The names of Jannes and Jambres appear with considerable frequency in ancient and medieval sources, and traditions about their activity and fate are extant in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Greek, and Latin. Christian, Jewish, and pagan writers found occasion to refer to these two magicians at the Pharaonic court who plied the art of magic in opposition to Moses. Our oldest Semitic reference speaks of "Johana," while the earliest text of the book of Jannes and Jambres gives the names as "Joannes" (Johannes) and, by analogical formation, "Joambres," but the most common appellations of the two brothers are "Jannes" and "Jambres." In Latin and rabbinic sources, however, "Jambres," with some textual variation, becomes "Mambres."

It is now beyond doubt that in antiquity there existed, on the one hand, traditions about Jannes and Jambres, and on the other, a book that detailed some of their exploits. Not yet entirely clear, however, is the precise relationship between the loose traditions and the written composition.

The tradition

The earliest reference to our magicians occurs in the Damascus Document, fragments of which have been discovered in the Cairo Geniza and more recently at Qumran. The date of this work has been given as c. 100 B.C. Apparently referring to the exodus, it states, "... in ancient times, Moses and Aaron arose by the hand of the Prince of Lights and Satan [Belial] in his cunning raised up Jannes [Johana] and his brother when Israel was first delivered." Our earliest reference in Greek, the language in which most of our ancient sources were written, is 2 Timothy 3:8f., which is thought to date from the early second century A.D. Here our magicians are cited as opponents of the truth: "Men like this defy the truth just as Jannes and Jambres defied Moses: their minds are corrupt and their faith spurious. But they will not be able to go on any longer: their foolishness, like that of the other two, must become obvious to everybody."

From relative obscurity and doubtlessly due to the increasing prominence of Moses, Jannes and, to a lesser extent, Jambres achieved some prominence as magicians in the Greco-Roman world.

The origin of the Jannes and Jambres tale was clearly pre-Christian, more particularly Jewish, and its base is the biblical account of the exodus, in which Pharaoh's magicians are anonymous. But though the tale is of Jewish origin—some scholars have attempted to
hold Artapanus (c. 100 B.C.) responsible for it—a pair play an insignificant role in rabbinic literature before the ninth century A.D. Of the earlier literature, only the Talmud (Men. 85a) and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Ex 1:15; 7:11; Num 22:22) mention them. In the Targum (Ex 1:15), they interpret a dream of Pharaoh, predict the birth of Moses, and subsequently appear as the helpers of Balaam (Num 22:22). In later Jewish tradition they become Balaam’s sons. In the Talmud, Moses is derided for coming with magic to the home of magic.

Most early development of the Jannes and Jambres tale took place in a Greek (and Latin) Christian milieu. We touch here briefly on additions to the biblical Exodus, apart from the mere identification of the magicians. The order that follows is basically chronological.

Of much interest is the problematic statement by the pagan writer Numenius (2nd cent. A.D.), who, in a brief passage cited in Eusebius’ Praeparatio evangelica (9.8), says that Jannes and Jambres were able to undo, publicly, even the greatest of the disasters that Moses brought against Egypt. This assertion is the more noteworthy since Origen mentions in his Contra Celsum (4.51) that the same Numenius had recounted “the story concerning Moses and Jannes and Jambres,” which must mean that Numenius composed more on the subject than what has been preserved in Eusebius; presumably he had based his account on extensive traditions and perhaps was acquainted with a book on Jannes and Jambres. Whatever the case, Numenius’ statement clearly contradicts the biblical account according to which the magicians, hence Jannes and Jambres, were able to follow Moses’ act only to the second plague inclusive (cf. Ex 8:18). Furthermore, no known ancient author shows any agreement with Numenius’ aberrant claim. Consequently, it seems necessary to discount an author who, one would assume, knew well the Jannes and Jambres tale. New relevant evidence, however, has recently come to light in Pap. Chester Beatty XVI (see below, “Texts”), one fragment of which (26a') contains a passage (“. . . Jannes opposed Moses and . . . by doing everything they had [done]”) which appears to suggest that in the Book of Jannes and Jambres the conflict between Moses (and Aaron) and Jannes, at least insofar as this involved feats of magic, was telescoped into what in the biblical account is merely the introduction to the plagues episode. There is no evidence in our available texts that the book gave a blow-by-blow account of the story of the plagues, though, admittedly, conclusions drawn from silence must be treated with due caution.

To return to Numenius, if in the book the confrontation was indeed telescoped, and since one of the Chester Beatty fragments (see also Pap. Vindob. G 29 456 verso B) clearly states that Jannes equaled Moses’ achievement, Numenius may have been acquainted with Jannes and Jambres. To be sure, Numenius speaks of both Jannes and Jambres, while the fragment mentions only Jannes as directly opposing Moses, but this need not be a contradiction, since Jambres may have played a supporting role.

Naturally, no author, Christian or Jewish, who was intimately familiar with the biblical account would readily repeat the claim of Numenius, who may not have been guilty of distortion but nevertheless created the wrong impression by quoting out of context.

