

Q

For over a century “Q” has been used to refer to the 230 or so sayings of Jesus which Matthew and Luke share, but which are not found in Mark (*see* Synoptic Problem). In 1861 H. J. Holtzmann built on earlier discussion of the sources of the Gospels and claimed that Matthew and Luke had drawn on two main sources: Mark’s Gospel and a collection of the sayings of Jesus. The latter soon came to be referred to by German scholars as *Quelle* (“source”). In 1890 J. Weiss abbreviated *Quelle* to Q; this quickly gained wide acceptance.

In the twentieth century the Q hypothesis has been the basis of nearly all serious study of the origin and development of the Gospel traditions. This article sets out the main reasons why Q has been accepted so widely. It also includes discussion of the two most influential rival hypotheses. The final section sketches the very different ways the theological perspective of Q has been understood.

1. Terminology and Importance of the Q Hypothesis
2. The Case for the Q Hypothesis
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4. The Case against the Q Hypothesis
5. The Theology and Purpose of Q

1. Terminology and Importance of the Q Hypothesis.

1.1. Terminology. The term Q has been used in several ways, with resulting confusion. (1) For some scholars Q is simply a shorthand way of referring to non-Markan traditions shared by Matthew and Luke: Q traditions may have existed in a number of short written documents or collections of oral traditions. (2) Some scholars see Q as a cycle of oral tradition which circulated in the early church with a fairly fixed order. (3) Most recent writers assume that Q existed as a written document which disappeared shortly after it was incorporated by Matthew and Luke into their Gospels. They accept that with few exceptions Luke has preserved the original order of the Q traditions, though not necessarily the original wording. Hence it has recently become customary to refer to Q passages with the Lukan chapter and verse numbers. For example, Q 7:22 is a reference to the Q tradition which lies behind Luke 7:22 .

1.2. Importance. The Q hypothesis is important in current study of the Gospels for two quite different reasons.

1.1.1. Q As Authentic Jesus Tradition. Q traditions are often considered to be particularly important in attempts to reconstruct the teaching of the historical Jesus (*see* Historical Jesus). Many early supporters of the Q hypothesis believed that Q provided direct access to the authentic teaching of Jesus (*see* Gospels [Historical Reliability]). More recently, the criterion of “multiple attestation” has attracted wide support in discussions of the authenticity of the Gospel traditions: traditions found in several strands of the Gospel tradition (Mark, Q, traditions found only in Matthew [M] or only in Luke [L], traditions behind the Fourth Gospel) are more likely to be authentic than traditions less widely attested.

1.1.2. *Q As Representative of Diversity in Early Christianity.* In recent years some have claimed that the existence of Q underlines the diversity of earliest Christianity. Since Q did not contain passion (see Passion Narrative) or resurrection traditions, the Q community's understanding of the Christian faith differed markedly from Paul's or Mark's strong emphasis on the centrality of the cross (see Death of Jesus) and resurrection. Q is alleged to represent a very early form of Christianity in which (for example) Jesus was understood to be God's Wisdom , or Wisdom's representative, or in which expectations of the imminent return of Jesus as an apocalyptic " Son of man " figure were dominant.

2. The Case for the Q Hypothesis.

Five main arguments have been advanced in support of the view that both Matthew and Luke used Q as a primary source as well as Mark. Although some are stronger than others, taken cumulatively these arguments confirm that there are good grounds for accepting that both Matthew and Luke used Q.

2.1. Verbal Agreement. There is often very close verbal agreement between Matthew and Luke which extends over several verses. As examples, the following passages should be compared carefully:

Matthew 3:7–12 par. Luke 3:7–9 , 16–17

Matthew 4:1–11 par. Luke 4:1–13

Matthew 11:2–11 , 16–19 par. Luke 7:18–28 , 31–35

Matthew 23:37–39 par. Luke 13:34–35

In line after line of the Greek text (and even in an English translation) there is such close verbal correspondence that it is probable that Matthew and Luke are drawing on traditions from the same source. If both Evangelists drew on independent traditions (i.e., oral traditions which had not been collected into a source), very much greater divergence in wording would be expected. This observation is supplemented by an appeal to Markan priority: even though Matthew and Luke are two very different Gospels, they have both used Mark. Thus it is likely (so the argument runs) that where they agree closely in non-Markan sections, they are both using a common source.

