

THE JANNES/JAMBRES TRADITION IN TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN AND ITS DATE¹

LESTER L. GRABBE

300 W. GREEN ST., PASADENA, CA 91123

IN the present renaissance of targumic studies, one point of major controversy continues to be the dating of the various targumim. Perhaps one reason why the question of dating has been so important is that the targumim have been heavily drawn on for comparative studies, especially in regard to the NT.

The question is very much a moot one even among targumic specialists. For example, Martin McNamara has written two widely circulated works whose results are heavily predicated on the general antiquity of "the Palestinian targum."² Joseph A. Fitzmyer opposes not only the term "Palestinian targum" but also the early dating of the targums generally declared to be of Palestinian provenance.³ A recent article by Anthony York goes to great lengths to show that no one has come up with a clear means of dating the targums.⁴

The means by which McNamara and others attempt to show that "the Palestinian targum" is early is by finding various early traditions within it.

¹My thanks to Dr. Richard D. Hecht for inviting me to read this paper in the Seminar on Targumic and Aramaic Studies at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Pacific Coast Section (Santa Barbara, CA, March 30-April 1, 1978). I also offer sincere thanks to Professor Michael L. Klein of Hebrew Union College, Dr. Anthony D. York of Cornell, and Dr. P. Brock of Oxford for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. This expression of gratitude does not, of course, imply their agreement with, or responsibility for, the thrust of the paper or any point within it.

²M. McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (AnBib 27; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966) 64-66; *Targum and Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 86-89. The latter is of a more popular nature. Most recently see his article, "Targums," *IDBSup*, 856-61, especially 859-60.

³See, for example, his reviews in *TS* 29 (1968) 322-26; *CBQ* 30 (1968) 417-28; 32 (1970) 107-12; *JBL* 91 (1972) 575-78; 95 (1976) 315-17. Fitzmyer's queries seem to be three-fold: (a) can one speak of "the Palestinian targum" instead of just "Palestinian targums"? (b) are they as early as is often supposed? (c) why does one even refer to *Tgs. Yerus'almi I and II* and *Neofiti* as "Palestinian" in opposition to other targums?

⁴A. D. York, "The Dating of Targumic Literature," *JSJ* 5 (1974-75) 49-62. One should consult York's article for the citation of scholars other than McNamara and Fitzmyer who have taken sides in the question of the dating of the various targums. He discusses in detail the positions of such important writers as P. E. Kahle and E. Y. Kutscher.

One of these supposed early traditions is that of Jannes and Jambres. This is found in both 2 Tim 3:8-9 and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (= *Tg. Yer. I*) on Exod 1:15 and 7:11 (cf. also Num 22:22). No less than three times in three pages, McNamara asserts that the tradition in *Tg. Yer. I* is the closest in form to that of the NT passages.⁵

The basis on which McNamara makes his judgment seems clear enough. "Only in *TJI Ex 7,11f.* do we find the forms of the names as given in 2 *Tm* together with the tradition to which this NT text refers" (p. 84). The following argumentation by McNamara confirms that this is indeed the basic premise of his argument. Other sources are examined in chronological order and all found to be wanting, either because they have different forms of the names or because they incorporate a different version of the tradition.

At one point in his presentation, McNamara notes: "The relation from the point of view of the names and the tradition is so close, in fact, that one is naturally led to believe that in 2 *Tm* 3,8f. Paul[!] is dependent on the Jewish liturgy of his day and that *TJI Ex 7,11f.* has retained this liturgical paraphrase of NT times" (p. 92).⁶ In his concluding statements for this section, he writes "It appears to be a logical deduction from what we have just said that *TJI Ex 1,15* and *7,11f.* are old midrashim of pre-Christian origin, and that we now have them in *TJI* as they existed in the P[alestinian] T[argum] in NT times" (p. 96). Judging from McNamara's other writings, one gathers he is saying that not only this tradition but an entire "Palestinian targum" (of which *Tg. Yer. I* is essentially a variant) was already existent in NT times.