Philostorgius (4th/5th cent.), in addition to repeating that the magicians Jannes and Jambres were afflicted with ulcers (cf. Ex 9:11), relates that Moses sent the mother “of one of them” to her death. No mother of either, of course, appears in the biblical account, but the Vienna text as well as the Chester Beatty fragments8 mention “the mother,” not of one but of both magicians. Though Philostorgius may be suggesting that Jannes and Jambres were paternal half brothers, there is no extant tradition that contradicts their being full

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3 This was first proposed by J. Freudenthal, Alexander Polyhistor (Breslau, 1875) p. 173. See also L. E. Iselin, “Zwei Bemerkungen zu Schürers ‘Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi.’” Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie 37 (1894) 321–26.


5 “Addition” has been taken fairly strictly. When, for example, the Ambrosiaster (4th cent.) states that Jannes and Jambres confessed in pain that God was active in Moses (confessi sunt cum dolore vulnerum Deum in Moyse operatum), this is not regarded as an addition. Though the biblical story does not speak of “confession,” the magicians’ acknowledgment of the “finger of God” (Ex 8:19) was naturally understood as meaning just that (cf. also Cosmas Indikopleustes, Christian Topography 3.164 B). For the boils, see Ex 9:11. Similarly, 2Tim 3:8f. can hardly be said to go beyond the biblical account, apart from the naming of the magicians.

6 See the discussion under “Texts.”
brothers. Of further interest is that, as Philostorgius intimates, "the mother" died a violent death. This is now apparently confirmed by the Chester Beatty papyrus.

Twice in the tradition we are told that Jannes and Jambres themselves perished as a result of their confrontation with Moses. According to the Acts of Pilate (4th cent.), Jannes and Jambres were regarded as gods by the Egyptians but perished "together with those that believed in them" (5:1), since the signs they did were not of God. That the two had adherents is specifically stated in the Vienna (3rd cent.) and Chester Beatty (4th cent.) fragments, where they appear as "the friends." That Jannes and Jambres themselves perished is subsequently also mentioned by Abdias (6th cent.) and apparently in part is confirmed by the Chester Beatty fragments, in which Jannes seems to have died an untimely death. But though their mother seemingly perished likewise, there is no evidence that Jambres did. Further confirmation of Jannes' death comes from the British Library text (11th cent.; cf. "Texts," below), though we remain in the dark about the circumstances.

From the earliest mention of "Jannes and his brother" in the Damascus Document we encounter explicit references to the fact that our magicians were in league with the devil. In the Testament of Solomon (3rd/4th cent.) a demon who, interestingly, has some connection with "the Red Sea" replies to the king: "I am he who was called upon by Jannes and Jambres who fought against Moses in Egypt" (25:4). Similarly, in the later text of the Questions of St. Bartholomew (6th/7th cent.) Satan says, "Simon Magus, Zaroës, Arfaxir, and Jannes and Mambres are my brothers" (Lat. 2, 4:50). Of further significance here may be a statement in the Penitence of Cyprian (5th cent.) in which the great magician of Antioch relates how the devil called him "a clever lad, a new Jannes, trained for service, and worthy of fellowship with himself" (§6). The implication seems to be that Jambres had enjoyed such fellowship. It is possible that Palladius (5th cent.) also meant to imply that Jannes and Jambres had been assisted by demons. In his Lausiac History (ch. 17) he relates that Macarius of Alexandria (4th cent.) once visited the garden-tomb (kēpotaphion) of Jannes and Jambres, and upon arrival was met by seventy demons who resided there. Presumably in the tomb, he found a small brass jar suspended, and outside were some empty pomegranates that had been dried up by the sun. A rusty chain lay by the well beside the tomb. The connection, however, between Jannes and Jambres and the demons is indirect at best and may in fact be non-existent. Of interest is the reference to the garden-tomb, since one of the Chester Beatty fragments mentions Jannes' tomb (mnēion for mnēmeion), near which, as it seems, his mother was buried.

In our extant texts there is no explicit reference to the devil's role in the opposition of Jannes and Jambres, but the last lines of a Chester Beatty fragment (26a?) are suggestive. After Jannes has been struck with a fatal illness in consequence of his contest with Moses, the text continues that he "sent word to the king [saying, 'This' active [power] is of God.' Therefore I deliberately (thelōn) op[posed Moses]." Obviously, here we have moved well beyond the biblical account, which simply states, "So the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God' " (Ex 8:19).

