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A Symposiastic Background to James?*

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The Epistle of James is not commonly seen in relation to early Christian common meals. At the same time, the work is preoccupied with the common life of an early Christian community, which in turn was, generally speaking, closely related to the way in which it celebrated its meals. In other words, ethics, ecclesiology, and etiquette were closely related. Based on this consideration, this essay attempts to relate aspects of the epistle to symposiastic conventions as they were known in the first-century Mediterranean world.

Keywords: James, Eucharist, symposium, ethics, ecclesiology, ritual

1. Introduction

The Epistle of James is not commonly known for its interest in meals, such as the Lord's Supper,[1] nor in ritual as such (in spite of 1.26–27 and 5.14–16).[2] In

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1 Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (TANZ 13; Tübingen: Francke, 1996) 79–80 n. 68, is an exception as he argues that the gathering described in Jas 2 is a meal. Earlier, Bo Reicke, *Diakonie, Festfreude und Zelos in Verbindung mit der altchristlichen Agapenfeier* (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 1951:5; Uppsala Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1951) 37–8, also argued that this meeting was that of the 'Kultgemeinde' (the context of Reicke's study leads to the assumption that a meal is meant); in fact, he identified the hearing of the word (1.19.21–23), worship (θρησκεία) in 1.27, the συναγωγή in 2.2, the 'peace' in 2.15, and the sacrifice of Abraham as a type for Christians in 2.21, as elements of Christian liturgy that can be found in the letter.

2 Gunnar Garleff, *Urchristliche Identität in Matthäusevangelium, Didache und Jakobusbrief* (Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel 9; Münster: LIT, 2004) 303, is representative for many: 'Das Medium "Ritus" spielt im Jakobusbrief zur kollektiven Identitätskonstruktion keine besondere Rolle. Es finden sich keine Anmerkungen zu rituellen Aspekten der Taufe, zum Abendmahl oder zum Gottesdienst. Die gottesdienstliche Versammlung bildet in Jak 2,1ff lediglich die Kulisse des ethischen Problems der Parteilichkeit. Wenn man überhaupt im Jak Hinweise auf einen identitätskonstruierenden Ritus finde will, dann kommt allein der Abschnitt 5,13–18 dafür in Frage, in dem es um die Gebetspraxis geht'. This lengthy quotation

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fact, the most obvious gathering that is mentioned in the letter, in Jas 2.1–13, is sometimes seen as either a judicial gathering[3] or, more often, as a generic meeting of the community, possibly a Sabbath gathering.[4] In spite of this, it will be argued here that precisely the contemporary discourse on symposiastic conventions provides a helpful matrix for the interpretation of James, taking into account the close relationship between meal-community and community-as-such in the first-century Mediterranean world. In order to make this argument, this article will first consider early Christian meal praxis in the context of meal praxis in the early Roman Empire in general. Second, some texts and themes from James will be considered against the background of the matrix of early Christian meal practice. Lastly, concluding observations will be offered.

2. Early Christian Symposiastic Practice: Etiquette and Ethics

It may safely be assumed that the celebration of the Lord's Supper was part of the life of Christian communities in general.[5] This, of course, does not mean

shows two things: too strict a subdivision between ritual and ethics (ritual is more often than not enacted ethics), and too narrow a concept of what the Lord's Supper might have been in first-century early Christianity. Voices similar to that of Gerlaff include also e.g. Matthias Konradt, '"Geboren durch das Wort der Wahrheit"—"gerichtet durch das Gesetz der Freiheit". Das Wort als Zentrum der theologischen Konzeption des Jakobusbriefes', *Der Jakobusbrief. Beiträge zur Rehabilitierung der 'strohernen Epistel'* (ed. Petra von Gemünden, Matthias Konradt, and Gerd Theißen; Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel 3; Münster: LIT, 2003) 1–15, 1. On Jas 1.26–27, see also Christoph Burchard, *Der Jakobusbrief* (HNT 15/1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 91–5.

3 A view that was put forward in modern exegesis by Roy Bowen Ward, 'Partiality in the Assembly: James 2:2–4', *HTR* 62 (1969) 87–97; see further e.g. Patrick J. Hartin, *James* (Sacra Pagina 14; Collegeville, MI: Liturgical, 2003) 131–2; Peter H. Davids, *James* (NIC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1982) 109–10; Wesley Hiram Wachob, *The Voice of Jesus in the Social Rhetoric of James* (SNTSMon 106; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000) 157–8; Ralph P. Martin, *James* (WBC 48; Waco: Word, 1988) 109–10. For a concise critique of Ward, see Christoph Burchard, 'Gemeinde in der strohernen Epistel', *Kirche* (ed. Dieter Lührmann and Georg Strecker; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980) 315–28, esp. 322–3.

4 See for example James Hardy Ropes, *The Epistle of St. James* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916) 188–9; Martin Dibelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th ed. 1984) 167–8; Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1980) 100–101; and Rudolf Hoppe, *Jakobusbrief* (SKK.NT; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2nd ed. 1999) 52 (indicating that it is probably a liturgical gathering); Hubert Frankemölle, *Der Brief des Jakobus. Kapitel 2–5* (ÖTK.NT 17/2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994) 388–9; Franz Mussner, *Der Jakobusbrief* (HThK. NT 13/1; Freiburg: Herder, 4th ed. 1981) 117.

5 See e.g. Gerd Theißen's way of putting it: 'Das Verhältnis zum Sakrament wird zum Test für die Zugehörigkeit zu Jesus—und damit zur Gemeinde' (*Die Religion der ersten Christen: eine*

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that it has to occur in every single early Christian writing. However, a close connection between issues of communal life and the celebration of common meals, or the Lord's Supper, may well be assumed whenever they occur in early Christian writings.[6] The reason for this is that meals were in general at the heart of communities and groups in Mediterranean society, as well as a prominent way of enacting society (or part of it) with all its structures.[7] This has become well established in scholarship and does not need to be argued extensively here.[8] For the study of early Christianity, meals, as they were held in the context of voluntary associations, are of relevance given that a high degree of organizational and functional agreement between these societies and early Christian communities can be found.[9] The meals of these *collegia* or societies, which have become the subject

Theorie des Urchristentums [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000] 275). The common meal can be seen as the central rite of early Christianity, thus contributing to the construction of its identity. See e.g. Garleff, *Identität*, 42–4.

