49.

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century Abraxas amulets appeared in private European collections, and with time also in museums' collections; today the amulets appear for example in Berlin State Museums, Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of the Jagellonian University in Cracow, Cairo Museum, World Museum in Liverpool etc. Due to the interest the gems enjoyed, gem catalogues were publicized by various scholars, Attilio Mastrocinque, Armand Delatte and Philippe Derchain, and Campbell Bonner, which became authoritative in this field of research.<sup>204</sup> With the developing digitalization some collections are available in the form of online database, best known example is the Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database which is based on the work of previously discussed authority in the study of magical gems, Campbell Bonner<sup>205</sup>. There are of course other databases, albeit the objects are processed in less detail – e.g. the Cornell Gem Impressions Collection of Cornell University Library<sup>206</sup> or the Gems database of the Classical Art Research Centre associated with the University of Oxford<sup>207</sup>; in both these online databases the category of Abraxas amulets includes all gems containing the Anguipede character which reflects the museum collections' approach using Abraxas as a category in the collection organization.<sup>208</sup> The following section analyzing the amulets refers to the magical gems present in the online database of Campbell Bonner.

The amulets vary in the content from simple one-word inscriptions, or simple image with simple inscriptions, to a mix of images, characteres (specific signs used in magical texts) and more complex inscriptions. Standard orthographic form of Abraxas in the amulets' inscriptions is ABPAΞΑΣ or ABPAΣΑΞ<sup>209</sup>; the form ARBATHIAŌ (APBAΘIAΩ)<sup>210</sup> or its variation, as mentioned by Professor Youtie, is not as common in the engraved gem amulets. The name Abraxas is usually accompanied by other words,

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<sup>204</sup> Richard Gordon, "Archaeologies of Magical Gems," in *'Gems of Heaven': Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in Late Antiquity, c. AD 200-600*, edited by Chris Entwistle and Noël Adams (London: British Museum, 2012), 39.

<sup>205</sup> *The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database*, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://cbd.mfab.hu/>.

<sup>206</sup> "Cornell Gem Impressions Collection," *Digital Collections, Cornell University Library*, accessed May 5, 2021,

[https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog?f%5Bcollection\\_tesim%5D%5B%5D=Cornell+Gem+Impressions+Collection](https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog?f%5Bcollection_tesim%5D%5B%5D=Cornell+Gem+Impressions+Collection).

<sup>207</sup> "Gem research," *Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford*, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/gems/default.htm>.

<sup>208</sup> Gordon, "Archaeologies of Magical Gems", 45.

<sup>209</sup> The possible incorrect reading and use explained by C. W. King, see page 18.

<sup>210</sup> *The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database*; variation ABRAŌTH (ABPAΩΘ) in amulets CBd – 597, 1169, 2374, 2994, and 3900.

most often IAŌ (IAΩ, Tetragrammaton)<sup>211</sup>, and SABAŌTH (ΣΑΒΑΩΘ)<sup>212</sup>, and their variations; less frequently ADŌNAI (ΑΔΩΝΑΙ)<sup>213</sup> can be found, all derived from Jewish divine names. More textually complex amulets may also contain formulas ABLATHANALBA (ΑΒΛΑΘΑΝΑΛΒΑ)<sup>214</sup>, or angelic names clearly of Jewish origin OURIĒL (ΟΥΡΙΗΛ)<sup>215</sup>, GABRIĒL (ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ)<sup>216</sup>, and MICHAĒL (ΜΙΧΑΗΛ)<sup>217</sup>. Another name/word that may be present in the amulets is SEMESEILAM (ΣΕΜΕΣΕΙΛΑΜ)<sup>218</sup>.

The amulets' imagery standardly includes rooster-headed anguipede<sup>219</sup>; the most common form of Abraxas amulet comprises of said anguipede with variant inscription of IAŌ, both with<sup>220</sup> or without<sup>221</sup> ΑΒΡΑΞΑΣ (or ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ). If the imagery of the amulet is compound, it often depicts the rooster-headed figure and other figures, such as Ouroboros (snake eating its own tail)<sup>222</sup> or Chnoubis (lion-headed serpent)<sup>223</sup>, both figures are also being ascribed to Gnostic symbolism and they are often linked to the Sun and solar aspects. Among the imagery it is also possible to find Greek divine entities Hermes<sup>224</sup>, Helios<sup>225</sup>, Harpocrates<sup>226</sup>, Aphrodite<sup>227</sup>, Hecate<sup>228</sup>, and Egyptian divine entities Osiris<sup>229</sup>, Horus<sup>230</sup>, Anubis<sup>231</sup>, and Thoth<sup>232</sup>.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, CBd – 5, 12, 102, 120, 149, 155, 229, 302, 322, 458, 466, 524, 532, 533, 577, 579, 588, 594, 595, 597, 601, 606, 613, 617, 618, 619, 624, 632, 633, 634, 642, 657, 672, 674, 862, 877, 885, 886, 979, 980, 1006, 1056, 1062, 1080, 1095, 1111, 1126, 1132, 1134, 1201, 1321, 1367, 1368, 1393, and 1509.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, CBd – 12, 466, 539, 588, 594, 606, 613, 632, 642, 674, 675, 862, 877, 885, 980, 1126, 1201, and 1509.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, CBd – 466, 594, 606, 632, 674, and 675.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, CBd – 11, 321, 606, 657, 675, 853, 1030, 1111, 1114, and 1457.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, CBd – 613, 862, 2324, 2554, 2584, and 3519.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, CBd – 862, 2279, 2480, 3457, and 3519.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, CBd – 467, 613, 674, 675, 981, 982, 1080, 2188, 2324, and 2480.