Although in many of the non-Markan passages which Matthew and Luke share the verbal agreement is striking, in the following three passages (and in many others) it is not. Both Matthew and Luke include the parable of the man who built his house on the rock (Mt 7:21 , 24–27 par. Lk 6:46–49), but the wording differs considerably. In Matthew 23:4 , 6–7 , 13 , 23 , 25–27 , 29–32 , 34–36 par. Luke 11:39–52 a large number of similar sayings are found in the same order; in some sayings the wording is very close, but in others there is striking variation. Matthew and Luke both include what is clearly the same parable of the pounds, but their versions of the lengthy parable differ in numerous details (Mt 25:14–30 par. Lk 19:11–27).

Supporters of Q account for the differences in the wording of non-Markan traditions in two main ways. Since both Matthew and Luke often revise the wording of Mark quite extensively, we should not be surprised to find that they have also done so with the second main source which they have utilized. This is a plausible argument, and in some passages the Evangelists' redaction of Q can be discerned with little difficulty (see

par. parallel passage in another/other Gospel(s)

Redaction Criticism). But why have the Evangelists revised some Q traditions quite considerably but not others? Many scholars suggest that the variations in some passages are so great that it is likely that Matthew and Luke drew on two different editions of Q. In other words, Q was revised and even extended (perhaps more than once); it was utilized at different stages in its evolution by Matthew and by Luke. Some writers use the abbreviation Q_{Mt} and Q_{Lk} to refer to the versions of Q used by Matthew and Luke. Some such explanation seems necessary to account for the close verbal similarity in some passages but differences in others.

2.2. The Phenomena of Order. Although Matthew weaves his sources together (especially in the five large discourses) and Luke places them in “strips” or blocks, there are some significant agreements in the order in which the non-Markan traditions are found in Matthew and Luke. These agreements in order cannot be coincidental and strongly suggest the use of a common source. For example, the following individual sayings or small units appear in Matthew in the same order: Luke 3:7–9 , 16–17 ; 4:1–13 ; 6:20b–21 , 22–23 , 29 , 30 , 32–35 , 36 , 37–38 , 41–42 , 43–44 , 46 , 47–49 ; 7:1–10 , 18–23 , 24–26 , 27 , 28 , 31–34 , 35 . In at least 85 percent of the Q traditions it is possible to ascertain the common order or to determine which Evangelist disturbed the common order (Kloppenborg, 80).

The phenomena seem to rule out the possibility that both Evangelists were drawing on independent oral traditions. Why should so many traditions appear in both Gospels in the same order, especially when there is often no obvious reason for their juxtaposition? At the very least, Matthew and Luke seem to have drawn on a cycle of oral traditions with a fairly fixed order. The phenomena of order are so striking that they strongly suggest that Q was a written document.

2.3. Doublets. In several passages in Matthew and Luke we find that essentially the same tradition is repeated; these repetitions are known as doublets. They occur where Matthew and Luke both use the Markan form of a saying, but elsewhere they also both include a non-Markan or Q form of essentially the same saying. The following two doublets are particularly striking (though there are many more):

(1) “The one who has, to that one will more be given ...,” Mark 4:25 par. Matthew 13:12 and Luke 8:18 ; a similar saying is found at Matthew 25:29 par. Luke 19:26 .

(2) “If anyone wants to follow me, they must deny themselves ...,” Mark 8:34–35 par. Matthew 16:24–25 and Luke 9:23–24 , with a similar saying at Matthew 10:38–39 par. Luke 14:27 ; 17:33 .

