

DOES NEGLECT MEAN REJECTION? CANONICAL RECEPTION HISTORY OF JAMES

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Abstract: *Canonicity debates have pivoted on various criteria over the centuries. Today, authorship, a primary criterion, is complicated by concerns about pseudonymity and challenges to the linguistic abilities of the apostles. Recent work by David Nienhuis proposes James to be a pseudonymous second-century document. Nienhuis exploits the historical silence and perceived neglect of the Epistle of James to create a scenario against traditional authorship positions. This paper evaluates the validity of his argument. Despite his thorough monograph, underappreciated aspects of the evidence weaken his work. The case against James being the author of the eponymous epistle put forth by Nienhuis is reexamined on a number of fronts. The evidence suggests that the author was in a position of early ecclesiastical authority, one like James the Just held during the first century.*

Key words: *James, canon, Nienhuis, canonical history, papyri, linguistic dimensions, pseudonymity*

Debates over the NT canon are receiving renewed interest. While there are new methods of inquiry and newer questions, nevertheless, the debates remain the same. Perhaps no NT text is more debated than the Epistle of James. In fact, nearly fifty years ago James Brooks said James “had a more difficult time in acquiring canonical status” than other texts.¹ David Nienhuis further contends, “No other letter in the NT contains as many troubling and ambiguous features, and to this day no scholarly consensus exists regarding its point of origin.”² The sentiment is not new. Martin Luther called James “an epistle of straw” that “mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture.”³ Luther even put James and the other Catholic Epistles (CE) in a different order in an attempt to diminish their canonical significance.⁴

Determining the canonical reception history of James is not easy. Brooks believed “the canonicity of James was not and is not self-evident.”⁵ Furthermore, he

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¹ James A. Brooks, “Place of James in the New Testament Canon,” *SwJT* 12 (1969): 41.

² David R. Nienhuis, *Not By Paul Alone: The Formation of the Catholic Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 22.

³ *Luther's Works (LW)* 35.362, 397.

⁴ While famous for his dislike of James, Luther did accept its canonical status and “would not prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him” (*LW* 35:397).

⁵ Brooks, “Place of James,” 54.

found its place within the canon today is not and cannot be based on traditional criteria of authorship, antiquity, and apostolic orthodoxy; rather James is accepted because “it has continued to prove its value in the life of the church.”⁶ Since the work of Brooks, Nienhuis has written a monograph devoted to the canonical history of James. Nienhuis concludes the pseudonymous author or authors were writing in the middle second century “to a second-century Christian readership in order to promote the essentially Jewish underpinnings of Christian faith and practice.”⁷

This paper investigates the argument and evidence of such claims. Since Nienhuis presents the most recent and thorough work concerning the canonical nature of James, primary attention is given to his book.⁸ The principal goal is not to disprove Nienhuis or Brooks, nor to offer a counter-thesis, but to evaluate key components of their argument as representative of criticisms in canonical debates. The examination focuses on six areas of their case beginning with three traditional criteria for canonicity: authorship, antiquity, and reception history. Then attention is given to three modern areas of debate: literary dimensions, intertextuality, and evidence of existence. I conclude that Brooks and Nienhuis have exaggerated some of the evidence, disregarded other evidence, and commit a logical fallacy, weakening their critiques and position concerning James.

I. TRADITIONAL FEATURES OF CANON RECEPTION

F. F. Bruce is likely correct in stating that “the earliest Christians did not trouble themselves about criteria of canonicity.”⁹ There are, nonetheless, at least three features commonly used for investigating canonical status today: authorship, antiquity, and reception history.

1. *Authorship.* The primary criterion used in canonical reception studies is authorship. Nienhuis claims authorship was always a linchpin for the Christian community, and “Jerome anchored every other NT text in the authority of the historic, apostolic tradition.”¹⁰ Bruce also maintained that the importance of apostolic authorship meant that any “writings of later date, whatever their merit, could not be included among the apostolic or canonical books.”¹¹ Therefore, the canonical status and authoritative function of a document seemingly depended on the status of the author.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 159 (italics original). His more complete description goes as follows: “The second-century author of James desired the content of the letter to comport closely with the historicized James of his day, a James who was somewhat ambiguous about his Christianity. According to that image, James the Just was a rather independent Christian; he was more oriented toward the law than the gospel” (p. 158).

⁸ More recently, Nienhuis and Wall published a canonical approach to all the catholic letters: *Reading the Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude as Scripture: The Shaping and Shape of a Canonical Collection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). That work is broader and adopts the work Nienhuis did on James.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 254.

