

The Book of Abramelin

The Book of Abramelin tells the story of an Egyptian mage named Abraham (pronunciation: (éjbrəham)), or Abra-Melin, who taught a system of magic to Abraham of Worms, a Jew in Worms, Germany,^{[1][2][3]} presumed to have lived from c.1362–c.1458.^[4] The system of magic from this book regained popularity in the 19th and 20th centuries partly due to Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers' translation, ***The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage***; and partly to its importance within the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and later within the mystical system of Thelema (created in 1904 by Aleister Crowley).

Due to trust issues, Mathers used the least-reliable manuscript copy as the basis for his translation, and it contains many errors and omissions. The later English translation by Georg Dehn and Steven Guth, based on the earliest and most complete sources, is more scholarly and comprehensive. Dehn attributed authorship of *The Book of Abramelin* to Rabbi Yaakov Moelin (Hebrew יעקב בן משה מולין; ca. 1365–1427), a German Jewish Talmudist. This identification has since been disputed.^[5]

Contents

Structure

Origin

Abramelin operation

Magic word squares

Abramelin and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

Abramelin and Thelema

Abramelin and contemporary eclectic occultism

See also

References

External links

Structure

The grimoire is framed as a sort of epistolary novel or autobiography in which Abraham of Worms describes his journey from Germany to Egypt and reveals Abramelin's magical and Kabbalistic secrets to his son Lamech. Internally the text dates itself to the year 1458.

The story involves Abraham of Worms passing his magical and Kabbalistic secrets on to his son and tells how he acquired his knowledge. Abraham recounts how he found Abramelin the Mage living in the desert outside an Egyptian town, Arachi or Araki, which borders the Nile. Abramelin's home sat atop a small hill surrounded by trees. He was an Egyptian mage and taught a powerful form of

Kabbalistic magic to Abraham. He was a "venerable aged man", and very courteous and kind. He discussed nothing but "the Fear of God", the importance of leading a well-regulated life, and the evils of the "acquisition of riches and goods".

Abramelin extracted a promise from Abraham that he would give up his "false dogmas" and live "in the Way and Law of the Lord." He then gave Abraham two manuscript books to copy for himself, asking for ten gold florins, which he took with the intention of distributing to seventy-two poor persons in Arachi. Upon his return fifteen days later, after having disposed of the payment money, Abramelin extracted an oath from Abraham to "serve and fear" the Lord, and to "live and die in His most Holy Law." After this, Abramelin gave Abraham the "Divine Science" and "True Magic" embedded within the two manuscripts, which he was to follow and give to only those whom he knew well.

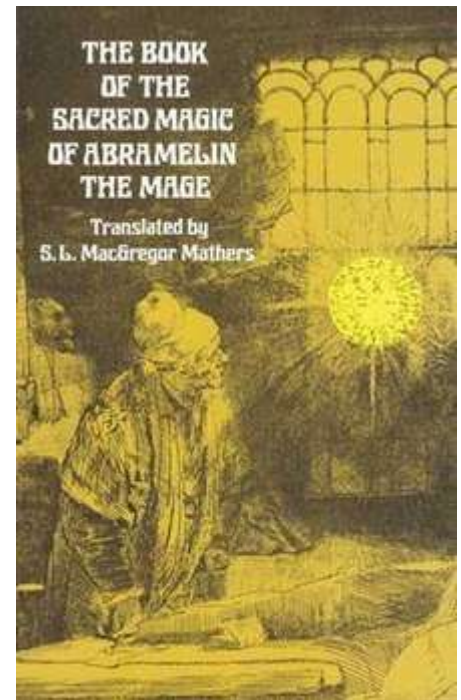
Origin

The book exists in the form of twelve manuscripts and an early printed edition. The provenance of the text has not been definitively identified. The earliest manuscripts are two versions that date from about 1608, are written in German and are now found in Wolfenbüttel.^{[6][7]} Another two manuscripts are in Dresden, and date from about 1700 and 1750 respectively.^{[8][9]}

The first printed version, also in German, dates to 1725 and was printed in Cologne by Peter Hammer.^[10] A partial copy in Hebrew is found in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and dates from around 1740.^[11] An 18th century manuscript copy exists in French in the *Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal* in Paris, an institution founded in 1757.^[12] Another 17th-century manuscript in Italian exists in the 'Legato Martinengo' of the Querini Library in Brescia, Italy. It was part of the collection of the Count and Qabbalist Leopardo Martinengo of Barco and Torre Pallavicina. The manuscript, unknown for centuries to international researchers until 2009, has been found by academic researcher Maria Elena Loda in the esoteric section. At the moment, it is the only known manuscript translation in the Italian language of the Abramelin grimoire.^[13]