The presence of so many doublets is taken by many scholars to suggest or even confirm that Q was a written document rather than a set of oral traditions. If Matthew and Luke drew on oral traditions (so the argument runs), we might have expected that an oral Q tradition would have been conflated with the similar Markan saying.

2.4. Q As a Coherent Entity. The Q material hangs together as an entity. With one exception, the Narrative of the healing of the centurion’s son (Mt 8:5–13 par. Lk 7:1–10), the Q traditions are all sayings of Jesus. Many supporters of the Q hypothesis go further and claim that the non-Markan traditions shared by Matthew and Luke betray a similar theological outlook and belong to a similar literary genre (see 4 . below). Q did not survive beyond its incorporation into Matthew and Luke, but the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was discovered in 1945, does consist of a collection of sayings of Jesus. This suggests that other collections of the sayings of Jesus may have been made in the early church.

This general line of argument is obviously less compelling than the preceding three, but its force should not be underestimated. Both in terms of content and literary genre, traditions which are found only in Matthew (M traditions) or only in Luke (L traditions) are much more disparate than Q traditions.

2.5. Other Explanations Are Less Satisfactory. On close inspection rival explanations of the non-Markan material shared by Matthew and Luke are much less plausible than the Q hypothesis. Downing (*NTS* 37 [1991]) has added fresh considerations in support of this conclusion. He has shown that the redactional methods involved in the two-Gospel (Griesbach) hypothesis and in the claim that Luke used Matthew are quite unlike the ways ancient writers handled their sources. On the other hand, Matthew and Luke use Mark and Q in ways which do bear comparison with well-established conventions in antiquity. This important observation strengthens still further the conclusion that the case for Markan priority and Q is far stronger than the case for any of the rival solutions of the Synoptic problem.

The cumulative force of the five preceding arguments is very impressive, but the case for Q falls short of absolute proof. Even the strongest supporters of Q accept that the hypothesis is less securely established than Markan priority. However, Q remains a valid working hypothesis for serious study of the Gospels.

3. The Nature and Extent of Q.

The evidence is marginally stronger for concluding that Q was a written document rather than a collection of oral traditions which were transmitted with a fairly fixed order. However, comparative studies of the transmission, revision and expansion of oral and of written traditions in antiquity urgently need to be undertaken.

Although most of the early supporters of Q believed that it was a collection of sayings in Aramaic (and therefore earlier and more reliable than traditions which circulated in Greek), this view is not now widely accepted. It was based partly on one interpretation of the comments of Papias (early second century) which were quoted by Eusebius (at the beginning of the fourth century): “Matthew collected the sayings [*ta logia*] in the Hebrew language [i.e., perhaps Aramaic] and each one interpreted [or translated] them as he was able.” However, since Papias also uses *ta logia* to include Mark’s *narratives*, as well as sayings of Jesus, most scholars now conclude that Papias was referring to canonical Matthew and not Q. If so, Papias’s phrase “in the Hebrew language” may either be a reference to the Jewish features of Matthew’s Gospel or a mistake.

Several scholars have claimed that some Q traditions which differ considerably in Matthew and in Luke rest on the Evangelists’ differing, or even in some cases mistaken, translations of underlying Aramaic traditions. However, the linguistic evidence is not clear-cut, and Matthew’s and Luke’s knowledge of Aramaic is not demonstrable (*see* Languages of Palestine). On the other hand, there is some linguistic evidence which supports the conclusion that Q was composed originally in Greek. Since there is often close verbal correspondence in Matthew’s and Luke’s Q traditions, it is probable that they were both drawing on traditions in the same language, that is, Greek.