¹⁰ Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 100.

¹¹ Bruce, *Canon*, 259.

The traditional position is that James, the brother of Jesus, was the author of the eponymous epistle. In contradistinction, Nienhuis claims, “the majority of scholars consider the pseudonymity of James to be uncontroversial.”¹² However, a claim of a majority without official polling, or even a footnote reference, leaves much room for debate. Nienhuis is more nuanced seventy-four pages later in his book, saying, “To this day there exists no scholarly consensus on the authorship and provenance of the letter.”¹³ Still, references to any type of consensus are a curious matter, since few things in biblical studies demonstrate a full consensus. Furthermore, polling the entire NT guild concerning James would be of little value. Most scholars rely on the work done by others for fields in which they do not specialize. The voices necessary to poll are those formally contributing to the matter in question.

Consider in the last three decades that Johnson, Hagner, Moo, McCartney, Davids, Carson, Bauckham, and Martin Hengel, have all formally published on the epistle and concluded the author to be James the Just, the brother of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁴ Well before them, Bernard Weiss also contended for apostolic authorship.¹⁵ This list of scholars, admittedly cursory, demonstrates that while pseudonymity is today a viable position, many voices currently contributing to the study of James still support the position of James’s authorship.

2. *Antiquity*. Antiquity is the second major traditional criterion for canonical status. While Nienhuis contends for a mid-second century date of writing, older views placed it a century earlier. Weiss held that various details of James indicated the epistle came from “a very early epoch of the Apostolic age,” and was likely written before the Pauline mission.¹⁶ Additionally, even if one accepts conscious literary intertextuality to be present in James, Weiss still believed the improbable echoes of 1 Peter did not “prove anything against its having been composed after the middle of the year 50.”¹⁷ The matter of antiquity is the primary assault that Brooks and Nienhuis make and will be explored more thoroughly below.

¹² Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, “An Introduction to the Letter of James,” *RevExp* 97 (2000): 15; D. A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 672; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 22; Dan McCartney, *James* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 9; Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 21–22; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 62; Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciples of Jesus the Sage* (NT Readings; New York: Routledge, 1999), 16; Martin Hengel, “Der Jakobusbrief als antipaulinische Polemik,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis for His 60th Birthday* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne and O. Betz; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 252. For an extensive bibliography of research on James, see Ferdinand Hahn and Peter Müller, “Der Jakobusbrief,” *TRu* 63 (1998): 1–73.

¹⁵ Weiss, *Manual of Introduction*, 112.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104–5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

3. *Reception history.* A third major factor for canonicity is early church use and widespread acceptance.¹⁸ Bruce believed that local recognition of an epistle was not enough; “a work which was acknowledged by the greater part of the catholic church would probably receive universal recognition sooner or later.”¹⁹ Admittedly, the claim entails some conjecture, yet it does summarize the traditional position.

Questions concerning the usefulness and authorship of James were common during the Reformation. Though he accepted James as canonical, John Calvin complained it was “more sparing in proclaiming the grace of Christ than it behooved an Apostle to be” and acknowledged some in his day spurned the epistle.²⁰ Erasmus and others also deliberated concerning authorship.

Moving back a millennium, the debate becomes more difficult. Brooks states that the uncertainty surrounding James “appears to have come to an end as a result of the influence of Jerome (d. 420) and Augustine (d. 430).”²¹ There are, however, chronological problems with his assertion. His view might account for the Carthage council in 419 accepting all twenty-seven texts, but it is strained when considering all twenty-seven were affirmed at Carthage in 397, which is early for Augustine and Jerome to have had any influence.

Yates addresses the claim that “it was strong personalities, especially those of Augustine and Jerome, who made the difference” concerning James and finds it “a questionable and assumption-filled position.”²² Augustine was ordained as a bishop in 395, and it is unlikely his influence was immediately strong enough outside of North Africa to secure a questionable document.²³ Even two years before his ordination, the Laodicea meeting in 393 lists all the OT and NT books in Canon LX.²⁴ Even earlier in 382, the Council of Rome accepted James. Furthermore, the encyclical Easter letter by Athanasius in 367 mentions the “Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic, seven, viz. of James)” and the rest the NT canon.²⁵ When Jerome was nineteen and Augustine thirteen, and also not a Christian, they cannot be accredited with influencing Athanasius to include James in his Easter letter.