All German copies of the text consist of four books: an autobiographical account of the travels of Abraham of Worms to Egypt, a book of assorted materials from the corpus of the practical Kabbalah (including some which is duplicated in the German-Jewish grimoire called "The Sixth and 7th Books of Moses") and the two books of magic given by Abramelin to Abraham. The well-known English translation by S.L. MacGregor Mathers from the French Manuscript in Paris contains only three of the four books. The Hebrew version in Oxford is limited to Book One, without reference to the further books.

Of all the extant sources, the German manuscripts in Wolfenbüttel and Dresden are taken by scholars to be the authoritative texts. According to respected Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem, the Hebrew version in Oxford was translated into Hebrew from German.^[14] An analysis of the spelling and language usage in the French manuscript indicates that it dates to the 18th century and that it was



Dover edition 1975

also likely copied from a German original. Although the author quotes from the Jewish Book of Psalms, the version given is not from the Hebrew; rather, it is from the Latin Vulgate, a translation of the Bible employed by Roman Catholics at that time.

The German esoteric scholar Georg Dehn has argued that the author of The Book of Abramelin was Rabbi Yaakov Moelin (Hebrew יעקב בן משה מוילין; ca. 1365–1427), a German Jewish Talmudist and posek (authority on Jewish law). (ref Georg Dehn, *The Book of Abramelin: A New Translation*, transl. by Steven Guth, Ibis Publishing, 2006)

Abramelin operation

The text describes an elaborate ritual whose purpose is to obtain the "knowledge and conversation" of the magician's "guardian angel." The preparations are elaborate, difficult, and long. All of the German texts describe a duration for the operation of 18 months before any divine contact is known. In the Mathers translation, the initial phase of working the system lasts only six months.

During the period of the work, the magician must daily pray before sunrise and again at sunset. During this preparatory phase, there are many restrictions: chastity must be observed, alcoholic beverages refused, and the magician must conduct his business with scrupulous fairness.

After the preparatory phase has been successfully completed, the magician's Holy Guardian Angel will appear and reveal magical secrets.

Once this is accomplished, the magician must evoke the 12 Kings and Dukes of Hell (Lucifer, Satan, Leviathan, Belial, etc.) and bind them. Thereby, the magician gains command of them in his own mental universe and removes their negative influence from his life. Further, these spirits must deliver a number of familiar spirits (four principal familiars, and several more associated with a set of magical word-square talismans provided in the Abramelin's Book Four).

The magical goals for which the demons can be employed are typical of those found in grimoires: the practitioner is promised the ability to find buried treasure, cast love charms, the ability of magical flight, and the secret of invisibility, to list a small number of examples.

Magic squares feature prominently in the instructions for carrying out these operations, as does a recipe for an anointing oil (taken from Exodus 30), popularly used by ceremonial magicians under the name "Abramelin Oil". There are also several further tools - such as a holy Lamp, a Wand made of an almond branch, a recipe for incense known today as "Abramelin Incense" (also taken from Exodus 30), various Robes, a square or seven-sided plate of silver or (bees) wax, etc.

Because the work involves evocation of demons, the Abramelin operation has been compared to Goetic magic, especially by European scholars. However, the text's primary focus is upon the invocation of the guardian angel, and modern works on the subject tend to focus upon this aspect as well.

Magic word squares

The practical magic of Abramelin (found in both Book III of the French text, and Book IV of the German original) centres around a set of talismans composed of magic word squares. These are similar to traditional magic squares, though the latter are usually composed of numbers, while Abramelin's squares contain letters. Commonly word squares are used as puzzles or as teaching aids for students. In the context of Abramelin, the focus becomes mystical—so that each square *should* contain words or names that relate to the magical goal of the square. A parallel is found in the famous Sator Arepo Tenet Opera Rotas word square, an altered version of which is also found among Abramelin's squares.

For example, a square entitled "To walk underwater for as long as you want" contains the word MAIAM (מים), the Hebrew word for "water". A square for recovering treasures of jewelry begins with the word TIPHARAH (תפארה, a variant of Tiferet), which can mean "golden ring" in Hebrew and is also the name of the sphere of "Beauty" (which has the planetary attribution of the Sun) on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

Abramelin and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

In 1897, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* was translated into English by the British occultist Samuel L. MacGregor Mathers. The magic described in the grimoire was influential in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, of which Mathers was the head.