Though in the majority of references Jannes and Jambres are simply described as magicians—sometimes, as we saw, in explicit league with the devil—one source indicates specifically that they practiced necromancy. In the Acts of St. Catherine (Text B.11), a work which in its present form does not antedate the tenth century but perhaps contains earlier material, we are told that Jannes and Jambres "show to those who seek to behold the persons (faces) who from of old have slept in the earth." Once, in an Arabic work of Bar Hebraeus (13th cent.), we are told that Moses was entrusted by Pharaoh's daughter to Jannes and Jambres for instruction in wisdom. In conclusion, we briefly summarize (post-9th-cent.) rabbinic additions to the biblical account. As already mentioned, from helpers of Balaam in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,

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10 For a similar story extant in Syr. but probably deriving indirectly from Palladius, see Iselin, Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie 37 (1894) 321f.
11 See J. Viteau, Passions des Saints Écaterine et Pierre d'Alexandrie (Paris, 1897).
12 The term "necromancy" is employed in an untranslated line that precedes this passage (see M. R. James, The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament, pp. 33f.).
Jannes and Jambres achieve the status of sons, and together with their father are counselors of Pharaoh. It is they who are responsible for the order to destroy all newborn males of Israel, in an effort to forestall predicted ruin. When Moses nevertheless grows to manhood, they leave for Ethiopia; but, after some years, they reappear on the scene as Pharaoh's magicians, who with their craft oppose the exodus of Israel. When bested by Moses, they, against God's explicit advice, are accepted by him as proselytes. This allows them to accompany Israel out of Egypt and places them in a position to continue their animosity on the desert wanderings. Not unexpectedly, they are in the forefront of the golden-calf revolt, and as a result are put to death (cf. Ex 32:28). Alternatively, they remained with Pharaoh, went with him to the Red Sea, flew above the waters on wings they had made themselves, but perished at the hands of the archangel Michael.

In the manifestly earlier traditions about Jannes and Jambres there is little if any corroboration of these rabbinic elaborations. There is no evidence of their filial relationship to Balaam, and no connection with the Red Sea episode or desert wandering is evident.14

The book

That at some point in the evolution of the Jannes and Jambres tale a book was composed about them is first mentioned by Origen (3rd cent.). In reference to 2 Timothy 3:8f., he states that the information contained there is not found in "public books" (= canonical) but in an apocryphal composition entitled The Book of Jannes and Jambres.15

In the next century, the writer known to modern scholarship as the Ambrosiaster (4th cent.) comments directly on 2 Timothy 3:8f. and labels it "an example from the apocrypha."16

The so-called Gelasian Decree (6th cent.), which, among other things, contains a list of biblical books, includes, as an apocryphal book, the title Penitence of Jannes and Jambres.17

What the precise meaning is of a reference in the Chronicle of John of Nikiu (7th cent.), preserved only in Ethiopic, is not clear.18 In chapter 30 of that work he writes, "Pharaoh Petissonius, who is Amosis, King of Egypt, reigned with the help of the book of the magicians Jannes and Jambres." At first glance the book appears to be by them (or belonging to them) rather than about them, but whatever the intent some book is clearly alluded to.19

It is now certain that a book on Jannes and Jambres not only existed in antiquity but has been preserved in fragments. Unfortunately, due to its very fragmentary state much remains disconcertingly unclear, but on the positive side it must be said that we now know much more than we did a mere decade ago. When we integrate the manuscripts, the story runs somewhat as follows:20

1. The king of Egypt, one assumes, has summoned his wise men to observe the growth of some miraculous tree or other plant, the branches of which have quickly formed a shelter from the sun's heat. While Jannes (?) at the behest of the king is seated under "a certain apple tree," "a great earthquake" strikes, accompanied by thunder and lightning, and the violence of the elements breaks off some of the branches of the shelter. Thereupon Jannes (as chief magician?) runs into the library in order to consult his magical books and tools.

2. Perhaps while he is engaged in his magical proceedings in the library heavenly emissaries appear to him and bring him a message from "the LORD of the earth and the

14 Jannes' warning to Jambres not to accompany Pharaoh in his campaign against the "Hebrews" (see Vienna papyrus A) need not foreshadow the pursuit but perhaps ought to be so interpreted in the light of one of the Chester Beatty fragments (26g). Though once again our text is too fragmentary for complete reconstruction, enough is clear to determine that at least the question of the pursuit is raised. But we do not know whether Jambres, in defiance of his brother's warning, accompanied the king. An indirect connection between our magicians and the sea episode is found in TSol, in which the demon upon whom the brothers are said to have called hails from "the Red Sea."
15 Commentary on Matthew 27:9. The work is extant only in Lat. translation, hence the reference reads "Mambres" for "Jambres." See further on Mt 23:37.
16 Commentary on 2 Timothy.
17 See Iselin, Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie 37 (1894) 324.
18 We may have further indication of the existence of a book in the Acts of St. Catherine Text B.11, in which the singular verb with Jannes and Jambres perhaps suggests that the reference is to a composition known as Jannes and Jambres rather than to the magicians as individuals.
19 The outline is of necessity only tentative. As a result of more study it may well turn out that the order of some of the Chester Beatty fragments will have to be changed. See the authors' forthcoming monograph.
Overseer of the universe." They have come to remove him to Hades, where he will share the lot of the dead. However, "two clad in white" appear to grant him a respite of fourteen days (?).

3. Having comforted his mother, who apparently has fallen ill, and having committed her to the care of his friends, Jannes takes Jambres with him (from an unknown place) to Memphis, where he entrusts his brother with a book (of magic?), enjoins him to keep it secret, and warns him against participation in the king's campaign against and in pursuit of the Hebrews. He perhaps also relates to Jambres what had transpired with his mother.