Furthermore, Yates points to Pelagius as support for moving the *terminus ante quem* further back than Athanasius. Yates contends,

¹⁸ The history of reception and use can be discussed under the rubric of functionality. Kruger discusses the strengths and limitations of the rubric in canon discussions. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 34–40.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Canon*, 261.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Calvin’s Commentaries; trans. John Owen; Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 276. A century later, Turretin indicates the authenticity of James was still questioned. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. James Dennison; trans. George Musgrave Giger; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:105.

²¹ Brooks, “Place of James,” 49.

²² Yates, “The Canonical Significance of the Citations of James in Pelagius,” *ETL* 78 (2002): 482.

²³ *Ibid.*, 485.

²⁴ Canon LX can be found in *NPNF*² 14:159 along with the editorial statement, “This Canon is of most questionable genuineness.”

²⁵ Athanasius’s Letter 39 can be found in *NPNF*² 4:551–52.

The very fact that Pelagius was comfortable with stopping off his quotations of James with the phrases *et reliqua* and *et cetera* indicate that, in all probability, he expected the majority of his readership to know James well enough to be able to call to mind the lines that followed.²⁶

Therefore, in light of the ecumenical councils and early church canonical references, there is substantial reason to believe that James was widely circulated and well known in the early fourth century at the latest. This date is at least a half-century earlier than Brooks held, and the widespread reception was in no way dependent on the personalities of Jerome or Augustine.

At this point in canonical history discussions, attention is typically given to the Muratorian fragment from the late second century. However, the value of the document is often exaggerated. The fragmentary nature of the eighty-five lines, not to mention “barbarous Latin and with erratic orthography,” speaks against placing much weight on it.²⁷ Metzger contended it should not be called a “canon list” but rather a “kind of introduction to the New Testament.”²⁸ Furthermore, the fragment does not have the tone of “legislation but of explanatory statement concerning a more or less established condition of things.”²⁹ The absence of James in the fragment is, therefore, of little to no consequence. In fact, given that the document begins mid-sentence and ends abruptly, it is, according to some like Hahneman, “reasonable to suggest that the Fragment may have contained other references now lost, and that James and Hebrews (and 1 Peter) may have been among them.”³⁰

The evaluation of explicit references to the canonical status of James through traditional criteria firmly establishes canonical reception to the early fourth century. On account of these historical limitations, Nienhuis builds a case against apostolic authorship and early existence of James.

II. AGAINST EARLY AUTHORSHIP AND EXISTENCE

Brooks states in unequivocal terms that there is “no indisputable evidence of its existence prior to the beginning of the third century,” and James is “not generally received as canonical until the latter half of the fourth century.”³¹ While shown above that James was widely known and viewed canonically by the early fourth century, the focus now turns to his first proposition. Is Brooks correct to say there is no indisputable evidence of existence before the third century?

²⁶ Yates, “Canonical Significance,” 487.

²⁷ Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 191.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

³⁰ Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 25. Hahneman is drawing on various suggestions by Lightfoot, Zahn, G. Bunsen, and Westcott, concerning the missing and omitted portions of the fragment.

³¹ Brooks, “Place of James,” 41.

In defense of his position, Brooks contends that 2 Clement did not know James, and the absence “from the Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian is most significant.”³² Nienhuis also finds that Irenaeus and Clement did not know James, and though “Tertullian mentions James of Jerusalem at various key points in his text, he nowhere offers any evidence that he was aware of a letter attributed to that apostle.”³³

Brooks and Nienhuis both assert that Origen is “the first early theologian to make clear use of the letter of James.”³⁴ However, even then the “acceptance of the letter was not universal,” which leads Nienhuis to view Origen as reluctant to make much use of the epistle given its “uncertain status among his readers and hearers.”³⁵ Nienhuis concludes that the late appearance of the letter of James is because it was written in the East by “an individual (or perhaps even a group)” using intertextual links “to create an apostolic letter.”³⁶ While understandably reluctant to assign a firm date throughout his book, Nienhuis concludes James was likely written “sometime in the middle of the second century.”³⁷

Nienhuis offers a well-rounded examination, but his conclusion is driven by motives external to James. He confesses that his hypothesis concerning the CE collection “requires a much later date for the letter (James), since it assumes that the author was writing with a ‘canonical’ collection of letters in mind.”³⁸

Attention turns to three key arguments by Nienhuis. He posits that factors of literary dimensions, intertextuality, and the absence of early evidence indicate James was not written by James the Just, but instead in the middle second century. Again, the immediate goal is not to disprove Nienhuis but to evaluate his argument.