The British occultist Aleister Crowley, at the time a young member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, started preparations for seeking the angel by following Abramelin's instructions, in Boleskine House, Scotland, but he abandoned this plan to assist Mathers during the Golden Dawn schism of 1901.

Abramelin and Thelema

The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage was to have a profound effect upon Crowley, the founder of Thelema. In 1906, Crowley decided to alter the Abramelin operation so that he might perform it during a trip he and his wife Rose Kelly and their infant daughter were taking through China. He reported first a vision of a shining figure who admitted him to the magical Order A:A., and later a more drastic mystical experience that he thought to be the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel. However, he showed ambivalence about the role that his use of hashish had played in this experience, so in October 1908, he again performed the operation in Paris without its use. (See John St. John, in external links.)

As he developed the system of the A:A., the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel was to become the fundamental task of every minor adept. Although Crowley would go on to create his own ritual for attaining this, while also saying that an adept could more or less achieve this mystical state in any number of ways, the fundamental concepts remained consistent with Abramelin.

Abramelin and contemporary eclectic occultism

Since the time of Mathers' translation, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* has remained popular among English-speaking ceremonial magicians and occultists interested in Hermetic Qabalah, Christian Kabbalah and grimoires. A paperback reprint during the renewed rise of

interest in hermeticism during the 1970s placed the book before a new generation of readers, and one offshoot of this was that a number of people, both within and without the Thelemic and Golden Dawn communities, claimed to have either undertaken the Abramelin operation *in toto* or to have successfully experimented with the magic squares and Abramelin oil formula found in the text.

There are several important differences between the original manuscripts and Mathers' edition. First, one of the four books was missing entirely from the French manuscript with which he worked. Second, Mathers gave the duration of the operation as six months, whereas all other sources specify eighteen months. Third, possibly due to a mistranslation, Mathers changed one of the ingredients within the recipe for Abramelin oil, specifying galangal instead of the original herb calamus. The oil in the German manuscript sources also contains cassia and is nearly identical to the biblical recipe for Holy anointing oil. The differences between the recipes cause several notable changes in the oil's characteristics, including edibility, fragrance, dermal sensation, and spiritual symbolism. Fourth, there are 242-word squares in Mathers' translation, while the original German has 251. Most of the squares in Mathers are not completely filled in, and those that are differ from the German sources.

A German translation, credited to Abraham of Worms and edited by Georg Dehn, was published in 2001 by Edition Araki. In the Dehn version, the fourth book is included and Mathers' galangal substitution is reverted to calamus (though not in the English translation — see Abramelin Oil). All 251 of the word squares are completely filled in. An English translation of Dehn's edition was published in 2006 by the American publisher Nicholas Hays.

See also

- Belial
- Lucifer
- Satan
- Leviathan

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- *Book of Abramelin: A New Translation* by Abraham von Worms, edited by Georg Dehn, translated by Steven Guth, foreword by Lon Milo DuQuette, (Nicholas Hays, September 2006) [ISBN 0-89254-127-X](#)
- *Die heilige Magie des Abramelin von Abraham*, edited by Johann Richard Beecken (Schikowski, 1957) [ISBN 3-87702-017-8](#)
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- *Buch Abramelin das ist Die egyptischen großen Offenbarungen. Oder des Abraham von Worms Buch der wahren Praktik in der uralten göttlichen Magie* (Editions Araki, 2001) [ISBN 3-936149-00-3](#)



The 1725 Hammer edition, first printed version.

- *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* translated by S.L. MacGregor Mathers (1897; reprinted by Dover Publications, 1975) [ISBN 0-85030-255-2](#)
- Maria Elena Loda: *La Magia Sacra di Abramelin* , in Misinta n° 31, Brescia 2009 (critical article about the Italian manuscript of the Martinengo Collection) e "Libri, Maghi, Misteri: il manoscritto di Abramelin nella Biblioteca Queriniana di Brescia.", in Medioevo 216, Gennaio 2015 (critical article with new details about the Italian manuscript of the Martinengo Collection).

External links

- *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* translated by S.L. Macgregor Mathers (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/grim/abr/index.htm>)
 - *The Book of Abramelin* translated by Georg Dehn & Steven Guth (<http://ibispress.net/?product=book-of-abramelin-new-and-expanded-edition>)
 - *Abramelin Yahoo group*. (<https://groups.yahoo.com/group/abramelin/>)
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