<sup>218</sup> Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, 187.; CBd – 11, 619, 981, 1114, 1132, and 1457.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, CBd – 11, 12, 120, 229, 302, 579, 588, 594, 595, 597, 600, 601, 606, 613, 617, 618, 619, 621, 632, 633, 634, 657, 979, 980, 992, 1056, 1095, 1111, 1114, 1126, 1134, 1201, 1367, and 1368.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, CBd – 229, 594, 601, 2481, 3483, 3486, and 3777.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, CBd – 42, 119, 451, 589, 593, 609, 614, 620, 631, 673, 993, 1115, 1146, 1453, 1758, 2336, and 2477.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, CBd – 321, 532, 561, 624, 877, 887, 982, 1144, 1300, and 2188.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, CBd – 102, 140, 187, 675, 1006, 1517, and 2584.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, CBd – 2140, and 4209.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, CBd – 467, 642, 657, 1067, 1095, and 2324.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, CBd – 95, 102, 322, 326, 512, 523, 524, 533, 619, 621, 1321, and 1393.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, CBd – 533.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, CBd – 1038.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, CBd – 617, 674, 1080, and 1096.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, CBd – 321, 512, and 539.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, CBd – 1030, 1096, and 1300.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, CBd – 1033.

Abraxas amulets comprise of two aspects, i.e. inscriptions and images, both of which seem to be significantly analogous to the textual context of Greek magical papyri. Modern scholarship, including Professor Smith and Vitellozzi, recognized the contextual resemblance and, as it was previously discussed, inferred that the amulets and papyri share the roots of their magical practice.<sup>233</sup>

An essential question remains: what or who is Abraxas in the amulets' context? The former assumption that Abraxas amulets belonged to Gnosticism saw the amulets as religious objects reflecting their beliefs, it was accepted that Abraxas was a god in Basilidean cosmology. Outside of the Gnostic assumption, to determine Abraxas's identity from the amulets is considerably complicated mainly due to lacking context if not considered parallel to the magical papyri. Based on the amulets themselves it would be legitimate to assume magical potency, at least as a *vox magicae*, at most as representing specific magical or divine entity.

The question of identity links to the question of the purpose for which the amulets were used, also due to lack of accessible context. Going back to the standard form of the amulets, the content of the amulets does not suggest the intended result or the essential intention of amulet's creation, in addition secondary theories are applied that relate to the individual divine names and the aspects of the rooster-headed figure, whence it is assumed that amulets served as a protection against evil. Not as frequently the text present on the amulet describes the specific intention, or goal, to which the amulet should have served, e.g. pain relief. And again, as the amulets were/are put in parallel to the magical papyri, the meaning and purpose of the amulets is oftentimes explained in the terms of the papyri.<sup>234</sup>

## 2.4 *Ḥarba de-Moshe*

Fascinating account of a magical text may be found in the treatise *Ḥarba de-Moshe* (*The Sword of Moses*; *חרבא דמשה*) that is said to belong among early Jewish magical texts, thus it is an essential step in the development of Jewish magical practices between the Talmudic and medieval period, simultaneously the text is exhibiting the

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<sup>233</sup> Vitellozzi, "Relations Between Magical Texts and Magical Gems Recent Perspectives", 181-183.

<sup>234</sup> Altinoluk and Atakan, "Abraxas", 220.; Peleg-Barkat and Tepper, "Engraved Gems from Sites with a Military Presence in Roman Palestine", 100.

influence of Greco-Egyptian magical practice and supposedly the relation to other Aramaic magical sources – the incantation bowls.<sup>235</sup>

As many other magical sources, *Harba de-Moshe* is difficult to date and to place. Similar to the Nag Hammadi codices, final text of the treatise is a composition of various parts written in Babylonian and Palestinian Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek, which interferes the geographical assessment of the place of origin. Two places are usually discussed – Palestine and Babylonia – due to the Aramaic variation within the text; however, new linguistic analysis by Yuval Harari concludes that the presence of Hebrew suggest the place of origin to be Palestine.<sup>236</sup> The question of the composition date poses a challenge as well. The first known mention of the treatise comes from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium in a rabbinic responsum. Moses Gaster, the first translator, assumed that the text originated in the first four centuries CE<sup>237</sup>, later scholars put the origin of the text to Geonic period, approximately from the end of 6<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>238</sup> Gershom Scholem proposed the date of origin to be between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century while implying that due to the compositional character the individual parts were assumably much older.<sup>239</sup> Harari theorized the date of compilation in the period after 500 CE as plausible and shared Scholem’s implication.<sup>240</sup>

Although the original text of *Harba de-Moshe* is assumed to come from the 11<sup>th</sup> century the latest, the earliest preserved version of the text comes from a manuscript from the 14<sup>th</sup> century – the minimal time period between the original text being produced and the earliest preserved text is three centuries which further complicates the assessment of the origin date. The text was preserved in medieval and early modern manuscripts in varying extent: short versions from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the longest version from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Later found fragments from the Cairo Genizah add more pieces to the puzzle of the text; however, not all fragments were identified yet, and so for now the

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<sup>235</sup> Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 315.; Harari, “Moses, the Sword, and The Sword of Moses“, 294.