1. *Literary dimensions.* A prime reason Nienhuis rejects James the Just as the author is because he contends the historical James would be unable to produce the literary features of the epistle.³⁹ Nienhuis states that the epistle “was written by a writer for whom Greek was clearly *Muttersprache*.”⁴⁰ There are, however, some underlying problems with his statement. Nienhuis offers no evidence—or even a comment for that matter—proving James was raised in a monolingual community to justify his use of *Muttersprache*.

Contrary to Nienhuis, there are substantial indicators that Palestine in the first century was a multilingual society, and that Greek, not Aramaic, was the *lingua franca* of Palestine. Stanley Porter has edited three volumes of collected essays demonstrating the pervasive use of Koine as the *lingua franca*: *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays* (1991); *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics* (2000); and with Andrew Pitts, *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Devel-*

³² Ibid.

³³ Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 36, 48, 40, respectively.

³⁴ Ibid., 55; Brooks, “Place of James,” 41.

³⁵ Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 55.

³⁶ Ibid., 22.

³⁷ Ibid., 238.

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

³⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

opment (2013).⁴¹ Furthermore, Hengel decades ago had surmised that “even in Jewish Palestine, individual groups grew up bilingual and thus stood right on the boundary of two cultures.”⁴² Hengel believed that even Paul, trained as a Pharisee, likely “worked with both the Hebrew and Greek texts in accordance with the bilingual milieu in the Jewish capital.”⁴³ More recently, Hughson T. Ong has discussed multilingualism using sociolinguistics. Ong concludes that Palestine was bilingual and diglossic at both the personal and societal levels (state, community, and social groups).⁴⁴

Even in the late nineteenth century, Weiss wrote, “it is now fully recognized that even a Palestinian might have acquired facility in writing Greek and must have written in Greek to Jews of the Diaspora.”⁴⁵ Since then, Hengel has more forcefully demonstrated that the economy, language and literature, education, and architecture, are all evidence of thorough Hellenization by the middle of the first century.⁴⁶ The evidence leads Hengel to conclude that “from the middle of the third century BC *all Judaism* must really be designated ‘Hellenistic Judaism’ in the strict sense.”⁴⁷

If Nienhuis denies a Jew in the first-century could write James, then he must disprove the evidence appreciating the Koine linguistic abilities of the NT authors who lived during a thoroughly Hellenized Second Temple period. Simply put, there is no reason “why a Galilean Jew like James could not write such Greek.”⁴⁸ The historical evidence does not suggest a single *Muttersprache*. Quite the contrary, a bilingual and diglossic James would likely be able to write the Epistle of James.

⁴¹ Stanley E. Porter, ed., *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays* (JSNTSS 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991); idem, *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000); Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, eds., *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development* (Early Christianity in Its Hellenistic Context 3; Linguistic Biblical Studies 6; Leiden: Brill, 2013).

⁴² Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 1:105.

⁴³ Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of its Canon* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 108. Mogens Müller also demonstrates the extensive use of the Greek OT in the pre-Christian period. He further concludes that for the NT authors, the Septuagint, not the *Biblia Hebraica*, was their Holy Writ. See Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (JSOTSup 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 121.

⁴⁴ Hughson T. Ong, “Ancient Palestine is Multilingual and Diglossic: Introducing Multilingualism Theories to New Testament Studies,” *CurBR* 13 (2015): 343. Ong contends Greek and Aramaic are the “competing prestige languages” with Hebrew being reserved for liturgical settings (p. 344). To see a more extensive presentation of his argument, see Hughson T. Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus and the Sociolinguistic World of the New Testament* (Linguistic Biblical Studies 12; Leiden: Brill, 2015).

⁴⁵ Weiss, *Manual of Introduction*, 116.

⁴⁶ For instance, consider that under King Alexander Jannaeus (Jonathan) there were bilingual coins in the early first century BC, which continued until Bar Kokhba in AD 130. Also Jason the high priest builds a Greek gymnasium below the Temple Mount in 173 BC. See Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1:59–61.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:104 (italics original). Bauckham builds on Hengel in Bauckham, *James*, 22–25.

⁴⁸ Johnson, “Introduction to James,” 156. See also Sophie Laws, *The Epistle of James* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 1980), 40; J. N. Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek? How Much Greek Could the First Jewish Christians Have Known?* (NovTSup 19; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 3–21, 189–91; McCartney, *James*, 28–29.

2. *Intertextual lexical borrowing.* A more complicated area to examine is the potential use of James by other authors. Brooks contends Origen was “the first Christian writer to quote from the book and to attribute scriptural authority to it.”⁴⁹ Of course, that is an ambiguous claim and Brooks clarifies, “No writer prior to Origen mentions James as the writer of a book, nor does any earlier writer *quote directly from the book.*”⁵⁰ Testing these claims is more difficult than making them.