6 Questions related to meal praxis belonged to the more hotly debated questions of (ritual) identity within early Christian communities. See e.g. 1 Cor 8; 10–11; Rom 14–15; Acts 10; see in the Gospels esp. Mark 7.1–15/Matt 15.1–20.

7 See e.g. the observation made by Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 156, 'Es ist überraschend, in welch hohem Maß Gemeinschaft als *Mahl*gemeinschaft realisiert wurde, denn zunächst ist Koinonia ein ganz umfassender Wertbegriff für alle Formen sozialen Zusammenlebens, der beispielsweise in den antiken, an der Polis orientierten Staatstheorien eine zentrale Rolle spielte'. See further also: Pauline Schmitt-Pantel, *La Cité au Banquet. Histoire des Repas Publics dans les Cités Grecques* (Collection de l'École Française de Rome 157; Rome: École Française, 1992) 1–13; James N. Davidson, *Kurtisanen und Meeresfrüchte. Die verzehrenden Leidenschaften im klassischen Athen* (trans. Gennaro Ghirardelli; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999) 58–91; Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003) 1–10; Michal Dayagi-Mendels, *Drink and Be Merry: Wine and Beer in Ancient Times* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1999) 79–97, esp. 79; as well as John D'Arms, 'The Roman *Convivium* and the Idea of Equality', *Sympotica: A Symposium on the* Symposion (ed. Oswyn Murray; Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 308–20.

8 See esp. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

9 On which, see e.g. Smith, *Symposium*, esp. 87–131, further also e.g. Eva Ebel, *Die Attraktivität früher christlichen Gemeinden* (WUNT 2/178; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), offering detailed descriptions of two non-Christian collegia: the 'cultores Dianae et Antonoi' (12–75) and that of a society dedicated to Dionysus (76–142), noting in the Introduction (1–12, here: 2) that the meal was central to these societies; see further Carsten Claussen, *Versammlung, Gemeinde, Synagoge: das hellenistisch-jüdische Umfeld der frühchristlichen Gemeinden* (StUNT 27; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), and Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 251–67. See also the overview provided by Wayne O. McCready, '*Ekklēsia* and Voluntary Associations', *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996) 59–73. See for the state of research and a discussion of objections e.g. Richard S. Ascough, 'Voluntary Associations and the Formation of Pauline Christian

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of increased study again in recent decades[10] (not least because of their symposiastic practice, and the discourse about them and meals in general), show a number of characteristics which will help to establish a framework for this study. The following may be noted in this respect.

First, it may be maintained that community is to a very large extent enacted and realized as a meal community.[11] This is a fairly banal observation, but of relevance nevertheless, not least because some *collegia* existed largely, so it seems, as an excuse for (lavish) meals in the first place.[12] These meals served various functions, and established various kinds of community, but were in any case crucial in establishing community.[13] Also, shared meals, even when not a formal expression of a covenantal relationship, did express a close bond between their participants whose violation was castigated by those commenting on it.

Communities: Overcoming the Objections', *Vereine, Synagogen und Gemeinden im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (ed. Andreas Gutsfeld and Dietrich-Alex Koch; STAC 25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 149–83. See for further studies e.g. Ebel, *Attraktivität*, and also Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (WUNT 2/161; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), as well as Ascough, 'The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association', *JBL* 119 (2000) 311–28. See for a study that underlines the coexistence of (functional) hierarchy and (theological) equality in the Pauline communities *qua* societies: Thomas Schmeller, *Hierarchie und Egalität. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung paulinischer Gemeinden und griechisch-römischer Vereine* (SBS 162; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995).

10 See e.g. Onno M. van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology; Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997); Stefan Sommer, *Rom und die Vereinigungen im südwestlichen Kleinasien (133 v. Chr. – 284 n. Chr.)* (Pietas 1; Hennef: Clauss, 2006); the contributions in Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Alfred Schäfer, eds., *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike* (STAC 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002); Jinyu Liu, *Collegia Centonariorum: The Guilds of Textile Dealers in the Roman West* (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 34; Leiden: Brill, 2009); Imogen Dittmann-Schöne, *Die Berufsvereine in den Städten des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasiens* (Theorie und Forschung 690; Regensburg: Roderer, 2001). For a briefer overview, see also: Richard S. Ascough, 'Greco-Roman Philosophic, Religious, and Voluntary Associations', *Community Formation in the Early Church and the Church Today* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002) 3–19.

11 See e.g. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 156; Smith, *Symposium*, 1–13.

12 See e.g. Richard S. Ascough, 'Forms of Commensality in Greco-Roman Associations', *Classical World* 102 (2008) 33–45 (34).

13 See for an argument calling attention to a broad spectrum of social functions e.g. Ascough, 'Forms', reacting to the somewhat narrower view of John F. Donahue, 'Toward a Typology of Roman Public Feasting', *AJP* 124 (2003) 423–41.

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Second, meals, as 'microcosms'[14] and, often, ideal-typical enactments of social order,[15] were embodiments of a community's (or host's) view or philosophy of society.[16] While most, if not all, of those organizing a meal would have agreed that εὐκοσμία, a wholesome order, should be the result of the meal,[17] characterized by cheerfulness (εὐφροσύνη) or joy (χαρά)[18] and not somberness[19] or the like, opinion was strongly divided as to what this might mean in terms of (seating) order.[20] While, at least to some extent, all participants in a symposium would be regarded as equals,[21] there were obvious differences between them, especially with regard to social status. A perennial question was how social status ought to relate to someone's status at a meal gathering, not only in terms of invitations and of seating order, but, for example, also in terms of food servings (cf. e.g. the extensive discussion in Plutarch's *Table Talk*, *Mor.* 615C–619A). This desire for εὐκοσμία also meant that disorder, whether in word or deed, was not appreciated; this would apply to fights—or even talk of war[22] of any kind—although disputes and discussions of a more civilized kind would be welcomed at the appropriate time.

Third, and related to the former point, it should be noted that most meals, or communities oriented towards meals, were led or supervised by officers—either by those of a larger household, or, in the case of an association, by elected officers. As has been observed by others, early Christian officers may well be likened to

14 See e.g. Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999) 4–5, and esp. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) 261–4.