4. While Jannes is delivering to his adherents an address that mentions a wedding he has attended and possibly also his previous altercations with Moses, emissaries from the palace arrive, urging him to oppose "Moses the Hebrew," who in the presence of the king has succeeded in astounding everyone with his feats. Though Jannes is able to duplicate whatever "Moses and his brother" have done, he is afflicted with "a painful ulcer" and retreats to the hedra, presumably his official residence, from which he presently sends word to the king explaining that the "active power of God" was operative in Moses and that he, in full knowledge of this fact, launched his opposition.

5. Jambres (and perhaps the mother of the two brothers) subsequently appears to visit Jannes, who gives him instructions for the next move. That night, however, a portent of a falling star is observed; the next morning, it is apparently interpreted (by whom our fragmentary text does not tell us) as indicating the downfall of Jannes and his adherents and as foreboding his own death.

6. Jannes presumably meets his end as a result of his "painful ulcer." He is survived by his brother and his mother, who addresses his corpse with a moving lament. Though we remain in the dark as to the manner and circumstances, it is clear that his mother follows Jannes in death; she is buried with complete ritual by her second son, Jambres, apparently next to Jannes' tomb.

7. It seems reasonable to assume that at this point in the story Jambres comes into his own as a magician. We are told that he opened the book(s) (probably the one that had earlier been entrusted to him by Jannes) near (?) the apple tree (which likewise has appeared earlier in the story), and "performed necromancy." The penitent shade of Jannes promptly makes its appearance and launches into an apparently lengthy and wide-ranging discourse admitting the justness of his punishment, warning his brother against a life that will lead to Hades, describing his abode below, relating God's displeasure with idols and idol worshipers alike, and evidently warning at length about the life that leads to hell. Perhaps Jannes, for the benefit of the reader, recaps the debacle of the opposition with appropriate paraenetic commentary along the way. What became of Jambres we do not know.

Texts

Jannes and Jambres is extant only in fragmentary form. Scholars have long been acquainted with British Library, Cotton, Tiberius B.V., fol. 87. First edited in 1861, this text in Latin (plus Anglo-Saxon translation) and accompanied by two illustrations was brought to renewed scholarly attention in 1901 by M. R. James. The date of the British Library fragment is eleventh century A.D.

In Greek we possess Pap. Vindob. G 29 456 verso of the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, which comprises four fragments (A–D) and has been dated to the third century A.D. As a basis for translation, we have used P. Maraval's edition as well as photographs kindly supplied by H. Loebenstein of the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna.

Further fragments in Greek are in the possession of the Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art, Dublin. Seven frames include a total of ninety-three fragments, the vast

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majority of which are too small either for reconstruction of the papyrus or for translation. The date of the Chester Beatty fragments is fourth century A.D. or perhaps somewhat earlier. Though the official designation is now Pap. Chester Beatty XVI, the numbers of the individual frames that appear with the present translation have no official status and hence are subject to change.

The argument of K. Koch that a passage in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 1:15 constitutes an insertion from Jannes and Jambres has been convincingly refuted by C. Burchard. We have therefore not included the passage in our edition of Jannes and Jambres.

A.-M. Denis cites a passage from Philostorgius that in his judgment is a quotation from our book. This seems unlikely not only because the wording of the passage suggests a reference rather than a quotation but also because the statement that Moses sent the mother "of one of them" to her death contradicts our extant fragments, which make it clear that Jannes and Jambres were sons of the same mother. This passage, therefore, like that of Pseudo-Jonathan, has been ignored for our edition of Jannes and Jambres.

In addition to an enumeration of extant texts, mention should be made here of the possibility that more than one version of the book existed. When one compares the Latin fragment in the British Library with the parallel Chester Beatty text (24afp’), it becomes readily apparent that the two are not identical. The differences, however, are not so great that they cannot be explained by the fact that the former was lifted out of its original context and modified accordingly. Yet there is some evidence to suggest that more than one version of our book was in circulation. By a remarkable coincidence, Pap. Vindob. G 29 456 verso, fragment B, parallels Pap. Chester Beatty XVI 26a (part of recto and continued on verso). Initially, the Vienna papyrus merely shows some expansion: "wonder" (or "signs," but not both) of Pap. Chester Beatty is "signs and wonders" in Pap. Vindob., and "Moses and his brother" of the former becomes "Moses and his brother Aaron" in the latter. However, from approximately that point onward the two texts, though similar and even identical at times, go their own separate ways. Naturally, much is uncertain because of the state of the papyri, but that the two texts diverge quite markedly is not subject to debate.

