

Who was ›James‹?

Edited by

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Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen

zum Neuen Testament

485

Mohr Siebeck

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485



Who was 'James'?

Essays on the Letter's Authorship
and Provenance

Resulting from a Conference on the Occasion
of Oda Wischmeyer's 75th Birthday

edited by

Eve-Marie Becker, Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson,
and Susanne Luther

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

The majority of articles in this volume are based on papers presented at a conference entitled “Who was ‘James’? Challenging Concepts of Epistolary Authorship”, held in August 2019 at Schloss Wilkinghege (Münster, Germany). We took the opportunity of Professor Oda Wischmeyer’s 75th birthday as a fortunate occasion to hold this conference. The conference, funded by the Thyssen Stiftung, brought together scholars from New Testament studies and linguistics, with varying perspectives and views on James.

The volume is supplemented by three contributions presented at a workshop entitled “Imitation and Classicism in Hellenistic Textual Worlds: Literary Devices and Ethical Implications”, held in June 2017 at Sandbjerg estate (Denmark).¹ The workshop brought together scholars from the fields of New Testament and classical studies to discuss the role of literary imitation in early imperial literature. The workshop was organised by Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson (Aarhus/Münster), funded by the Aarhus University research fund (AUFF) and co-funded by the “Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie” (WGTh) as part of the research group “Genre and Ethics”, organised by Eve-Marie Becker (Aarhus/Münster) and Hermut Löhr (Münster/Bonn).

We are grateful to all contributors to this volume for their great effort in preparing the manuscripts for publication, and to the editorial board of WUNT – especially Jörg Frey (Zürich) – for accepting the volume for the series. We owe a debt of gratitude to Mohr Siebeck publishing house – especially Tobias Stähler und Elena Müller – for bringing the publication to fruition with such professionalism. Furthermore, we are grateful to the AUFF (Aarhus) for its funding of the workshop at Sandbjerg in 2017, and to the Thyssen Stiftung for its funding of the conference in Münster in 2019.

We would like to thank various staff members at the “Neutestamentliches Seminar” at the University of Münster for their help with the organisation and realisation of the Münster conference in 2019 – especially the former secretary Maria Arnhold. Finally, we thank student assistants Benjamin Lensink (Groningen), who has contributed with dedication and diligence to the formatting of the articles, and Rebecca Meerheimb (Münster), who has maintained the

¹ The contributions on James submitted by EVE-MARIE BECKER (“Σοφία ἄνωθεν versus ἄνω κλησις?”), GEORGE HINGE (“The hexameter in James 1:17”), ODA WISCHMEYER (“Scriptural Classicism”).

publication project all the way through, up to its completion, with commitment and accuracy. Maren Klenk and Alexander Stefan Michelis (both Münster) are to be thanked for their assistance in preparing the indices.

Münster and Göttingen in May 2022

Eve-Marie Becker,
Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson,
and Susanne Luther

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Who was ‘James’?

Profiling the Epistolary Author and His Provenance Introduction to the Volume

EVE-MARIE BECKER, SIGURVIN LÁRUS JÓNSSON, SUSANNE LUTHER

In the centuries following the reformation, the study of the letter of James resided in the hermeneutical framework of Martin Luther’s influential verdict of James as an “epistle of straw”. With the development of historical-critical exegesis – as it emerged in the founding of Meyer’s “Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar” series (1829), where James was first annotated in 1858 – the letter of James became a regular object of New Testament exegetical treatment.¹ In that context, a paradigm shift came about, which is fundamental to 20th century exegesis: In his major KEK-series commentary on James, Martin Dibelius (1921) moved away from theological interpretation by reading James programmatically in light of tradition history and literary history. Ever since, the style of letter writing and the quest for the letter’s author and provenance are most important, if not at the very centre of James Studies.