15 See also e.g. Andreas Bendlin, 'Gemeinschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Identität: Forschungsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zu den Mustern sozialer Ordnung in Rom', *Vereine* (ed. Egelhaaf and Schäfer) 9–40.

16 See also e.g. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 173–4, who notes that 'es ganz unabhängig von speziellen religiösen Aspekten so etwas wie eine gemeinsame, *griechisch-pagane Mahltheologie* gibt, die sich zunächst nicht in Kategorien wie Theoxenie, Theophagie, Mysterienmahl, Opfermahl usw. (also in einer wie immer gedachten göttlichen Präsenz im oder beim Mahl) äußert, sondern in einem konsistenten Komplex von Wertvorstellungen, die traditionell mit Symposien verbunden sind: Ruhe und Frieden, Reichtum und Fülle, unbeeinträchtigte Gemeinschaft, Gerechtigkeit, usw'.

17 See e.g. D'Arms, *'Convivium'*, further also Smith, *Symposium*, esp. 8–12, 54–8.

18 See e.g.: Xenophanes, fr. 1 (Diels/Kranz); Homer, *Od.* 9.5–10; Acts 2.46; Rom 14.17. See more extensively: Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 173–4.

19 So e.g. William J. Slater, 'Sympotic Ethics in the *Odyssey*', *Sympotica* (ed. Murray) 213–20, 213–4, see Plutarch *Mor.* 612E; Lucian *Par.* 51.

20 For this and the following, see esp. D'Arms, '*Convivium*'.

21 See e.g. D'Arms, '*Convivium*', 308–17; Smith, *Symposium*, 55–8.

22 See Anakreon fr. 9 (Diehl). Oswyn Murray, 'War and the Symposium', *Dining in a Classical Context* (ed. William J. Slater; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991) 83–103, surveys the association of drinking fellowship and military fellowship, however.

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those existing in voluntary associations, and it is of some significance to underline that officers played a role in facilitating the meals of such associations as well.[23]

On the basis of these general considerations, it is now possible to address a number of elements from James that become more understandable in the light of contemporary symposiastic conventions.

3. Reading James against the Background of Early Christian Symposiastic Practice

3.1. *A Question of Seating Order*

James 2.1–13 is clearly related to some sort of communal gathering of the community that James addresses. The text itself may be classified as an example of deliberative rhetoric that seeks to steer a community in a particular direction.[24] Specifically in Jas 2.1–7[25] reference is made to the structure of gatherings of the community to which the letter is addressed. The issue at stake is the question of seating order, an issue of considerable importance in the contemporary discussion on the ideal meal fellowship (symposium) and with that on ideal/utopian community, as was just noted with reference to Plutarch's *Table Talk*. Here, first, the question of the kind of meeting is addressed; second, the question of seating order will be discussed.

3.1.1. What Kind of Meeting?

As will be clear from the literature,[26] there is little clarity as to what sort of meeting is envisioned in Jas 2.1–13. The two main options are, currently, either a Sabbath gathering (commonly understood as not being a Eucharistic, or, at least so it seems, not a communal meal), or a juridical meeting. The option that the meeting envisages the Lord's Supper is not commonly defended.

The view that a juridical meeting is in view has been set forth by Ward and is followed by others.[27] The central topic that is at stake here, the seating arrangement, is part of Ward's argument. Ward points out that, unlike at a Sabbath gathering where there would be a previously arranged seating order, people would not know in advance where to sit at a juridical meeting. Further features of Ward's discussion include the observation that questions relating to partiality in biblical

23 See Smith, *Symposium*, 33–4, 87–131, for various examples and two sets of statutes.

24 See e.g. the convincing argument by Wachob, *Voice*, esp. 11–17; see also Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 390–1.

25 On the structure, see e.g. Garleff, *Identität*, 251–2; Martin, *James*, 57–9.

26 See above, section 1.

27 See above, note 3.

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literature most commonly arise in the description of juridical meetings[28]—though it must be added that this is not a strict rule (1 Clement and Act Pet 12, with a reference to the better treatment of the rich, also show that the use of this concept outside of juridical situations is entirely possible).[29] Ward makes the observation that in Jas 2.4 reference is made to judges and judgment, and he casts doubt on the likelihood that a person of some social standing would visit a meeting dedicated to early Christian worship. To this is often added that both men are strangers not only to this meeting, but also to the community as such.[30] However popular, this view suffers from a number of weaknesses. First, parts of the argument seem to contradict each other: if, as is often assumed, both men are strangers not only to this kind of meeting, but also the community, why would they want to or have to appear before this early Christian court (for which see e.g. 1 Cor 6.1–11)? Even if only one of them belongs to the early Christian community, it seems unlikely that this would have happened; if both had been members of the community that is addressed, it seems unlikely that they would have been completely unfamiliar with the proceedings at such a meeting. And that is to assume that one has to do here with a real, not an imaginary situation.[31] Furthermore, while it is open to question whether the 'liturgy' of a judicial meeting was known to a lesser extent than the 'liturgy' of other gatherings, it certainly seems to be the case that the active assigning of seats also took place at meals,[32] both at those of private and social kinds and at the symposiastic gatherings of associations. Finally, the reference to Jas 2.4, it seems, is not necessarily to judging in a juridical situation; the assignment of seats certainly is also a judgment

28 See e.g. Matthias Konradt, *Christliche Existenz nach dem Jakobusbrief* (StUNT 22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) 136 n. 228: Lev 19.15; Ps 81.2 LXX; Prov 18.5; Mal 2.9; Sir 4.22, 27; 1QH 6; *Did.* 4.3; *Barn.* 19.4; *1 Clem.* 1.3; Polycarp *Phil.* 6.2.

29 See Konradt, *Existenz*, 136.

30 See for a summary, Davids, *James*, 109.

31 A real situation often seems to be assumed in the literature, or is left open, with emphasis on the character of Jas 2.1–13 as an example (e.g. Konradt, *Existenz*, 137; similarly: Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 387; Mussner, *Jakobusbrief*, 116–17), but this is not necessary; if Jas 2.1–13 is indeed deliberative in character, the possibility of the use of an *exemplum* here, not an actual case from the community addressed by the letter increases. See Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUT 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) 14, 23. However, as e.g. John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, 'Patronage Avoidance in James', *HTS* 55 (1999) 1–40, esp. 3–5, indicates (and as was commonly accepted in contemporary rhetorical theory), an example that was close to the world of the addressees would be stronger than one that was not, and it seems likely that the situation sketched in Jas 2.1–3 may well be one known to the recipients of James. See further also Matthias Ahrens, *Der Realitäten Widerschein oder Arm und Reich im Jakobusbrief* (Berlin: Alektor, 1995) 147–51.