Original language

In consequence of his argument that a fragment in Pseudo-Jonathan belongs to Jannes and Jambres, Koch has attempted to uncover Semitisms in the Latin fragment at the British Library—the only text known to scholars at the time of Koch’s writing—but his arguments in support of an Aramaic original are not convincing. Particularly when one remembers the influence of the Septuagint, one is hesitant to posit a Semitic original in order to explain the phenomenon of clauses linked simply by "and . . . and" and the occurrence of "saying" after the finite verb respondit ("he answered"). Similar Septuagintalisms exist in our newly discovered Greek texts, but these are insufficient to prove that the original language of the book is Semitic. Certain other features point in a different direction, e.g. the use of the particle te as a connective not simply of word pairs but of coordinate clauses as well, and the appearance of the so-called historical present.

Our oldest texts of Jannes and Jambres are in Greek and there is as yet no good reason to believe that the original language of the composition was other than Greek.

Date

The usual difficulty in dating literature of the kind we are concerned with is compounded by the extremely fragmentary nature of the text. The Vienna fragments are third century A.D., and Pap. Chester Beatty XVI was written at most a century later. When we add to this evidence the fact that Origen (c. 185–c. 254) specifically mentions the existence of an apocryphal book on Jannes and Jambres, whence, according to him, the information in 2 Timothy 3:8 derives, it becomes clear that the latest possible date of our book is the middle of the third century A.D. The earliest possible date, however, is more difficult to determine.


25 A.-M. Denis, Fragmenta Pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt graeca, p. 69.
Several scholars have thought that the book is pre-Christian. J. Bidez and F. Cumont, for example, date it back to hellenistic times, and E. Schürer argued that,

... as it is probable that those anonymous personages owed their name and individuality first of all to the apocryphal book itself, we may perhaps venture to refer the date of the composition of this work to pre-Christian times. These scholars may well be correct, but proof still eludes us. Even if in its present form the book is Christian, that in no way precludes an originally (pre-Christian) Jewish composition.

Possible evidence for Jannes and Jambres as a Christian book is as follows: (1) In fragment B of the Vienna papyrus (1. 8), the word chiazein occurs, the basic meaning of which is "to form (the Greek letter) chi." It need mean no more than "to cross out" or "to mark with an X" but could possibly be a reference to the cross. Unfortunately the context is no aid to interpretation, hence the evidential value of the word is slight. Furthermore, only the Vienna text but not the basically parallel text of Chester Beatty has the reading in question. (2) Chester Beatty 23e recto, line 2, reads apparently "this one having descended to Ha[des . . .]," which may be a reference to the descent of Christ. The remainder of the sentence might run "[did not] die," but again we cannot go beyond the realm of the possible. Other interpretations can be adduced. (3) Perhaps the best argument for Jannes and Jambres, in its present form, as a Christian book lies in its apparent literary form. If our ordering of the material is even approximately correct and if the Gelasian Decree has reference to our book, Jannes and Jambres is essentially a confession (poenitentia), a genre of literature that was manifestly Christian but not Jewish.

Provenance
As has already been mentioned, Freudenthal sought to connect the Jannes and Jambres tale with the Jewish historian Artapanus, basing his argument on the fact that Numenius, who is said by Origen to have composed "the story of Moses and Jannes and Jambres," called Moses by his hellenized name, Musaeus, as did Artapanus. His argument, however, was judged inconclusive by Schürer, who stated that "the names of the magicians, which in all probability are Semitic, seem rather to point to a Palestinian origin." Subsequently Iselin attempted to strengthen Freudenthal's argument by claiming that "Aristomenes," in Bar Hebraeus, is a corruption of "Artapanus." Hence Bar Hebraeus is made to yield that Paul in 2 Timothy 3:8 is dependent on Artapanus.

By extension, if Artapanus was the originator of the Jannes and Jambres tradition, perhaps he in fact wrote the book, or at any rate the book might be presumed to have been written
in Egypt. But thus far no convincing argument has been made for Artapanus as the originator of the tradition. Though it is a priori not unlikely that Artapanus would have created the tale, in view of his obvious interest in Moses, what seems to contradict this possibility is the fact that we do possess, in Eusebius, Artapanus' connected narrative of the confrontation, but Jannes and Jambres are not mentioned.35 Of course Artapanus may have written a separate work on the two magicians, but in that instance is it credible that in his survey he did not even mention their names?

Of some possible significance is the fact that, in our texts, the center of action seems to be Memphis,36 the Old Kingdom capital, whereas in the biblical account no city is mentioned by name. Memphis also plays the central role in Artapanus and Philo,37 but this city of ancient fame and lasting prestige would admittedly be the logical choice for any author with historical sense who tried to place Moses historically.

Since our earliest texts of Jannes and Jambres were found in Egypt and since our book is first mentioned by an Alexandrian author, the burden of proof may be assumed to lie with those who wish to advocate a Palestinian origin for the composition. The place of origin of the tradition, in distinction from our book, is another question.

Theological importance

The fragmentary nature of our text makes it hazardous, if not impossible, to arrive at definitive theological conclusions. Some tentative observations, however, may be made. That Jannes and Jambres may have relevance for the question of forgiveness will be noted below.

