

Article

The First Apocalypse of James in a Socio-Linguistic Perspective: Three Greek and Coptic Versions from Ancient Monastic Egypt

David W. Kim ^{1,2,3} 

¹ Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA; david.kim@anu.edu.au

² Historical Studies, College of General Education, Kookmin University, Seoul 02707, Republic of Korea

³ School of History, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra 2601, Australia

Abstract: The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC) in 1945 rates as one of the two most profound occurrences for Biblical archaeology and interpretation during the last hundred years, along with the Dead Sea Scrolls (1946–1956). The codices allow us to document Christian monastic culture, gnostic Christianity and gnostic offshoots in the desert climate of Late Ancient Egypt. The recovery of the related Codex Tchacos (CT) brought further excitement for contemporary readers by 2006, it being sensational that narratives of “Judas the betrayer” and “doubting Thomas” were found in the whole collection of writings. The text named the [*First*] *Apocalypse of James*, significantly, was found to be in both NHC and CT in different Coptic versions (from near the sacred sites of Chenoboskion and El Minya), but yet another more fragmentary version in Greek had turned up much earlier among the huge cache of papyri found at Oxyrhynchus (also, like the other places, on the banks of the Nile). Given the opportunity for comparison, what distinguishes the three versions? Does comparative analysis better tell us what this ancient text is about? Does the strong presence of Gnostic Christian insights in the Coptic texts still imply a historical Jamesian community is being honoured? This paper concentrates on three comparable passages in the three versions that apparently contain historical memories of James and his followers. It works on the reasonable hypothesis that the Greek version of Oxyrhynchus Papyri (P.Oxy. 5533) (hereafter = PO) is prior and read with different purposes than the two Coptic translated versions of CT (CT 2.10–30) and NHC (NHC V,3. 24–44). When a critical approach, involving a socio-linguistic comparison, is applied, we will see that the three versions of the text were not directly related to each other, but that narratives about James the Just were available to desert monastics from the second century CE. The paper argues for a literal transmission of traditions from a Jewish Christian community around James into Egypt, that the textual figure of James in the Oxyrhynchus fragments points to a ‘mutual familiarity’ between PO and CT, while the NHC tradition of James has been further elaborated by processes of compilation and addition.

Keywords: P.Oxy. 5533; Codex Tchacos; Nag Hammadi Codex; Gnostics; monasticism; Egypt



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1. Introduction

The hot and dry desert of Egypt was a common space for ancient ascetic communities seeking to maintain their belief or promulgate their teachings in the context of a remote life (Gabra and Takla 2015; Sheridan 2012; Goehring 1999). While Ein Feshkha, on the West Bank (now between Israel and Palestine), was a wilderness region where the sacred Jewish manuscript collections of the Dead Sea Scrolls were stored, mostly during the first century CE, along the banks of the Nile in the south of Egypt lay sites of various monastic movements from the second century onwards, with the best known monasteries being those of Shenaset (Chenoboskion), the White Monastery (Boud’hors et al. 2022), Tmoushons, and that of Pachomius (Lundhaug and Jenott 2018). These centres not only show the continuance of Greek (Ptolemaic) cultures in late Antique Egypt, but also the flourishing of

Coptic (especially Christian) literature, and, to a limited degree, Latin and Arabic learning, down to the sixth century (Magness 2002; Binning 2022, pp. 293–310; Choat and Giorda 2017). The burgeoning finds of Christian manuscripts of Late Antiquity brought a fresh wind of discovery for modern readers, and even from the end of the nineteenth century, important documents were showing up to prefigure the later, more spectacular finds of post-War times.

The archaeo-papyrological excavations of Bernard Grenfell (1869–1926) and Arthur Hunt (1871–1934), by two British classical scholars in cooperation with the Egypt Exploration Society, uncovered numerous religious manuscripts on papyri from Oxyrhynchus about 160 km south of Cairo near the Bahr Yussef branch of the Nile. Among the multitude of private and public (usually fragmentary) documents found there in 1898—edicts, petitions, codes, registers, wills, census returns, official correspondence, tax assessments, court records, sales, bills, accounts, leases, horoscopes, inventories, and private letters (Rathbone 2009, pp. 49–53)—were found parts of hitherto unknown Gospels and Gnostic Christian writings, including one (denoted 5533 and temporarily left neglected) that related to James. The whole papyrus corpus has ongoing consequences, because less than two percent of the half-million fragments that were uncovered have been professionally examined so far (Rathbone 2009, pp. 49–53; Smith and Landau 2021, pp. 3–13), with the latest series of finds (numbered LXXXVII) being published in 2023.

Throwing light on these fragments, although outstanding in their own right, came the discovery of those Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC), rocking Biblical scholarship in 1945. These thirteen leather-bound padded-cover papyrus codices included 52 early Christian and Gnostic (including Gnostic Christian) treatises. The historical existence of the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was then known only through the testimonies of the Fathers Hippolytus and Origen, was unveiled at that time through the Coptic version (NHC II,2: 32,10–51,28 in the so-called Jung Codex). This was followed by the recognition that three Oxyrhynchus fragments, P.Oxy. 1, 654, and 655, were Greek fragments of the same gospel (Bernhard 2006, pp. 16–48). However, the “doubting Thomas” in terms of textual reliability could not resist the criticism of their being a Christian Gnostic invention (Kohn 2004, pp. 105–17), generating the conclusion, which becomes a working assumption of the paper, that desert monasticism was taken up by Gnostic or gnosticizing Christians, and that we cannot presume these codices were only works discarded by orthodox monks as too heretical to keep in their libraries.

A third surprising discovery came with the Codex Tchacos (Askeland 2021, pp. 299–314; Bethge and Brankaer 2007), bound Egyptian papyri emerging from the Jabal Qarara region of El Minya, Middle Egypt, in the late 1970s, and only made available to scholars in 2006 after decades of struggle with local and international dealers. The book of 66 pages enclosed four Gnostic tractates, together responding to personages known from the New Testament from a “unique” perspective (De Conick 2009, pp. 243, 255), probably used as Scripture by a marginal Gnostic Christian group and not necessarily monastic. The texts of the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (CT 1.1–9) and the *First Apocalypse of James* (=1 Apoc. Jas.) (CT 2.10–32) did not surprise any serious reader because they were already known through NHC VIII,2 and NHC V,3. While the fragment of the *Book of Allogenes* that was enclosed was different from the Nag Hammadi work of the same name (NHC XI,3), the Coptic *Gospel of Judas* (CT 3.33–58), previously only referenced in the polemic against the Cainites by Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 180) and Epiphanius of Cyprus (370s), was a hot topic in the 2000s (Jenott 2011). Trompf and Kim approached this document with the understanding that “Judas is thus this gospel’s hero: in his betrayal he makes the necessary ‘sacrifice’ of a body connected to Jesus for redemption to occur, the only worthy sacrifice in a sea of other (Jewish and ordinary Christian) ones”. It was the only work in CT without a parallel in NHC, and the former collection, carbon-dated to the 280s, over a hundred years before the latter, larger cache was “thought to be transcribed by Christian monks” in fourth- and fifth-century desert Egypt (Trompf and Kim 2018, pp. 180, 183).