32 A NT text that indicates this rather clearly is Luke 14.8–10; see in general Smith, *Symposium*, 33–4. For further offices and officers, see the statutes of four associations as they have been published by Schmeller, *Hierarchie*, 96–115, esp. 115.

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of a person, especially with regard to his/her standing in a community. This, at least, is indicated by Plutarch's brother Timon (*Mor.* 616C),[33] while also the (much later) *Didascalia Apostolorum* refers to the assessment of visitors in a congregation by means of the assignment of seats to them in language which is reminiscent of that used in James (see *Did. Ap.* 12.4–6).

When turning to the view that a Sabbath meeting might be in view, the second main alternative, the starting point here often seems to be considerations about the meaning of the word συναγωγή (Jas 2.2), which is seen to indicate both a Jewish-Christian background[34] and a gathering of some sort.[35] Even if the word's precise meaning in this context is uncertain,[36] it seems to be clear that it must indicate a gathering of people, not a building (or at least not primarily)—the focus is clearly on people gathering; if a building is intended, then it is only as the place of this meeting, which makes the difference between these two possible meanings of the word of lesser importance.[37] The word could be used to refer to early Christian worship services as well,[38] but its use in this sense in the NT is rare, the main parallel being found in Heb 10.25, where 'ἐπισυναγωγή' is used to describe a gathering of the faithful. It stands to reason, therefore, to assume that Jas 2.2 is a reference to a main gathering of the community that James addresses without indicating much about its character yet.[39] Thus, there is little that indicates a (non-symposiastic) Sabbath meeting, it seems. Also the matter-of-fact way in which James refers to the meeting is a further reason to think that one has to do here with a main meeting, if not *the* main meeting, of the community involved. Whether this meeting takes place on the seventh or the first/eighth

33 See Smith, *Symposium*, 56. Timon argues that if a host assigns places according to honor, he 'instead of playing the host, makes himself a juryman and a judge over people who do not call upon him to decide an issue and are not on trial as to who is better than who, or worse; for they have not entered a contest, but have come for dinner' (trans. LCL).

34 See e.g. Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 388m, ὑμῶν clearly indicates that the meeting is that of the Christian group addressed by James (even if the term 'Christian' is somewhat of an anachronism here). As Burchard, 'Gemeinde', 315, suggests, the use of the word ἐκκλησία in Jas 5.14 is probably more a self-designation of the group addressed by James than 'synagogue'.

35 See e.g. Garleff, *Identität*, 253; Martin, *James*, 61.

36 See e.g. Dibelius, *Jakobus*, 165–7, Dibelius rightly warns against drawing too many conclusions from the use of the word συναγωγή only. Similarly e.g. Ropes, *James*, 188–9, noting the Christian use of the term in order to describe meetings in Herm. *Mand.* 11.9, 13, 14; Ignatius *Pol.* 4.2, *Trall.* 3; Irenaeus *A.H.* 4.31.1–2; Epiphanius *Haer.* 30.18; Justin *Dial.* 58.14.

37 This in spite of the semantic unclarity of the noun συναγωγή, which can indicate a gathering, a building or a gathering for judgment. As the majority interpret the noun in this context as referring to an assembly or a gathering of people, it is, as will be demonstrated, anything but impossible to imagine that this gathering is a meal or a symposiastic gathering. See on the semantic aspects e.g. Garleff, *Identität*, 253.

38 See e.g. Epiphanius *Haer.* 30.18; Ignatius *Pol.* 4.2, *Trall.* 3; Herm. *Mand.* 11.9, 13, 14.

39 See e.g. Hoppe, *Jakobusbrief*, 52; Konradt, *Existenz*, 137 n. 239; Laws, *James*, 100–101: a meeting.

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day of the week does not need to be debated extensively here. Apart from the lack of clear evidence, a main reason for this is that, if the meeting is not a juridical meeting, but another main meeting of the community addressed by James,[40] the likelihood increases considerably that this meeting would have been a meal gathering, which may be associated with either 'Saturday' or 'Sunday'.[41] Apart from this, given that the character of this meeting as a meal cannot be proven definitively, but can only be inferred, the following discussion of the question of seating order as the background of the discourse on this topic in relation to symposiastic conventions in the contemporary Mediterranean world will demonstrate the usefulness of this discourse for understanding this passage of James.

Before turning to the question of the seating order, one other aspect of the description of the meeting should also be considered. When it comes to identifying the meeting's character, the *way* in which the various seating options are identified is of importance. According to Jas 2.3 the options are to be seated, to be standing, or to be seated on a footstool (ὑποπόδιον), in descending order of honor.[42] Admittedly, these are very general options, but the choice between sitting and standing and the reference to sitting on a footstool, that is, on a level equivalent to that of someone's feet, are more telling than they seem.[43] In fact, a good example of the status attached to seating arrangements can be found in the symposiastic scene in Luke 10.38–42, where Jesus is seated as the guest of honor. Mary is at his feet, in a subordinate position, listening to Jesus, and Martha is at her feet, doing all the work. Certainly, this pericope is not a full-blown symposium, let alone a Eucharist, but it certainly is a meal with an honored guest and division of roles, and the accompanying standing as reflected in the various (physical) positions of the actors is paralleled in contemporary practices at the dining table: those in the highest position would sit, i.e. recline, while those in lower positions would either stand, especially when they were expected to take upon themselves some kind of service,[44] or sit at the feet of those reclining. When ὑποπόδιον is used in this and similar contexts, it means a small stool at the

40 This is commonly done; see e.g. Martin, *James*, 57, assuming an undefined kind of worship, or, as Martin also considers, a meeting of the Christian community that needed to settle particular disputes.

41 See e.g. the considerations of Gerhard A. M. Rouwhorst, 'The Reception of the Jewish Sabbath in Early Christianity', *Christian Feast and Festival* (ed. P. Post, G. Rouwhorst, L. van Tongeren, and A. Scheer; Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 223–66, esp. 254.