Q was probably originally a little larger than the 230 or so verses shared by Matthew and Luke. Since both Matthew and Luke omit some Markan material, why should we suppose that they have both incorporated Q in full? Hence some of the traditions found only in Matthew or in Luke (M or L) may have belonged originally to Q, though the precise extent of such additional Q traditions is far from clear. Two examples will show just how

difficult it is to be sure. Matthew 11:28–30 follows immediately after a Q block and (according to some) even though these verses are not found in Luke, they may have belonged to Q. However, if they did belong to Q, why did Luke omit traditions which he surely would have included if he had known them? Luke 4:16–30 is at least partly independent of Mark. Did Luke include some Q traditions in this important passage, even though there is no trace of non-Markan material in the equivalent passage in Matthew? Since some of the non-Markan traditions in Luke 4:16–30 cohere well with a number of Q traditions, several scholars accept this suggestion.

4. The Case against the Q Hypothesis.

Until two decades or so ago the two-document hypothesis (i.e., Markan priority and Q) was accepted widely by scholars from very different backgrounds. Earlier objectors to the Q hypothesis had made little headway. Some claimed that the alleged contents of Q are so heterogeneous that it is unlikely to have existed as a distinct source; this point will be discussed below. Others noted that no other writing quite like Q seems to have existed in the early church—though the discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas* (see Gospels [Apocryphal]) partly undermined this point. Other objectors claimed that the considerable variations in the proposed reconstructions of Q eroded confidence in the hypothesis. More recently, however, reconstructions have shown that there is broad agreement about the contents of Q.

Since 1965, however, there have been several fresh attempts to undermine the Q hypothesis by offering alternative explanations of the evidence. Two rival hypotheses have been vigorously supported and must be considered seriously, even though they have not attracted wide support. On the two-Gospel hypothesis (to be distinguished from the two-document hypothesis), which was first set out in 1789 by J. J. Griesbach and which has recently been defended vigorously by W. R. Farmer and others, Luke has used Matthew, and Mark has used both the earlier Gospels. Other scholars (most notably A. M. Farrer and his pupil M. D. Goulder) retain Markan priority and dispense with Q by claiming that Luke has used Matthew. Both solutions of the Synoptic problem eliminate the need for any form of the Q hypothesis by claiming that Luke used Matthew.

4.1. Did Luke Use Matthew? If this claim is accepted, there are major implications for our understanding of the origin, transmission and development of the Gospel traditions. On this view the earliest form of the traditions must always lie behind Matthew's Gospel, not Luke's; hence, Matthew is particularly important in historical reconstruction. If Luke has used Matthew, then he has used this major source extremely freely indeed: He is the first "interpreter" of Matthew, which he has dismantled in order to write his own very different Gospel. For the following reasons, this alternative to the Q hypothesis is most unlikely.

4.1.1. The Matthean Discourses. If Luke has used Matthew, what has happened to Matthew's five impressive discourses? On this view a small part of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7 reappears in Luke 6:20–49 (see Sermon on the Mount), but the rest of the material is either scattered (apparently haphazardly) right through Luke's Gospel and set in very different contexts, or it is omitted completely. Why would Luke wish to do this? Matthew's other discourses have been treated similarly. For example, Matthew's second discourse in chapter 10 reappears in no fewer than seven different chapters in Luke!

While attempts have been made to account for Luke's rather odd treatment of the Matthean discourses, they have convinced few. M. D. Goulder (1989) recognizes that Matthew's fifth discourse poses particular difficulties for his hypothesis. He has to concede that Luke has carefully separated the Markan and non-Markan parts of Matthew 24–25. The former are included in Luke 21, the latter are isolated (by marking a copy of

Matthew with a pen!) and included in Luke chapters 12–13 , 17 and, we may add, 19 . This is a tortuous explanation of Luke’s methods, to say the least.

4.1.2. *The Matthean Expansions of Mark.* If Luke has used Matthew, we would expect him to have adopted some of the expansions and modifications Matthew makes to Mark. But hardly a trace of them can be found in Luke. Where Matthew and Mark have the same tradition, Luke opts for Mark’s version and ignores Matthew’s; at the same time he rearranges Matthew very considerably. Why did Luke find Matthew so unattractive, when in almost all other parts of early Christianity it became the favorite Gospel?

Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi provides a good example. At Luke 9:18–21 Mark’s account (Mk 8:27–30) has been used, but there is not a sign in Luke of the major addition Matthew makes to Mark at 16:16–19 . Here several sayings of Jesus addressed to Peter, including the words “On this rock I will build my church” have not been used.

Why, then, does Luke omit so many of Matthew’s numerous expansions of Markan material? This point has often been pressed by those who deny that Luke has used Matthew. Goulder replies as follows. Luke has a “block policy”: “when he (Luke) is treating Marcan matter he has Mark in front of him, and he has made it his policy not to keep turning up Matthew to see what he has added. . . . Luke does not include the additions because he had decided on a policy which involved letting them go” (Goulder, 1.44). This leads Goulder to suggest that once a Marcan block has been dealt with, Luke sometimes comes back to Matthew’s additions to Mark: some of the additions are transferred to other contexts, some are ignored unintentionally, some are rewritten.

4.1.3. *Agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark.* There is a further phenomenon which seriously erodes the plausibility of Goulder’s hypothesis: the minor agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark. Goulder appeals (as have other scholars) to the minor agreements in order to undermine the Q hypothesis and also to offer clear-cut support for Luke’s use of Matthew. The minor agreements, however, can be turned against his own hypothesis.

On Goulder’s explanation of the minor agreements, in Markan contexts Luke sometimes prefers Matthean words or phrases. But Goulder also insists that in Markan contexts Luke makes it his policy *not* to keep turning up Matthew to see what he has added. There is clearly an important flaw in his case against Q. The claim that the minor agreements undermine the Q hypothesis must either be abandoned, or we must accept that in passage after passage Luke has had Matthew in front of him and has redacted Matthew quite perversely. For on Goulder’s view Luke has repeatedly retained quite tiny modifications Matthew has made to Mark (the minor agreements); at the same time Luke has ignored numerous *major* Matthean additions or modifications to Mark which would have suited his purposes, and transferred or rewritten only some of them.

4.1.4. *Variations in Similar Non-Markan Traditions.* Where Matthew and Luke contain similar non-Markan traditions, most scholars accept that it is very difficult to decide which Evangelist has the earlier form of the tradition. But scholars who claim that Luke has used Matthew must accept that it is *always* Luke who has changed Matthew’s earlier form of the tradition. Their attempts to defend this view often look like special pleading.

For example, if Luke has used Matthew, then he has *abbreviated* Matthew’s earlier and fuller version both of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1–12 ; see Sermon on the Mount) and of the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:9–13 ; see Prayer).

Why should Luke wish to do this? In both cases it is difficult to discover plausible reasons; it is much less difficult to suppose that while Luke has retained Q traditions with few changes, Matthew has expanded them.

4.1.5. Variations in Placing Q Sayings Relative to Markan Contexts. After the temptations of Jesus (Mt 4:1–11 par. Lk 4:1–13), Luke and Matthew never use the Q sayings they share in the same Markan context. If Luke has used Matthew, then he has carefully removed every non-Markan (Q) saying from the Markan context it has in Matthew and placed it in a different context!

4.1.6. Implied Differences between Luke's Treatment of Mark and Matthew. One final point sums up several of the above observations. If we accept that Luke has used Mark, then with the help of a synopsis we can readily discover the changes of various kinds which he has made to Mark. On the whole he has retained the order of Mark's traditions and has considerable respect for their content, especially when he is quoting sayings of Jesus. If Luke has also used Matthew, we would expect him to have modified his second source in broadly similar ways. But this is by no means the case.

4.2. Conclusions . Enough has been said to show that it is by no means easy to suppose that Luke has used Matthew. However, it is as difficult to falsify this hypothesis as it is to establish conclusively that Matthew and Luke both used Q. At the end of the day we are left to balance probabilities. Redaction criticism (*see* Redaction Criticism) does in fact offer a way forward, for the results which rival theories offer at the redactional level can be compared. For example, if for the sake of argument we were to assume that Matthew's main source was Luke's Gospel, it would be possible to examine the modifications made by Matthew and then to consider whether this hypothesis offers a more coherent explanation of Matthean redaction than the assumption that Matthew's sources were Mark and Q.