Meanwhile, in the midst of an additional shock surrounding the so-called *Gospel of Jesus's Wife*, which turned out to contain a forgery at the crucial Coptic passage (*GJW Recto 4*) (Kim 2015), the Oxyrhynchus papyri tagged 5533, or what became the third version of the *First Apocalypse of James (1 Apoc. Jas.)*, was 're-discovered' on three leaves in 2017 by Geoffrey Smith and Brent Landau after Papyrus specialist Dirk Obbink selected it for study in America from the massive Grenfell–Hunt collection preserved at the University of Oxford (Moss 2017; University Communications 2017). P.Oxy. 5533, which offered a Greek version of *1 Apoc. Jas.* recently published in the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri LXXXVI* volume of 2021, shed a curious light on quite contextually specific personal revelations of Jesus to James the Just (Smith and Landau 2021, pp. 3–13). Something of the character of the Jewish Christian community formed by the legacy of James, the 'brother' of Jesus, can be better traced back from these Greek leaves to a second-century Christian[–Gnostic?] monastic setting (Lundhaug and Jenott 2015, 2018).

This paper seeks to examine select passages from the three versions of *1 Apoc. Jas.* and to explore the socio-linguistic characteristics of the three versions as they pertain to apparent historical reminiscences of the ancient James community, or at least to create a space in which three distinct narrative episodes covered in the three versions can be examined comparatively to see how they might reflect earlier historical traditions held by the ancient James community, and how and whether each version has transformed the James traditions for newer theological or gnosticizing purposes. The critical analysis that follows is based on the Greek fragments as primary, comparing them to the two Coptic ones as secondary, and this paper proposes that the three sets of James narrations we compare are retained in three textual genres that are independent of each other. The relevant texts in P.Oxy. 5533 and the Tchacos versions, though, seem closer to each other, and they would have been assimilated into a Gnostic society or ethos in similar ways. The relevant James traditions of NHC V,3 were written later, with additions from a compilation of sources, and the narration was adapted to bolster Christian Gnostic theological perspectives. The Coptic TC and NHC versions, we argue, actually better reflect the origination of these narratives in Jewish Christian culture, for in comparison to P.Oxy. 5533, the traces of changes to earlier traditions are clearer.

2. James in Three Textual Traditions

Non-canonical narratives about James, we should recognize, appear in as many as seven apocryphal texts of early Christianity.¹ Among them, *1 Apoc. Jas.* contains various discourses between Jesus and James, the latter apparently being considered a step-brother of Jesus (Funk 2007, pp. 321–30). The work as a whole—although only CT and NHC are in a good enough state to provide us with a relatively complete picture—can be divided into two parts: one surrounding the pre-passion Jesus, and the other surrounding the risen Jesus (Gianotto 2008, pp. 531–41). While the text begins with James's testimony, providing a recollection of Jesus's instructional teachings on "Him-who-is", femaleness, and redemption, the rest of Jesus' sayings are responses to the questions by James on mystical subjects, such as archons, hebdomads, the 72 heavens, powers, hosts, redemption, faith, sufferings, multitude, the Pre-existent One, and the figure of Addai (Pedersen 2018), as well as burnt offerings and knowledge (Edwards 2013, pp. 65–79). The final narrative in the text is not a conversation between Jesus and James but more a depiction by Jesus for James' sake of imminent conflict and division between two different groups, for which reason, it seems, James abruptly leaves the place. While many gleams of Gnosticism shine through the whole tract (Lewis 2013), as if Jesus mostly has to warn James about aeonic or archontic powers to be faced when he dies (especially Sophia and her son Achamoth) and not mere earthly challenges, various allusions in the text evoke the literary(–historical) figure of James ('brother' of Jesus, in tradition known as 'the Just,') who appears in the New Testament [e.g., 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 2:9–12; Acts 15:13; Jas.]. In response to what Jesus declares, James shows his emotional condition (stress, sorrow, and anger) over Jesus' supposed death and his own forthcoming martyrdom: "When James heard. . . and was much distressed",

“he wiped away the tears in his eyes and [was] very bitter”, and “James heard of his [sufferings] and was grieved” (CT [sect.] 17 [Kasser and Wurst edn. as most accessible, p. 117]). *1 Apoc. Jas.* is laced with 14 longer sayings of Jesus that are directed to James and virtually all of them seem saturated with special Gnostic purport (with four of the sayings being elucidated), and they stand in contrast in the presentation to the *Gospel of Thomas*, with its 114 unelucidated and less gnosticized Jesus *logia* (Kim 2021), but behind the Jesus/James conversations there lurk narrative details apparently reflecting much earlier traditions about James, inferably preserved by his community. These narrations, embedded in the later passages of CT and NHC, are all interestingly preserved in the earliest and Greek text of *1 Apoc. Jas.* of P.Oxy. 5533.

None of the three versions of *1 Apoc. Jas.* are preserved in completion. The Nag Hammadi text, even if in eleven fragmented parts, contains more of the whole apocalypse, although the ends of NHC V, 3. 37 and 39–43 are in a state that makes it well-nigh impossible to recover their sentences satisfactorily (Funk 2007, pp. 321–32). The CT find is better preserved, but sections of CT 2.13, 14, 24 and the last part of CT 2. 29–30 are damaged, and the context of the text cannot be reconstructed (Kasser and Wurst 2007, pp. 121–61; Funk 2007). The Greek version (See Figure 1), though apparently only parts of a whole, is valuable for our purposes—the Oxyrhynchus Papyri 5533 comprises three papyrus fragments named A, C, and H (Smith and Landau 2021). This greyer ink manuscript is about 13 cm wide and 14–15 cm tall, written by a single hand in the fourth or fifth century, and the Greek fragments were once presumed to be the work of a junior scribe, given the uncorrected errors and omissions in “accents, breathings, diaereses, sense breaks, and elision” (Smith and Landau 2021, pp. 3–4). These failures of an inattentive copyist are interpreted to be part of an educational context in which young scribes were trained to produce exact reproductions of early Christian manuscripts in ancient Egypt (ibid., pp. 4–5). The inconsistencies in the linguistic structure of the Greek text were thought to represent “a teacher’s mode to help students learn to read and write”. The regular application of mid-dots in this Greek James text is actually unique among ancient manuscripts (Moss 2017). An important point is, of course, that the Greek text has clearly been copied from a Greek text that we can cautiously hypothesize, for working purposes, was older than the CT and NHC versions, which were, as most fairly deduce, Coptic translations of earlier Greek versions (or copies of earlier such translations) that are probably (but may not be) earlier than P.Oxy. 5533’s source. This paper focuses on the narratives in P.Oxy. 5533 (Leaves A, G, and H) and on those parallel parts in the Coptic versions of CT 2.16–17 and 24–26 and NHC V, 3.29–30 and 37–39, and it is thus a piece homing in on the question of the residual traditions of a very early Jamesian community.

