

FRIENDSHIP AND BENEFACTION IN JAMES

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FRIENDSHIP AND BENEFACTION IN JAMES

by

Alicia J. Batten

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Introduction

After many years of relative neglect, there is a resurgence of interest in the letter of James.¹ Despite the fact that consensus on many historical questions surrounding the letter – such as its date, authorship, and provenance – cannot be found, the array of methods now used to analyze ancient literature, many of which do not seek to answer primarily historical questions, have found plenty in James to explore. Nor is it acceptable to assume that James is somehow theologically marginal because it does not mention the death and resurrection of Jesus; for the question of whether there was some sort of early Christian “core” theology or central “gospel” message is wide open. Indeed, the potential relationship between James and the Pauline corpus does not comprise the chief area of interest; rather, studies of James’s literary genre and rhetorical structures, as well as the social, cultural and theological themes it addresses are plentiful, sometimes with no mention of Paul at all. Continual research into the varieties of ancient Judaism, the nature of Hellenism, and the complexity of the origins of Christianity have all contributed to the recognition that James deserves much more attention than it had previously earned, languishing as it did for many years on the edges of biblical studies. James is now studied on its own terms, in its own right.

Scholarship focused upon understanding the literature of early Christianity in the context of Hellenistic moral philosophy has long flourished, however. Texts such as Paul’s letters and Luke–Acts have received the most attention here, but others, including James, are not far behind. In recent decades particular interest has been paid to the Hellenistic *topos* of friendship, and how the language and ideas associated with this *topos* were significant to ancient Judaisms, Graeco-

¹ See two recent survey articles on scholarship on James, by Todd C. Penner (“The Epistle of James in Current Research,” *CurBS* 7 [1999] 257–308), and Mark E. Taylor (“Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James,” *CurBS* 3.1 [2004] 86–115) respectively.

Roman culture, and the emergence of early Christianity.² The literature on ancient friendship is massive; the use of friendship language is pervasive in a variety of contexts, and thus it is hard to imagine how anyone in the first century Greek-speaking Mediterranean, including the author of James, would be unfamiliar with this often idealized form of relationship.³

As this book will argue, James is indeed conversant with traditions of friendship, and uses these traditions within the letter's argumentation.⁴

² Two very significant volumes are John T. Fitzgerald, ed., *Friendship, Flattery and Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* (Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), and John T. Fitzgerald, ed., *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship* (SBLRBS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). In addition to these, a variety of scholars have discussed the function and importance of friendship language in the New Testament. For example, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Benjamin Fiore, "Friendship in the Exhortation of Romans 15:14-33," *Proceedings of the EGL and MWBS* 7 (1987) 95-103; F. Hauck, "Die Freundschaft bei den Griechen und im Neuen Testament," in *Festgabe für Theodor Zahn* (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche, 1928) 211-28; Hans-Josef Klauck, "Kirche als Freundesgemeinschaft? Auf Spurensuche im Neuen Testament," *MTZ* 42 (1991) 1-14; Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Peter Marshall, *Enmity at Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT 2.23; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987); Alan C. Mitchell, "The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37," *JBL* 111 (1992) 255-72; PHEME PERKINS, "Christology, Friendship and Status: The Rhetoric of Philippians," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 26; ed. Kent Harold Richards; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 509-20; Stanley K. Stowers, "Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven: Reading Theology in Philippians," in *Pauline Theology, Volume I* (ed. J.M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 105-21.

³ Four important and easily accessible histories of friendship in antiquity are L. Dugas, *L'Amitié Antique* (2nd ed., Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1914); Jean-Claude Fraise, *Philia: La notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique. Essai sur un problème perdu et retrouvé* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1974); Luigi Pizzolato, *L'idea di amicizia: nel mondo antico classico e cristiano* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1993); David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Franz Dirlmeier's dissertation, *φιλός und φίλια im vorhellenistischen Griechentum* (Munich, 1931) is also significant. See also the collection of articles edited by Michael Peachin, *Aspects of Friendship in the Graeco-Roman World. Proceedings of a conference held at the Seminar für Alte Geschichte, Heidelberg, on 10-11 June, 2000* (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 43; Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2001).