Thankfully, Nienhuis is more nuanced. He adjusts the categories of quotation, allusion, and echo, from Richard Hays.⁵¹ He then spends a lengthy time examining the possibility that James was used in writings prior to Origen. He concludes it was not. In fact, Nienhuis believes James borrows from 1 Clement and Hermas.⁵²

Space does not allow reexamination of all possible textual connections. Attention is, therefore, given to a shared linguistic feature in 1 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas. Nienhuis acknowledges the strongest parallel between Hermas and James is the “use of the rare term *δίψυχος*.”⁵³ He believes James is copying from Hermas since James uses it only twice while Hermas uses it fifty-five times even to the point where it becomes a subtheme.⁵⁴ Consequently, Nienhuis contends the lexical usage went from high to low. However, there is another way to view the evidence.

For starters, calling *δίψυχος* a rare word is inadequate. The *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database reveals it is a neologism originating with James, Clement, or Hermas, whoever came first.⁵⁵ Two decades before Nienhuis, though not cited, Porter argued that *δίψυχος* is a Christian word coined by James.⁵⁶ Quite significantly, the usage is exclusive to Christian authors. Furthermore, two matters suggest later authors are using James rather than the reverse.

First, the overwhelming majority of *δίψυχος* occurrences, whether in homilies or religious tracts, show direct dependence on the theology of Jas 1:8 and 4:8. The references demonstrate direct and explicit literary dependence on James. Second, contrary to Nienhuis the frequency of usage certainly went from low to high. Clement uses *δίψυχος* only six times (11:2, 23:2–3; 2 Clem 11:2 [repeating 1 Clem 23:3], 11:5, 19:2) and is typically dated to AD 95–97 but could have been written as

⁴⁹ Brooks, “Place of James,” 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 42 (italics added).

⁵¹ Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 30, is adapting from Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 23.

⁵² Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 62 and 120 respectively.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 120. *δίψυχος* is “double-tongued” or double-minded.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* However, I am only able to find fifty-two occurrences of the lemma *δίψυχος* in Hermas.

⁵⁵ The theory of a lost source text shared by the three latter authors, best articulated by Oscar Seitz, is too conjectural to withstand scrutiny. Oscar J. F. Seitz, “Relationship of the Shepherd of Hermas to the Epistle of James,” *JBL* 63 (1944):131–40. A more reasonable position is posited by Porter, who claims that “until such time as an extant source earlier than the book of James is found, the origin of *δίψυχος* is the book of James.” Stanley E. Porter, “Is *dipsuchos* (James 1:8; 4:8) a ‘Christian’ Word?,” *Bib* 71 (1990): 478.

⁵⁶ Porter, “*dipsuchos*,” 474, 497.

early as the 80s.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Hermas is dated to the mid-second century.⁵⁸ Therefore, whether Hermas adopted the word from James or Clement, Hermas made a larger theme out of previously more modest statements. Usage went from low to high.

A more probable historical scenario is that James created a new word to express himself and used it twice. Clement looked to the authority of the apostolic author and made a few more uses of the new word. Once the new word had become fixed in Christian circles, Hermas used it far more frequently without fear of being misunderstood. Such a chronology, admittedly speculative, would account for the exclusive Christian usage since *δῆψυχος* originated in James and narrowly circulated in Christian circles.

a. *Direction of borrowing on position of authority.* It is difficult to determine the direction of influence in historical documents. Therefore, I believe Nienhuis has directed attention to an important question. What is a more probable scenario, the apostolic James influencing Hermas, or Hermas influencing a pseudonymous James? Joseph Verheyden is correct to note, “Herms has not been very helpful in addressing the question.”⁵⁹ It offers no explicit clues to its sources. What can be usefully done, however, is to ask whether the position of power and authority held by the authors is similar or dissimilar and how that is suggestive for the direction of influence.

Assuming the scenario by Nienhuis, it would be advantageous for a late pseudonymous James to bolster her/his/their position of authority by capitalizing on a major theme in a popular document like Hermas rather than downplay it. However, the use of *δῆψυχος* in James is far less than Hermas or 1 Clement. Conversely, if one accepts an early date and circulation for James, then it is understandable why Hermas and 1 Clement capitalize on the theological point from James. They increase the use of *δῆψυχος* to build on the authoritative status of the Epistle of James.