42 See e.g. Martin, *James*, 62. Martin notes rightly that, depending on who is doing the seating, one may well have to do with an official of the congregation here, which would point to 'a congregation rife with practices of discrimination'.

43 For a brief overview of the inventory of a dining room, see Smith, *Symposium*, 14–18.

44 This does not mean that the poor man in Jas 2.1–13 was expected to do actual table service, but standing could be interpreted as a 'servant's position'. See for a critical review of this general rule, however, Matthew B. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006), who gives on 84–92 various examples of free men who

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foot of a κλίνη, rather than support for somebody sitting on a high chair, e.g. a king on a throne.[45] The latter is naturally the way ὑποπόδιον is used in the LXX (Ps 109.1; Isa 66.1). In short, even if Jas 2.2–3 is not very specific, the kind of terminology used and the image evoked certainly can be related to a symposiastic setting.[46]

3.1.2. Honor and Partiality

On the basis of the above considerations, it is now possible to turn to the question at stake in Jas 2.1–13, which will be discussed from the perspective of the discourse on symposiastic convention. Specifically, it will be illustrated how by introducing the notions of προσωπολημψία[47] and δόξα[48] a socially highly relevant theme is addressed: both were intimately bound up with the question of seating order in contemporary discussions about the ideal symposium (and hence with the structure of an ideal community). This observation not only makes it more plausible that the scene in Jas 2.1–13 is indeed symposiastic in character, but also sheds light on the way in which it may have resonated with the 'cultural encyclopedia' of the readers of James.

After calling upon his readership to retain the faith in the 'Lord of glory' free from προσωπολημψία,[49] James addresses the issue of social status (δόξα) and wealth in the context of the faith.[50] This topic is brought up by contrasting the

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were made to stand or who were left standing at a symposium, or who elected to do so. See for two interesting examples: Cicero *Ver.* 2.3.62, and Plautus *Stich.* 486–93.

45 See the considerations of Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 79–80.

46 E.g. Wiard Popkes, *Der Brief des Jakobus* (ThHNT 14; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001) 162–3, opts for a worship setting in analogy to 1 Cor 14.23–26, but why it should be 1 Cor 14 and not 11.17–34, he does not address. Similarly e.g. Burchard, *Jakobusbrief*, 98–9.

47 On the negative evaluation of this attitude in Jewish-Christian tradition, see e.g. Popkes, *Brief*, 159–60, with reference to Acts 10.34; Rom 2.11; Col 3.25; Eph 6.9; 1 Pet 1.17; see further also: Wachob, *Voice*, 157–60.

48 See e.g. Wachob, *Voice*, 178–87, on the 'cultural scripts of honor, limited good, and patron–client relations' that constitute much of the 'social and cultural texture' of Jas 2.1–13.

49 On the background of this caution, see e.g. Martin, *James*, tracing its background in early Judaism and the OT/HB, see e.g. Ps 82.2; Prov 6.35; 18.5; 24.23; 28.31; Mal 1.8; 2.9; Sir 4.22, etc. A particularly prominent text in this respect is Lev 19.15, on which see esp. Luke Timothy Johnson, 'The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James', *JBL* 101 (1982) 391–401, esp. 393, 400–401. However, the fact that Lev 19.15 stands in the context of a text about judicial procedure does not imply that also Jas 2.1–13 must refer to such a situation; in fact, what is culled directly from Lev 19 in Jas 2.8 is a rather general rule, while also Lev 19.15, probably at the background of James' thought here, whether as part of rabbinic tradition or not, is a text that may well transcend its original setting and have become a more general rule.

50 A central statement on equality and difference in James is already found at the very beginning of the letter, i.e. in Jas 1.9–10, where (social and) economic differences are recognized and simultaneously paraenetically corrected. Jas 2 may well be seen as an application and

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arrival at the community's gathering of a pauper, dressed in rags,[51] and somebody wearing expensive attire,[52] or at least attire that indicates a high(er) social standing.[53] James seems to sketch an extraordinary, maybe even imaginary, situation[54] in order to make his point—taking the possible fictional character of the scene into account may also affect the discussion about whether or not the two are first-timers, which does not seem to be a necessary assumption in any case.[55] For the angle from which the text is approached here, however, the aforementioned issue is of limited importance: even when the composition of a meal fellowship changed only slightly, a change in seating order might be necessary, and clearly much more is at stake with, especially, the arrival of the more prominent of the two new arrivals. The question that in fact arises for the (meal) fellowship into which this man enters, is how it elects to deal with the layered nature of the society it existed in and of which various layers were represented. The two extreme options were naturally either to disregard social standing entirely or to make it a point of great significance. Both views had their advocates, and a favorite place for enacting one's predilection was the meal.[56] The risk that one ran when judging the matter wrongly was to lose guests, as the following anecdote from Plutarch's *Table Talk* shows. Notably, this scene addresses a situation quite akin to the one sketched in Jas 2.1–13:

> My brother Timon, upon an occasion when he was host to a considerable number of guests, bade them each as they entered take whatever place they wished and there recline, for among those who had been invited were foreigners as well as citizens, friends as well as kinsmen, and, in a word, all sorts of people. Now when many guests were already assembled, a foreigner came up to the door of the banquet room, like a grandee out of a comedy, rather absurd with his extravagant clothes and train of servants, and, when he had run his eyes round the guests who had settled in their places, he

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further elaboration of this statement. See e.g. Konradt, *Existenz*, 145–8; Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 368.

51 See e.g. Martin, *James*, 61–2, comp. 1 Pet 3.21; Rev 22.11.

52 See for a succinct discussion of the *realia*: Garleff, *Identität*, 253–4, comp. also Martin, *James*, 61. If the man was a patron of the congregation (or within the congregation) the dynamics described in the text would be all the more perspicuous; see for considerations about this e.g. Kloppenborg Verbin, 'Patronage', and also Nancy J. Vyhmeister, 'The Rich Man in James 2: Does Ancient Patronage Illumine the Text?', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 33 (1995) 265–83.

53 The golden ring that is mentioned may be indicative of equestrian status; see Davids, *James*, 108; equestrian status was one that could be achieved through the accumulation of wealth.