<sup>236</sup> Harari, “Moses, the Sword, and The Sword of Moses“, 295-297.

<sup>237</sup> Gaster, “The Sword of Moses“, 172.

<sup>238</sup> Harari, “Moses, the Sword, and The Sword of Moses“, 296.; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 315.

<sup>239</sup> Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 99.

<sup>240</sup> Harari, “Moses, the Sword, and The Sword of Moses“, 296.

*Harba de-Moshe* remains most true to the original text in two modern versions<sup>241</sup> – by Moses Gaster and more recently by Yuval Harari<sup>242</sup>.

An interesting discovery was made by Alexander Fodor; the Arabic manuscript *Sifr Ādam* (*The Book of Adam*) which contained three Jewish magical treatises – including *Harba de-Moshe* and *Sefer ha-Razim*; here *Harba de-Moshe* is put into the framework of *Sefer ha-Razim*. Some parts of the Arabic text follow the text of Aramaic *Harba de-Moshe*, albeit the Arabic text seems to be stripped of any reference or even allusion to Jewish tradition, most notably the title of the Arabic text is “The Sword of God”, Moses is clearly omitted from the narrative. The elimination of Jewish tradition was perhaps a conscious effort of the redactor to make the text accessible to wider audience, which might suggest perceived efficiency or popularity among the recipients of the magical practice.<sup>243</sup> The manuscript in its entirety exhibits adjustments to Christian, and in some places also to Muslim, rhetoric. Recently found manuscript of the same text *Sifr Ādam* shows signs of adaptation process to accommodate the previously Christianized text to Islamic tradition<sup>244</sup> which then might suggest further opening of the tradition to wider and more complex religious environment.

The text of this magical treatise begins by describing the ritual how to gain power over the Sword which is a process taking several days including fasting, and adjurations of thirteen angels who are set in a hierarchical order.<sup>245</sup> The second section of the treatise is the wording of *Harba de-Moshe* itself, which is a list of divine names and Aramaic phrases; the names are by a majority considered to be *voces magicae* of various origin, presumably also transliterations of Greek names in Hebrew letters.<sup>246</sup> In the third section dedicated to specific magical practices the divine names are linked to a variety of medical magic, love magic, agricultural magic, magic concerned with monetary or knowledge

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<sup>241</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 175-176.; Yuval Harari, “The Sword of Moses (Harba de-Moshe): A New Translation and Introduction,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7, no. 1 (2012): 63-65.

<sup>242</sup> Yuval Harari, *The Sword of Moses – A New Edition and Study* (Jerusalem: Academon, 1997), (Hebrew) (חרבא דמשה: מהדורה חדשה ומחקר. ירושלים: אקדמון, תשנ"ז).

<sup>243</sup> Alexander Fodor, “An Arabic Version of ‘The Sword of Moses’,” in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, edited by Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 341, 370, 371, and 383.

<sup>244</sup> Dóra Zsom, “Another Arabic Version of Sefer ha-Razim and Harba de-Moshe: A New Sifr Ādam Manuscript. *Studies in Memory of Alexander Fodor*, edited by Kinga Dévényi. *The Arabist*, Budapest Studies in Arabic 37 (2016): 182-183, accessed May 5, 2021.

[https://www.academia.edu/30797200/ANOTHER\\_ARABIC\\_VERSION\\_OF\\_SEFER\\_HA\\_RAZIM\\_AND\\_%E1%B8%A4ARBA\\_DE\\_MO%C5%A0E\\_A\\_NEW\\_SIFR\\_%C4%80DAM\\_MANUSCRIPT](https://www.academia.edu/30797200/ANOTHER_ARABIC_VERSION_OF_SEFER_HA_RAZIM_AND_%E1%B8%A4ARBA_DE_MO%C5%A0E_A_NEW_SIFR_%C4%80DAM_MANUSCRIPT).

<sup>245</sup> Harari, “Moses, the Sword, and The Sword of Moses”, 294-295.

<sup>246</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 176-179.

enrichment etc.<sup>247</sup> The last passage applies both Greek and Babylonian magical terminology which Aramaic lacked, in some instances only Aramaic transliterations of the original terms.<sup>248</sup>

The text is lacking consistency in the name forms which is apparent also in the case of Abraxas presence.<sup>249</sup> Abraxas appears three times written in three varieties – ABKSS (אבכסס)<sup>250</sup>, ABRSK (אברסק)<sup>251</sup> and ABRKSS (אברכסס)<sup>252</sup>. The first instance ABKSS can be found in the text of *Harba de-Moshe* itself (in the list of divine names) surrounded by varieties of Tetragrammaton, in identic forms to those present in the Greek magical papyri IA $\bar{\text{O}}$  (יהו, יאו)<sup>253</sup> and structures that seems to repeat and duplicate the Tetragrammaton (יהה יאי יי יאיי)<sup>254</sup>. In the second case ABRSK is also a part of *Harba de-Moshe* text, in a succession of unknown names. The third form ABRKSS emerges in the last part of the treatise in which Abraxas assumes an important role in a revelation magical ritual, no other divine names appear in this context.