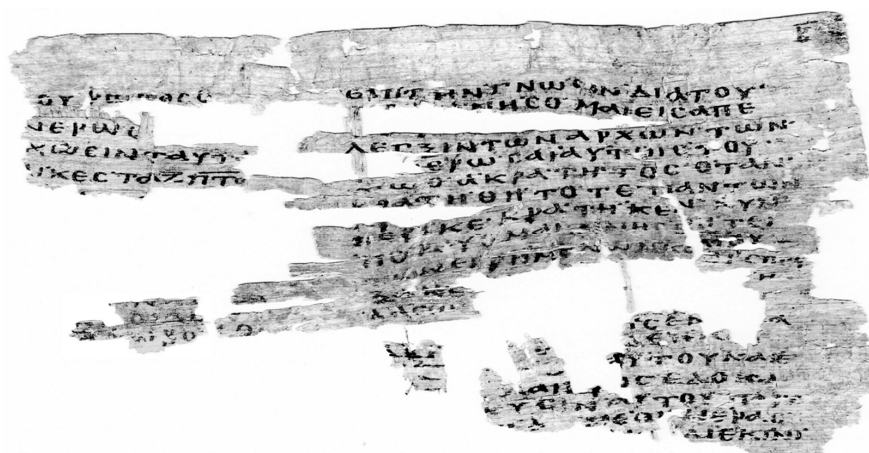


Figure 1. P.Oxy. 5533, Leaf A (a Greek fragment of the First Apocalypse of James).

Socio-linguistic analysis suggests the independent character of the three different versions, but in the Greek text leading up to the narrations, James has Biblical-sounding

revelations granted to him by Jesus in the less distinctly Gnostic terms of “knowledge”, “hidden”, “foresight”, “these things concealed”, and “seven spirits”, which we suggest most reflect, in all three versions, the Jewish Christian community from which the narratives, in our view, originally derived. The Tchacos James writer was detectably familiar with the Oxyrhynchus James (or something like it) and attuned it for his group’s purposes. This is why it has been useful to have the Greek text to help reconstruct small, damaged parts of the Coptic text (CT 2.16–17); indeed, modern editing has allowed two segments to be fairly added to the recently published CT text (Kasser and Wurst 2007, pp. 115–61). The kind of adaptation or culturo-linguistic transformation that was discerned for CT has already been previously spotted in other cases where we have both Greek and Coptic texts to compare. For three examples, note also how the Berlin Codex and Nag Hammadi *Sophia of Jesus Christ* can be re-evaluated in light of P.Oxy VIII 1081; the Berlin and NHC Codices of *The Gospel of Mary* can be re-evaluated in view of two Greek texts of P.Oxy L 3525 and Papyrus Rylands 463 (Smith and Landau 2021, p. 5); and the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, in a limited way, can be re-evaluated considering the three Greek fragments of P.Oxy. 1, 654, and 655. If we can draw out special changes to James’ narrations in CT, Candida Moss (2017) deduces the same for the NHC version. She proposes a culture of socio-linguistic transmission, such that “[early] Christian writings were not static, but living texts subject to change”. Indeed, changes in the NHC 1 *Apoc. Jas.* version indicate how the James tradition was dramatically developed in an Egyptian monastic society (Lundhaug and Jenott 2018; Wipszycka 2018). The following comparative study of three distinct narrative traditions of James show how they underwent textual development, signalled by new ideological additions, editing, and alterations.

Table 1 presents two illustrative moments in our first chosen text cluster, one of which concerns James’ reaction to intimations of Jesus’ passion, after the latter has reassured him of his power and knowledge over the “rulers” (or archons) and that James has no need to be distressed, after which Jesus leaves (1–1 and 1–2). These versions subtly prefigure James’ own death (as was implied earlier, e.g., in NHC V,3,25), implying James’ leadership in bringing others to faith and comforting him in his “initial distress” (Reaves 2019, p. 49; see Parkhouse 2021, pp. 61–65). This text cluster amounts to a relatively undeveloped narration, with the sayings of Jesus primarily elicited through the questions of James, without describing any spatial setting (Edwards 2013, pp. 65–79). Admitting that P.Oxy. 5533 is more damaged and fragmentary, and CT 2.16–17 and NHC V,3,29–30 are better preserved, we can spot verbal developments in the latter versions. Thus, we can see that the terms of “this” (PO.1–1) is altered to “this reason” (CT.1–1) to indicate the assurances of James’ deliverance; and both CT.1–1 and NHC.1–1 developed the key phrase in PO.1–1 (“to show them this”) into “and I shall reveal to them”. The first-person pronoun of PO.1–1 is missing in the phrase “that have been said”, but the CT.1–1 and NHC.1–1 change this, with a stronger tone, to “what I have said” and “I have told you”. The CT.1–2 and NHC.1–2 accentuate James’ resolution more firmly, following up with the narration of Jesus’s departure. Both Coptic texts pinpoint and provide the name “James (Ἰακκω βος)”, and the NHC narrator created an additional farewell scene, adding “the master said good-bye to him”.

The second moment or episode that follows concerns a more specifically located Jesus/James encounter, with Jesus suddenly reappearing while James was walking yet involved in a scheduled prayer with his disciples and explains the real meaning of his passion (see above Table 1, 1–3 and 1–4) (Funk 2007, pp. 321–32; Mattison 2023). James has been distressed about Jesus’ talk about his sufferings (expressed as τὰ πάθη αὐτοῦ in OP.1–3), and now he will learn his word’s true meaning. Actually, in one unusual exposition of 1 *Apoc. Jas.*, Mark Mattison (2023, p. 5) interprets OP’s Greek phrase to refer to Jesus’s physical sacrifice: “Jesus left James in order to be crucified so that his physical body would die”. This looks to be a pre-Gnostic detail. As for differences between the versions and changes made, note how in the OP and CT texts Jesus returned in “two days”, while the NHC tradition is less clear (“some days”). This could reflect that the Egyptian monastic communities

that were sources of the OP and CT texts were familiar with each other, given Smith and Landau’s previous arguments for the bilingual similarity of the two texts (see Gruber 2003). On the other hand, there are peculiarities of the CT version that need to be reckoned with here. The narrator of CT.1–3 wants to stress that it was Jesus’ suffering rather than his own that motivates James’ anxieties, saying, “And it was this alone that he had [to] console himself (ΜΟΝΟΝ ΔΕ ΠΑΙ ΜΑΟΥΛΛΑϞ ΠΕΤΕΟΥΝΤΑϞΑϞ ΜΜΑϞ ΕΣΟΛϞΑ ΝΖΗΤῘ ΕΤΕ)”. The two American scholars Geoffrey Smith and Brent Landau have supposed that this phrase was dropped in the PO and NHC texts because of a *saut du même au même* case (literally, an unsatisfactory stylistic ‘jump from the same to the same’ in French) (Smith and Landau 2021, p. 11). If that is true, and the scribes of the PO and the NHC versions applied the same policy, the CT copyist may have had a different Greek text, or perhaps just accepted the decision of the community leader extolling the Tchacos ‘scriptures’ (see above). Following the same principle, we should ask why CT texts amplified Jesus’ reappearing “all of a sudden (ΖῆΝ ΤΜΗΤΕ ΔΕ ΖῆΝ ΟΥΨΟΝΕ)”, a phrase not included either in the PO or NHC texts. Generally, the PO and CT texts are similar, but again that does not mean that they share the same Greek text; remember that the actual papyrus of the Greek we have (as PO) is dated later than Coptic Codex Tchacos, even though both PO and TC can be said to presuppose earlier Greek copies (or Greek originals from some unknown dates!).