The current scholarly debate about James still focuses to a large degree on the letter’s literary profile. More specifically, James’ religious “place” at the crossroads of Hellenistic-Judaism and early Christianity is under dispute.² Much of this debate seems to depend on the identification of the letter’s author, introduced as “James, the servant of the Lord” (Jas 1:1), in *historical* terms. Unfortunately, such a religious-historical quest cannot be based on sufficient historical evidence: We do not know for certain, whether the self-designation of the letter-writer as “James” is authentic, fictitious or pseudepigraphic. Here, the study of James joins

¹ ODA WISCHMEYER, “Der Jakobusbrief,” in *Der Kommentar in seiner Geschichte: H.A.W. Meyers KEK von seiner Gründung 1829 bis heute*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 436–453.

² JOHN S. KLOPPENBORG, “Diaspora Discourse. The Construction of Ethos in James,” *NTS* 53/2 (2007): 242–270; JOHN S. KLOPPENBORG, “Emulation of the Jesus Tradition in James,” in *Reading James with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of James*, ed. Robert L. Webb/John S. Kloppenborg, LNTS 342 (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 121–150; JOHN S. KLOPPENBORG, “The Reception of the Jesus Tradition in James,” in *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition*, ed. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr/Robert W. Wall (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 71–100; HUUB VAN DE SANDT and JÜRGEN ZANGENBERG, eds., *Matthew, James and the Didache: Three Related Jewish-Christian Documents in Their Historical, Social and Religious Setting*, SBL.SS (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 201–232.

the burgeoning field of research in ancient *epistolography*,³ more particularly New Testament letter writing and pseudepigraphy.⁴

In this research framework, the quest for James' epistolary authorship and its intellectual provenance has to move *beyond* the pure investigation of historical authorship. Instead, a multi-dimensional concept of epistolary authorship is needed, where observations about the explicit, the implicit, the historical, and the literary author must be combined with studies on style, rhetoric, literary criticism, genre criticism and literary history, religious profiles, literary patterns of authorship, communicative structures etc.

In current research – accomplished by interdisciplinary and international research networks – ancient concepts of (epistolary) authorship have been re-evaluated and applied as keys for textual interpretation (of epistolary writings): This applies to the field of Pauline epistolography⁵ and Hellenistic-Roman religious author-literature (“Autorenliteratur”).⁶

In line with the methodological and conceptual progress made in these fields, our conference – entitled “Who was ‘James’? Challenging Concepts of Epistolary Authorship” – intended to further develop and apply the research paradigm of ancient (epistolary) authorship to the study of James: For here lies a significant *desideratum* as well as a possible way out of earlier *aporias* in James Studies. Conversely, more specific insights into James' literary concept and authorial profile can “complete” the current-outcomes of research in ancient (epistolary) author-literature.

The conference setting encouraged a debate where the methodological presuppositions and implications of identifying or rather profiling “James” and their consequences for reading and interpreting the letter as a part of the emerging Christ-believing literary culture were examined and developed for further discussion in the field of antiquity studies.

³ E.g., THOMAS J. BAUER, *Paulus und die frühkaiserzeitliche Epistolographie: Kontextualisierung und Analyse der Briefe an Philemon und an die Galater*, WUNT 276 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); LUTZ DOERING, *Ancient Jewish Letters and the Beginnings of Christian Epistolography*, WUNT 298 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); PAOLA CECCARELLI et al., eds., *Letters and Communities: Studies in the Socio-Political Dimensions of Ancient Epistolography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴ E.g., HANS-JOSEF KLAUCK, *Antike Briefliteratur und das Neue Testament*, UTB 2022 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998); JÖRG FREY ET AL., eds., *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen*, WUNT 246 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

⁵ E.g., EVE-MARIE BECKER and JACOB MORTENSEN, eds., *Paul as homo novus: Authorial Strategies of Self-Fashioning in Light of a Ciceronian Term*, SANt 6 (Göttingen/Bristol: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).