Jannes and Jambres clearly evidences continued Jewish (if the work was Jewish in origin) and Christian interest in necromancy, though in our book as well as in the Old Testament it is condemned, if only by association with the opponents of Moses. It may well be, however, that when the Chester Beatty text comments on idolatry (22a*), its primary and perhaps only referent is necromancy. But for this there is no absolute proof. We may have no more than a general condemnation of idolatry, necromancy included, which is well attested in early literature of both religions.

Further noteworthy items are mentioned here only in passing. Astrological interest appears in a passage that seemingly links the impending death of Jannes to a falling star (26a*). God is spoken of as episkopos (25a*), a term which, though well enough attested in early literature, is relatively rare as a divine epithet.38 Hades appears to be described as the great equalizer which obliterates all distinction between king and pauper (22j*).39 Heavenly emissaries are sent to remove Jannes to Hades (25a*),40 but "two clad in white" win him a reprieve, and the mother apparently addresses the corpse of Jannes (24b*).

Relation to canonical books

As indicated at least as early as the Pseudo-Jonathan tradition, the Jannes and Jambres tale takes its point of departure from the biblical account of the contest between Moses and Pharaoh's court magicians in the plague narrative of Exodus 7 and 8. Later elaboration, though not present in our fragmentary text, links these two magicians to the birth of Moses (Ex 1–2), the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14), the golden calf incident (Ex 32), and the oracles of Balaam (Num 22–24). Jannes and Jambres are not named in the biblical story, nor are they ever referred to anywhere else in the Old Testament.

Not until the New Testament do we again meet any reference to these two antagonists of

35 See Denis, Fragmenta, pp. 189–95. [Also see J. J. Collins' contribution on Artapanus in the Supplement. — J.H.C.]
36 See Vienna papyrus fragment A.
37 Its precise role in Josephus is unclear (Ant 2.240).
38 See, e.g., 1Clement 59:3 and SibOr "Fragments" 1. 3 (J. Geffcken, Die Oracula Sibyllina [GCS: Leipzig, 1902; reprint Amsterdam, 1970] p. 227.). Olympiodorus' fragmentary commentary on Job (PG 93.221A), and in earlier classical literature Iliad 22.255 and Sophocles, Antigone 217.
40 Cf. the angel who announces death in Tab.
Moses. In the often quoted verses 2 Timothy 3:8f., the author of the epistle compares false Christian teachers to Jannes and Jambres. As the latter defied truth when they opposed Moses, so the former defy truth when they champion a pattern of behavior contrary to accepted Christian standards. The end result for them will be the same as that of Jannes and Jambres. Knowledge of the tradition is assumed, but no information apart from their names is provided.

**Relation to apocryphal books**

It has been suggested above that Jannes and Jambres in its present form is a confession or penitence (poenitentia), as it is labeled in the Gelasian Decree in distinction from Origen, who calls it simply “Book of Jannes and Jambres” (Mambres). This decree lists immediately preceding our book the *Penitence of Origen* and the *Penitence of (Saint) Cyprian*, and earlier on the *Penitence of Adam*. Of these only the *Penitence of Cyprian* has survived; James, more than seventy-five years ago, suggested a connection between the two books:

In one of the writings classed with it [i.e. the *Penitence of Jannes and Jambres*] in the Gelasian Decree, the *Penitence of Cyprian*, we see a document calculated to give us a fair idea of the nature of what is gone [i.e. lost of Jannes and Jambres]. Cyprian, the hero of the *Penitence*, is the wizard of Antioch . . . and in his work he tells—with a quantity of interesting detail—the story of his initiation into the black art, and his practice of it, and its failure when confronted with the power of the true God. Very much the same would the contents of the *Penitence* of the two Egyptian magicians have been, only it is doubtful whether they or at least both of them, made so fine an end as Cyprian.  

James’s surmise seems to have been correct in general terms; it is now confirmed by new evidence, though obvious differences between the two works exist, not the least of which is the fact that whereas Cyprian’s is a totally retrospective account, by the protagonist himself in the first person, of his initiation into and the practice of magic, in Jannes and Jambres the confession, apparently put in the mouth of Jannes, who speaks from the realm of the dead, is preceded by a third-person narrative that details the conflict between the two brothers and Moses. From the point of view of literary form, Cyprian’s would seem to be the more developed penitence.

In the course of his lament over past misdeeds, Cyprian repeatedly expresses his belief and fear that God will not forgive him, and in one of his despairing utterances he exclaims as follows:

I do not believe that He forgives me. For I am not convinced that a man worse than I has been born, seeing that I surpassed the well-known Jannes and Jambres. They when they practised magic acknowledged the finger of God, but I was convinced that God did not exist. If God did not forgive them, when they recognized him in part, how can He forgive me since I totally ignored him.

James has placed what may be termed a Faustian interpretation on this passage by suggesting that the two brothers did not obtain pardon. There is, however, no completely compelling reason for drawing this inference. The passage may simply mean that, as a result of their opposition to Moses (God), Jannes and Jambres perished; but this punishment does not exclude ultimate forgiveness. Alternatively, Cyprian may simply be drawing an inference, either from the Exodus account or from the Book of Jannes and Jambres. Yet there is possibly some support for the idea that the book explicitly dealt with the question of forgiveness. In a passage of Pap. Chester Beatty XVI (23f’), which appears to be part of Jannes’ confession and touches on his present plight in Hades, we read: “and now there is for us no forgiveness.” But be it noted once again that our text is very fragmentary!