The list of divine names includes various divine entities of various origin. The most important element are the names belonging to Jewish tradition; divine names such as variations of the Tetragrammaton (יהוההה, יואו, יאו, יהו)<sup>255</sup> and Tetragrammaton in its true form<sup>256</sup>, Sabaoth or its abbreviation due to frequent use in proximity (צבאות, צ)<sup>257</sup>, and Elohim (אלהים אלוהים)<sup>258</sup>; and angelic names Gabriel (גבראל, גבהאל)<sup>259</sup>, Michael (מיכאל)<sup>260</sup>, and other angelic names with the suffix “-el” (מורתאל, אקדסאל, מוסבאל, etc.)<sup>261</sup> Gaster proposes the presence of Greek and

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<sup>247</sup> Harari, “Moses, the Sword, and The Sword of Moses“, 294-295.

<sup>248</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 178-179.

<sup>249</sup> Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 260.

<sup>250</sup> Gaster, “The Sword of Moses“, VIII.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, IX.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, IX.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, VIII.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, VIII.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, VIII, IX, XI, and XII.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, XI, and XII.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, VII-IX.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, VIII.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, VIII, and XI.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, VIII, and XI.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, VIII, IX, and XI.

Egyptian divine names<sup>262</sup>, e.g. Zeus (יִזְאוּס)<sup>263</sup>, Isis (אִסִּס)<sup>264</sup>, Osiris (אֹוִזְרוֹס)<sup>265</sup>, and Thoth (תֹּוֹהוֹת)<sup>266</sup>, albeit these words are assumed to be equivalent of the divine names, and Gaster warns against a rash assumption concerning the divine name associations.<sup>267</sup>

Two other interesting entities that are present in other magical sources, e.g. Greek magical papyri, and amulets; are assumed to be found in *Harba de-Moshe*; the known formula ABLANATHANALBA, in the text as ABLA NATA (אֲבֵלָא נְאֵתְהָ)<sup>268</sup> and SEMESILAM as MESULAM<sup>269</sup> MESULAM SE (מְסוּלָם מְסוּלָם סָא)<sup>270</sup>.

Concerning Abraxas's identity in *Harba de-Moshe*, while in the successive list of names the identity is not apparent or assumable from the context as no fixed or preferred context may be found it seems that Abraxas here serves as a *vox magicae* for medical and mind-controlling magic. Whereas Abraxas as a part of the magical ritual, it is referred to as "prince whose name is Abraksas"<sup>271</sup> thus assuming a prominent role of a powerful entity in the ritual. The notion of a "prince" as a ruler might have been connected to the role of angels as rulers of celestial bodies and other natural phenomena<sup>272</sup>, correspondingly in Gnostic Basilidean tradition Abraxas was perceived in a role of the ruler of the 365 angels and their heavens assuming a role of angelic being, therefore the text of *Harba de-Moshe* probably alluded to identic perception of Abraxas as an angelic entity. Reference to Abraxas as a prince appears also in *Sefer ha-Razim*, where the context clearly associates the term "prince" with angels<sup>273</sup>; parallel term is "minister" which is used in the Gnostic literature and "ministering" actions in *Sefer ha-Razim*<sup>274</sup>.

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 165-166.; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 179.

<sup>263</sup> Gaster, "The Sword of Moses", VII.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, VIII.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, VIII.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, VIII.

<sup>267</sup> Methodological problem with the search for divine names, see page 15.

<sup>268</sup> Gaster, "The Sword of Moses", VIII.

<sup>269</sup> Scholem notes that Semesilam appears in Jewish Hekhalot literature – The Lesser Hekhalot (הִיכָלוֹת) (זוֹטְרָתִי); the form (סְמֹסִלָּם) is visibly similar to the form in the Sword of Moses (מְסוּלָם); Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 76.

<sup>270</sup> Gaster, "The Sword of Moses", VIII.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>272</sup> Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität Zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur Eabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), 23-27.

<sup>273</sup> Morgan, *SEPHER HA-RAZIM*, 68.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 57, and 80.



## 2.5 Sefer ha-Razim

The magical treatise *Sefer ha-Razim* (*The Book of Secrets*, or also *The Book of Mysteries*) introduces Jewish magical tradition ascribing an essential role to angels and their hierarchy within the system presented in the text. The process of compilation and contextualization of the treatise was immensely influential in the scholarship interested in the magical traditions and their historical development.<sup>275</sup>

