

ABRAXAS (Greek Ἀβρασαξ) — the name of a god in the system of the gnostic Basilides; a magical spell inscribed on late Hellenistic amulets and talismans.

The etymology of the name has not been completely explained. J.B. Passerius regards the words as originating from the Hebrew *ha-berak-hah*, "blessing" (one of the oldest magical spells is close in meaning — abracadabra or "to bless" from *ha braka dabara*). A. Geiger also looks for its roots in Hebrew: it is composed of the two expressions *abh*, *bara*, and a negative, which means "Uncreated Father". C. Salmasius and S. Sharpe support an Egyptian etymology, as does J.J. Bellermann who thinks that "Abraxas" arose from the joining of two Coptic words: *abrak* and *sax* — a holy, revered and blessed name. It is likely that in ancient pagan times this name was associated with some particular god. G. Davidson thinks that it was the name of one of the demiurges in early Christian Egypt, which would confirm the theory that the name is of Egyptian origin.

Abraxas became part of the history of religion thanks to the early Christian heresiologists, St. Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses* I 24, 7), St. Hippolytus (*Refutatio*, VII 14), and St. Jerome (*In Amos*, 3). They discussed the views of Basilides and considered him the "creator" of Abraxas. In Basilides' theogony, Abraxas occurs as the "Great Archon of the Ether", a "prince" who rules over 365 spiritual beings (*οὐρανοὶ* [ouranoi]) who were created by Wisdom and Power, two elements that come from the "Pre-eternal and Unknowable Being". Each *ouranós* (*οὐρανός*) manifests a different aspect of the god, while Abraxas shows the god's fullness as his representative (hypostasis). The "Unimaginable" is also described by the term "Omnipotent (Supreme) God". Irenaeus notes the connect between the name Abraxas and the number of the 365 *ouranói*. A. Neander and K.L. Gieseler follow Irenaeus and use the method of gematria to establish that this is the numeric value of the letters that compose the name Abraxas (A – 1, B – 2, R – 100, A – 1, S – 200, A – 1, X – 60 = 365). This number symbolizes the 365 daily revolutions of the Sun around the Earth in the course of the year in a geocentric system. One day and one revolution corresponds to one *ouranós*, while 365 days, in the course of which all the spiritual beings reveal themselves, correspond to Abraxas. Abraxas thus represents a type of solar god similar to the Iranian Mithra (*Meithras*) and the Egyptian god Nile — *Neilos-Hapi*. The numeric value of their names also equals 365, and the Greek Helios, whose number is 365, and when connected with the 5 planets it also gives the sum of 365.

At the beginning of the third century, Basilides' disciples began to make talismans and amulets that were called abraxases, and these were still used in the middle ages. On one side the name "Abraxas" would be inscribed (later the names "Sabaoth", "Sabao", "Jao" and "Adonaios" appeared — these were archons occurring in Orphic gnosis). On the other side there were various figures representing a god; most often there was a rooster with the body and hands of a man and snakes instead of legs. The figure held a shield, a scepter, a sword or a crown or wreath with a cross. His head, hands and the serpents ("5") symbolized the principle theological virtues (Bellermann). The particular elements of the figure referred to solar and gnostic symbolism — the rooster among the Egyptians, Persians and Greeks designated the sun, fire, and the victory of light over darkness; the serpent (Uraeus) had a similar meaning which in Egyptian mythology was the representative of the goddess "eye of the sun" who destroys the enemies of Ammon-Re. The forms of an ass and lion also appear on gems. The lion, like the rooster, had a solar reference. The lion symbolized the Sun, sunlight, and the power of light. The ass (a beast with often extremely different meanings) could mean patience, endurance and wisdom.

C. Salmasius, *De armis climastericis*, Lei 1648, 572; J. B. Passerius, *De gemmis basilidianis diatriba* in: Gori, *Thesaurus gemmarum antiquarum astriferarum*, Florentiae 1750, II 221-286; J.J. Bellermann, *Versuch über die Gemmen der Alten mit dem Abraxas Bilde*, B 1818-1819; A. Neander, *Genetische Entwicklung der gnostischen Systeme*, B 1818, 138-152; J.K.L. Giesler, *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, Bo 1844, I 123-124; S. Sharpe, *Egyptian Mythology*, Lo 1863, 252 (nota); A. Geoger, *Abraxas und Elxai*, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 18 (1864), 824-825; H. Leclercq, in: *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, P 1907, I 1127-1155; W. Drexler in: *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, R 1957, I 16-17; G. Davidson, in: *A Dictionary of Angels*, Lo 1967, 5 (*Słownik aniołów*, Pz 1998).

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