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41 James, *JTS* 2 (1901) 575.
42 *Penitence of Cyprian*, para. 17.
43 James, *JTS* 2 (1901) 576.
Cultural importance

Whether we have in Jannes and Jambres another tale, in addition to those of Simon Magus, Cyprian of Antioch, and Theophilus of Adana, that was a forerunner of the Faust legend is still relatively obscure. Very interesting in this connection is a passage in the Chester Beatty papyrus to which we have already referred twice, namely 26a. Here it is stated that precisely because Jannes knew that Moses’ power was from God, he launched his opposition. We have already noted that this comment goes well beyond the biblical account; but perhaps we are justified in going one step further. Implicitly, though perhaps not explicitly, we may be dealing here with a “pact with the devil,” which is an integral part of the Faust tradition; but in the pre-Faust legends it is not attested earlier than the story of Theophilus of Adana (7th–9th cent.). Similarly, like the end of Faust, the fate of Jannes (and Jambres?) may have been intended as a warning to the believers.

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GENERAL


FRAGMENTS FROM
THE BOOK OF JANNES AND JAMBRES

Pap. Chester Beatty XVI

25a'

] all [ ] having summoned [ his servants], both [the] wise men an[d the magicians, and after] seven [days] when he was w[alking] about in [his] ho[use] and saw [ the plant flouris[h] [and] that the bra[nches were already providing shade [ And when he had become [ ] he ordered [ to sit(?)] under a certain apple tree (méléa) And [when he was seated] there, a great earthquake occurred and from heaven (came) [the sound] of thund[er and lightning], so that some branches of the shelter [broke off]. When he saw what had happened Jannes ran into the li[b]rary where [his] magical tools were (bottom of page)

25a'

] they(?) came [ c]lothed [ t]he two having [ (remnants of two lines) ] to him and sal[y ing, the LORD of the earth and (the) Overseer [of the universe] has sent us to lead you away [to Hades Henceforth [you will be] a companion of the dead. Forever [you will be] pitied. Then] the two clad in white said, Let there be granted to him [still fourteen days(?)] in his house and after that [ (bottom of page)

21a'

(top of page) (remnants of two lines)
And when Jambres knew [ (remnants of six lines) lest bitter [ ] ] l[each day [ (remnants of two lines)

] to heed you faithfully. [Then he approached and kissed he]r, fi[lting back his tears]. [ ] let [his tears] flow. ] let his tears flow. And [he took leave of?] his friends having urged them all [to ca]re for his mother. (Then) he took his brother with him to Memphis
Keep it secret, and take heed so as not to go forth on the day when the king marches out with the grandees of Egypt against the people of the Hebrews, and do not accompany them []

and handed him the book. He said, Brother, I am passing on to you a document. Keep it secret, and take heed so as not to go forth on the day when the king marches out with the grandees of Egypt against the people of the Hebrews, and do not accompany them. And [to be ill and the [soul from death and from(?) []

God heaven []

God heaven []

When our mother had left []

from death []

Men and brothers, after(?) []

I took up position(?) against a certain Hebrew. And when he had not yet finished [speaking emissaries came from the palace saying, Come quickly [and oppose] Moses the Hebrew who is performing wonders to the amazement of all. [And in the presence of the king, Jannes opposed Moses and [his brother by doing everything they had done. Then the] fatal disease struck him] on the spot, [and with a painful ulcer he] went to the Hedra and after a while] sent word to the king [saying, This active [power] is of God. Therefore I deliberately opposed [Moses]

except unto death [Joannes called his brother and urged him [not to grieve him.] And [because/that he hazarded in the daytime(?) []

therefore regarding money/possessions []

against us. Make ready []

Pap. Vindob. G 29 456 (fragment B) oppose Moses the Hebrew who is performing signs and wonders to the amazement of all. And in the presence of the king, he opposed Moses and his brother Aaron by doing everything they had done. Then the fatal disease struck [him on the spot, and] with a painful ulcer [he went] to the Hedra to mark with a chi [to the king, saying, This is the finger of God]. Indeed I am unable []

Joannes [called his] brother [and] urged him [not to grieve] him [because/that he hazarded []

reigning []

Joannes called his brother and urged him [not to grieve] him [because/that he hazarded []

money/possessions and []

us. Make ready []

for the spirit []

that/because signs
for the morning and all the things being observed he made inquiry at what hour he saw the setting of the star he said, Such is a generation of lying lips and deceitful hearts of the hour of his death Come and see how long and he said to him nothing

remnants of one line)

after this to pursue the people of the Hebrews (remnants of two lines)

Egypt and of the people weeping Jambres (remnants of two lines)

remnants of one line)

the oaths which swore your and when Jannes he said to his brother (remnants of one line)

hundred thousand hundred foals hundred camels (remnants of three lines)