Since McNamara reaches his judgment about the existence of "the Palestinian targum" in the NT period on the basis of many examples, a testing of the validity of his thesis seems to require the examination of such individual examples. The purpose of the present article is to examine this one example of the Jannes/Jambres tradition and determine whether it is cogent.

Brief History of the Tradition

McNamara conveniently lays out the various sources which preserve some form of the Jannes/Jambres tradition and gives a thorough bibliography of secondary studies on the subject to the time of his writing. I will only

⁵In McNamara, *The New Testament*, 83-85, the following statements appear: "The paraphrase of *TJI* (to *Ex 7,11*) is, in fact, the only exact parallel we have to this NT text" (p. 84). "In fact, the only passage in all Jewish literature that offers a true parallel to 2 *Tm* 3,8f. is *TJI Ex 7,11f.*" (p. 85); "Here we have a perfect parallel to 2 *Tm* 3,8f." (p. 85).

⁶It seems to be a common assumption that the targums known to us today had their origin in the synagogue liturgy. That is, of course, one possibility but hardly the only one. It has yet to be demonstrated that the written rabbinic targums are oral in origin or that the targumic method is such first derived from the synagogue liturgy. The earliest targums known to us from Qumran caves 4 and 11 are fairly literal renderings of the Hebrew text and seem to be literary in origin. The actual synagogue liturgy of the first century is not known; there is no evidence so far that the readings of the Law and Prophets were accompanied by translations into Aramaic at this time. Cf. also York's forthcoming article, "Targum in the Synagogue and School," in *JSJ*.

summarize briefly (omitting 2 *Tm* 3:8-9), in approximate chronological order:

The earliest attestation is found in CD 5:17-19 (1st century B.C.): "For in ancient times Moses and Aaron arose by the hand of the Prince of Lights, and Belial raised Jannes [*yhnh*] and his brother by his evil device, when Israel was delivered for the first time."⁷

Pliny the Elder (1st century A.D.) lists Jannes among various magicians (*Nat. hist.* 30.2.11): "There is yet another branch of magic, derived from Moses, Jannes [*Janne*], Lotapes, and the Jews, but living many thousand years after Zoroaster."⁸

Similarly, Apuleius (2nd century A.D.) refers to a Johannes in a list of magicians (*De Apologia* 90): "I am he who would be Carmendas or Domigeron or this Moses or Johannes [*Iohannes*] or Apollobex or the Dardanus himself or whoever else after Zoroaster and Hostanus is famous among the magicians."⁹

The Pythagorean philosopher Numenius (2nd century A.D.) writes about the exodus as follows: "And next in order came Jannes and Jambres [*Iannēs kai Iambres*], Egyptian sacred scribes, men judged to have no superiors in the practice of magic, at the time when the Jews were being driven out of Egypt. So then these were the men chosen by the people of Egypt as fit to stand beside Musaeus, who led forth the Jews, a man who was most powerful in prayer to God; and of the plagues which Musaeus brought upon Egypt, these men showed themselves able to disperse the most violent."¹⁰

In the Babylonian Talmud the following reference is found (*b. Menah.* 85a): "Johana [*ywhn*'] and Mamre [*mmr*'] said to Moses, 'Wouldst thou carry straw to Hafaraim?' He answered them, 'There is a common saying, 'Bring herbs to Herbtown'."¹¹

McNamara also briefly discusses the form of the tradition in some of the later rabbinic writings and collections, such as the *Yalqut Shimoni*, the *Tanhuma*, and the *Exodus Rabbah*. He gives some further space to a writing on Jannes and Jambres mentioned by some of the patristic writers.¹² However, McNamara dismisses the former as late and the latter as too uncertain to be of much help. A few other sources mention that various

⁷Text and translation from C. Rabin, *The Zadokite Documents* (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 20-21.

⁸Text and translation from W. H. S. Jones (ed.), *Pliny* (LCL; London: Heinemann, 1963) 8. 24-85.