⁶ E.g., EVE-MARIE BECKER and JÖRG RÜPKE, *Autoren in religiösen literarischen Texten der späthellenistischen und frühkaiserzeitlichen Welt: Zwölf Fallstudien*, CRPG 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018); GERNOT M. MÜLLER, SABINE RETSCH and JOHANNA SCHENK, eds., *Adressat und Adressant in antiken Briefen: Rollenkonfigurationen und kommunikative Strategien in griechischer und römischer Epistolographie*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 382 (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2020).

The Quest for Authorship: Research Positions

Three positions are currently proposed in research on the letter of James with regard to the identification of who “James”, the letter writer, was (Jas 1:1):⁷

First, some researchers have proposed that the letter was written by a historical person named “James”, who was known to tradition. Hence the name of the author is considered *orthonymous*. In this case, either James the Zebedee or more likely James, the brother of Jesus (e.g., Mußner 1987; Hartin 2003; Heckel 2019; Johnson 1995), are candidates for identification of the letter’s author. This position implies an early dating of the letter of James to either 43/44 or 62 CE at the latest. Weighty arguments, however, speak against this hypothesis, e.g. the author’s excellent command of the Greek language, the letter’s lack of interest in traditional issues of Jewish identity, as well as other topics, which figure prominently in the early NT writings.

Second, it has been suggested, that the letter was intended to be received by readers as a writing authored by a *historical person* named “James”, who was known in tradition, but, in fact, the name of the author is pseudepigraphic. The author’s authority would then be based on that of James the Zebedee or more likely on that of James, the brother of Jesus (e.g., Dibelius 1921; Burchard 2000; Popkes 1986). While a large number of disparate substantiations have been put forward in support of this argument (e.g., Theissen, 2003), there are weighty objections to this hypothesis as well. The impersonal form of the letter, missing references to the lord’s brother and the history of the reception of the letter strongly contradict this argument.

A *third* option is to assume that the letter was written by an otherwise *unknown* James, thus classifying the letter as *orthonymous*, yet without attempting to identify the historical author (cf. Metzner 2017). This last hypothesis requires the fewest presuppositions concerning the person of the author, compared to the two previously mentioned. However, there are arguments that also call this hypothesis into question. The statements of the letter concerning the author are taken at face value, the customary practice of pseudepigraphy in antiquity is undervalued and no proof can be furnished of the assumed *orthonymous* author “James”, since the historical author largely remains in the dark. This third hypothesis has been prominently advocated in a recent commentary on James (Metzner 2017).

In current scholarship on James, it is indicative to interpret the texts based on as few assumptions as possible. If this trend is taken further, new ways have to be

⁷ See the introduction in RAINER METZNER, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, ThH.NT 14 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017); further KARL-WILHELM NIEBUHR, “A New Perspective on James? Neuere Forschungen zum Jakobusbrief,” *ThLZ* 129 (2004): 1019–1044; KARL-WILHELM NIEBUHR, “James in the Minds of the Recipients: A Letter from Jerusalem,” in Niebuhr and Wall, *Catholic Epistles*, 43–54.

explored to characterise the author and its text. The question of the authorship of James remains a matter of interest and discussion, despite these problematic hypotheses, as it is closely connected to the interpretation of the letter's content as well as to the question of its status in relation to other early Christian literary documents. If current hypotheses prove to be no longer viable, new approaches to the author of the letter have to be considered and explored.

The Aim of this Volume: Objectives and Research Questions

The aim of the conference held in August 2019 was to review comprehensively existing scholarly ideas on how James can be 'identified' as an epistolary author in and beyond the setting of emerging Christ-believing literary culture. By collecting all existing data, methods and hypotheses, the discussion was able to move beyond the current state of research. The conference participants aimed at evaluating current concepts of profiling ancient authors and at re-inventing more robust and transparent guidelines for James Studies: From there, James' authorial claim, religious profile and literary character – including the scholarly concepts that are adjusted to 'profiling' James – were studied in a fresh and eye-opening way.

