

When Is a Text Not a Text? The Quasi Text-Critical Approach of the International Q Project¹

MARK S. GOODACRE

INTRODUCTION

In an important article in 1995,² Frans Neiryck charted the steady transformation in the way in which scholars refer to Q. Neiryck notes, with at least a suggestion of concern, the increasing tendency to call Q a ‘Gospel’ in phrases such as ‘Sayings Gospel Q’ rather than, as previously, to call Q a ‘source’ in phrases like ‘the Sayings Source Q’ or *Logienquelle*. The value of the latter is that it is a more accurate and less provocative designation in that it reminds one of the origin and nature of Q as we currently know it, as an hypothetical documentary source that, according to the dominant theory of Gospel relationships, lies behind Matthew and Luke.³ But this well-documented, steady transformation in the nomenclature for Q, which shows few signs of abating,⁴ has been accompanied by a parallel and contingent shift that is less well documented but in many ways more troubling.⁵ For where Q and attempts

1 An earlier version of this paper was read at the Boston Theological Institute’s New Testament Colloquium, 10 March 2003; I am grateful for some very helpful feedback from those present. I would also like to thank Stephen Carlson for reading an earlier version of this essay and making many useful suggestions.

2 Frans Neiryck, ‘From Source to Gospel’, *ETL* 71 (1995) 421–30; reproduced in Frans Neiryck, *Evangelica III. 1992–2000. Collected Essays* (BETL 150; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001) 419–31.

3 For an altogether more positive assessment of the same trend, using the same phrase as Neiryck but published three years earlier, see Arland D. Jacobson, ‘From Source to Gospel’, Chapter 2 in *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q* (FF; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1992). Note that my use of the word ‘provocative’ is borrowed from Jacobson (3–4) and it is also used by John S. Kloppenborg Verbin – see next note.

4 For a recent informed comment on the issue, see John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2000) 398–407, especially 403, which notes, following Jacobson (*First Gospel*, 3) that the usage of the term ‘gospel’ is unabashedly ‘provocative’ or ‘argumentative’.

5 Note, for example, Neiryck’s relatively enthusiastic reception of the methods and results of the work of the International Q Project in contrast to his less enthusiastic feelings about the ‘gospel’ nomenclature (n. 1 above). See ‘The International Q Project’, *ETL* 69 (1993) 221–5; ‘*Documenta*

at its reconstruction have in the past always come under the general heading of 'synoptic source criticism', it is now to a marked degree getting treated as having its closest affinity with biblical textual criticism. As Q is increasingly inclined to leave the source-critical stage, the scene of many a happy triumph, it now finds itself on the text-critical stage, inhabiting a world of 'critical texts', 'the critical apparatus', 'sigla', 'readings' and 'witnesses'.

One of the first major steps in this direction was the publication at the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Claremont Graduate University, in 1985 of a volume labelled *Pap. Q*,⁶ an attempt to produce an edition of Q as if it had been discovered on papyrus, with the major agreements between Matthew and Luke standing as the main text and everything else as lacunae. James Robinson explained it in this way in his introduction:

This printout, like a unique papyrus, contains the only extant vestiges of the otherwise lost collection of Jesus' sayings familiarly known as Q. Reworked by Matthew and Luke as they incorporated it in differing ways into their Gospels, the text of Q was in the process 'corrupted' by the 'moth' of Luke and the 'rust' of Matthew . . . At places where the two Gospels are so alike that a shared dependence on Q is to be assumed, but where Luke and Matthew nonetheless diverge in some details of wording and order, it is unclear which has altered and which has retained Q. Hence both readings become suspect, resulting in a fragmented text like a tattered papyrus shot through with *lacunae*.⁷

But the most important development in this direction is the crystallisation of the quasi-text-critical approach in The International Q Project (= IQP), a collaborative enterprise sponsored by the Society of Biblical Literature with bases in Claremont (USA), Toronto (Canada), and Bamberg (Germany), homes to its three main editors, James M. Robinson, John S. Kloppenborg and Paul Hoffmann respectively, three of the leading Q scholars of this generation.⁸ Their primary task has been the

Q: *Q 11,2b-4*, *ETL* 72 (1996) 418-24, reproduced in Frans Neirynck, *Evangelica III* 432-9; and 'The Reconstruction of Q and IQP/CritEd parallels' in Andreas Lindemann (ed.), *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus* (BETL 158; Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 53-147.

6 James M. Robinson, Jon Daniels and Lief Vaage, eds., *Pap. Q* (Claremont: IAC, 1985).

7 *Ibid.*, 1 (Robinson's emphasis).