⁹My translation from the text given by McNamara, *The New Testament*, 87.

¹⁰Quoted by Eusebius, *Evang. praep.* 9.8.1; text and translation from edition by E. H. Gifford (vols. 1-4; Oxford: Oxford University, 1903).

¹¹Translation from I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1948) 513; text from L. Goldschmidt, *Der Babylonische Talmud* (Haag: Martinus, 1933) 8. 704.

¹²For a recent summary of the study of this tradition and an up-to-date bibliographical listing of secondary literature, see J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* (SBLSCS 7; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976) 133-34.

unnamed magicians attempted to thwart what Moses and Aaron were doing.¹³

2 Tim 3:8–9 is brief and only echoes Exod 7:11, but it adds two specific names: “As Jannes and Jambres [*Iannēs kai Iambrēs*] opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth . . . for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men” (RSV). *Tg. Yer. I* is much more extensive in its additions. At Exod 1:15 it reads:

And Pharaoh said that while asleep he saw in his dream and lo! the entire land of Egypt was placed on one scale of a balance and a lamb, the young of a ewe, on the other scale; and the scale of the balance with the lamb outweighed the other. Immediately he sent and called all the sorcerers of Egypt and narrated his dream to them. Immediately *Jannes and Jambres* [*ynys wymbrs*] the head magicians opened their mouths and said to Pharaoh: ‘A son is about to be born in the congregation of Israel through whom the entire land of Egypt is to be destroyed’.¹⁴

None of this is in the Hebrew text; however, the targum of Exod 7:11–12 is practically a word-for-word rendering of the MT except for the addition of the two names and another detail:

And Pharaoh also called the wise men and sorcerers, and they also, *Jannes and Jambres* [*ynys, ymbrys*], the sorcerers who were in Egypt, did likewise with their magic charms. And every man threw down his staff and they became basilisks, and immediately they were changed to become as they were at first and the staff of Aaron swallowed up their staffs.¹⁵

McNamara's First Proof

McNamara's first means of proof is this: “Only in TJI Ex 7, 11f. do we find . . . the tradition to which this NT text refers” (p. 84). However, this is questionable since it seems clear that in most of the sources just given we do not find a tradition expounded; rather it is presupposed and only briefly referred to. In 2 Tim 3:8–9 Jannes and Jambres serve only for purposes of analogy. *B. Menah.* 85a seems to assume that the reader is already familiar with the tradition. The excerpts from Pliny and Apuleius are only lists of magicians that were evidently notorious at the time.

A simple reading of Exod 7–12 in the Hebrew text indicates that Moses and the Egyptians were hardly on the same side. Therefore, what possible conclusion could one draw other than that the Egyptians—whether pharaoh

¹³For example, Philo, *Vita Mos.* 191–93; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.13.3 §§284–87. The magicians are also explicitly named in several post-NT Christian texts, such as the *Gospel of Nicodemus* 5.1 and the *Martyrdom of Peter and Paul* 34.

¹⁴Translation from McNamara, *The New Testament*, 93–94; text from D. Rieder (ed.), *Targum Jonathan ben Uziel* (Jerusalem: Salomon, 1974) 82 (see the review of M. Klein, *JBL* [1975] 277–79); cf. the older printed edition of M. Ginsburger, *Pseudo-Jonathan* (1903; reprint: Jerusalem: Makor, 1974).

¹⁵Translation from McNamara, *The New Testament*, 85; text from Rieder, *Targum Jonathan*, 90.

his counsellors, or the magicians—all opposed Moses? The only source suggesting otherwise is that of Numenius. His statement is hardly surprising for the accomplished polemicist that he was; he could easily have read the Exodus passage in the LXX—or otherwise learned of it—and simply turned it around to make the magicians victorious!