The international group of scholars invited to contribute focused on the text itself and neighbouring texts (esp. Pauline letters; letters of the so-called Apostolic Fathers), and reconsidered in a detailed way the intertextual, interreligious and intercultural influences that formed the letter of James and its concept of authorship. Special attention was given to the author's own (epistolary) personality and self-perception as expressed in the text. The questions discussed were:

- What do *style, diction, literary genre and rhetoric* reveal about the educational background of the author?
- What does the broad spectrum of different *traditions*, taken from the Old Testament/Septuagint, early Judaism and Greco-Roman contexts, reveal about the author's knowledge and use of ancient literature?
- Do the issues discussed show an interaction with *contemporary discourse*?
- How is the *authority of the author* as an epistolary teacher, constructed and upheld by language, meta-communicative tools, and letter writing techniques?
- In what way do the *arguments* of the letter mirror the social context of the author (and the addressees)?
- How does the (real or fictitious) *audience* addressed in the letter reveal the author's personal status, authorial position, and/or religious manner of communication?

Results and Disposition of the Volume

The conference held a Schloss Wilkinghege (2019) and the previous workshop on “Imitation and Classicism” held at Sandbjerg Estate (2017) have brought to light fresh results for studying the letter of James and its concept of literary authorship. Of particular importance in the history of research is the fact that the rather conventional debate about the historical author can profit from the inclusion of ancient concepts of authorship. As our conference was able to show, here lies a central hermeneutical parameter for contextualising the author as well as for interpreting the text. The search for the author of the letter of James and the text’s intellectual provenance thus goes beyond the mere establishment of historical authorship by using textual and contextual as well as literary-historical indicators to determine the author’s profile more comprehensively.

The decisive contribution of our conference is to show that the individual approaches presented in the lectures, each contribute a tile to our mosaic profile of the author – they contribute to the author’s profile only in their polyphony. Only a multidimensional concept of letter authorship, in which observations on the explicit, the implicit, the historical and the literary author are combined with extended studies on style, rhetoric, literary criticism, religious profile, literary authorial patterns and genre studies, communicative structures, and linguistics allows for a comprehensive and more advanced profiling of “James” as an ancient (epistolary) author. The articles that are collected in this volume, thus tend to argue for a heuristic of *profiling* rather than identifying “James” as the epistolary author.

In particular, three lines of quests and insights were proposed at the conference(s) and were further developed in the contributions to the present volume:

(1) Heuristics, Tools and Methods of Profiling “James”

A variety of articles show that there are two main avenues to the question of authorship and the profiling of “James”. On the one hand, there are attempts of historically profiling the author: In his contribution, entitled: “‘Elia war ein Mensch uns gleichgeartet’ (Jak 5,17). Jakobus, Elia und das Gebet des Gerechten in der Perspektive des Jakobusbriefes”, *Niclas Förster* discusses Elijah as an example for prayer in Jas 5:16–19. The example of Elijah apparently serves as proof text of the special prayer success of the entire Christian congregation. Furthermore, an allusion to James the brother of Jesus, is hidden behind Elijah and his power of prayer. The author of the letter of James took an implicit stand against the high estimation of men of prayer like Elijah or James as exceptional figures who are able to change God’s mind in a unique way and also to influence rain, like other natural phenomena. He goes so far as to relativise Elijah and James to bring them back to a general human measure, so that everybody can

pray like them. The approach of historical profiling reappears consistently and necessarily whenever statements about the author's religious-literary provenance in the frame of "Einleitungswissenschaft" or in the introductory chapters of commentaries are needed (see [2] below).