Furthermore, the Shepherd has a more nuanced and gentler tone than the dogmatic James. The rich are exhorted to weep and howl for their sins in Jas 5:1 (cf. 1:11; 2:6). However, in the second Similitude of Hermas 1:4 or 9.30:4, the rich are presented as useful but simply distracted by their wealth. The difference in tone is intense. James believed himself to be in a position of unquestioned authority while Hermas did not and was more restrained.

While difficult to formally verify the direction of influence, others have followed the same line of reasoning. Martin Dibelius says it well:

⁵⁷ Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 35–36. Lightfoot holds to the year AD 95 in *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: MacMillan, 1891), 3.

⁵⁸ Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 44; G. F. Snyder, *The Shepherd of Hermas* (The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary 6; London: Nelson, 1968), 22–24; Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 293–94.

⁵⁹ Joseph Verheyden, “The Shepherd of Hermas and the Writings that Later Formed the New Testament,” in *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 293.

It follows, therefore, that either the Letter of James does in fact come from a man named James—but in this case he would not have written in such a way if he were not sure of his own reputation—or the letter is falsely attributed to someone named James—but an obscure person with this name would not have been chosen as the patron for this authoritative paraenesis.⁶⁰

The fact is we only know of one James who held a significant position of authority in the very early church.⁶¹ As Bauckham explains, the opening salutation of Jas 1:1 “is not meant to distinguish him from other Jameses, but to indicate his authority.”⁶² Weiss goes further, saying the entire paraenetic letter can only be understood as coming from one in an “authoritative position at the head of the Church in Jerusalem.”⁶³ Only James, as leader and apostle in the early church, is likely to be as bold in denouncing the rich and declaring moral and ethical positions in unwavering absolutes. Later authors who lacked similar standing in the church were unlikely to be equally bold, which is why Hermas and Clement are more nuanced and balanced.

Brooks, however, is correct that no definitive and objective verdict is possible on purely textual and intertextual grounds. Though others wish to conclude more forcefully concerning factors of quotations, allusions, and echoes, I agree that the issues are not straightforward.⁶⁴ While absolute certainty cannot be achieved, the linguistic variables and authoritative presentation are suggestive that Clement and Hermas are building from James. The converse scenario has problems to contend with that are not satisfactorily addressed by Nienhuis.

3. *Physical evidence.* The last factor to consider is the physical evidence. Brooks briefly refers to P²³, which in his day was re-dated to the early third century. He reluctantly acknowledges, “This papyrus provides evidence for the existence of James at a date slightly earlier than Origen.”⁶⁵ Brooks is quick to add that it does not “indicate what use was being made of the book or whether it was a part of a collection of New Testament Scriptures or was circulating independently.”⁶⁶ Nienhuis, too, acknowledges three papyri of James are old enough to be used by

⁶⁰ Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (trans. Michael A. Williams; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 11–12.

⁶¹ James “occupied a unique position as head of the Jerusalem church for over a decade, from c. 49 until his martyrdom in 62.” Bauckham, *James*, 16. Dibelius and Greeven believe James the brother of Jesus is the only primitive Christian character who fits such a mold. Dibelius and Greeven, *James*, 65.

⁶² Bauckham, *James*, 17.

⁶³ Weiss, *Manual of Introduction*, 112.

⁶⁴ There are, of course, those who contend James was cited by early authors. Massaux concludes that “une réminiscence littéraire de ce texte paraît très probable” (“a literary reminiscence of the text seems very likely”); Édouard Massaux, *Influence de l'Évangile de saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant saint Irénée* (BETL 75; Leuven: Peeters, 1950), 316. Likewise, Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 631; McCartney, *James*, 20–23; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 68–80; Moo, *James*, 3; Davids, *James*, 8–9.

⁶⁵ Brooks, “Place of James,” 42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the Fathers contemporary with Origen.⁶⁷ However, Nienhuis only gives a combined three sentences to \mathfrak{P}^{20} , \mathfrak{P}^{23} , and \mathfrak{P}^{100} .⁶⁸

When considering the papyri in further detail, more is discerned concerning their role in canon debates. As Gamble explains, there is often a “failure to consider the extent to which the physical medium of the written word contributes to its meaning.”⁶⁹ The physical medium has a story to tell beyond and sometimes independent of the text it contains.