*Sefer ha-Razim* was published in 1966 by Mordecai Margalioth who extensively researched various fragments of magical texts that he put into context and assembled the final document comprising of texts traditionally credited to angel Raziel. A large portion of the text was accessible to European researchers before the publication of Margalioth's work, however, he implemented new fragments found in the Cairo Genizah. Margalioth worked with fragments written in Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin.<sup>276</sup> To add to the comprehensive mixture, there are sequences written in Hebrew which are only transliterated original Greek text.<sup>277</sup> The discovered fragments in Genizah initiated Margalioth's work assembling the text which was not available in its entirety yet, the correctness of his compilation of fragments and pieces of texts present in already available manuscripts was attested by previously mentioned Arabic manuscript *Sifr Ādam*, that contains the Arabic version of *Sefer ha-Razim*; the content pieced together by Margalioth is in two of three segments parallel to the original text in *Sifr Ādam*.<sup>278</sup>

As it was the case with previous sources, dating the *Sefer ha-Razim* is complicated by the fragmentary character of individual parts, albeit the date was set majorly in agreement to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century CE according to a linguistic and terminological analysis, albeit it was suggested that the magical practice, which the treatise applies, might be of much older origin. Although the majorly accepted date of origin is indeed set between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, Gideon Bohak adds a layer of Arabic

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<sup>275</sup> Reimund Leicht, "Some Observations on the Diffusion of Jewish Magical Texts", 214.

<sup>276</sup> Morgan, *SEIPHER HA-RAZIM*, 3-6.

<sup>277</sup> Gideon Bohak, "The Magical Rotuli from the Cairo Genizah," in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, edited by Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 330-331.

<sup>278</sup> Alexander Fodor, "An Arabic Version of Sefer Ha-Razim," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2006): 417, and 425, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40753418>.

tradition to consideration framing the possible origin – that the latest possible point of *Sefer ha-Razim* compilation might have occurred in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>279</sup>

During the analysis scholars found parallels to Talmudic and Hekhalot literature, concurrently other parallels were found to the Greek magical papyri and Aramaic incantation bowls; furthermore, several mythological and literary elements correspond to Egyptian tradition.<sup>280</sup> The multitude of cultural influences complicates the question of geographical origin of the text as no explicit evidence is available.<sup>281</sup>

The treatise begins with an introductory part discussing the text transmission from the angel Raziel to Noah before the world was flooded; the main body of the text comprises of seven portions according to seven firmaments that echoes ancient Jewish cosmological systems. The seven firmaments, seven heavens, all contain hierarchy of angels, their function, and the designated rites and magical practices in which they are the powerful active entities, the magical recipes deal with healing, incantation, talking to spirits etc.<sup>282</sup>

Abraxas is leading the angelic list of the fourth firmament in the form ABRASKS (אבראסכס)<sup>283</sup>, the context incorporates 31 angelic names, the best known from them Gabriel (גבריאל)<sup>284</sup>; a large number of the angelic names ends with the suffix “-el” which is the case in each firmament and each angelic list.<sup>285</sup>

The final section of the fourth firmament describes a prayer to Helios, appropriate to the context of the fourth firmament, the prayer concerns the Sun; a Greek prayer only transliterated to Hebrew letters.<sup>286</sup> The prayer is of interest to modern scholars; although prayers to Helios appear in the Greek magical papyri, none of them is close to *Sefer ha-Razim* prayer in content or linguistic devices.<sup>287</sup> The original Greek version of this Helios prayer was not found yet in any source and so the reconstruction is based solely on the text of *Sefer ha-Razim* which might negatively affect subsequent research.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 174.

<sup>280</sup> Morgan, *SEPHER HA-RAZIM*, 6, 8, and 10.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid*, 68, and 90.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, 68, and 90.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, 87-90.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>287</sup> Leicht, “Qedushah and Prayer to Helios“, 153.

<sup>288</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 242.

Outside of the fourth firmament a series of non-angelic names appears within the text, e.g. biblical names (Noah, Enoch, Seth, Adam)<sup>289</sup>, Greek divine names (Aphrodite)<sup>290</sup>, Greek mythological names of constellations (Orion, Pleiades)<sup>291</sup>; in several instances the text alludes to Greek figures without explicitly naming them (Aphrodite<sup>292</sup>, Hermes<sup>293</sup>). Although the magical recipes seem majorly influenced by the magical practices common in the Greek magical papyri, only a limited number of Greco-Egyptian borrowed divine names is recognizable possibly because of the copying mistakes and misrepresentations that took place during the centuries of transmission.<sup>294</sup>

The fourth firmament thematically covers opposites – fire and water, fire and cold, day and night; there are two groups of angels (also referred to as princes) who lead the movement of the Sun – the angels of fire lead the Sun during the day and the angels of cold lead him during the night, although there is the direct opposition, the angels are said to live in harmony – separately in symbiosis.<sup>295</sup> Abraxas is thus an angelic figure associated with the Sun and occupies a chief position among the angels of fire who lead the Sun through the day.<sup>296</sup>

## 2.6 Aramaic Incantation Bowls

Aramaic incantation bowls represent a magical tradition widespread predominantly in Mesopotamia in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century; the base was built probably already in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>297</sup> The texts found on the bowls were, as the title suggests, written in Aramaic in its chronological, geographical and register variations; the linguistic scope of the bowls requires complex analysis and poses a difficult task to scholars. Another difficulty in the research is to establish the provenance of the bowls.<sup>298</sup> The bowl research faces ongoing challenges and limitations; thus, the following examples serve

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<sup>289</sup> Morgan, *SEPHER HA-RAZIM*, 17.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>294</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 172.