The two-Gospel (Griesbach) solution of the Synoptic problem can be tested along these lines, as can the proposal that Luke has used Matthew. While it is possible to offer some explanation of Lukan and Markan redaction of Matthew on the Griesbach hypothesis, Markan priority offers a much more plausible and coherent account of the origin and distinctive purpose of Matthew and Luke. So too with the claim that Luke has used Matthew. This hypothesis is not, as is sometimes claimed, the simplest solution of the Synoptic problem. On this view Luke has used his sources in an extremely complex set of ways. His redaction of Matthew and of Mark cannot readily be explained as the result of his own literary or theological preferences.

On the other hand, the success of redaction criticism in clarifying the literary methods and distinctive theological emphases of Matthew and Luke on the assumption of dependence on Mark and Q is an important argument in favor of the two-source hypothesis. While some of the arguments which were used in the past to support this solution of the Synoptic problem have now been shown to be reversible or, in one or two cases, untenable, no more satisfactory account of the phenomena presented to us by the text of the three Synoptic Gospels has yet been produced.

5. The Theology and Purpose of Q.

Were Q traditions brought together simply as an anthology or summary of the sayings of Jesus? How coherent are they? Do they contain one primary theological perspective? Were Q traditions selected, arranged and modified for particular theological or pastoral reasons? Discussion of these questions has been approached from three quite different angles.

5.1. The Relationship of Q to the Earliest Kerygma. At the turn of the century several writers on the purpose of Q accepted that it must have contained an account of the death and resurrection of Jesus as well as a collection of his sayings. However, since in their passion and resurrection narratives Luke and Matthew share no more than a few phrases which are not found in Mark, it is impossible to sustain this view.

In his influential study of Q (1907) Harnack insisted that Q was a source of unparalleled value. It had been compiled without any discernible bias, “whether apologetic, didactic, ecclesiastical, national or anti-national” (171). Mark had exaggerated apocalypticism and subordinated the “purely religious and moral element” of Jesus’ message (250–51). Q, on the other hand, was a relatively complete account of “the message of Jesus” which expressed clearly the very essence of Christianity for twentieth-century men and women.

Harnack’s theological presuppositions were challenged by Barth and Bultmann who insisted that proclamation of the cross and the resurrection, not the teaching of the historical Jesus, was at the heart of the earliest Christian preaching. Harnack’s confidence in Q as “the message of Jesus” was also challenged by the work of the first form critics (*see* Form Criticism). They insisted that since all the Gospel traditions have been shaped by the faith and the needs of the post-Easter communities, not even Q provides *direct* access to the teaching of Jesus.

So what was the relationship of Q to the kerygma or proclamation of the earliest post-Easter communities? M. Dibelius (1919), B. H. Streeter (1924) and T. W. Manson (1937) all saw Q as a supplement to the early kerygma of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Q traditions were used as ethical guidance and encouragement for those who had accepted the kerygma.

Although this general view held sway for some time, it was strongly challenged by H. E. Tödt (1956). Tödt noted that many Q traditions are not hortatory and argued that the purpose of Q can be uncovered by elucidating the Q community’s use and development of Son of man sayings. The community did not develop a passion kerygma, but was convinced that Jesus, who had re-established fellowship with his followers as the risen one, is also the one who, as the coming Son of man, will be the eschatological guarantor of that fellowship.

Tödt’s proposals depended heavily on an unlikely view of the Son of man traditions in Q, but other scholars followed his lead and showed that Q traditions had been arranged and shaped in the light of christological concerns. Stanton (1973) drew attention to the importance of the accounts of the baptism and temptations of Jesus (*see* Temptation of Jesus) which stood at the beginning of Q; together with Matthew 11:2–6 par. Luke 7:18–23 (and related passages) they confirm that for the Q community the prophetic eschatological (*see* Eschatology) promises were being fulfilled in the actions and words of Jesus. The past of Jesus (including his rejection by those to whom he was sent), as well as his soon-expected Parousia, was important to the Q community (*see* Apocalyptic Teaching).