For starters, the three earliest papyri are from codices. The codex form is significant because in the earliest of artifacts, “Christians strongly preferred the codex for *those writings that they regarded as scripture*.”⁷⁰ Second, the James papyri have wide margins consistent with Christian texts, since Christians used the margins for quality “aesthetics of literary books of the time.”⁷¹ Third, the hands of the three papyri are consistent with clear, legible scripts of other Christian papyri. Fourth, the James papyri have *nomina sacra*, which are “so familiar a feature of Christian manuscripts that papyrologists often” view them as “indicating its probable Christian provenance.”⁷² While no one feature is incontrovertible proof, the combination of indicates the papyri are consistent with early Christian documents.

An additional feature of \mathfrak{P}^{20} , \mathfrak{P}^{23} , and \mathfrak{P}^{100} , which has not been explored in canonicity debates concerning James, is all three papyri appear to be from multivolume codices. More important still, James was not always the first document in its codex. Counting the characters per line and the number of lines, a reconstruction of the text can determine where the first verse began.⁷³ According to a reconstruction, \mathfrak{P}^{20} would have Jas 1:1–6 at the bottom of a verso and 5:17 on a recto with space for seven remaining lines. \mathfrak{P}^{23} would have Jas 1:1 at the top of a verso and 5:22 toward the top of a verso with fifteen remaining lines. With the first verse occurring on a verso, and not at the top for that matter, the reconstructions suggest it was not the first document in the codex.

⁶⁷ Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 70.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁹ Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of the Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 42. See also Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 189.

⁷⁰ Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 57.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 96. See also Traube Ludwig, *Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der Christlichen Kürzung* (Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters; Munich: Oskar Beck, 1907); Larry W. Hurtado, “Origin of the Nomina Sacra: A Proposal,” *JBL* 117 (1998): 655–73; Scott D. Charlesworth, “Consensus Standardization in the Systematic Approach to *Nomina Sacra* in Second- and Third-Century Gospel Manuscripts,” *Aeg* 86 (2006): 37–68; Scott D. Charlesworth, “Public and Private—Second- and Third-Century Gospel Manuscripts,” in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias; Library of Second Temple Studies 13; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 148–75. Line 16 in P20 has $\overline{\text{IIN}\Sigma}$. P100 verso line 3 has $\overline{\text{KY}}$ and line 19 has $\overline{\text{K}\Sigma}$. While few are observed, everything that can be written as *nomina sacra* is written in the Christian manner in these papyri.

⁷³ The methodology used here is adapted from Emily J. Gathergood, “Papyrus 32 (Titus) as a Multi-Text Codex: A New Reconstruction,” *NTS* 59 (2013): 588–606. To calculate the characters in the missing portion of text, Sinaiticus is used as a contemporary text for the purposes of spelling and *nomina sacra*.

Concerning \mathfrak{P}^{100} , Comfort and Barrett contend, “the pagination (6 and 7) indicates that this was a single codex of James or the first book of a collection of the General Epistles.”⁷⁴ The calculations for \mathfrak{P}^{100} are more involved. The recto of \mathfrak{P}^{100} has an average of thirty characters per line and the verso twenty-eight and a half characters. Taken together that is twenty-nine and a quarter characters per line with thirty-seven lines per side. The papyrus begins with Jas 3:13b on a verso, meaning from that point to Jas 1:1 there would be about 5,279 characters using Sinaiticus as a contemporary supplemental text. According to the reconstruction, Jas 1:1 would be at the absolute top of a verso with no room to spare. The recto would either be a cover page or possibly a preceding document.

Therefore, reconstructing \mathfrak{P}^{20} and \mathfrak{P}^{23} confirms that James circulated as a multivolume codex, with \mathfrak{P}^{100} likely confirming. What texts was James circulating with? While the other texts cannot be codicologically determined, James is not found circulating with anything other than the CE and NT documents. While \mathfrak{P}^{72} gives warrant for caution, these papyri with the combined evidence of the *nomina sacra*, the paratextual layout, and being in a multivolume codex, suggests James was circulating as equal with other NT documents no later than the third century.

III. SILENCE EQUALS NONEXISTENCE?

The final question is whether Brooks and Nienhuis are correct in correlating perceived neglect of James with evidence for its non-existence. Does neglect mean rejection and indicate nonexistence? Other scholars have previously discussed neglect without concluding nonexistence. For instance, much commends the proposal by Weiss that James seems to be known comparatively late because “it was addressed to strictly exclusive Jewish-Christian circles, in whose possession it remained.”⁷⁵ Carson and Moo mostly agree with the Jewish audience theory.⁷⁶ Yates, too, sees a Jewish audience as a justifiable explanation for the neglect.⁷⁷ Still others, like Johnson, contend an exclusively Jewish audience cannot be confirmed.⁷⁸ Peter Davids finds the “evidence of Christian material deeply embedded in the text of James makes those theories claiming a purely Jewish origin for the book unlikely.”⁷⁹ The lack of a consensus concerning the intended audience of James only serves to highlight the problem.