<sup>295</sup> Morgan, *SEPHER HA-RAZIM*, 67-68.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> Shaked, Ford and Bahyro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 1.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.; “Introduction: Magical Literature,” *The Schøyen Collection*, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.schoyencollection.com/magical-literature-introduction>.

rather as an illustration of the material potential than evidence for this thesis research interest.

Shaul Shaked, the authority in the field of Aramaic incantation bowls, theorized that the notion of Abraxas was present in the bowls' magical tradition; his claim was based on the comparison of three incantation bowls<sup>299</sup>, one of which contained the Aramaic transcription of Greek Abraxas as ABRKSS (אברכסט)<sup>300</sup>, the other two bowls contained similar structures ABRḤSSYH (אברחסייה)<sup>301</sup> and ABRSSBYH (אברסטבייה)<sup>302</sup> in parallel context, thus Shaked connects the three words to Abraxas. The text of the bowls does not further indicate any character or identity that could be ascribed to Abraxas.

Shaked reveals Abraxas also in another incantation bowl in the form ABRḤSYA (אברחסייה)<sup>303</sup>; deducing from the context that calls ABRḤSYA the “king of the world”<sup>304</sup> it is connected to Greek notion of Abraxas. Related to this text Shaked proposes that the form ABRḤSYA might be the original form of the name, returning to the claim that Abraxas originates in Aramaic<sup>305</sup>, only later translated to Greek ABRAXAS/ABRASAX. Although Shaked presents the idea of Abraxas linguistic origin, he notes that Aramaic texts usually transcribe Abraxas from Greek rather than using the “original” Aramaic form.<sup>306</sup>

The collection of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls includes five bowls which all incorporate two names remarkably close to previous Shaked's Abraxas variations – ABRḤS (אברחסט)<sup>307</sup> and ABSKS (אבסטכסט)<sup>308</sup>. These names are not recognized as Abraxas associations; however, they appear in similar context to previous magical texts – Tetragrammaton, Sabaoth, Gabriel and several other angelical names.<sup>309</sup> This observation

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<sup>299</sup> Shaul Shaked, “Transmission and Transformation of Spells: The Case of the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls,” in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, edited by Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari and Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 192.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>303</sup> Shaul Shaked, “Dramatis Personae in the Jewish Magic Texts: Some Differences Between Incantation Bowls and Geniza Magic,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2006): 376, accessed May 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40753416>.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 376.

<sup>305</sup> Discussion of Abraxas etymology, see page 18-20.

<sup>306</sup> Shaked, “Dramatis Personae in the Jewish Magic Texts”, 377-378.

<sup>307</sup> Shaked, Ford and Bahyro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 227, 230, 233, 236, and 239.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, 226-227, 229-230, 232-233, 236, and 238-239.

may not be an ultimate evidence, albeit it might serve as a point of interest to further research.

The last illustrating example is Aramaic bowl divorcing the owner from demons – the form ABRKSS (אַבְרַכְסַס)<sup>310</sup> appears. The translator connects Abraxas to Ashmodai, a demonic figure whose name also appears in the present text, classifying Abraxas directly as a demon<sup>311</sup>. The text is in many places illegible which is also the case in Abraxas's name vicinity as the character is not explicitly mentioned in the legible text, the transcriber probably understood the context of words “seal” and “bind” as suggesting Abraxas being a demon. Similarly interesting is the character of Ashmodai who appears in the incantation bowls in two character variations – a king of demons<sup>312</sup> and an angel<sup>313</sup>. The situation of double while opposing character of Ashmodai might possibly reflect the double character of Abraxas, however, based on the previous magical material studied in this thesis, there is no mention of demonic perception of Abraxas. Albeit interesting, such question would require comprehensive research of Aramaic incantation bowl material, and conceivably also other Aramaic amulets employing the name Abraxas.

The described examples of Abraxas's proven or assumed presence in the incantation bowls pose more questions than answers to the search for Abraxas's cultural and contextual identity which led me to not to take them in the account of the final analysis of Abraxas's presence in the magical texts.

## 2.7 Conclusion to Abraxas in the Selected Sources

The analysis of five sources and magical traditions (Gnostic literature, Greek magical papyri, amulets, *Harba de-Moshe* and *Sefer ha-Razim*) revealed the presence of Abraxas in varying forms, identities, and contexts from which we can assume the levels of importance that Abraxas enjoyed within the texts and magical practices.

The prevalent form in which Abraxas appeared undoubtedly comes from the Greek form of the name (written in Greek, Hebrew, and Coptic alteration), in fact all the

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<sup>310</sup> M. J. Geller, Nicholas Sims-Williams and J. C. Wright, “Notes and Communications,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 60, no. 2 (1997): 329, accessed May 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/620388>.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 327.

<sup>312</sup> Shaked, Ford and Bahyro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 153.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, 258.

sources contain such form, either in direct transliteration or in noticeably similar structure; and only the Greek magical papyri apply other versions, however, they are also derived from Greek. The standard original form seems to be Abrasax, as majority of the sources suggests (exceptionally using Abraxas: one example in Greek magical papyri and two examples in *Harba de-Moshe*), albeit the form Abraxas is widely spread and majorly used in the modern scholarship – this form seems to be implemented by the Christian thinkers (St. Augustine and Irenaeus) whose writings were used as reference by the antiquarians renewing the interest in Abraxas in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century leading to C. G. Jung and Hermann Hesse presenting the character to public knowledge as Abraxas.