⁴ I have explored this topic with regard to the figure of God in James: "God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor?" *NTS* 50 (2004) 257-72. Luke Johnson ("Friendship with the World/Friendship with God: A Study of Discipleship in James," in *Discipleship in the New Testament* [ed. F. Segovia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985] 166-83) has given some attention to friendship in James but he limits his discussion to Jas 2:23 and 4:4 and focuses more on discipleship than friendship. John S. Kloppenborg Verbin ("Patronage Avoidance in James," *HTS* 55 [1999] 755-94) and Leif E. Vaage ("Ciudad la boca: la palabra indicada, una subjectividad alternativa y la formación social de los primeros cris-

Although it refers explicitly to a φίλος only twice, language and themes used in Graeco-Roman discussions of friendship appear with an intriguing density. For example, I will argue that God is portrayed as a frank friend and benefactor; and that Abraham proves his friendship with God through testing and the offering of hospitality. James also uses the language and ideas of friendship in his instructions about community life. For example, the readers are exhorted to withstand testing and trials – often a characteristic of a true friend; they are not to be covetous and they should support one another – both aspects of the expected behaviour of friends. James also incorporates some conventions of friendship in the manner in which he communicates with his audience, for example, in his use of affectionate language, references to the audience as brothers, and employment of frank speech, or *παρρησία*.

This study also joins a number of others in arguing that James urges his audience to resist dependence upon wealthy patrons in favour of reliance upon God as a friend and benefactor, and through assisting others in the community. It is well known that ancient patron-client liaisons masked their relationship with the language of friendship. James, however, will not stand for such a camouflage, and deliberately exposes patronage for what it is: a threat to the community, and a violation of Jewish law.⁵ Dimensions of friendship, for James, function importantly in his address to his audience to form a moral paradigm⁶ that contributes to an overall resistance to wealth and patronage. I think that James deliberately uses the language of friendship in order to appeal to the audience because he knows that such language is used regularly for patron-client relations. James wants to crack this association of patronage and friendship apart, expose patron-client relations as divisive to community life and contrary to reliance upon God, and ally friendship much more closely with benefaction, which many ancient persons, particularly in eastern parts of the Roman Empire, understood to be distinct from patronage. I assert that the association of friendship with benefaction *in opposition to* patronage emerges in the text, and

tianos según Santiago 3,1–4,17,” *RIBLA* 31 [1998] 110-21) both discuss the “friendship with the world vs. friendship with God” notion but do not focus upon the language of friendship more broadly throughout James.

⁵ This is one of the arguments of Wesley Hiram Wachob in his book, *The Voice of Jesus in the Social Rhetoric of James* (SNTSMS 106; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁶ For a view of friendship as a moral paradigm in the “Christ Hymn” of Philippians, see L. Michael White, “Morality Between Two Worlds: A Paradigm of Friendship in Philippians,” in *Greeks, Romans and Christians* (ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, & Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 201-15.

provides grounding for much of the ethical exhortation throughout the letter.

This study will explore how and why James appeals to friendship at three levels: between the author and his audience; among community members; and between the community and God. I am not suggesting that James understands every relationship in the same way nor in identical terms, but that allusions, if not direct references, to friendship at each of these levels serve to strengthen his overall argument. The presence of friendship at each level aids James as he advocates resistance to wealth, and in particular, avoidance of patronage by the rich.

Structure and Method

Before entering into a close study of sections of James, it is important to provide an examination of friendship in a variety of ancient contexts, including early Christian literature. By offering some discussion of friendship in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman world, we can better observe to what extent James borrows from Jewish and Graeco-Roman notions of this *topos*. Chapter 2 thus centres on ancient friendship, with the caveat that the chapter is by no means an exhaustive study of the *topos*, but concentrates instead on those aspects of friendship that emerge in James. The subsequent chapter will focus more closely on the relations between friendship, patronage and benefaction in antiquity, as to my mind James is in the middle of this complicated mix. Scholars have argued that patronage and friendship are very similar, and often for good reason because patrons and clients would, at least in Roman times, refer to one another as “friend” and sometimes pretend that their relationship was one of friendship when it was not. Moreover, as some contemporary authors have concluded that patronage and benefaction are the same in antiquity, it is important to clarify the differences between these latter two concepts. Thus the intricate knot in which patronage, friendship and benefaction were entangled must be untied such that James’s strategy of invoking friendship and benefaction to undermine patronage can be understood.