54 Vgl. Hoppe, *Jakobusbrief*, 52, see also above, n. 32.

55 As e.g. Ropes, *James*, 191; Dibelius, *Brief*, 168; Davids, *James*, 109; Konradt, *Existenz*, 138 (rightly noting that it seems likely, but cannot be proven), argue.

56 See e.g. the various examples offered by D'Arms, '*Convivium*'.

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> refused to enter, but withdrew and was on his way out when a number of the guests ran to fetch him back, but he said that he saw no place left worthy of him. (*Mor.* 615CD)[57]

In a culture in which seating order was such a sensitive issue, any author addressing it would have to be careful to find a way of balancing both the notion of the equality of all diners (or freedom, 'libertas') and the fact of their different social statuses.[58] Arguments in favor of an 'egalitarian' meal fellowship would emphasize the former; others would underline the importance of the latter. James indeed navigates the waters of this issue carefully. First, he has already made a reference to faith in the Lord of glory (i.e. honor, also δόξα, the core concept at stake here) and has thus prefaced his introduction of the problem of προσωπολημψία, which in this text seems to suggest the arrangement of seating at a gathering on the basis of one's appearance–in this case an appearance that is suggestive of high social (as well as financial and political) status in contrast to an appearance that is more than suggestive of the opposite.[59] It may be suggested[60] that the introductory reference to Christ as 'Lord of glory' relativizes here already all earthly glory and fame; the notion of faith that James uses in v. 1 also returns in v. 5. Second, James addresses the question of the seating order not as one of competing claims to honor, as might be expected on the basis of contemporary discussions of the subject,[61] but as a question of wealth and poverty. In this way, James puts himself in an advantageous position to argue his point, since he can draw now on the divine preference for the poor that can be found in Jewish(-Christian) tradition (Jas 2.5), which makes a seating order based on perceived wealth very difficult to defend indeed. Furthermore, while honor and status were recognized as important factors, honor and status could not be acquired through wealth alone; personality and, especially, descent played a role in this as well.[62] Also, with regard to this background, James has chosen an advantageous angle from which to approach the issue, it seems. In fact, James goes far beyond simply stating an 'option for the poor'; rather, he indicates in Jas 2.5 how the poor are not only truly rich through faith (or in faith, cf. v. 1), they are also heirs of the kingdom. This

57 Paul A. Clement and Herbert B. Hoffleit, trans. and ed., *Plutarch: Moralia* 8 (LCL 405; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1969) 25.

58 See for an overview and examples: D'Arms, '*Convivium*'; Smith, *Symposium*, 10–12, 42–6.

59 See e.g. Garleff, *Identität*, 255.

60 See e.g. Konradt, *Existenz*, 137; Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 371, comp. Mussner, *Jakobus*, 116; Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 375. See also Wachob, *Voice*, 70.

61 See above, the references to Plutarch; see further the evidence assembled by D'Arms, '*Convivium*'.

62 See e.g. the treatment of Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, rev. ed. 2001) 97–100. A classic example in this case is Petronius' Trimalchio, who is very rich indeed, but not quite honorable.

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implies not only wealth, but also a status that wealth alone could not acquire, namely a status of (adopted) heirs of the kingdom, as well as belonging to a superior patron, i.e. God. The poor, therefore, are those who abound in honor and should be treated accordingly, even if the honor they have received is invisible for the present.[63] Conversely, the rich should be regarded for what they really are as well, those who have not been adopted as heirs of the kingdom, and even as those who behave dishonorably by dragging members of the congregation to court, which is problematic for members of the same meal fellowship (2.6),[64] as it obviously does not contribute to the coherence of the community and may be likened to the slandering that occurs in the community too (4.11). All these considerations about honor and internal structuring of a community echo discussions like the one found in Plutarch's *Table Talk* and elsewhere in the first century. If James had spun his treatment of this case further, it is likely that he would have suggested that the poor person that enters should have been given a place of honor. However, James does not do so, but opts to elaborate on ethical and theological aspects of the evaluation of the case in Jas 2.8–13.

Having noted this, attention may be drawn to a number of further texts from James, which can be related to the early Imperial discourse on symposia.

3.2. *Appropriate Speech*

The issue of appropriate speech, especially with regard to controlling one's tongue, is referred to a number of times in James. In an introductory way, this happens in Jas 1.19, 26, and it is discussed in much more detail, drawing heavily on (Jewish) Hellenistic traditions, in 3.1–12.[65] It is worthwhile to consider, however, *where* this appropriate and inappropriate speaking should take place. It may of course be that James' reference here is to slander or uncontrolled teaching, or speech in general, which is certainly covered by what he says,[66] but the start of his argument, which refers to διδάσκαλοι, suggests something different and indicates a more formal setting for this kind of speech.[67] Given that teaching was wont

63 See e.g. Garleff, *Identität*, 256; Martin, *James*, 63–8; see esp. Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 371–6, on the theological background. See also Mussner, *Jakobusbrief*, 120, 'Jetzt ist nicht mehr reich, wer goldene Ringe an den Fingern trägt und in prächtigen Kleidern umherschreitet, sondern wer von Gott erwählt ist'.

64 In this context, it is not necessary to consider (all) those covered by the remark about blaspheming the name (Jas 2.9) as members of the congregation; rather generic behavior by the rich, which stands in contradiction to the saving name referred to here, is in view. The blaspheming in question is behavior contradicting the ethical code implied by the name; at least, that seems to be the flow of the argument here.

65 See on the place of this section in the entire epistle, e.g. Martin, *James*, 103–7. On the traditional background, see e.g. Popkes, *Brief*, 217, esp. also the considerations of and the parallels presented by Dibelius, *Brief*, 222–49.