(top of page)

and a noise and he said his brother Jambres and [Jannes opposed

remnants of one line)

(top of page)

my of me is perishing and my whole body has been agitated his brother Jambres and [Jannes opposed

(top of page)

When Joannes heard of the king he encouraged/advised all the other friends. [And his mother] cried out saying and my son J[ remants of two lines)

and when [his] mother she was amazed and if to him and he had preferred (remnants of one line)
when [his] mother [came] [she approached him to kiss him [ from her and [ he said to her, Stay back, mother, [ on account of the fire (= fever?) I am unable [ I am in] much [pain], mother. Then [his mother ] said [ he replied [ you took the trouble, mother, [to come] to me [ (remnants of two lines) to him, I will go to [ (remnants of five lines) ] (top of page) I saw [the] dead and no one resembled you, child. Lie(? here [ ] your appearance [ ] has been utterly changed [ ] child, you are a corpse, for your tongue] and your lips are not moving and] your [knuckles] are not [ ] Jambres [ and weeping(?)] [ ] have been deprived [ (remnants of one line) ] and money [ (remnants of one line) ] (remnants of one line) ] the spirit [ ] his mother[?] [ ] the tomb of his brother [and [ ] Jannes said to [his] brother Jambres (remnants of seven lines) (bottom of page) Brit. Lib., Cotton, Tiberius B.V., fol. 87 Mambres opened the magical books of his brother Jannes; he performed necromancy and brought up from the netherworld his brother's shade. The soul of Jannes said in response, I your brother did not die unjustly, but indeed justly, and the judgment will go against me, since I was more clever than all clever magicians, and opposed the two brothers, Moses and Aaron, who performed great signs and wonders. As a result I died and was brought from among (the living) to the netherworld where there is great burning and the pit of perdition, whence no ascent is possible. Now then, brother Mambres,
make sure you do good in
your life to your children and
friends; for in the netherworld
no good exists, only gloom and
darkness. After you will have
died and have come to the
netherworld, among the dead,
your abode will be two cubits wide
and four cubits long

23a∗
your abode
cubits
(remnants of nine lines)

23b∗
(remnants of one line)
] cubits [
(remnants of three lines)
those who do not do evil [
(remnants of six lines)

23c∗
(remnants of one line)
] where are (the) sons [
] Egypt and on account of the [
(remnants of two lines)

23d∗
(remnants of four lines)
] and we are descending [
] but now(?) there is no
forgiveness for us(?) [
(remnants of two lines)
] and friends [
] for the gates of [
the] dumb and [
(bottom of page)

23e∗
(remnants of six lines)
] of us/our [
(remnants of two lines)
] the oikoum[ene
] unab[le
] corrup[tion

23f∗
] fo[r] he knew [This one having descended to Ha[des . . . d
died. These [
(remnants of two lines)

23g∗
(remnants of four lines)
our limbs [
full of darkness [
we are burning(?) [
nothing [
we [
to give it(?) [
(bottom of page)

22a∗
(remnants of one line)
We who wor[shipped ido[ls and
carved images until we came [to de
struction together with [our] idols, [for neither
the idols nor their worshipers does
God the King [of the earth love(?)]
and in Hades no one, not even [  
(remnants of one line)

\[22\]b+
] the wretched one(?) [  
(remnants of three lines)
] practiced sorcery [  
] commit perjury [  

\[22\]c+
(remnants of six lines)
] money len[der  
] my [br]other [  

\[22\]j+
in] Hades not even a kin[g  
] excels [  
] equality/fair dealing, just ones [  
(remnants of one line)
] having opposed [  
] of the earth [  
] the mighty one [  
] tortue [  

\[22\]ab+
(remnants of three lines)
] of [th]e children nor of the [  
] the soul [  
] fornication. Nothing [  
] very gladly he sins and [  
(remnants of one line)
] brothe[r  

\[22\]c+
(remnants of one line)
] she [  
] but grief [  
] the wom[an  
] evil [  
(remnants of two lines)
] for[nication [  
(remnants of one line)

\[22\]k+
(remnants of one line)
Pha]raoh kin[g  
(remnants of one line)

\[22\]m+
(remnants of one line)
] of God [  

\[22\]v+
(remnants of three lines)
] practiced sorcery [  
] commit perjury [  

\[22\]x+
(remnants of six lines)
] money len[der  
] my [br]other [  

\[22\]y+
in] Hades not even a kin[g  
] excels [  
] equality/fair dealing, just ones [  
(remnants of one line)
] having opposed [  
] of the earth [  
] the mighty one [  
] tortue [  

\[22\]z+
(remnants of three lines)
] of [th]e children nor of the [  
] the soul [  
] fornication. Nothing [  
] very gladly he sins and [  
(remnants of one line)
] brothe[r  

\[22\]\+
(remnants of one line)
] she [  
] but grief [  
] the wom[an  
] evil [  
(remnants of two lines)
] for[nication [  
(remnants of one line)