Some contributions, on the other hand, draw on revealing intertextual or intercultural influences of James as an early Christian writing within the context of the literary environment (Susanne Luther, Eve-Marie Becker, Thomas J. Bauer). In her contribution, entitled: "Profiling the Author of the Letter of James: Dealing with Traditions in the Light of Epistolary Authorship Conceptions", *Susanne Luther* focuses on the reception of Hebrew Bible, Hellenistic Jewish, Greco-Roman as well as early Christian speech-ethical traditions in the letter of James, which contribute to profiling the author by elucidating his background, self-conception and theological position. In her contribution, entitled: "Wer ist 'Jakobus?' Ein typologischer Blick im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Briefkultur", *Eve-Marie Becker* aims at interrelating "James" to the literary tradition of Pauline epistolography, and thereby pushing the 'Paul-and-James'-debate further. In his contribution, entitled: "Der Jakobusbrief und das Bild des Jakobus im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Epistolographie", *Thomas Johann Bauer* offers an outline of the tradition of Pauline and apostolic letters as an instrument of authentic and authoritative instruction within Christian communities and discusses how the (pseudepigraphic) letter of James uses this tradition to present James next to Paul and others as a normative figure of highest authority over all churches.

Some contributions provide insight into the *persona* of the epistolary author of "James" from the perspective of literary studies and literary theory. These contributions specifically consider methods and approaches from neighbouring academic fields such as literary theory (Clarissa Breu) and linguistics (Christine Ganslmayer): In her contribution, entitled: "Prosopopöie im Jakobusbrief aus dekonstruktiver Perspektive", *Clarissa Breu* links the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia to deconstructive thinking and authorship in the letter of James. She thereby develops a notion of pseudepigraphical letter writing as representing a de-/personalised author. In her contribution, entitled: "Der Autor des Jakobusbriefs aus linguistischer Perspektive", *Christine Ganslmayer* addresses author-related methods of linguistic analysis and applies them to the letter of James. Her article shows how the question of authorship should focus less on James as a historical person, his identity or staging and more on the individual linguistic profile of the author. Linguistic research paradigms can prove helpful in the process of reconstructing a profile, based on linguistic patterns and utterances in the text and on their placement in the context of the NT and Greek-Hellenistic textual culture as a whole.

(2) *The Letter of James in Current Exegesis and Commentary Work*

How do the questions about James' authorship affect the current work on commentaries of the letter? Three of the contributors to this volume (John S. Kloppenborg, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, Oda Wischmeyer) are currently working on major commentaries – in fact, in the most prominent international commentary series – on “James” (Hermeneia-, EKK- and KEK-series). In their contributions, they reflect on how the quest of authorship has an impact on the exegetical analysis of the letter in the framework of a critical commentary. In his contribution, entitled: “Wer war ‘Jakobus’ in den Augen seiner Leser? Zu meinem Ansatz der Kommentierung des Jakobusbriefs im EKK”, *Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr* develops a text-pragmatical approach by first looking for the implied author and his audience and then taking into consideration the process of transmission, beginning with the historical origin of the letter and including its reception history. In her contribution, entitled: “Who was ‘James’? Der Herrenbruder, ‘ein Namenloser aus den Vielen’, ein ‘role model’ oder ein frühchristlicher Lehrer mit Namen Iakōbos? Die Neukommentierung des Jakobusbriefes für Meyers Kritisch-Exegetischen Kommentar”, *Oda Wischmeyer* presents a different model for dealing with the question of the author. The trend in research is toward an appreciation of the author's profile. At the same time, the literary analysis of the letter is becoming more important. The letter is understood less as an ethical compilation and more as a writing that combines literary quality with authoritative claims and ethical instructions. The categories of ethopoeia and prosopopoeia need further development. In his article, entitled: “The Author of James and His Lexical Profile”, *John S. Kloppenborg* argues that the combination of very low-frequency, high-register lexemes, combined with vocabulary that belongs to epic and lyric registers, implicitly constructs the author as educated and as a teacher with strong competences in classical traditions and in philosophical psychagogy. In her article, entitled: “Σοφία ἄνωθεν versus ἄνω κλη̅σις? Jas 3:15, 17 and Phil 3:14 in Comparison”, *Eve-Marie Becker*, who is currently working on a KEK-commentary on Philippians, draws conclusions from her exegetical insights on Philippians and the literary-historical contextualisation of James (see above) and applies them to the interpretation of the letter of James.

