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JANNES AND JAMBRES (PERSONS) [Gk *Iannês, lambrês*]. The names traditionally assigned to the magicians who, according to Exod 7:11–12, 22, opposed Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh on the occasion of Israel's exodus from Egypt. Tradition characterizes them as willful and persistent opponents to God and Moses (2 Tim 3:8–9). There was also a pseudepigraphic book entitled *Jannes and Jambres*.

### A. The Traditions

Though not named in the OT and only once in the NT, the two brother magicians appear frequently in Jewish, Christian, and pagan sources extant in Arabic, Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Old and Middle English, and Syriac. [638 col. 2] Hebrew and Aramaic literature gives the names as *y(w)ny/*' and *mmr*' as well as in more Hellenized guise with final *samek*: *ynys* and *ym(b)rys*. In Gk sources the usual forms are *Iannês* and (through analogical development) *lambrês*, though the former occasionally appears in its typologically earlier form *Iôannês*. (Syriac follows the Greek spelling.) Latin tradition features *Iamnes/Iannes* (and rarely *Iohannes*), but virtually uniformly gives the second name as *Mambrês*, a form to be traced via the VL (apparently corrected to *lambrês* by Jerome in conformity with the Greek of 2 Tim 3:8) to the early Jewish Church. That the first name is Semitic is no longer in doubt, but it is significant that Moses' chief opponent should have been assigned a popular Yahwistic name. The second name presents more of a problem. A derivation from the Heb root *mrh*, "be contentious, refractory, rebellious," has found widespread favor.

An early reference to two brothers as opponents of Moses and Aaron occurs in the *Damascus Document* (CD) 5, 17b–19: "For in earlier times Moses and Aaron arose with the help of the Prince of Lights, while Belial raised up Yohanah (*yhnh*) and his brother." Though the Cairo Geniza mss of CD are medieval in date, the passage in question has also been identified among the finds in the Judean desert (6Q15 3; 1st century C.E.), but its date of composition is wrapped in the controversial literary history of CD. Beginning with S. Schechter's 1910 edition of CD, Yohanah and his brother have been equated, without qualification, with the Jannes and Jambres of later literature. Such an interpretation is, however, open to serious doubt, since in CD, as opponents of Moses and Aaron, they are portrayed as *Israelite* leaders of apostate Israel in Egypt (see CD 3,5-6, Ezek 20:7–8; 23:3, Josh 24:14). Their role is typological for contemporary (non-Essene) Jewish leadership, reflecting, therefore, socio-religious conflict within Palestinian Jewry. A number of historical identifications have thus far been proposed.

Subsequent tradition identified Yohanah and his brother as Pharaoh's magicians (Exod 7:11). By the 1st century C.E., the pagan writer Pliny the Elder mentions Moses, Jannes, and Lotapes (= Jambres?) as magicians among the Jews many thousands of years after Zoroaster" (HN 30.2.11), and in similar vein Lucius Apuleius (2d century C.E.) includes Moses and Johannes (Jannes) in a list of renowned magicians (*Apol.* 2.90). However, the most interesting reference in pagan authors is the note preserved in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* (9.8) from the Neoplatonist Numenius of Apamea (2d century C.E.) that Jannes and Jambres were able to undo even the greatest of the disasters which Moses brought against Egypt—a claim which contradicts the biblical account (cf. Exod 8:18). A statement by Origen (*Cels.* 4.51) that Numenius had recounted the story of Moses and the two magicians suggests that Origen must have been acquainted with extensive traditions about the magicians and may well have known the book entitled *Jannes and Jambres* (see B. below).

Because of their mention in 2 Tim 3:8–9, Jannes and Jambres frequently appear in later Christian sources which merely echo the NT reference or give more details of their wicked behavior. The story was clearly well-known since most references presuppose an acquaintance with it. Unfortunately, only snippets of the tale have survived. The two brothers are said to have been magicians at the court [639 col. 1] of Pharaoh Ahmoses (John of Nikiu) or Pharaoh Chencheres, who was the Pharaoh that drowned with his army in the Arabian Gulf (Ps-Dionysius of Telmahre). Pharaoh's daughter reputedly entrusted Moses to Jannes and Jambres for instruction in wisdom (e.g., Bar Hebraeus). They were regarded as gods by the Egyptians (*Acts Pil.*), and Satan counted them his brothers (*Ques. Bart.*). Moreover, Abezethibou, the demon from the Red Sea, claimed to have come to their aid (*T. Sol.*); it was they who were responsible for leading Pharaoh astray until the king and his host met their death in the sea (*Mart. Pet. Paul; Pal. hist.*). Moses, in the course of their altercations with him, afflicted their adherents with sores and sent the mother of one of them (sic) to their death (Philostorgius). The two brothers tried to withstand God's mighty acts by means of fake magic; but when bested by Moses they confessed in pain from their sores that God was active in Moses (Ambrosiaster). They practised necromancy, (*A. Cath.*) and as a result of their wickedness they perished (Abdias). In spite of their having acknowledged "the finger of God," they received no divine forgiveness (*Pen. Cyp.*). Their garden tomb, a monument to their former power and wealth, was visited by Macarius of Alexandria, who found it inhabited by 70 demons (Palladius).