66 So e.g. Konradt, *Existenz*, 274–80.

67 With an obviously Jewish background, see e.g. the exemplary comments of Hartin, *James*, 173.

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to occur in the context of a symposium—Smith terms such occasions 'philosophical banquets'—[68], this aspect of James can again be related to a symposiastic setting. With regard to this, it is probably not without significance that in other (Jewish) Hellenistic literature, the topic of appropriate speech, including teaching, is not infrequently discussed precisely in the context of discussions of meal fellowship. Examples of this include Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa*, where among other things the speech and teaching of precisely Plato's protagonists in the *Symposium* and the Therapeutae are compared and contrasted,[69] and especially also Sirach 32, a chapter providing instruction about appropriate behaviour at a festive meal (cf. Sir 32.1).[70] The following quotation from Sirach 32 may provide a good account of the interrelationship between symposia and appropriate speech, even if the background of the metaphors used in Jas 3.1–11 is broader:[71]

> [3]Speak, you who are older, for it is your right, but with accurate knowledge, and do not interrupt the music. [4]Where there is entertainment, do not pour out talk; do not display your cleverness at the wrong time… [7]Speak, you who are young, if you are obliged to, but no more than twice, and only if asked. [8]Be brief; say much in few words; be as one who knows and can still hold his tongue. [9]Among the great do not act as their equal; and when another is speaking, do not babble. [10]Lightning travels ahead of the thunder, and approval goes before one who is modest… [12]Amuse yourself there to your heart's content, but do not sin through proud speech. [13]But above all bless your Maker, who fills you with his good gifts. (NRSV)

Examples from non-Jewish (Christian) literature may be added here.[72] The reason why appropriate speech at a symposium is considered so important is that it is one of the ways in which community can be built up or, conversely, destroyed.[73] This applies to uncontrolled speech in general, but probably specifically to irresponsible and, as James may indicate, competitive,[74] teaching. While

68 See Smith, *Symposium*, 47–66. See further on discussion as a possible form of entertainment also Ezio Pellizer, 'Outlines of a Morphology of Sympotic Entertainment', *Sympotica* (ed. Murray) 177–84.

69 See Philo, *Contempl.* 57–9, 75–9.

70 It may be observed with e.g. Smith, *Symposium*, 138, that music and other entertainment could have the same structural value for a symposium as table talk.

71 On various aspects, see e.g. Burchard, *Jakobusbrief*, 138–44, Hartin, *James*, 173–81.

72 See e.g. the references listed by Konradt, *Existenz*, 275, and Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 491.

73 See e.g. Smith, *Symposium*, 50–4; for James, this is not the primary issue, as e.g. Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 483–4, underlines, given that James is primarily concerned with the veracity of speech and the agreement between teaching and walk of life.

74 See the considerations of Konradt, *Existenz*, 274–5 n. 42, who draws attention to the fact that being a teacher implies a position of prominence, which is related to the theme of honor in the rest of the letter. Similarly: Davids, *James*, 136.

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the reference to teaching and teachers already implies a communal setting, the interrelationship of the symposium and speech suggests that what James has to say on this subject may well be related specifically to appropriate speech at the community's common meal, during which both teaching and conversation could take place. In fact, it may even be imagined that a letter such as James' would be read out in such a setting. At the very least, the background of the discussion of appropriate speech, including teaching, in contemporary discussions of meal fellowship may further the understanding of Jas 3.1–12 by drawing attention to the relationship between appropriate speech and responsible teaching and the building up of a community.

3.3. *Conflict and Fellowship*

Whereas intellectual discourse and discussion were highly valued in symposiastic settings—depending on the context as much or even more than dance and music—,[75] the opposite is the case with community-disrupting conflicts and disputes. Given that James addresses precisely these issues in 4.1–17, it is worthwhile to explore whether there might be a relationship between that pericope which focuses on the destructive results of out-of-control passions and contemporary thought on meal fellowship.

Among authors writing about the symposium, it is commonplace that a meal should be a well-ordered whole, since it is only as an εὐκοσμία that a table can truly function as a 'maker of friends'[76] and thus bring about fellowship. Various kinds of out-of-control behavior were, therefore, not appreciated, nor was anything else that would potentially disrupt the community. An example of uncontrolled or irresponsible speech has been discussed above. In treatments of conflicts at the symposium, it is commonplace also to relate these to a lack of control over one's passions or to a lack of self-control in general, as also happens in other instances of uncontrolled behavior[77]—drunkenness, which was typically not approved of, is but one example of this.[78]

75 See Smith, *Symposium*, 47–66.

76 See e.g. *Mor.* 149A-B, 158C, 621C, even if these friendships should be thought of in pragmatic, rather than emotional terms (see: Plutarch *Mor.* 616A, see *Mor.* 660B-C). On equality and Roman meals in general, see D'Arms, '*Convivium*', 308–20, who notes that another Roman poet, Statius (*Silv.* 1.43–45; see Juvenal *Sat.* 2.110) praises these banquets of Domitian, whereas Augustus was known for organizing his *cenae rectae* (formal dinners) strictly according to social hierarchy; see e.g. Suetonius *Aug.* 75, comp. Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.4.28.

77 See esp. the discussion by Konradt, *Existenz*, 85–100, as well as Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 583–5 and Mussner, *Jakobusbrief*, 177–8.

78 Slater, 'Ethics', 214–5, the classical example of this kind of ὕβρις being the unhappy ending of the wedding celebration of Peirithoos and Hippodameia to which the Centaurs had been invited and who get drunk (see Homer *Od.* 21.295–304). Slater himself proposes convincingly that in the Odyssey a contrast is made between the ideal symposium of the Phaeacians on the one hand (*Od.* 8) and the celebrations of Penelope's suitors, all through the Odyssey. Such

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Against this background, the fact that some members of the community apparently speak evil of others (Jas 4.11) stands out as an obvious contradiction to the purpose of a successful symposium, especially as slander is also related to the question of appropriate speech, as was discussed above. This observation may add an additional element to the understanding of James' argument in 4.11–12; if slandering can be understood as a form of betrayal, the outrage that was generally felt about that may also speak to Jas 4.11–12.[79]

While Jas 4.1–17 is not a symposium, the topics that are being discussed there, as the background of James' concern for the life of the community that he addresses, can be understood well against the background of contemporary discussions of symposia and the community that should result from them, as well as of phenomena that stood in the way of this, i.e. unruly passions and resulting disorderly behavior and conflict.

3.4. *The Structure of the Community*

The common meal and the organization or structure of a community were closely interrelated in voluntary associations.[80] Surviving statutes of various Hellenistic societies provide ample illustration of this.[81] This is of obvious

disorderly conduct was closely associated with symposia, especially with those associated with *collegia* (see e.g. Plato *Leg.* 2.671A; Plutarch *Alc.* 4.4–6; Athenaeus *Deipn.* 12.534E-F).