As already noted, *Tg. Yer. I* at Exod 7:11–12 differs from the MT only by the addition of the phrase, “and immediately they were changed to become as they were at first” (McNamara's translation). Therefore, McNamara is unjustified in concluding: “The close relation of TJI Ex 7, 11f. to 2 Tm 3, 8f. becomes still clearer when we see that only in TJI do we find stress laid on the powerlessness of these magicians . . .” (p. 85). That the magicians were roundly defeated by Moses and Aaron is quite strongly shown by the MT (“Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods”); the *Tg. Yer. I* adds nothing to this impression.

Thus, this supposed proof evaporates under scrutiny.

McNamara's Main Proof

McNamara evidently puts most of his weight on the other proof, the form of the names: “Only in TJI Ex 7, 11f. do we find the forms of the names as given in 2 Tm . . .” (p. 84). McNamara does note that Numenius gives the same forms as those in 2 Timothy, but he eliminates this because Numenius evaluates the activities of the two magicians positively.

When one looks at the two names in their Semitic form in *Tg. Yer. I* (*ynys* and *ymbrys*), it is immediately apparent that they do not follow the normally expected form of Semitic names. The names look, in fact, suspiciously Greek in form, as most scholars recognize. McNamara himself accepts that Jannes and Jambres are only Greek forms of the Semitic names *Yohana* and *Mamre*.¹⁶ The arguments for this, from my own investigation, may be summarized as follows:

(1) Indigenous Hebrew and Aramaic names ending in *samek* are somewhat rare.¹⁷

¹⁶On p. 86 he writes: “We may regard Jannes as the Grecized [*sic*] of the Semitic *Yohana*”; similarly he states on p. 83, note 29a: “And in the tradition of the Latin Church Jannes' brother is *Jambres*, not *Jambres*. This Latin form of the name is very probably dependent on the Palestinian, in which the form is *Mamre*.”

¹⁷A check through the almost two hundred quadruple-columned pages in S. Mandelkern, *Veteris testamenti concordantiae hebraicae atque chaldaicae* (corrected edition by M. Margolis and M. Goshen-Gottstein; Jerusalem: Schocken, 1959) 1349–1532 produced only 18 ending in *samek*. Of these, 4 were of uncertain status because of textual or other difficulties: *ba'ālīs* (1381), *hārhās* (1408), *yēbūs* (1411), *lahmās* (1466). Of the remainder about 9 were of foreign origin (marked with an asterisk) while only about half this number was reasonably certain to be Hebrew in origin: **barqōs* (1383), **hānēs* (1407), *heres* (1409), *mikmās* (1471), **meres* (1478), **āmōs* (1496), **pīnhās* (1501), **pairōs* (1506), *qērōs* (1512), **ra' mēsēs* (1516), **rahpanhēs* (1530), **hāpēnēs* (1530), **tīras* (1530).

(2) Those in Hebrew and Aramaic texts which do end in *samek* tend to be borrowings; in Hellenistic times the borrowings are generally from Greek and Latin.¹⁸

(3) The Greek forms *Yannēs* and *Yambrēs* are generally thought to be Hellenized forms of *Yōhānā*² and *Mamrē*².¹⁹

(4) The Aramaic forms *Yannīs* and *Yimbērēs* are not original Semitic names but rather the Aramaic transliteration of the Greek forms *Yannēs* and *Yambrēs*.

If these points are accepted, however, a question immediately arises: What is an early "Semitic" tradition doing with Greek names in it? Would not one expect to see the original Semitic names (one of which is found in the Damascus Covenant)? The congruence between the names in *Tg. Yer. I* and 2 Timothy is indeed remarkable; nay, *suspiciously* remarkable. Rather than being a mark of antiquity, the form of the names may actually be a sign of lateness. Before examining this concept further, though, it would be well to note an important aspect of McNamara's reasoning.