Table 1. P.Oxy. 5533 (Leaf A) with two Coptic texts.

Texts	Context
P.Oxy. 5533 (Leaf A)	PO.1–1: ↓ ‘to knowledge. Because of this I shall appear for the refutation of the rulers to show them this: the one who cannot be grasped, when he is grasped, then he has prevailed over all. Now I am going. Remember the things that have been said and let [them] grow in you’.
	PO.1–2: “I shall take pains. . . ” . . . [and] he prepared what was necessary.
	PO.1–3: [James] heard of [his sufferings] and was [troubled] and waited for his coming. He arrived after [two] days [and behold, James] was going to the mountain called <i>Golgoul</i> with [his own] pupils who gladly heard him [and] had him for comfort, saying “[This] is the second teacher”. And behold, the crowd was scattered . . . was left [alone] . . . pray. . . to him the Lord . . . [Ceasing] the prayer, he went to take him,
	PO.1–4: saying this: “[Rabbi,] I have you. I heard what [you suffered and] I was troubled”.
CT 2.16.15–17.25	CT.1–1: to knowledge. And for this reason I shall [appear] in order to rebuke the rulers, [and I] [shall] reveal to them that there is one who cannot be grasped. When he is grasped, then he becomes strong. So now I shall go. Remember <i>what I have said</i> , and let it grow within you’.
	CT.1–2: (James:) “I shall make every effort, Rabbi, to do as you have said”. And Jesus left and prepared what was destined for him.
	CT.1–3: James heard about his sufferings, and he was deeply distressed and awaited his coming. <i>And it was this alone that he had [to] console himself</i> —waiting for this coming. And <i>two days</i> passed, and look, James was performing his duties upon the [mountain] called “ <i>Galge[la]m</i> ”. [---] there [---] with his disciples [who] listened to him willingly. And they had him as a comforter, saying, “This is the second master”. And look, they dispersed, and J[am]es remained behind by himself and prayed a great deal, as was his custom. <i>And all of a sudden</i> Jesus appeared to him, and he stopped praying and began to embrace him,
	CT.1–4: saying this: “Rabbi, I withdrew from you. I heard what you endured, and I was greatly distressed”.
NHC V, 3. 29.25–30.9	NHC.1–1: [. . .]. And after this I shall appear to rebuke the rulers, and I shall reveal to them that there is one who is invincible. If that one is seized, he will seize all of them. But now I shall go. Remember the things <i>I have told you</i> , and let them enter your heart’.
	NHC.1–2: <i>James said</i> , “Master, I shall hurry to do as you have said”. <i>The master said good-bye to him</i> , and he fulfilled what was fitting.
	NHC.1–3: When James heard of the master’s sufferings, he was deeply distressed. They were waiting for the sign of his coming, and it came after <i>some days</i> . James was walking on the mountain called <i>Gaugela</i> , along with his disciples, who still listened to him with desire. They had a comforter, and they said, “This is the second [teacher]”. The crowd dispersed, but James remained [behind and] prayed . . . , as was his custom. The master appeared to him. He stopped praying, embraced him, kissed him,
	NHC.1–4: saying, “Rabbi, I’ve found you. I heard of the sufferings you endured, and I was greatly troubled”.

For this re-appearance episode, the Nag Hammadi scribe added a few new aspects, including a “sign” and a “kiss”, as if sprucing up what we have in the OP narration, which has “[Ceasing] the prayer, he (James) went to take him (Jesus)”, NHC reads instead: “He (James) stopped praying, embraced him (Jesus), kissed him”. Regarding such scribal interference, Julio Dias Chaves presumes that the “product of a Coptic compilation (NHC V) [is] . . . not directly linked to the Greek original context of composition”, with the reproduction, which he believes “necessarily took place from the fourth century on”, being far removed from the time of any James tradition’s inception, let alone any possible corresponding event in New Testament times (Dias Chaves 2016, p. 240). Therefore, the kiss may simply be an embellishment, or the late supplying of additional detail. The humanizing image of Jesus embracing and kissing James, admittedly, was once thought to stem from “a remnant of Jewish Christian anti-Paulinism”, but the Greek text does not support this view, as it is without emotional features (Schoedel 1991, pp. 158–61). A reference point in all three versions (PO.1–4; CT.1–4; NHC.1–4), though, that could take us back to a primitive Christian context, lies with James’ expression of excitement at either simply finding Jesus or because Jesus *re*-appeared to him, apparently after his resurrection. Each of the three versions have James exclaiming the term “Rabbi”, which may well derive from ancient communities following the historical James as a Jewish Christian community, which would explain its prominent use earlier in *1 Apoc. Jas.*, as in NHC V,3,25–26 (Reaves 2019, pp. 48–53). For this episodic segment, the Greek and Coptic versions are all in good condition, and that is why they are chosen for comparison to probe any similarities between them, but the NHC is demonstrably the richest linguistically. Contemplate, for example, PO.1–4, with “[what you suffered and] I was troubled” beside the more refined NHC.1–4 on “the sufferings you endured, and I was greatly troubled”.

With regard to the last sub-segments of these three versions, we note that they all concur in narrating that Jesus reappears to James on a mountain (rendered in three different ways), apparently in the Palestinian/Levantine region (see Shanks and Witherington 2014, p. 180, on NHC’s “Gaugela” in Syria), and that James has followers there, who treat James as their “second teacher” after Jesus. We will need to return to this as a likely residuum of the tradition about James and his community from New Testament times.

Let us proceed to the second of the three sets of narrative tradition selected for socio-linguistic comparative analysis, the sets in CT and NHC, each presented further toward the ends of the two versions.