Chapters 4–6 will explore the particulars of James’s strategy. Here I join other authors who think that James is a crafted letter displaying familiarity with Hellenistic epistolary and rhetorical techniques.⁷ Scholars

⁷ On epistolary techniques, see F.O. Francis, “The Form and Function of the Opening and Closing Paragraphs of James and 1 John,” *ZNW* 61 (1970) 110–26; and John L. White, “New Testament Epistolary Literatures in the Framework of Ancient Epistolography,” *ANRW* 2.25.2 (1984) 1755–56. On specific rhetorical and stylistic techniques,

do not agree with every conclusion made by Fred O. Francis in his groundbreaking article that showed how James and 1 John conform, in many ways, to Hellenistic letters, but his work did open the door to the examination of James *as a letter*, and subsequent studies have compared James to Jewish diaspora letters, in particular.⁸ To illustrate this: many, using a range of methods, accept Jas 5:7-20 as a perfectly acceptable closing to the text.⁹ In addition, despite the long-held view of James as a loose jumble of teachings lacking overall coherence, scholars are increasingly examining James according to the conventions of ancient rhetoric, either as a whole or in units.¹⁰ Although authors do not agree about the overall rhetorical structure of the letter, or even on whether one can be found,¹¹ there are sections of James where they have arrived at a certain degree of consensus, such as Jas 2:1-13, which

such as diatribe and alliteration, see Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, 10-16; Martin Dibelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus* (ed. Heinrich Greeven. Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament [MeyerK]. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964); ET: *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ed. Heinrich Greeven; trans. Michael A. Williams (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 38; Abraham J. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament," *ANRW* 2.26.7 (1992) 314.

⁸ On James as a diaspora letter, see Manabu Tsuji, *Glaube zwischen Vollkommenheit und Verweltlichung: Eine Untersuchung zur literarischen Gestalt und zur inhaltlichen Kohärenz des Jakobusbriefes* (WUNT 2/93; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Siebeck] 1997) and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, "Der Jakobusbrief im Licht frühjüdischer Diasporabriefe," *NTS* 44 (1998) 420-43.

⁹ For example, Hubert Frankenmölle, "Das semantische Netz des Jakobusbriefes. Zur Einheit eines umstrittenen Briefes," *BZ* 34 (1990) 175; Martin Klein, *Ein vollkommenes Werk. Vollkommenheit, Gesetz, und Gericht als theologische Themen des Jakobusbriefes* (BWANT 139; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995); James Reese, "The Exegete as Sage: Hearing the Message of James," *BTB* 12 (1982): 82-85; Robert Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (New Testament in Context; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998); Wilhelm Wuellner, "Der Jakobusbrief im Licht der Rhetorik und Textpragmatik," *LB* 43 (1978) 36.

¹⁰ For example, see Ernst Basland, "Literarische Form, Thematik und geschichtliche Einordnung des Jakobusbriefes," *ANRW* 2.25.2 (1988) 3646-84; John H. Elliott, "The Epistle of James in Rhetorical and Social Scientific Perspective: Holiness-Wholeness and Patterns of Replication," *BTB* 23 (1993) 71-81; Lauri Thurén, "Risky Rhetoric in James?" *NovT* 37 (1995) 262-84; Wachob, *The Voice of Jesus*; Duane F. Watson, "The Rhetoric of James 3:1-12 and a Classical Pattern of Argumentation," *NovT* 35 (1993) 48-64; Duane F. Watson, "James 2 in Light of Greco-Roman Schemes of Argumentation," *NTS* 39 (1993) 94-121; Wilhelm H. Wuellner, "Der Jakobusbrief."

¹¹ See Duane F. Watson, "A Reassessment of the Rhetoric of the Epistle of James and Its Implications for Christian Origins," in *Reading James with New Eyes. Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of James* (ed. Robert L. Webb & John S. Kloppenborg; Library of New Testament Studies 342; London: T & T Clark, 2007), 99-120.

several understand to conform to the elaboration of a theme exercise as outlined in ancient rhetorical handbooks.¹²

Chapter 4 begins the analysis of James's strategy by examining the introduction or exordium, of James, which appears, as will be argued, in 1:2-18. As the study of ancient rhetoric indicates, the exordium is a key component of an argument, as it can often introduce key themes that the writer will develop as well as the ethos or character of the speaker. It sets the tone for the entire text. Therefore, if language and ideas associated with the tradition of friendship emerge in this part of the letter, they must be significant for the letter as a whole. I will explore to what extent friendship and the related concept of benefaction appear in the exordium at the three levels of author to hearers/readers, the desired attributes of community members, and the description of God.

Chapter 5 focuses upon Jas 2:1-26, which several scholars have deemed a discrete unit of the letter that can be divided into 2:1-13 and 2:14-26 respectively. Each sub-section can be understood to be a complete argument. After reviewing why this is the case, the book again discusses friendship at the level of the voice of the author, the instructions for community life, and the description of God, or, in the case of 2:14-26, of the two famous figures, Abraham and Rahab. It is in 2:1-13 that James's opposition to patronage appears most clearly, with the illustration of the rich man and the poor man who enter the gathering; and the community response to their entrance is important in James's larger discussion of faith and works.