McNamara briefly notes that various late rabbinic writings and collections have different forms of the names and that none of these exactly correspond to those in *Tg. Yer. I*. But then he adds: "Even if they were to be found in the writings we have just mentioned all these are from some nine centuries later than St. Paul's day, though the traditions they contain have much older roots as is always the case in Judaism" (p. 91). This comment is especially noteworthy because it negates McNamara's entire argumentation! That is, he argues that the form of the names in *Tg. Yer. I* are so important simply because they agree with those in 2 Timothy. *Yet he now informs us that in a late text the agreement in the names is of no consequence!*

¹⁸As a spot check the names under the letter *pe* which ended in *samek* were examined in C. Kasovsky, *Thesaurus mishnae* (Jerusalem/Tel-Aviv: Massadah, 1957-61) 1439-1515. Of the four proper nouns found there, one was an OT name of Egyptian origin (Phinehas), two were of Greek origin (*pilōspōs*, *pērōqlōs*) and only one of apparent Semitic origin (*papēyas*). A perusal of J. Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch* (1866-67; reprinted Darmstadt: Metzler, 1966) 251-310 turned up approximately fifty substances (not just proper names) ending in *samek* or *samek alef*. Of these at least thirty, in Levy's opinion, were Greek or Latin in origin. For further illustrations, one might consult S. Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum* (1898-99; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), and especially the additional comments by I. Löw printed with it. P. Schwen, "Die syrische Wiedergabe der neutestamentlichen Eigennamen," *ZAW* 31 (1911) 267-303, gives all the names from the Peshitta NT; all those ending in *samek* are from Greek names ending in *sigma*.

¹⁹On the transliteration of Semitic names into Greek, see especially BDF §§ 36-40 (pp. 20-23). The names Jannes and Jambres are discussed specifically by H. Odeberg, *TDNT* 3. 192-93; J. Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch*, 1. 337. Jannes is easily connected with *Yōhānā*². The name Jambres is more difficult. The *b* in the middle is to be explained from normal Greek phonetics (BDF § 39 [5] and references there). Thus, the name *Mamrē*² of Gen 13:1 appears as *Mambrē* in the LXX (see critical edition of J. Wevers [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974]) 182 and *Mambrēs* in Josephus (*Ant.* 1.10.2 § 182; critical edition of B. Niese [1887; reprinted Berlin: Weidmann, 1955] 1. 45). The first syllable *la-* seems best explained as an assimilation to Jannes, with *la-* replacing *Ma-*. Because of itacism, the *eta* was probably pronounced as an *iota*.

In other words it all depends on when one thinks a particular collection is to be dated. However, it is well known that the antiquity of *Tg. Yer. I* is not universally assumed. Many would date it in its final form after the late writings *Exodus Rabbah* or *Tanhuma*.²⁰ Thus, one could easily turn McNamara's statement against him by a slight paraphrase: "Even if the names in *Tg. Yer. I* are the same as in 2 Tim, this targum is centuries later than St. Paul's day . . .!"

Form of the Tradition in Pseudo-Jonathan

The development of a tradition around the opponents of Moses in Pharaoh's court is not too surprising. There is a tendency to create names for the unnamed and often to add further details with time.²¹ Since there were two Hebrew leaders (Moses and Aaron), it would seem a natural thing to think of two opponents. The next step would be to name these, then imaginatively develop the incident to the point of a personal confrontation.

A chronological study of the texts proves interesting. The earliest record, that of CD, mentions two individuals but names only one. Already by the second half of the 1st century A.D. both individuals have names as 2 Timothy shows. The fact that at least one of the names is already known by Pliny in the 1st century indicates either that the legend developed from Exodus was widespread or that a famous magician by the name of Jannes (Yohana), who was otherwise known, had simply been appropriated by the tradition in its development. By the time the tradition surfaces in Amoraic times in the Babylonian Talmud, dialogue is already a part of it. Of course, the legend may have been thoroughly embellished long before this time, but our sources do not let us know for certain.

McNamara provides data for another observation which he himself failed to make. In the sources which he labeled late, the names generally have the Greek form rather than their original Semitic characteristics. Although the sources referred to as late by McNamara may in some cases be earlier than he suggests,²² none of them still seems to be earlier than about the 7th century. Since the Greek forms of the name are all in the later Semitic sources, their presence in *Tg. Yer. I* is in perfect harmony with the late dating normally given it.