Table 2 covers a segment at the end of a Jesus/James dialogue in which Jesus tells James how he (James) can be delivered from suffering. The narrator of the text tells how, when James is arrested by a multitude of people, Jesus’ instructions allow him to avoid their attacks. The relevant Leaf G of P.Oxy. 5533 is fragmentary, including the two parts isolated as PO.2–2 and 2–4. The relevant parts in CT.2–2, NHC.2–1, and NHC.2–4 are also partly missing, although the context is understandable. However, they all relate an episode in which Jesus prophesies for James by way of a future narration that involves “Levi” and his younger brother. The usage of ‘holy spirit (ἅγιον πνεῦμα)’ in the Greek text looks pre-Gnostic, and one might suspect a verbal leftover of the Jamesian community, a Jewish Christian one, when references to the role of “Levi” (as λευει in CT.2–2) and the Land (of Israel) (even “Jerusalem [ⲢⲈⲓⲗⲏⲙ] in NHC.2–1)” are taken into consideration. But we must be careful. Already, such Greek phrases and terms in PO as “these aforesaid things”, “hidden”, “he is not (there)”, and “[through] foresights]” ironically exhibit the textual potentiality from which Gnostic concepts could develop (as in CT and NHC) within the ascetic culture of the Egyptian desert (Choat and Giorda 2017; Goehring 1999). As it is, the Greek text we have is not that ancient and is already showing signs of being the work of an early gnosticizing writer, but in the deduced original ‘less or un-tampered state’ it can be fairly said to precede the two Coptic versions of *1 Apoc. Jas.* in the provenance of a military crisis in which the early James community needs protection (one suspects during the Bar Kochba revolt [132–6 CE], not the Jewish War [66–70]). As for the Coptic texts themselves, both the drive for edification and the confident manipulation or deformation

of earlier tradition in both of them confirm the intense labour and prosperity of Gnostic Christian communities, albeit under the threat of religious persecution, during the third, fourth, and fifth centuries (Parkhouse 2021, pp. 69–71; Binning 2022, pp. 293–310).

Table 2. P.Oxy. 5533 (Leaf G) with two Coptic texts.

Texts	Context
P.Oxy. 5533 (Leaf G)	PO.2–1: “for a holy spirit [will come] from him and he will be considered worthy to inherit <i>these aforesaid things</i> .
	PO.2–2: When his younger son inherits them . . . Levi, then this land will be warred upon, [but] Levi will hide them prudently . . .”.
	PO.2–3: “his mind, but <i>the younger</i> will grow in them and keep them <i>hidden</i> [until he becomes (?)] seventeen years old.
	PO. 2–4: And then this land will be warred upon while <i>he is not (there?)</i> , but [<i>through foresight</i>] he will be protected. . .”
CT 2. 24.4–13 & 24.22–25.4	CT.2–1: And there will come from him a seed, holy and worthy to inherit these [things] I have said.
	CT.2–2: And when his little child <i>grows up [---] he [---] living</i> , he will receive the name ‘Levi.’ Then the land will be at war again. But Levi, as a little child, will hide there,
	CT.2–3: his mind. The younger one, however, will grow up with them, and he will keep them hidden until he reaches his seventeenth birthday.
	CT.2–4: And then the land will go to war. But since he is not there, he will be safeguarded in accordance with providence.
NHC V, 3. 37.2–38.10	NHC.2–1: Then he is to bring forth. . .without words. On the basis [of what was] prophesied earlier, <i>I say, [he is to take] a wife [outside] Jerusalem in her. . . , and he <is to> produce [two] sons from her</i> .
	NHC.2–2: [<i>They are</i>] to inherit <i>these things</i> , and the understanding of the one who will rise [even higher]. <i>They are to receive from him a portion of his mind</i> .
	NHC.2–3: “ <i>The smaller is the greater among them</i> . Let these things be shared with him and hidden within him until [he] is seventeen years old. . .from [them].
	NHC.2–4: <i>He will be severely persecuted at the hands of his fellow... He will be proclaimed [through] them, and he will proclaim this word. Then [it will become] a seed of [salvation]</i> ”.

Table 2 displays the greater linguistic similarities of the PO and CT texts, while the features of the NHC text are more creatively Gnostic. Still, in CT.2–1, the “holy spirit” found in PO.2–1 is altered to read “a seed, holy (ΟΥCΠΕΡΜΑ ΕΦΟΥΕΕΒ)”, apparently a Gnostic adaptation and a novel development by the CT copyist (although, in NHC 2–4, the idea of a special seed is also present). As for the reference to the ‘Holy Spirit’ in the Greek fragments, rather than being a pre-Gnostic residue, it is possible that a later scribe wanted to bring the text into conformity with the emerging Trinitarian theology of the day. (Remember, scribes can have their own special impact: ponder how CT only has “James” as its title, and the NHC title is just “The Apocalypse of James”, with no mention of it being ‘the First’ in either version (Dias Chaves 2016, pp. 235–53).) Neither “holy spirit” nor “holy seed” appears in the NHC.2–1. Additionally, while PO.2–1 and CT.2–1 are generally close, the narrator for NHC.2–1 not only apparently modified the Greek source with the phrase: “Then he is to bring forth...without words”, but also included new additional references to “a wife” and “two sons”.

Again, the sub-sections we isolated as PO.2–2 and CT.2–2, on the child Levi and his younger (unnamed) brother, share basically the same content, despite CT.2–2 being extended by the addition about how the boy “grows [up] [---] he [---] living”. On the other hand, NHC.2–2 accentuates the children’s joint inheritance of “the understanding of the One Who Is (ΠΕΤΨΟΟΠ’ = the transcendent God)” before singling out the “younger son” or younger brother of “Levi” as playing a greater role when he turns seventeen. Two new phrases pertaining to the revelation of Gnostic truth are created—“[They are] to inherit these things” and “They are to receive from him a portion of his mind”—to replace the talk in PO.2–2 about an earthly situation of war (rather than what has been ‘gnosticized’ at NHC V,3, 36,5–37,25 into a cosmic conflict). Both PO.2–3 and CT.2–3 share a common reference to

mundane war, even though CT.2–3 laces the prophecy with different terms (“however”, “reaches”, and “birthday”). The NHC.2–3 includes the reason that the younger son was chosen, as “the smaller is the greater among them”. A comforting tone is sounded in both PO.2–4 and CT.2–4, saying that, although the land will be at war, the younger brother would be protected. This scene was revised in the NHC.2–4 with the addition that the younger brother will be under persecution from his fellows yet will eventually become “a seed of [salvation]”. Perhaps this literary development may have arisen because, to cite Ravinder Binning’s generalization about ancient Egyptian documentation (Binning 2022, p. 293), “copying and translating inevitably introduced additions and changes”. NHC’s rewording provided a greater feeling of assurance to its recipients than to the readerships of P.Oxy. 5533 and CT, but we still have to acknowledge that the NHC revisor most definitely transmogrified earthly war into a cosmic conflict with inimical aeonic forces threatening (the Gnostic Christian) community. The historical residuum we are interested in tracing is well-nigh obscured in the Nag Hammadi version.

Let us now turn to the third of the three sets of narrative tradition selected for socio-linguistic comparative analysis, closer to the ends of the CT and NHC texts.