79 Betrayal in the context of a meal is betrayal at a high level of intimacy; see the association with Ps 41.10 in John 13.18. This may have been appreciated thus in a wide cultural circle: betrayal by a friend could be regarded as worse than an enemy's insult (see Lysias *Or.* 6.23; 8.5–6; Chariton *Chaer.* 5.6.2; Cornelius Nepos *Lib. Ex.* 14.6.3, 11.5; Sir 22.21–22; *Test. Jud.* 23.3); the higher the degree of intimacy, the worse the betrayal (see Cicero *Rosc. Amer.* 40.116). See for disgust for traitors of their people: Xenophon *Hell.* 1.7.22; Cicero *Fin.* 3.9.32; Virgil *Aen.* 6.621; Livy *Urb. Cond.* 1.11.6–7; 5.27.6–10; Valerius Maximus *Dict.* 1.1.13; Seneca *Controv.* 7.7; Cornelius Nepos *Lib. Ex.* 4.4. What may well be in the background as well are the strong bonds established especially by hospitality and guest friendship (see e.g. Lysias *Or.* 12.24; 18.10, Plutarch *Cor.* 10.3; Cicero *Fam.* 13.19, 25, and 36). For guest friendship and for the rejection of unkindness/violence against those who had shared the same table see: Homer *Il.* 21.76; *Od.* 4.534–5; 11.414–20; 14.404–95; Hesiod *Op.* 327; Euripides *Cycl.* 1126–28; *Hec.* 25–6, 710–20, 850–6; Ovid *Metam.* 1.144; 10.225–8; Livy *Urb. Cond.* 25.16.6. See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003) 912–13; Jean Delorme, 'Le dernier repas de Jésus dans le texte. Mc 14, 16–25', *Nourriture et Repas dans les milieux juifs et chrétiens de l'antiquité* (ed. Michel Quesnel, Yves-Marie Blanchard, and Claude Tassin; LD 178; FS Charles Perrot; Paris: Cerf, 1999) 111–12.

80 At the very least someone was needed to preside over the meal, for example the *pater familias*. At a symposium the leader of the symposium did not need to be the host. Depending on the kind and the scale of the meal, there were more or fewer officers; the aim of their functions is expressed well by the title 'εὔκοσμος', referring to one of these functions. See Schmeller, *Hierarchie*, 43.

81 See in general the considerations of Ebel, *Attraktivität*; Smith, *Symposium*; and further Schmeller, *Hierarchie*; Claussen, *Versammlung*.

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relevance for the study of early Christian communities. In James, reference is twice made to officers.[82] First, Jas 3.1 refers to teachers in such a way that one is led to think that this is a kind of officially recognized office.[83] Second, Jas 5.14 mentions matter-of-factly *the* elders of the community who have to perform a particular task among the sick.[84] On their own, these two instances do not establish any close connection with a Eucharistic celebration or any other meal for that matter.[85] In the case of Jas 3.1, however, it has been indicated above already that the question of appropriate speech and teaching can plausibly be related to a symposiastic setting. The reference to the elders in Jas 5.14 may also be understood as a reference to the officers of a community that James presupposes,[86] which was, most likely, organized in a way akin to Hellenistic voluntary associations (to some extent including synagogues)[87] with their systems of offices and office-bearers,[88] which typically involved meals. While this does not turn Jas 5.14–16 into a meal scene, it does increase the likelihood that meals played a role of importance for the community to which James wrote, which is of relevance for what has already been argued above.

82 See e.g. Burchard, 'Gemeinde', 318–19. That may be comparable to synagogue officers or officers of other voluntary associations, see e.g. James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992) 228–357; see also e.g. Davids, *James*, 191–3; the remark that back then there was no 'Amt in unserem Sinne' (Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 483, see also 487–8) is both misleading (there were offices and officers indeed) and superfluous. Also his argument that, on the one hand, the reference to teachers in 3.1 and elders in 5.14 offers no indication as to the sociological structure of the community addressed by James, and on the other hand that 'die griechische Gerusia, bzw. der jüdische Orts- und Synagogenvorstand als Modell einer kollegial-patriarchalen Presbyterordnung' play a role (Frankemölle, *Jakobus*, 710), fails to convince, given that the argument contradicts itself.

83 See e.g. Martin, *James*, 104–5.

84 See e.g. Gerlaff, *Identität*, 315.

85 So also e.g. Gerlaff, *Identität*, 313.

86 See e.g. Mussner, *Jakobusbrief*, the 'Bezeichnung als "die Ältesten der Gemeinde" im Jak-Brief setzt das Ältesten-Institut in den Lesergemeinden als bekannt voraus'.

87 See Albert Baumgarten, 'Graeco-Roman Voluntary Associations and Ancient Jewish Sects', *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (ed. Martin Goodman; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 93–112. See also: Burtchaell, *Synagogue*, as well as John M. G. Barclay, 'Money and Meetings: Group Formation among Diaspora Jews and Early Christians', *Vereine* (ed. Gutsfeld and Koch) 113–27; Peter Richardson, 'Early Synagogues as Collegia in the Diaspora and Palestine', *Associations* (ed. Kloppenborg and Wilson) 90–109. Burtchaell, *Synagogue*, while rightly underlining the institutional character of even the earliest Christian communities (esp. 272–357), overemphasizes the importance of the synagogue, giving the impression that early Christian communities simply adopted this specific form of organization, while ignoring the importance of voluntary associations.

88 See for an overview with regard to Jas 5 e.g. Sigurd Kaiser, *Krankenheilung. Untersuchungen zur Form, Sprache und Aussage zu Jak 5, 13–18* (WMANT 112; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006) 112–16.

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4. Concluding Observations

On the basis of these observations, it can be concluded that, with regard to a considerable number of elements from James, it is plausible to interpret them against the background of, or in the context of, a symposiastically organized community. The reason for this may well be that the meal is, for James, as for many other contemporary authors, the locus of the most fundamental enactment of a community and its values. Hence, a distortion of the authentic etiquette, as is the case in James 2 (and also where there are judicial or other conflicts between members of the community, or slander or other inappropriate speech) implies the distortion of the community's ethics and ecclesiology. While James does not necessarily talk about meals (even though this can be argued for Jas 2), what he does talk about can well be related to the thought-world of a group that is organized around meals and expressed its corporate identity through them.

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