The question yet to be answered is, How did the Greek forms of the name enter the Semitic tradition? The data exist; to draw a coherent conclusion unfortunately requires conjecture. It is possible that these forms of the name

²⁰See B. Grossfeld, "Bible, Translations, Ancient Versions, Aramaic," *EncJud* 4.845-46.

²¹Cf. especially B. Metzger, "Names for the Nameless in the New Testament," *Kyriakon* (Festschrift Johannes Quasten; ed. P. Granfield and J. Jungmann; Münster: Aschendorff, 1970) 79-99.

²²For example, he dates *Exodus Rabbah* to the 11th-12th centuries, whereas some recent studies by specialists have argued for a dating in the 7th century. See J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969) 79-80.

were simply taken from the NT. After all, as Jacob Neusner has observed, it is a mistake to assume that rabbinic writers could not borrow from Greek sources.²³ The clue, however, may lie in the lost pseudepigraph of Jannes and Jambres which was evidently in Greek and known to patristic writers. As McNamara has rightly observed, it is difficult to deal with what we do not have; but if we assume it did once exist, and that it circulated in Greek, it seems to be a good candidate for the Greek form of the names in the later rabbinic literature even if not the sole source of the tradition.²⁴

This is, of course, rather speculative. Nevertheless, the data do show that the Greek form of the names is found in Semitic sources only in collections generally regarded as late in their final form.

Summary and Conclusions

The salient points may be summarized as follows:

(1) Of McNamara's two proofs that the form of the tradition in *Tg. Yer. I* is early, one proves nothing. That is, the concept that only the targum and 2 Timothy show the powerlessness of the magicians is totally unsupported by the sources; with one exception they agree with the Hebrew text of Exodus which itself shows the powerlessness of the Egyptian sorcerers.

(2) The form of the names Jannes and Jambres in *Tg. Yer. I* is Greek. That is, they are names Semitic in origin which were given Greek forms and then reborrowed back into Semitic while retaining the Greek characteristics.

(3) The Greek names of the magicians are found elsewhere only in late rabbinic texts.

(4) These facts combined with other arguments for a late editing of *Tg. Yer. I* suggest that the targum in the form now known to us is at least as late as the 7th century.

(5) McNamara himself does not regard the form of the names as of significance if they come from a late text.

(6) *Ergo*, McNamara's arguments, according to his own criteria, are totally irrelevant in this particular case.

While this summary may appear facetious to some readers, it seems to be a legitimate conclusion from the analysis presented above. The one example investigated here helps to illustrate a major point to be noted about McNamara's writings: despite the many different examples given, a very fundamental assumption runs through all his argumentation. This assumption is that "the Palestinian targum" already existed in NT times

before 70. This is a serious begging of the question. The particular example investigated in this article underscores the conclusions of Anthony D. York:

A common assumption of many of these works is that the P[alestinian] T[argum], as a corpus, is either before or contemporaneous with the New Testament. . . . this assumption has not been proven, and . . . no effective method has as yet been devised to distinguish between the recension of a particular targumic text and the tradition that underlies that text.²⁵

²³Cf., for example, J. Neusner's statement in another context, "Less defensible still, it is assumed that Christian exegetes, philosophers, and tradents always borrowed from Jewish ones, never contrarywise" (*Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees Before 70* [Leiden: Brill, 1971] 3:176-77). See also *ibid.*, 249-50, in which he considers that the rabbis may have borrowed from Josephus on a particular point.

²⁴K. Koch ("Das Lamm, das Ägypten verrichtet," *ZNW* 57 [1966] 79-93) argued that the tradition in *Tg. Yer. I* on Exod 1:15 was a fragment of the *Paenitentia Janne et Mambre*. This was opposed by C. Burchard, "Das Lamm in der Waagschale," *ZNW* 57 (1966) 219-28.

²⁵York, "Dating of Targumic Literature," 49.