Table 3 continues from Jesus’ prophesy and its inner narration, as previously discussed, and goes on to present Jesus and James, concluding their conversation before James’ martyrdom. It concerns a crucial part of *1 Apoc. Jas.* as the work winds up, a special Jesus/James exchange about seven women, reckoned by James to be Jesus’ female disciples in NHC V,3 38,17–18, and once more we have all three versions yielding passages that we can again set side-by-side, which were thus selected by us for comparative analysis. In this case, the CT text is well preserved, while the OP and NHC texts are fragmentary. PO.3–1 and 3–3, and their parallels NHC.3–1 and 3–3, are too unclear to allow for their full meaning to be understood, but the greater similarity between P.Oxy. 5533 (Leaf H) and CT 2.25.12–16 and 26.1–10 was confirmed when all the three versions were viewed synoptically (Smith and Landau 2021, pp. 12–13). The Greek term “this logos (ὁ λόγος)” of PO.3–1 can be fairly said to represent a pre-Gnostic authentic Jewish Christian tradition, traceable to an early James community. CT.3–1 delivers the extra sentence, “And these things will happen to restrain the rules”, but without any obvious signs of gnosticizing. Together, CT.3–1 and NHC.3–1 decorate the opening sentence of the segment with an introduction of Jesus’ interlocutor as James (esp. NHC, with “James said”), and the vocative “Rabbi” in both PO.3–2 and CT.3–2 confirms that the linguistic figure of the James applies to these versions. Again, an evocative reference to “light” is found in both these versions, and one may well ask whether this connects to the “the logos” in PO and also has a basis in early Jewish Christian tradition. Meanwhile, NHC.3–2, similar to the revelation discourse of *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NHC III.4 = Berlin Codex (BG) 8502, 3), presents a distinctly different enquiring aspect of James, who asks Jesus about seven women that he perceives to be the latter’s disciples and believes have “become strong through the perception within them” (Haxby 2013, pp. 81–82). This is a special elaboration of what is presented more simply in the other versions as Jesus’ last revelation to James before his martyrdom.

Pausing to consider the special material of NHC 3.2–3, Antti Marjanen seriously conjectured (Marjanen 2010, p. 528) that “the seven women” held “a similar role to the prophets of the old times (in the Israelite prophetic tradition)” (cf. also Guy 1947). Maryanne pictures a well-developed Gnostic Christian philosophy in opposition to the mainstream Christianity, as seen in James’ question about the strange and alternative role of females in Jesus’ work (Ibid., pp. 535–46): “Yet I ask of you [something else]: who are the seven women who have [become] your disciples? Look, all the women bless you. But I wonder how it can be that [powerless] vessels have become strong through the perception within them?” This question, acknowledging how marginalized women can be empowered, may have truly encouraged those females in the socially vulnerable community of Gnostic Christianity, immersed in monastic Egyptian culture (Parkhouse 2021, pp. 69–71).

Table 3. P.Oxy. 5533 (Leave H) with two Coptic texts.

Texts	Context
P.Oxy. 5533 (Leaf H)	PO.3–1: and [this <i>logos</i> will be] disdained [by them. . .] trickery (?) [. . .]”. “Rabbi, . . . and. . .” PO.3–2: of the <i>light</i> [so that they may be in the] manifest [even if they] have these things [concealed]. PO.3–3: The seven] women [are] the seven spirits. . .spirit. . .of thought . . . spirit of fear’
CT 2. 25.12–16 & 26.1–10	CT.3–1: and they will despise this very word. And these things will happen to restrain the rules”. (<i>James</i>): “Rabbi, I have come to believe all these things, and they are well placed. . .” CT.3–2: of <i>light</i> , so that they may possess the secrets when they are revealed. CT.3–3: These seven women are seven spirits who are introduced in this (?) <i>scripture</i> : A spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel [and] strength, [a] spirit [of] understanding and knowledge, a spirit of fear.
NHC V, 3. 38.11–39.8	NHC.3–1: <i>James said</i> , “[I am] encouraged . . . and they are . . . [for] my soul. NHC.3–2: <i>Yet I ask of you [something else]: who are the seven women who have [become] your disciples? Look, all the women bless you. But I wonder how it can be that [powerless] vessels have become strong through the perception within them?”</i> NHC.3–3: The master [said], “You . . . well . . . a spirit of. . . , a spirit of thought, [a spirit] of counsel and. . . , a spirit of. . . , a spirit of knowledge, [a spirit] of fear.

We can affirm that Jesus’s saying in PO.3–3 also supports the conception that the teaching of “the seven women” and “the seven spirits” downplays a dualistic aspect of sexuality, but we can fairly ask whether this derives from an early Jewish Christian tradition preserved in the Greek version. The section of NHC.3–3 covering Jesus’ response to the long question is damaged, but PO.3–3 and CT.3–3 stand together in representing Jesus’s positive affirmation of vulnerable figures. The seven spirits of the seven women are detailed in CT.3–3 as the spirits of wisdom, insight, counsel, strength, understanding, knowledge, and fear. The Greek tradition seems more related to the Hebrew revelation of Isaiah and is likely to be a pre-Gnostic allusion (Marjanen 2010, pp. 536–38; Haxby 2013, pp. 81–82): “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord” (Isa 11: 2–3). Seemingly picking up on this, the reference to “*This* (?) *scripture* (ΤΕΙ ΓΡΑΦΗ)” in CT.3–3 may mean the prophetic Hebrew book (Hames and Casanellas 2015). Note how the tradition of the seven spirits is progressively transformed by the author of Romans as the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully” (Rom 12:6–8). This plausible connection led Sarah Parkhouse to assert the influence of Jewish and ‘standard’ Christian traditions on *1 Apoc. Jas.*, suggesting that readers of the text were familiar with Jewish scriptures. For her, even Johannine Christological themes of identity, death, and ascension are in the text, although reformulated (Parkhouse 2021, pp. 61–65). This presupposes, however, cultural connections and literary transmissions between the Johannine and the James communities that have not been established, and in any case, CT’s reference to “this scripture” may pertain to the Tachos James apocalypse or the Tchacos Codex *in toto* as being authoritative for an emergent gnostic group (Trompf and Kim 2018, p. 184). Meanwhile, our socio-linguistic analysis opens the possibility that the original Greek text for the *1 Apoc. Jas.* contains a prophetic perspective going back to Jesus and James. That may help to explain why, for theologico-political reasons, the Book of James was excluded from the Scriptural corpus of mainline Christianity when the canonical boundary was determined in the 39th *Festal (Easter) Letter* of 367, by Athanasius (ca. 296–373), as Bishop of Alexandria (Gwynn 2012): “If anyone adds anything to them, . . . And if anyone takes words away . . . , God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, . . .” (Rev. 22:18–19).

3. Traces of the James Community in the Greek P.Oxy. 5533

We proceed further, as it is a main goal of this paper to move beyond the three texts to detect early traditions by asking the key question: Is there any evidence to be gathered from this comparative textual study concerning the earliest or foundational Jamesian community? If the Greek and two Coptic versions of *1 Apoc. Jas.* depict various pictures of James, how do their images of James and Jesus reflect the transitional history of an earlier Christianity? James, the ‘brother’ of Jesus, is not placed traditionally among the twelve disciples. He is not the James who was an eyewitness of Jesus at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2) or at the raising of Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), nor did he hear the Gethsemane prayer (Mark 14:33; Matt 26:37). One might suppose him to be a rather sceptical onlooker, as Jesus’s half-brother. However, the tradition (works and belief) of James the Just are found in several Biblical texts of the first century. Along with the earliest witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, James remained in Jerusalem, becoming part of John Mark’s upper room group (Acts 1:14). He met the converted Saul (Gal 1:19) and received a report on Peter’s miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:17). The chairman in the Jerusalem Council recognized James’ eldership (=a ‘pillar’) in the early Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9; cf Acts 15:13). However, the Jewish Christian James, according to Josephus (36–100 CE), was martyred by stoning under the order of Ananus ben Ananus, a High Priest of the late Herodian era in 62 CE (just after the death of Porcius Festus, the Roman Procurator of Judea). As Josephus writes in one version: “So he (Ananus) assembled the Sanhedrim of judges, and brought . . . the brother of Jesus . . ., whose name was James: and some others [or, some of his companions.] . . . And as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned” (Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaica* 20. 200).