Nienhuis affirmatively cites Brooks in summarizing the main problem: “If in fact James was known to most of the Christian writers between Clement of Rome

⁷⁴ Philip Wesley Comfort and David P. Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), 632.

⁷⁵ Bernhard Weiss, *A Manual of Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. A. J. K. Davidson; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888), 2:111.

⁷⁶ Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 629.

⁷⁷ Yates finds James was reintroduced to the Christian community “during the decade or two prior to the 390’s.” See Jonathan Yates, “Canonical Significance,” 487.

⁷⁸ Johnson, “An Introduction to the Letter of James,” 166.

⁷⁹ Davids, *James*, 21. Hagner goes further, contending James is “an encyclical letter and applicable to a wide readership quite independent of the specific circumstances of any intended readers.” Hagner, *New Testament*, 682.

and Origen, it is impossible to explain why there is not a single unmistakable reference to the book during this period.”⁸⁰ They are, in fact, correct. It is impossible to infallibly explain why no evidence of explicit early citation has survived or yet been discovered. However, they have made the error of taking the absence of evidence as evidence of absence. To put it another way, they have equated evidence of silence with evidence for nonexistence.

Consider the study by Michael Kruger concerning the work *To Autolytus* by Theophilus (ca. AD 177). Kruger notes that Theophilus does not reference the CE. However, as Kruger points out, “Silence about a book is not evidence for the rejection of that book (particularly given that we only possess this single surviving work).”⁸¹ The point Kruger makes applies to other early church authors. While more works from Origen, Clement, and Hermas, have survived than Theophilus, it is unlikely that everything they wrote survived. In fact, we know it did not.

Furthermore, consider the use of the OT in the NT. While a hotly debated topic, one point is sure. The NT authors do not cite all OT canonical and non-canonical texts, yet it is not indicative of whether the NT authors were ignorant of or rejected the texts not cited. While Paul repeatedly cites from Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve, Daniel, and the Pentateuch, it is no proof of his rejecting other texts, nor proof of his being ignorant of non-canonical texts. As Hengel points out, “Other Scriptures were earlier read and studied,” and “Paul very likely knew Wisdom and probably Sirach,” among other texts.⁸²

Lastly, consider what happens if the argumentation is applied to the OT use by Origen, Hermas, and Clement. While many of their works survived, none of them cites Ruth, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, or Haggai.⁸³ Interestingly, James neglects those texts, too. However, despite James, Origen, Hermas, and Clement, neglecting these OT texts, no one argues their neglect indicates canonical rejection. Therefore, explicit quotation, allusion, or echo, cannot be the sole or final criteria for establishing canonicity and existence. While the claim by Brooks and Nienhuis cannot be infallibly disproven, the logic of their argument does not hold up.

IV. CONCLUSION

The narrow focus of this paper was to evaluate particular points of argument concerning the canonical history of James. While not directly intended, it has offered support for James as the author of the Epistle of James. First, a first-century Jew in Palestine would be capable of composing the Epistle of James. Second, on account of the authoritative status of James as both a person and eponymous epistle, both Clement and Hermas likely used James as the logogenitor, or neologist, of

⁸⁰ Brooks, “Place of James,” 47, cited in Nienhuis, *Not by Paul*, 102.

⁸¹ Kruger, *Question of Canon*, 166.

⁸² Hengel, *Septuagint*, 111.

⁸³ For the examination of citations and allusions I used the indexes of the *ANF* series.

a new term for a theological theme. Third, the previously underexplored physical evidence supports a date prior to the explicit citations of James.

However, the primary goal of the paper was negative in orientation. The goal was to test the validity of the arguments by Brooks and Nienhuis against the authorship and history of the Epistle of James. In truth, Brooks and Nienhuis are not disproven, which was not the goal. There is still “no indisputable evidence” for the existence, circulation, and canonical reception of James before the third century.⁸⁴ However, the sagacity of one’s ability to dispute evidence does not make their counter-thesis infallible. Despite the thoroughness of their arguments concerning a real challenge in NT studies, I am not persuaded of their thesis. I find the linguistic details and the features of the papyri weaken their case. Also, silence as evidence for nonexistence is not enough. This paper has not resolved all debates nor answered all questions concerning the canonical history of James, but it has served to sharpen particular points of inquiry.

⁸⁴ Brooks, “Place of James,” 41.