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A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php

Asmodeus

The *New Standard Dictionary* states under *Asmodeus* that in Le Sage's opera (!) *Le Diable Boiteux* Asmodeus is the name of the demon who conducts Don Cleofas in his nightly adventures. In the noted French writer's satirical novel (1707) Asmodeus is identified with Cupid, and his lameness is said to be due to the fact that he had an encounter in France with the demon of selfishness, Pillardoc. The fight took place in the aerial regions, and Asmodeus was hurled to earth. Also in the twelfth canto (l. 6600) of Wieland's *Oberon* (1780) Asmodi is identified with Cupid. The opinion that Asmodeus is depicted in the Talmud as lustful is unwarranted. In Jewish legends Asmodeus is said to have been captured by Solomon's captain of the host, Benaiah ben-Jehoiadah. On the way to Jerusalem the demon knocked against a house, and overturned it, and when at the request of a poor woman he suddenly turned aside from her hut, he broke his leg. In the Christian pseudepigraph *The Testament of Solomon* (GJV⁴ 3, 419) Asmodeus tells Solomon: My business is to plot against the newly-wedded, so that they may not know one another; I sever them utterly by many calamities (JE 2, 217—220). In this respect Asmodeus corresponds to Oberon in Wieland's poem, but the calamities which befall Huon and his spouse are merely disciplinary trials, just as Job's suffering is but a test of his faith in God.

The first mention of Asmodeus is found in the religious novel, known as the Book of Tobit, which seems to have been composed at the beginning of the Maccabean period, about 170 B. C. Sennacherib in the Book of Tobit represents Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria, who appears in the Book of Daniel, which originated about the same time, as Nebuchadnezzar. Tobit seems to have been composed by a Persian Jew (AJSL 24, 98) for the encouragement of his coreligionists in Palestine at the beginning of the Maccabean rebellion, just as Gen. 14 was written by a Babylonian Jew for the inspiration of the followers of Zerubbabel who rebelled against the Persians at the beginning of the year 519 B. C. (JBL 37, 210; JSOR 2, 77). The Syrian persecution was regarded as a divine chastisement of the Chosen

People (cf. Tob. 13 5, 9 and 2 Mac. 1 27-29; 6 12-16; also Tob. 13 12 in R. H. Charles' *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* and 1 Mac. 1 31; finally Tob. 1 17-19; 2 7; 12 12, 13 and 2 Mac. 9 15; 1 Mac. 7 17).

It has been observed that the Book of Tobit has an Iranian background. Tobit's daughter-in-law lived in Ecbatana, the present Hamadân, near the foot of Mount Elvend, 188 miles SW of the capital of modern Persia, Teherân. Even at the present day one tenth of the inhabitants of Hamadân are Jews. The town contains the reputed sarcophagi of Esther and Mordecai, also the tomb of the great Arabian physician and philosopher Avicenna who died in 1037 A. D. Tobit had deposited money in Rages, the Avestan *Rhagâ*, which is mentioned also in the Behistûn inscription of Darius Hystaspis: the Median Phaortes, who had rebelled against Darius in 522, fled to Ragâ, but was captured and impaled in Ecbatana. The name survives in the huge ruins of *Rai*, situated some five miles SE of Teherân. A historical sketch of Rhaga, the supposed home of Zoroaster's mother, has been given by Jackson in the Spiegel memorial volume published at Bombay in 1908.

Asmodeus, the name of the demon who killed the seven bridegrooms of Sara, is the Persian *Aeshma-daeva*. Aeshma is the Avestan demon of rage, and *daeva* means *demon*, devil. In Hebrew, *Aeshmadaeva* appears as *Ashmedai* = *Aîšmadaîy*: the first syllable *aîš* (cf. JAOS 37, 322, n. 12) became *aš*, just as Syr. *aik* is pronounced *ak* (Nöldcke, *Syr. Gr.* § 23, (') and *dâîya* was shortened to *daj*. In the Talmudic idiom final consonants are often dropped (Margolis § 4. o). According to Justi, *Aeshma* is connected with *ish*, to drive, from which *ishu*, arrow, is derived; he combined it 25 years ago with Skt. *ishmîn* (RE³ 2, 142, l. 42). This, however, does not mean *driving*, *stormy*, but *armed with arrows* (JAOS 31, 50). In the OT, *Aeshma* appears as *Ashima* which is given in 2 K 17 30 as the name of an idol worshiped by the people of Hamath, *i. e.* the ancient capital of Galilee at the hot springs S of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee (not Epiphanea on the Orontes, N of Homs-Emesa, SW of Aleppo). For the transposition of the *i* in *Ashima* instead of *Aishma* we may compare Lat. *asinus* — Sumer. *anši*

(ZDMG 69, 170, n. 3; OLZ 18, 203; AAJ 7; WZKM 23, 365). Both *asinus* and *ὄνος* are Oriental loanwords, but they cannot be derived from the Semitic *atân*, she-ass. Nor is the combination of *ὄνος* (beast of burden) with *onus*, burden, and *ἀνία* (Ætol. *ὀνία*) burden, heaviness, grief, sorrow, satisfactory. We have a similar transposition in *Jamaica*, the original name of which was *Jaymaca* (or *Haimaca*) i. e. *Land of Woods and Water* (EB¹¹ 15, 134^a; BK¹⁴ 9, 864^a).