The writings of Church Fathers carry on the Jamesian tradition by imaging James as bishop or head of the Jerusalem church and apostle (for testimonies by Papias, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria through the second century, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome in the fourth, and Pseudo-Andrew of Crete in the seventh, see Rankin 2016). The James legacy was also popular in the early Christian apocrypha. The importance of Jesus’ appearance to James, also recognized in Paul’s 1 Corinthians (15:7), is represented in the *Gospel of Hebrews* (Evang. Heb.[ed. James [Frag.16]] (Hames and Casanellas 2015) and the *Gospel of Thomas* (Kim 2021). We find the appearance of the risen Jesus to James and Peter in the *Apocryphon of James* (NHC 1.2), a work written in Egypt (Lindenlaub 2020, pp. 3–27), and, as its name suggests, the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James* (or *Infancy Gospel of James*) has James providing a narrative of the birth of Jesus by Mary with Joseph present (Bremmer 2020).

The James legacy was transmitted by the early Jewish Christian community from Jerusalem to Egypt over the course of a geopolitical history of the religious persecution (Kasser and Wurst 2007, pp. 115–16). The canonization process and the localization of Jewish Christian culture in the Graeco–Roman world brought it into contact with the Gnostic ethos, and lineaments of tradition from the pre-Gnostic James followings somehow survived in the fourth-to-fifth century Gnostic Christian monasticism (Lundhaug and Jenott 2018; Gabra and Takla 2015, 2018). Matters for spiritual attention were altered and old narrative details were re-used for ascetic purposes. “The focus on divine identity and cosmic conflict, . . . may have held more influence in the fourth century on the Coptic codices when Christian bodies no longer faced Roman officials but Christian souls faced the powers of the devil” (Parkhouse 2021, p. 70). William Schoedel and Eirini Bergström detected a Valentinian formula in *1 Apoc. Jas.* and other “elements of Valentinianism”, maintaining that these, along with other Gnostic teachings, were taken over or developed by a group which imagined itself to be “in continuity with the original Jewish Christian congregation in Jerusalem” (Schoedel 1970, p. 121; see Bergström 2019; Edwards 2013, pp. 68–72). All three versions leave signs of the issues that early James Jewish Christian community dealt with, yet made of these issues living spiritual dialogues, ‘Gnostic-style’, rather than *pericopai* of old narration, even though the scribes (and their supervisors) evidently felt that the old setting of the Jesus/James exchanges and the matters they discussed still had

pertinence. Various scholars presume that the Coptic readers of CT and NHC V,3 would have knowledge not only about the basic Christian story of the incarnation, passion, and resurrection, but also about “Valentinian theological speculation such as the identity of Achamoth” (see [Parkhouse 2021](#), pp. 51–71).

The Greek text of P.Oxy 5533, of all three versions, provides the best indications of early Jewish Christian Jamesian narration. Leaf A posits the historical existence of James’ disciples, and best conveys a historical sense of James’ deep concern for and commitment to his master Jesus:

PO.1–3: [James] heard of [his sufferings] and was [troubled] and waited for his coming. He arrived after [two] days [and behold, James] was going to the mountain called Golgoul with [his own] pupils who gladly heard him [and] had him for comfort, saying “[This] is the second teacher”. And behold, the crowd was scattered was left [alone] pray to him the Lord [ceasing] the prayer, he went to take him,

[Ἰάκ]ω[βος] δὲ ἤκου[σε]ν τ[ὰ] π[ά]θ[η] αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐ[λ]υπ[η]θή καὶ προσεδόκα
[τὴν ἔλ]ευσιν αὐτοῦ. παρε[γένε]το δ[ὲ] μεθ’ ἡμέρας [β] καὶ ἰδοὺ Ἰάκ[ωβος] διεκί-
νῃ ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρωσ τὸ λεγόμενον Γολγουλ μετὰ τῶν εἰδίων μαθητῶν οἵτιν[ες] ἠδέεω
αὐτοῦ ἤκουον κ[α]τὰ εἶχον αὐτὸν εἰς παρα[μο]ιθεῖαν λέγοντες [‘ο]ὔ[τ]ός ἐστιν
ὁ δεύτερος [δ]ιδάκκαλως’. καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐσκορπ[ί]θη ὁ λαός. []..... [] [] []
φθῆ μ[όν]ο[ς]. [] εὐχ[c. 17] ω[.]. θ[c. 12] αὐτοῦ ὁ κ[ύρι]ος [α] [.....]ς τῆ[ς]
προσευχῆ[ς] ἔρχε[το] λαβ[ε]ῖν αὐτὸν λέγων

The scene of PO.1–3 is, in our assessment, about the period between the death of Jesus and his resurrection (cf. *Evang. Heb.* [16]), while James and [his own] pupils (μαθητῶν) carried on the regular custom of prayer at the usual mountain meeting-place. James’s followers are depicted as glad to have James as “a comforter” even after the death of Jesus. James was then recognized as “the second teacher (διδάκκαλως)”. The Greek text is not clear, but CT.1–3 and NHC.1–3 both underscore James’ strong leadership by representing the disciples respectfully dispersing while he remained behind for another extra prayer. The text of PO.1–1 of “I shall appear for the refutation of the rulers”, which was not much changed in the Coptic texts of CT.1–1 and NHC.1–1, could reflect the provision of encouragement that the members of the Jamesian community originally felt and/or received that they could be secured from the religio-political persecution in the colonized Jewish society in which James was eventually killed.

Now, all three versions have named the mountain where James and his disciples regularly prayed, but all differently, and we are left with a tantalizing choice between “Golgoul (Γολγουλ)” (PO.1–3), “Galge[la]m (ΓΑΛΓΗΛΑΜ)” (CT.1–3), and “Gaugela (ΓΑΥΓΗΛΑΝ)” (NHC.1–3). Sufficient concurrence between the versions sets the place of the two Jesus/James encounters in *1 Apoc. Jas.* as outside Jerusalem. None of them specify the place where the pre-passion meeting occurred, but the mountain-top site marks the second meeting, between James and the *risen* Jesus (see [Kasser and Wurst 2007](#), pp. 115–16). While the names of the place may all, in some way, reflect Golgotha (meaning ‘place of the skull’), where Jesus was crucified ([Reaves 2019](#), p. 49), it has been suggested that the differing tones or accents derive from the James community of early Christianity in fending off smears from Jewish opponents about the ‘bad place,’ especially following the destruction in and around Jerusalem in 70 CE ([Böhlig and Labib 1963](#), p. 40). This kind of anti-Jewish retort, Pamela Reaves also argues, indicates how the concept of God’s rejection of the Jews was transmitted across the different Gnostic groups in ancient Egypt ([Reaves 2019](#), pp. 52–53). At this point, we are not to forget the appearance of the figure of Addai in *1 Apoc. Jas.* esp. in NHC V,3 36, which was actually not singled out for our synopses of the different versions. From this inclusion, Nils Pedersen infers that the traditions of the Jewish Jerusalem Chris-

tians, which had “played a role in the formation of early Syrian Christianity” (cf. *Doctrine Addai* [ca. 400] lurk “in the Jewish Christian substratum of the Gnostic text” (Pedersen 2018, p. 178). The text(s) of *1 Apoc. Jas.* indicate an apostolic succession of the Jamesian tradition—James > Addai > Manaël (Masphael) > Levi > Levi’s unnamed younger brother (Mattison 2023, p. 8)—which implies that there are Jerusalem–Edessa connections in the very foundation of Eastern Christianity (cf. Trompf 2023, pp. 376–78).