Context of the present Abraxas in the analyzed sources usually involves Jewish divine names and/or Jewish angelic names; in the sources connected to Greco-Egyptian tradition, Greek magical papyri and amulets, Abraxas appears in immediate context of Greek and Egyptian divine names, concurrently in these sources Abraxas follows various solar characters of Greek and Egyptian provenance. Identic references to both traditions occur also in other analyzed sources, however, not in proximity of Abraxas.

The identity of Abraxas is important yet often unanswered question forcing the assumptions to be made from the context. In most of the texts Abraxas is identified as an angel – several times directly marked as an angel; in other cases, it might be inferred from the context, either of angelic names or of angelic referential terms. Abraxas is often present in strings of names assumably of magical potency without any apparent identification suggesting the name to be *vox magicae*. In the Greek magical papyri, there are several examples of higher divine role – Abraxas as a god; however, most examples seem rather indirect. Abraxas is either present in strings of names that are introduced as a god, or Abraxas is assimilated with a different divine being (god). Only in one instance Abraxas is directly marked as god along with other names, some of them angelic names, that usually are not connected to the divine. Abraxas seems to have an undeniable magical potency inclined to be identified as an angel or unspecified magical entity or/and name.

Significant characteristic that permeates several sources is the connection of Abraxas to the Sun and solar attributes – the number 365, association with other solar characters and imagery of Greek, Egyptian and even Persian origin. The number 365 was being connected to the Sun by various traditions; however, only in Greco-Roman tradition the numerical value translated to Abraxas's name. The solar attributes appear also in

Jewish tradition; however, it does not seem as an internal disposition to Abraxas but rather as a contextual role – initiating movement of the Sun – within the source *Sefer ha-Razim*.

In conclusion, Abraxas appears at least in three language variations (Greek, Hebrew/Aramaic, Coptic), all of which are based on Greek version – Abraxas/Abrasax. Most often context surrounding Abraxas comprises of Jewish divine and angelic entities implying magical potency and angelic identity. In Greco-Egyptian context Abraxas seemingly attains more powerful magical potency with strong inclination to solar attributes.

## Conclusion

This study has attempted to examine the various meanings and the contexts of the name Abraxas in four textual corpora written in the Eastern Mediterranean during the last centuries of antiquity (Nag Hammadi texts, Greek magical papyri, amulets, and Jewish magical texts) and to clarify whether it was considered translatable and transferable by late antique writers and readers. The major findings of my research can be summarized in the following way:

1. Abraxas and/or its variations appear in all of the 4 aforementioned ancient corpora  
– Gnostic literature, Greek magical papyri, amulets, and Jewish magical literature.
2. Abraxas went through syncretic process since it entered diverse religious traditions, including Gnosticism, Judaism, and the polytheistic-syncretic religious world of magical papyri.
3. Abraxas and its variations are attested in forms based on Greek ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ.
4. Abraxas and its variations occur mostly in context of Jewish divine names and angelic names.
5. Abraxas is often identified as an angelic being.
6. Abraxas is often associated with the Sun and solar attributes.
7. Abraxas, name and concept, was not translated – untranslatability.
8. In sum, Abraxas was untranslatable but transferable, that is to say, the word was not translated, but it was capable of entering diverse religious traditions.

Transmission of tradition through the syncretic processes is a highly debated phenomenon in historical and anthropological research, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, that arises both positive and negative connotations. Syncretism can be triggered by numerous events which are either conscious and planned decisions, or results of uncontrolled events. The process depends also on the internal approach of the receiving tradition – the form and the level to which it accepts and utilizes the procedure. Borrowing



and utilizing Abraxas was conscious choice for the benefit of the receiving traditions. Any research attempting to identify individual syncretic subjects has its limitations. In Abraxas's case, the name was transferred to several traditions (Gnosticism, Greco-Egyptian magic, Jewish magic), thus finding its origin is challenging. The search is often based on the name's etymology, namely Hebrew/Aramaic which however lacks convincing evidence. Following language can mislead the search for origin as mixing of cultures and languages was common in the Roman Empire, e.g. Jews in Alexandria spoke and wrote in Greek. Context research may be conducted to search for the origin; Abraxas often occurs in the context of Jewish divine names which suggests Abraxas originating in Jewish tradition.

In all corpora to some extent, Abraxas is associated with the Sun or solar attributes. The worship of the Sun and the solar deities was a common feature in the history of many cultures on all continents, significantly so in the Roman Empire. To Egyptian religious practice the Sun worship was substantial having several gods marked as solar – Ra, Horus, Amun, Aten; in Greek people worshipped Helios and Apollo, in Mesopotamia there was Persian Mithras, Akkadian Shamash, Hittite Istanu, Canaanite Shapshu, and others. In Jewish magic Abraxas is also associated with the Sun, thus showing that the Sun was important in Jewish cultural environment. Biblical monotheism developed amidst the cultures worshipping solar deities; and while it differentiated itself from the pagan polytheistic religions, it preserved some of their symbolism. In the non-rabbinic Judaism, the God is said to have been associated with the Sun, which supports the imagery found in synagogues from Late Antiquity in Palestine – Bet Alpha, Ḥamat Tiberias, Sepphoris, Na'aran. There the Sun was depicted, and it was depicted as the Greek solar deity Helios, thus suggesting syncretic symbolism. In Abraxas solar cults, biblical Judaism, and magical practice are all connected.