In Jewish literature of the common era Jannes and Jambres are especially prominent in legends connected with the birth and early years of Moses, but the time and circumstances of their demise vary in the sources. According to some traditions (*Tg. Ps.-J.; Yal. Reu.*) they were assistants of Balaam (cf. Num 22:22), Israel's staunch opponent at the pharaonic court. Commonly, however, they are called his sons, a tradition which may be as old as the 3d century C.E. A dream of Pharaoh was interpreted by them to augur destruction for Egypt at the hands of an Israelite about to be born (*Tg. Ps.-J.*). At a royal banquet, when Moses was two, he placed Pharaoh's crown on his own head. Balaam, who was in attendance with his sons, reminded the king of his earlier dream and counseled Moses' death. Pharaoh, however, heeded contrary advice and decided to put Moses to the test. When the child was directed to choose between a glowing ember and a gem, under angelic prompting he picked the former, stuck it in his mouth, and thus contracted his speech impediment (cf. Exod 4:10). Balaam and his sons fled to Ethiopia where they usurped the throne during its king's absence. But when their city subsequently fell to a strategem of Moses, who had succeeded the king of Ethiopia, they returned to Pharaoh's court. In due time Moses and Aaron presented themselves at Pharaoh's palace, where they gained entrance by casting a spell on the two lions that barred their way. The king, frightened by their divine appearance, delayed answering until the following day their demand for the release of the Israelites. Meanwhile he summoned Balaam and his two sons who counseled him to put their authenticity to the test (*ShY* cf. *YaL Sim., ChronJ., ChronM, Exod. Rab.*). Jannes and Jambres cheated at magic by exchanging their staffs for snakes. Though they managed to check the majority of the angels, they could not prevail against the angel of the (divine) presence (*ml'k pnyw*) who sided with Moses.

Outdone by Moses, they came to him to become proselytes and, against God's explicit directive, were accepted. [639 col. 2] Thus a "mixed multitude" (Exod 12:38) with Jannes and Jambres at the head accompanied Israel out of Egypt. It was they who were the real culprits in Israel's idolatrous extravaganza at Sinai and consequently were killed by the Levites (*Yal. Reu;* cf. *Midr. Tanh.*). Alternatively in Jewish tradition, Jannes and Jamhres, flying above the Red Sea on

self-made wings, were destroyed by an angel dispatched by God (*Yal. Sim.*; cf. *Yal. Reu.*; *ChronJ* 54). A minor tradition as them executed together with Balaam and the princes of Midian in accordance with Num 31:8 (*ChronJ* 48, *Zohar*).

## **B. The Book**

The earliest reference to a book entitled *Jannes and Jambres* is in the Latin translation of Origen's commentary on the gospel of Matthew (*comm. in Mats. (GCS 11,250)*). This book was thought by Origen to have been the source for Paul the presumed author of 2 Timothy. Later references are found in the Ambrosiaster, the *Decretum Gelasianum*, and some Syriac and Middle English sources. Fragments of the book in Greek are extant in a Vienna papyrus (P. Vindob C 29456+ 29828 verso; 3d century CE.), P. Chester Beatty XVI (3d/4th century C.E.), P. Heid. Inv G 1016 (4th century C.E.), and in P. Mich. Inv 4925 verso (4th century C.E.). A fragment of a translation into Latin has been preserved in a manuscript of the British Library (Cotton Tiberius B.V fol. 87; 11th century C.E.). All texts are fragmentary, but they add a wealth of detail to our knowledge of the story.

The remnants of the book commence with the magicians' genealogy and then move through various phases of Jannes' opposition to Moses. Summoned to the palace, he matches Moses and Aaron's feats but is laid low, by disease. In the course of events, clear omens of impending doom are sent his way; yet, his fight continues unabated. Ill and near death he takes leave of mother and friends, and, in Memphis, entrusts his brother with the book of magic. After receiving news of the disaster at the Red Sea, Jannes meets his own end. He is lamented by his mother who subsequently dies a violent death and is buried by her surviving son near the tomb of Jannes. Brought up from Hades by Jambres, the shade of Jannes launches into a lengthy admission of wrongdoing. We do not know the response of Jambres and his final end.

In at least its final literary form the book quite clearly is a confession, hence underscoring the title given it in the *Decretum Gelasianum: The Confession (Penitence) of Jannes and Jambres*. The essence of the tale is the magicians' deliberate and determined opposition to Moses (God) in the face of repeated divine warnings. Their obdurate behavior precluded forgiveness forever. It is this aspect of the plot that suggests Jannes and Jambres as the oldest precursor of the Faust legend. The end of Jannes (and Jambres?) was no doubt intended to serve as a warning to the believing community.

Though the Jannes and Jambres tradition probably arose on Palestinian soil and in a Semitic-speaking environment, there is no indication that the original language of the book was other than Greek. The date of origin of the tradition can hardly be much later than the 2d century B.C.E., while the book was written probably at least as early as the 2d century C.E.

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ALBERT PIETERSMA