The reconstructed phrase in NHC.2–1 of “[outside] Jerusalem” strongly supports this as the original location of the James community. The image of Jerusalem for *1 Apoc. Jas.* is generally depicted with a hostile attitude, as in CT.11.23–12,3: “But do not return to Jerusalem, for this (city) always gives the cup of bitterness to the children of light as a dwelling place of many rulers”. Nevertheless, there is an overlap in the view of Jewish Christians and negative gnostic views of Jerusalem (Schoedel 1991, p. 175), as we can confirm through the Jesus/James exchange about the seven women recognized as disciples of Jesus, which implicitly occurred in Jerusalem, especially in NHC.3–2. The representation of female leadership marks an innovative challenge to the male-dominant society of first-to-second-century Jewish and Jewish Christian society, and, in NHC V,3 40,25, Jewish female names of disciples—Salome, Mariam, Martha and Arsinoe—are significantly listed. The image of “[powerless] vessels (ΝΑΓΓΙΟΝ ΝΩΥΒ)” gains later relevance to the needs of Gnostic Christians in subsequent centuries who, like the female leaders, hope for a mystical “perception within them (ΝΖΝΘΟΜ ΜΝ ΖΝΑΙ ΣΘΗΣΙΣ)” and “to receive from him a portion of his mind” (NHC.2–4, and see Haxby 2013, p. 93). From this perspective, we can detect how the tradition of the early Jewish James community took on a cogent pertinence in the assimilated life of ancient Egyptian Christianity, even under the oppression from the mainstream churches, with the warning “He will be severely persecuted at the hands of his fellow . . .” in [NHC.2–4] being [re]interpreted for these later times.

4. Conclusions

The late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries produced textual evidence of the diversity and development of Jewish and Gnostic Christianities. The ongoing discovery of ancient Greek and Coptic papyri is unveiling the hidden secrets and narratives of various early Christian communities, many affected by a Gnostic ethos and apparently meeting religious persecution for their views and facing alienation in a changing Graeco–Roman world. As Christianity spread throughout the Mediterranean region, the Jesus tradition was transmitted across cultures and languages, becoming mixed with local ideologies and popular worldviews. Today, in three fairly clear-cut cases—in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (P.Oxy VIII 1081, NHC III,4.90–119, and Berlin Codex); the *Gospel of Mary* (P.Oxy. L 3525, Papyrus Rylands 463, and Berlin Codex); and the *Gospel of Thomas* (P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655, and NHC II,2,32–51)—the socio-linguistic transmission of the original Christian teachings connected to ‘more marginalized’ or ‘questionable’ figures is illustrated in the polemical modification and transformations of newly discovered Coptic literature. This paper has attempted to introduce a fourth case, in which the traditional figure involved was not a disciple of Jesus but was nonetheless an elevated figure in early Christian times whose aura grew in significance within the ascetic culture of Gnostic Christianity in third-to-fourth-century ancient Egypt (Goehring 1999).

A continuing transmission of early Jamesian traditions and interest in James as an authoritative source both show up remarkably in *1 Apoc. Jas.*, found in different Greek texts in P.Oxy. 5533 and in Coptic texts in CT and NHC. We have to concede, in the end, that the texts are basically independent of each other, and we cannot definitively confirm that either CT or NHC V,7 depend on the extant PO Greek version, for, although the affinities between P.Oxy. 5533 and CT are strong enough to reflect relative ‘familiarity,’ we cannot say definitively that our Greek text is directly related to the two Coptic ones, or provides the text from which their authors made translations or redactions. However, through comparative detection, we can deduce convenient processes of enhancing earlier Greek versions of the non-extant Greek *1 Apoc. Jas.* in a vital gnostic culture. The relative

inability to draw the three versions together in a tighter way, even though we found sufficient portions of the works to look at them synoptically, hardly points in the direction of a unifiable or reconstructable single prototypical text, and instead only suggests that the three different versions we possess originate from different Greek writings and the traditions they alluded to or recorded. This implies that there were plural ascetic groups (or monasteries) maintaining the Jamesian tradition, even during the development of Gnostic Christianity. We have only found what little we can from as much as has been left to us. Tables 1–3 illustrate this multiplicity, and display proclivities of style and concern in each written product. Apparent innovation in a text—as when (from Table 1) CT.1–3 reads: “And it was this alone that [about the crucifixion (death) of Jesus] he had [to] console himself,” decisively diverging from PO.1–3 and NHC.1–3—ultimately lead us to ask whether the scribe has a special source (different to that accessed by the others) or has the choice (or is given a directive) to write new content.

Overall, in line with our object to find traces of a very early James community, the least we can say is that NHC embellishes the most as a gnosticizing document, although it nonetheless contains crucial fragmented information, especially personal names that seem to be surviving details from a distant past. We have worked on the assumption that the Greek text has priority when probing back as far as we can go, and our tabulations for comparison generally bear this out as a sensible heuristic procedure. We noted, as an important example, how Leaf G of P.Oxy. 5533 contains revelational terms, such as “these aforesaid things”, “hidden”, “he is not (there)”, and “[through] foresights]”, which look Biblical and pre-Gnostic—perhaps they even carry reminiscences of a New Testament context, even though they were susceptible to being patently re-worked by Gnostic minds. However, again, one has to be careful about how far we think we can reach back chronologically, and it is perhaps wise to be content with the portions of the versions of *1 Apoc. Jas.* we have examined here for comparison and transmission history, yielding small glimpses the Jewish Christian tradition of the Jamesian community, which emerged around the early to the middle of second-century CE (Lumpkin 2017). It is to be hoped that this article, which has a strong tradition–history side to it, throws useful light on this emergence, which could perhaps be further enlightened by the [re-]discovery of more fragments of the *First Apocalypse of James* (or other Gnostic texts) from the Oxyrhynchus treasure-store.

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Note

- ¹ *The Letter of James, the Secret Book of James, the Protoevangelium of James, the Ascents of James, the Contestatio of James, the Apocryphon of James, the First Apocalypse of James, and the Second Apocalypse of James.*

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