In Chapter 6, we turn to Jas 3:13-4:10, which again conforms to the rhetorical structure of an elaboration exercise. After explaining how it does so, the chapter turns to the presence of friendship and benefaction at the three levels of author to audience, community behaviour, and the description of God. This chapter will argue, further, that the statement in Jas 4:4 is a rephrasing of a teaching of Jesus, but deliberately reworded in order to maintain the description of God as a friend.

Chapter 7 returns to the question of patronage as one of the rhetorical exigencies that the letter of James addresses, reviewing both some of the ideas discussed throughout the book, and briefly engaging other passages in James that support the notion that patronage could be one of the problems that James is tackling. This chapter also provides summary conclusions to the volume as a whole.

Overall, our work thus combines rhetorical analysis of James in the context of the social and cultural models of friendship, patronage and

¹² Wachob, *The Voice of Jesus*; Watson, "James 2."

benefaction. Often this manner of approaching a text is called socio-rhetorical criticism, a method pioneered by Vernon K. Robbins.¹³ This approach explores the multiple textures of a text, focusing upon a variety of levels including the text itself and how it attempts to communicate, the social and cultural context in which the text is produced, as well as the ideological textures of both the world from which the text emerges and the world in which it is interpreted. Analysis of the text itself examines its “inner texture” or structure, as well as its “intertexture” – that is, how it uses antecedent oral and written materials, and how it interacts with the community of discourse from which it emerges.¹⁴ Study of the social and cultural textures of texts employs social-scientific work and applies it to various dimensions of the ancient world in order to understand how the text is interacting with the large social and cultural features of that world. Sensitivity to the fact that the texts of early Christianity, for example, were produced in a world very different from contemporary North American society, is crucial here; the interpreter must be careful not to impose her or his values on texts that simply do not share them. Finally, this approach to understanding literature involves attention to the interests and power dynamics of the author, text and readers of texts.¹⁵ Socio-rhetorical criticism acknowledges that no author, text nor interpreter (nor interpretive community) is completely neutral, but has a set of interests, positive or negative, that he, she or it wants to promote. It thus tries to articulate how the ideology is at work in authors, texts and readers, in hopes of understanding these three dimensions of text and interpretation with more clarity.

Socio-rhetorical analyses do not always examine every “texture” of a particular text but they are interdisciplinary in that they require attention to more than one dimension of a text. This volume does not examine the ideological texture of James, for example,¹⁶ not because ideology is not important, but simply because this is beyond the aims of

¹³ Vernon K. Robbins, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse. Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ See Robbins, *Tapestry*, 115.

¹⁵ For a concise discussion of what now is known as “ideological criticism,” see Gale A. Yee, “Ideological Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John H. Hayes; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999) 534–37.

¹⁶ For recent analyses of ideology in James, see Wesley H. Wachob, “The Epistle of James and the Book of Psalms: A Socio-Rhetorical Perspective of Intertexture, Culture and Ideology in Religious Discourse,” in *Fabrics of Discourse. Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins* (ed. David B. Gowler, L. Gregory Bloomquist, & Duane F. Watson; Harrisburg, London, New York: Trinity Press, 2003) 264–80; Alicia Batten, “Ideological Strategies in James,” in *Reading James with New Eyes. Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of James* (Library of New Testament Studies 342; London: T & T Clark, 2007) 6–26.

this particular study. Here, the focus is primarily on the social and cultural textures of the letter's context, and specifically on the concepts of patronage, friendship, and benefaction, the existence of which is well documented in the first century Mediterranean world. However, and as described above, the book also examines the "inner texture" of James insofar as it deals with the rhetorical structure and argumentation of several units in the letter, as well as the voice of the implied author. Further, there is attention to the "intertexture" in the same units insofar as they are using previous, and primarily scribal, traditions from Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world. Friendship, benefaction and patronage therefore become the "lenses" through which these literary dimensions of the text are examined. What I hope will become clear is that James not only speaks as a trustworthy and authoritative friend to his audience, but that he advocates aspects of friendship and benefaction among members of the community such that they will not seek the patronage of the wealthy. In stressing some of the virtues intrinsic to true friendship, James exposes the "false friendship" of patron-client relations. Central to his message is reliance upon God, a friend and benefactor who offers generous benefits without reproach. In emphasizing these particular aspects of God, James implicitly undermines the "friendships" the community has, or desires to have, with rich patrons, who also receive direct criticism throughout the letter. For James, a life embodying some of the great virtues of friendship is also one in which friendship with God is a possibility. Thus his moral exhortation and his theological message are intricately connected as he attempts to provide guidance in this potent little text.

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