(3) *The Letter of James and Ancient Literary Criticism*

Finally, this volume offers an important contribution to the current debate on overarching questions about ancient concepts of authorship that may shed light on James Studies and the profiling of “James”. The contributors in this section reconsider the question of authorship, with a view to the traditions of the literary context received and adapted in the letter of James as well as to the socio-eco-

nomical, ethical and theological issues discussed in the text and their discursive context(s). Here, both the consideration of the stylistic, rhetorical and literary techniques chosen by the author (George Hinge, Oda Wischmeyer) and the consideration of literary forms and strategies (Alicia Batten, Lorenzo Scornaienchi) as well as literary-historical settings (Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson, Nicolas Wiater) are important.

In his article, entitled: “The Hexameter in James 1:17: Metrical Forms in Graeco-Roman Prose Literature Between Emulation and Quotation”, *George Hinge* discusses whether the apparent hexameter is due to chance or a deliberate choice of the author. This opens up a more thorough investigation of James’ use of prose rhythm, especially the *clausulae* favoured by polished prose authors, writing in Hellenistic Greek and Roman-Age and Latin. The article rounds up with a general discussion of the concept of quotation in Classical literature. In her article, entitled: “Scriptural Classicism? The Letter of James as an Early Christian Literary Document”, *Oda Wischmeyer* argues that in the context of early Jewish and early Christian Greek literature, James’ letter can be characterised as an independent text of literary quality, connecting the features of imitation and emulation with the literary technique of blending, thereby combining scriptural classicism with innovative elements. In her article entitled “James the Dramatist”, *Alicia Batten* compares the Letter of James to ancient satirists with particular attention to how James and satirical authors construct masks or personae that “perform” alongside various characters, such as the rich and poor, within the literature that they produce. In his article, “Polemik im Jakobusbrief und deren Bedeutung für die Konfiguration des Autors”, *Lorenzo Scornaienchi* discusses the question of authorship of the letter from the perspective of its polemic intention. The author utilises for its purpose an “auctor”, that is an authoritative figure who historically could counter the theology of Paul. James, the brother of the Lord, was in fact the main contemporary competitor of Paul. In his polemics, James argues against justification by faith – Paul’s peculiar doctrine – but he also criticises Paul’s relations with rich people and his aggressive language. With the authority of James, the letter assumes the role of a critique of Pauline theology and gives a definition of Jewish Christian ethics for a new Hellenistic audience. In his article, “The Letter of James as Ethopoeia”, *Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson* argues that speech-in-character best describes the content and purpose of James. The author establishes authority, both explicitly in the ascription and self-designation as teacher and implicitly though the use of language. This building of ethos (*ethopoeia*) corresponds to descriptions in contemporary literary criticism. In his contribution, “Being ‘James’: Pseudepigraphy and Narrative Identity”, *Nicolas Wiater* reads the Letter of James against contemporary non-Christian rhetorical and literary practices of pseudepigraphy, with particular emphasis on the interrelation of pseudepigraphy and narrative identity. Ancient pseudepigraphy, he argues,

was a productive literary and cultural practice that played an essential role as a means of relating to and actively reliving the past. Relating to 'James' through the performance and experience of the letter, he suggests, was more important to contemporary readers than the author's actual identity.

Further prospects and acknowledgments

The volume offers both, a revision of previous research findings in New Testament epistolography, and in particular in James' studies, *and* the widening of the research quest on "James" with the inclusion of experts from various other relevant fields (history, philology, linguistics, history of religion, etc.). As a result, the volume presents innovative approaches to ancient (epistolary) "author research" ("Autoren-Forschung") which establish further criteria for characterising religious "letter authorship". The letter of James proved to be an excellent sample text, which enabled us to show, on the one hand, that the hermeneutic perspective with a focus on the authorship allows for new insights and interpretations of the text. On the other hand, it became clear that this methodological and conceptual approach is only fruitful in its plurality and only thus enables a comprehensive interpretation in the field of James Studies and ancient epistolography alike.

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