Also the part played by Tobias' dog is distinctly Aryan. In the OT, the dog is regarded as an unclean animal. In the Talmud we read that no one should keep a dog unless it is chained, and Rabbi Eliezer said, A man who raises dogs is like a man who raises hogs, *ham-mëgaddël këlabîm kam-mëgaddël hüzîrîm* (BT 6, 299, 19). In the Book of Tobit Tobias' dog accompanies his young master on his journey and follows him when he returns to his parents in Nineveh after having cured his bride. In the Aramaic and Hebrew versions of the Book of Tobit the dog is omitted. According to some Catholic exegetes, Tobias' dog represents the Keeper of Israel; Raphael, the Messiah; and Sara, the Church of the NT.

Tobias also cured his father Tobit who had lost his sight when he was 58 years old. He recovered it after he had been blind for eight years. The cure of his blindness is said to have been effected by the gall of the fish which Tobias had caught in the Tigris. The liver and the heart of the fish, placed on the embers of incense, expelled Asmodeus who had tormented Sara for years. The blindness of Tobit, it may be supposed, is a subsequent exaggeration, as is also the number of the husbands of Sara who were killed by Asmodeus before they could consummate the marriage. In the Talmud we are told that no woman might marry again whom death had bereft of three husbands (*Yeb.* 64^b; *Nidd.* 64^a). In some parallels to the story of Tobias and Sara the number of former husbands killed in the bridal night is not seven, as in the Book of Tobit, but five or three (*cf.* GJV⁴ 3, 241; also the Warsaw edition of the Midrash Tanhûma, vol. 2, p. 124 and *Shab.* 156^b = BT 1, 716, l. 24).

Sara's demoniacal possession may have been a case of hystero-epilepsy. In the NT, hysterics and epileptics are regarded as

demoniacs (*c. g.* Mark 9 17-26). If Sara always had in the bridal night an epileptic seizure followed by a fit of hysterics, this attack may not have killed her husbands, but it may have killed their love for her, and they may have disappeared as speedily as possible. An epileptic fit is characterized by a sudden loss of consciousness attended with convulsions. The seizure is usually preceded by a loud scream. The eyes roll wildly, the teeth are gnashed together: foam, often tinged with blood, issues from the mouth, while the contents of the bladder and the bowels may be ejected. The attack is followed by drowsiness and stupor (Mark 9 26) which may continue for several hours, or a hysterical attack may occur as an immediate sequel to an epileptic fit. The eyes may then be tightly closed, with the body and limbs rigid, and this stage may be followed by violent struggling movements.

The chief remedies for hysterics are asafetida and valerian which O. W. Holmes called *almir of hysteric squirms*. Asafetida, the old pharmaceutical name of which is *devil's dung*, is found especially between the Aral Sea and the Persian Gulf. The Romans called this inspissated sap *laser Syriacum* or *Persicum*. The Greek name is *ὄπρος Μηδικός*. The specific remedy for epilepsy is bromide of potassium, and bromine is derived from *βρωμιος*, stench. Pliny (32, 226) says that an epileptic seizure may be checked by the fumes of burning horns of goats or deer (*morbum ipsum deprahendit caprini cornus vel cerviniusti nidor*). Hysterical patients often enjoy the most disagreeable odors: they may object to a fragrant flower, but like *c. g.* the odor of burnt feathers. The oil of valerian smells like stale cheese. It is found not only in the root of valerian, but also in the secretion of sweating feet and in the liver of the dolphin. Delphinic, which is identical with isovaleric (or isopropylactic) acid, was discovered hundred years ago by the great French chemist M. E. Chevreul. The fish caught by Tobit may have been a dolphin which was formerly supposed to be a fish.

If Tobit's put on the embers of the incense, containing asafetida, the liver and the heart of a dolphin, which he had kept for several days, the *μυρρυνή* Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4, 168)

may well have expelled the demon. At any rate, this remedy may have had a most powerful effect on Sara. It may seem strange that asafetida should have been used for incense, but this gum-resin is relished as a condiment, not only in Persia and India, but also in France, and in Northern Abyssinia it is chewed like a quid of tobacco in this country or betel-nuts in the East (BL 79). In England, valerian (*setwall*) was used for sachets in the sixteenth century. The nard-plant, from the base of which the famous perfumed unguent of the ancients, known as spikenard, was derived, is closely allied to valerian. The odor of *Nardostachys Jatamansi* is intermediate between valerian and patchouli which gives their peculiar perfume to India ink and Indian shawls. Hysteria (or *neuromimesis*) is essentially a lack of inhibitory power, and something nasty or dreaded may induce sufficient inhibitory power. A hysterical fit may be prevented or checked if the patient is threatened with something particularly disagreeable.

As to the cure of Tobit's blindness, Tobias may have tattooed Tobit's leucomata (Tob. 2 10) *i. e.* white opacities of the cornea with the soot of the charred incense mixed with the (evaporated and dried) gall of the dolphin. Black-lead or crayon drawings are set with a coating of ox-gall. The treatment administered by Tobias did not cure his father's blindness, it consisted merely in pigmentation of the leucomata (EB 1455). Cf. PAPS 40, 71—95.

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The Last Supper

When we speak of the Last Supper we generally associate with it Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting at Milan, which has become for all Christendom the typical representation of the scene (EB¹¹ 16, 447^b). But the Master and His disciples were not seated along the far side and the two ends of a narrow table, with the disciples ranged in equal numbers on His right and left. In Leonardo's picture Jesus sits in the center, and John and Peter next to Him on the right hand side of the