5.2. Redaction-Critical Studies. In the 1950s the ways the four Evangelists reshaped and arranged the traditions at their disposal were studied intensively. It soon became possible to show that “redaction” of earlier traditions had been carried out in accordance with particular theological emphases. Discussion of Q from this perspective was pioneered by D. Lührmann (1969) and has been continued by a number of scholars. Attention is focused on the ways originally separate traditions have been linked together in Q and on sayings which have been “created” by the Q community in order to clarify or interpret earlier traditions. Separation of original tradition and later redaction is obviously much more difficult and hypothetical than it is in the case of

Matthew's and Luke's redaction of their sources, but that has not deterred scholars from trying to discern the primary purposes of the compiler(s) of Q.

It is possible to demonstrate that several blocks of Q traditions share strikingly similar literary features or theological emphases. For example, R. A. Piper (1989) has shown that Q traditions include a number of *collections* of proverbs, or aphorisms, which develop an argument in similar ways. D. R. Catchpole (1992) argues that many Q traditions reflect the call of Jesus to Israel : a radical commitment to God's will in light of the imminent end-times is expected; some traditions reflect concern over the delay of the Parousia.

But it is not easy to discern the overriding concern of the final redactor of Q. Hence it is no surprise to discover that some have suggested that Q traditions underwent two or more major redactions. Reconstructions of possible stages in the development of Q traditions are likely to be influenced strongly by the investigator's presuppositions concerning the transmission and development of Gospel traditions, and even by views on the development of earliest Christianity.

5.3. The Literary Genre of Q. Since an appreciation of the literary genre of a writing is a crucial first step in interpretation, it is surprising that earlier writers on Q paid so little attention to its literary genre. J. M. Robinson (1964) remedied this in a bold claim that Q was part of a "trajectory" of sayings genres which extended from Proverbs to Gnostic writings (especially the *Gospel of Thomas*) and the rabbinic tractate *m. Abot*. On this view the wisdom sayings in Q are dominant, and Jesus is portrayed primarily as the representative of the heavenly Sophia (Wisdom).

Robinson's proposals have been refined and extended in J. Kloppenborg's major study (1987). Kloppenborg notes that the writings with which Robinson associates the literary genre of Q are much more homogeneous than Q itself. He argues that the formative component of Q consisted of a group of six "wisdom speeches" which were hortatory in nature and in their mode of argumentation similar to other wisdom writings. This stratum was subsequently expanded by the addition of groups of sayings which adopted a critical and polemical stance with respect to Israel; the temptation story (Mt 4:1–11 par. Lk 4:1–13), which was the final addition to Q, gave it a more biographical cast.

M. Sato (1988) argues that the literary genre of Q is comparable with OT prophetic writings. In all three of the main stages of Q's composition, many individual Q traditions are prophetic in form and in emphasis. Whereas for Kloppenborg prophetic traditions in Q are subsidiary to wisdom traditions, for Sato precisely the reverse is the case. Debate on the genre of Q is likely to continue for some time.

We may now be reasonably certain that Q existed as a written document; its 230 or so sayings of Jesus were used and partly reinterpreted by both Matthew and Luke. But we can be less certain about Q's earlier history, literary genre, overall theological perspective and purpose. Although clusters of traditions with related themes can be identified, Q contained such varied material that it is unwise to claim that it had *one* primary theological perspective or that it was used in the early church in any *one* specific way. The Q hypothesis will continue to be prominent not only in nearly all serious study of the Gospels, but also in discussion of the origin and nature of the earliest expressions of Christian faith.

See also L TRADITION ; M TRADITION ; SYNOPTIC PROBLEM .

m. Mishna

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