On the topic of tradition translatability comprehensive debates were led among ancient writers – Herodotus did not hesitate to translate anything while Origen opposed the idea vehemently deeming possible to translate nothing. Two aspects are commonly recognized – linguistic and conceptual. The linguistic aspect of translatability relates to the name Abraxas and its variations. The Greek writing ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ is the base for all transliterations and variations in all traditions (Greek, Coptic, Hebrew/Aramaic) suggesting that the name was taken over from Greek sources. The conceptual aspect of translatability is visible on the identity Abraxas adopted in every tradition; it is often

identified with angelic being, in all studied corpora. In the associated identity lies the potency of Abraxas's syncretism – Abraxas was not ingrained in any religious tradition, as strongly as for example Zeus in Greek or Jesus Christ in Christian tradition, that would prompt adherents of other religious traditions to reject to use it, and so it could enter different contexts. In conclusion, both linguistic and conceptual aspects were not translated, albeit Abraxas was easily transferred to diverse religious traditions; thus, translatability does not equal transferability, furthermore they do not necessarily depend on each other.

## Appendix: Transliteration Tables

### A Hebrew Transliteration Table

א	A
ב	B
ג	G
ד	D
ה	H
ו	W
ז	Z
ח	H̄
ט	T̄
י	Y
כ	K
ל	L
מ	M
נ	N
ס	S
ע	'
פ	P
צ	Ṣ
ק	Q
ר	R
ש	Ś
ת	T

B Greek Transliteration Table

Α	A
Β	B
Γ	G
Δ	D
Ε	E
Ζ	Z
Η	Ē
Θ	TH
Ι	I
Κ	K
Λ	L
Μ	M
Ν	N
Ξ	X
Ο	O
Π	P
Ρ	R
Σ	S
Τ	T
Υ	U
Φ	PH
Χ	KH
Ψ	PS
Ω	Ō

C Coptic Transliteration Table

Ⲁ	A
Ⲃ	B
Ⲅ	G
Ⲇ	D
Ⲉ	E
Ⲋ	S <sub>t</sub>
Ⲍ	Z
Ⲏ	Ē
Ⲑ	TH
Ⲓ	I
Ⲕ	K
Ⲗ	L
Ⲙ	M
Ⲛ	N
Ⲝ	X
Ⲟ	O
Ⲡ	P
Ⲣ	R
Ⲥ	S
ⲧ	T
ⲩ	U
ⲫ	PH
ⲭ	KH

Ψ	PS
Ω	Ō
ϣ	SH
ϥ	F
ḥ	X
ʒ	H
Ϡ	J
Ϛ	TSH
ϣ	TI

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## **Annotation**

Name of Author: Bc. Nikola Svobodníková

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Name of Department: Kurt and Ursula Center for Jewish Studies

Name of Thesis: A Blessing and a Curse: Divine Names in Jewish Textual Tradition

Name of Supervisor: Doc. Tamás Visi, Ph.D., M.A

Number of Characters: 135 848

Number of Appendices: 1

Number of Works Cited: 121

Key words: Abraxas, Gnosticism, Nag Hammadi library, Greek Magical Papyri, Amulets, *Harba de-Moshe*, *Sefer ha-Razim*, Aramaic Incantation Bowls, Magic, Syncretism, Translatability, Transferability, Transmission of Tradition

The diploma thesis focuses on Abraxas, a divine entity, and its linguistic and conceptual aspects in ancient textual sources – the Gnostic literature, Greek Magical Papyri, amulets, and Jewish magical texts *Harba de-Moshe*, and *Sefer ha-Razim*. Each appearance of Abraxas is studied and put into the framework of syncretism and translatability as means of tradition transmission.

## **Anotace**

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Název diplomové práce: Požehnání i zlořečení: Božská jména v židovské písemné tradici

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Počet znaků: 135 848

Počet příloh: 1

Počet titulů použité literatury: 121

Klíčová slova: Abraxas, Gnostická literatura, Rukopisy z Nag Hammádí, Řecké magické papyry, Amulety, *Ḥarba de-Moše*, *Sefer ha-Razim*, Aramejské zaklínací misky, Magie, Synkretismus, Překlad, Přenositelnost, Přenos tradice

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na Abraxase, božskou entitu, a s tím spojené lingvistické a konceptuální aspekty vyskytující se ve starověkých písemných zdrojích – gnostická literatura, řecké magické papyry, amulety, a židovské magické texty *Ḥarba de-Moše* a *Sefer ha-Razim*. Každý případ je pak zkoumán a vsazen do rámce synkretismu a přeložitelnosti (možnost překladu) jako způsobů přenosu tradice.