

Centrum judaistických studií Kurta a Ursuly Schubertových
Posudek magisterské diplomové práce

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

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Hodnotící kritéria	% podíl na celkové známce	hodnocení
Téma:	5%	1
Metodologie a argumentace:	20%	1.5
Interpretace:	20%	1
Použití sekundární literatury:	10%	1
Struktura a forma:	30%	2
Bibliografický aparát:	15%	1
Celková známka před obhajobou:		1.4

Témata pro obhajobu, průběh obhajoby:

The thesis is an excellent survey on the word Abraxas occurring in Eastern Mediterranean texts dating approximately from the first to the seventh centuries. The author of the thesis carefully studies Gnostic literature (the Nag Hammadi codices), Greek magical papyri, amulets (engraved gemstones with Greek inscriptions and images produced most probably in Egypt), Jewish magical texts (Harba de-Moshe, Sefer ha-Razim) and Aramaic incantation bowls. She discusses the variations of the word, its possible origin and meaning, and presents the context in which the word occurs. On the basis of the word's context, she tries to determine in each case the semantic function of the word (whether it is a proper name or magical formula, vox magicae) and the identity behind it (deity, angel, daimon, etc.). The thesis offers a careful and exhaustive survey of the secondary literature written on the topic. Undoubtedly the thesis can be considered as a major contribution to the research on magical names.

A few critical remarks might be made concerning the title and the structure of the thesis. As for the title: it is misleading to a certain extent, for it does not really indicate the content of the thesis. As for the structure: the main topic of the thesis, that is, the research on Abraxas is put in a theoretical frame on syncretism and translatability. The theoretical introduction of the thesis for most part seems to be independent of the main discussion, and the reader sometimes

does not see its aim clearly. Syncretism is discussed by taking examples from Roman and Jewish cultures, but the selection of examples is not really justified, and the discussion ends abruptly, without referring to the subject matter of the thesis. It is not clear, whether it is a historical introduction to the syncretic nature of Jewish religion or syncretism in general – in either case it seems to be uncomplete.

The other topic of the introduction is the problem of “translatability of concepts or traditions” (in general), although the author focuses exclusively on proper names (that is, on a very specific issue – and I think it is not proper to draw general conclusions based on very particular data). However, her remarks do not discuss the translation of proper names in fact, but the issue of matching identities or concepts, identification of divinities in one culture with divinities of the other. In my opinion, translatability, or the possibility of translating a name does not mean this, but the translation of the name’s meaning, if it is perceptible.¹ For example, “Yonathan” might be translated as “God has given”, and although the name “Theodorus” means nearly the same, it cannot be considered as a “translation” of the former, since both names existed independently in Classical Greek and Hebrew cultures. I think that while talking about translatability, the author confuses categories, fails to distinguish between them clearly. For example, she writes regarding “Herodotus’s translation technique” (p. 11 – of the word doc., the text I received had no page numbers):

“Herodotus freely translates the foreign divine names to Greek divine names without a failure – Zeus Belus is Assyrian god Baal, Theban Zeus is Egyptian Amun. Herodotus himself addresses the translatability of divine names, ‘Aphrodite... is called by the Assyrians Mylitta, by the Arabians Alilat, by the Persians Mitra.’” (p. 11) I think that this remark misunderstands Herodotus’s words (and method), for Herodotus did not translate Aphrodite to Assyrian (or Aramaic) language as Mylitta, to Arab language as Ailat and to Persian language as Mitra, but matched the functions and attributes of one deity to the other.

Without being familiar with the text of Origen the author referred to, I would like to make a similar remark concerning the following sentence: “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.” (p. 12) Here again, the fact that “another name is used” is not identical with being translated to another language. In magic, the problem is not the translation, but any alteration of the name:

1 If in the usage of the author the term “translatability” has a meaning which differs from the usual one, she might define it indicating the divergence from normal usage.

a simple misspelling equally spoils the effect, since any change affecting the name brings along the change of the name's magical effect. These alterations might be deliberate as well, for example, when letters carrying certain natures are introduced in between the letters of the magical name, etc.

“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.” (p. 15) I think these are not (sporadic) “voices”, but the mainstream opinion. Furthermore, the sentence is positioned as revealing a certain attitude towards syncretism, which is not the case in my opinion, for the principle that altering the letters of the magical name alters the effect of the name does not reject the idea of “ability to translate and convey the tradition in language and concept” in general (p. 15), neither does it reveal a negative (or positive) attitude towards syncretism, for it is unrelated to it.

Since the thesis is obviously worth to be published, I would suggest rewriting the introduction in a way that it may refer more directly to the subject matter of the thesis. It might be helpful for the reader to have a short summary explaining essential information on Abraxas at the very beginning of the text in order to make easier to follow the discussion and to grasp the aim of the general theoretical observations which in the present form are not strictly related to the specific topic.

Práci doporučuji/~~nedoporučuji~~ k obhajobě, navržená známka před obhajobou: 1,4 (B).

Podpis konzultanta/oponenta*) (jen v tištěné verzi):

*) nehodící se škrtněte (popř. smažte)

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2. Metodologie a argumentační struktura = schopnost stanovit vlastní metodologický postup, dodržovat ho v toku textu, schopnost stanovit teze, zřetelnost argumentační struktury.
3. Interpretace textů = úroveň analytického a interpretačního umění
4. Použití sekundární literatury = znalost relevantních a nezastaralých textů, tvůrčí/kritické zacházení se sekundární literaturou (MA)
5. Struktura a forma = výstavba, členění textu, konzistence, jazyková správnost, stylistická vyváženost, čtivost.
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2. „technika“ hodnocení:

Každé kategorii je přidělena jistá váha vyjádřená v % podílu na celkové známce (tabulka v programu MS Excel automaticky spočítá výslednou známku před obhajobou)

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Je-li bytí jediná kategorie hodnocena známkou „4“, znamená to, že práce se nedoporučuje k obhajobě.

3. ostatní poznámky:

V případě, že jeden z posuzovatelů práci nedoporučí k obhajobě, možno uvést krátké vysvětlení ve verbální podobě.

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