8 The text was given in reports over several years in *JBL*: *JBL* 109 (1990) 499-501; *JBL* 110 (1991) 494-8; *JBL* 111 (1992) 500-8; *JBL* 112 (1993) 500-6; *JBL* 113 (1994) 495-500; *JBL* 114 (1995) 501-11; and *JBL* 116 (1997) 521-5. Recently published is the culmination of this work, James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, eds.; managing editor Milton Moreland, *Critical Edition of Q*. The text continues to be published serially as part of a huge, impressive database, with full quotation of authorities for each 'reading' in Q and assessments of them, under the general editorship of James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg, entitled *Documenta Q. Reconstructions of Q through Two Centuries of Gospel Research Excerpted, Sorted, and Evaluated*. The first volume was Shawn Carruth and Albrecht Garsky, eds.;

painstaking one of ‘assembling a database of all significant arguments used in the reconstruction of Q since the time of Holtzmann (1863)’;⁹ leading towards the construction of a critical text of Q in which the precise order and wording of Q is reconstructed as accurately as possible. As Kloppenborg explains in his recent book, *Excavating Q*:

Arguments are analyzed carefully and sorted into the categories, ‘Luke=Q, pro’, ‘Luke=Q, con’, ‘Matthew=Q, pro’, and ‘Matthew=Q, con’, in recognition of the fact that the presence of editorializing in Matthew, for example, is not a sufficient reason to suppose that Luke represents Q, since there may also be factors weighing against Luke. Once the database is complete, arguments are weighed and a reconstruction is proposed and rated as to its probability ({A} to {D}), that is, from high to low probability), in imitation of the United Bible Societies’ system for grading textual variants.¹⁰

Kloppenborg’s last sentence here is helpful: ‘in imitation of the United Bible Societies’ system for grading textual variants’. For it is not only this grading system but virtually the entire enterprise that is apparently acting in conscious imitation of biblical text criticism. The sigla used by the IQP are derived from textual criticism¹¹ as is the concept of delimiting ‘variation units’;¹² so too is the language of ‘witness’,

vol. ed., Stanley D. Anderson, *Q 11.2b–4* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters, 1996). Subsequent volumes so far published are Shawn Carruth, Christoph Heil and James M. Robinson, eds.; vol. ed., Christoph Heil, *Q 4.1–13, 16. The Temptations of Jesus – Nazara* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters, 1996); Albrecht Garsky, Christoph Heil, Thomas Hieke and Josef E. Amon, eds.; vol. ed., Shawn Carruth, *Q 12.49–59. Children against Parents – Judging the Time – Settling out of Court* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters, 1997); Paul Hoffmann, Josef E. Amon, Ulrike Brauner, Thomas Hieke, Josef E. Amon, Thomas Hieke, M. Eugene Boring, Jon Ma. Asgeirsson, eds.; vol. ed., Christoph Heil, *Q 12.8–12. Confessing or Denying – Speaking against the Holy Spirit – Hearings before Synagogues* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters, 1997); Paul Hoffmann, Stefan H. Brandenburger, Ulrike Brauner and Thomas Hieke, eds.; vol. ed., Christoph Heil, *Q 22.28–30. You Will Judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Thomas Hieke, ed.; vol. ed. Thomas Hieke, *Q 6.20–21. The Beatitudes for the Poor, Hungry, Mourning* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters, 2001); Steven R. Johnson, ed.; vol. ed. Steven R. Johnson, *Q 7.1–10. The Centurion’s Faith in Jesus’ Word* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

9 Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 101.

10 Ibid.

11 See *Q 11.2b–4*, ix–x and at greater length James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg Verbin; managing editor Milton Moreland, *Critical Edition of Q in a Synopsis, Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas, with English, German and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2000) lxxx–lxxxviii.

12 “Variation unit” is a concept borrowed from textual criticism . . . Of course in the case of Q it is not a matter of scribal error, but rather of Matthean and/or Lukan redactional “improvements”, but the need to delimit in terms of variation units is the same’, *Critical Edition of Q*, lxxx.

'attestation', 'reading', and, for that matter the very term 'Critical Text'. It is a mark of the success of the work of The International Q Project that very quickly it is becoming the standard reference point for studies of Q. Where scholars writing about Q differ from the IQP wording in a given instance, they feel obliged to register their disagreement carefully, rather as scholars feel obliged to register any disagreement with the text of NA.¹³

In some ways the development is simply the natural next step for a document that is becoming ever more concrete, ever more tangible. Q has been a 'text' with its own verse-numbering system for some time now. Yet this verse numbering system,¹⁴ like the quasi text-critical approach to Q to which it is related, has not (to my knowledge) been questioned or challenged by any Biblical scholar, neither text critic nor source critic nor anyone else.¹⁵ No doubt the prestige and influence of the IQP is itself a factor here. This is important, international, collaborative work of over forty scholars. It is sponsored by the Society of Biblical Literature, far and away the largest academic society connected with Biblical scholarship, its results have been published year after year in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, one of the most prestigious of the academic journals; and major academic publishers Peeters (Leuven) and Fortress (Philadelphia) are publishing volume after volume of the IQP's database, culminating in the *Critical Edition of Q* in the Hermeneia series and now *The Sayings Gospel Q in Greek and English*.¹⁶ Any attempt to challenge this major enterprise might seem at best daunting and at worst foolhardy.

Nevertheless, scholarship does not move forward without major enterprises getting subjected to testing, questioning and challenge. Perhaps such examination will result in the project getting strengthened; so let us not be afraid. The question I would like to ask is: how appropriate is such an approach and such language when one is dealing with a hypothetical text, that is, with a text that is not attested anywhere in antiquity, the existence of which is an inference from Matthew's and Luke's independent use of Mark.¹⁷ I will attempt to argue that the IQP's construal of

13 For example Dale Allison, *The Jesus Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997) 24, n. 102.

14 The versification system while widespread is still not universally used, however. There tends to be greater resistance to its use in more conservative scholarship. Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody, Ma., 1999) 200, speaks, for example, of 'the Q saying . . . found at Matthew. 8.21-2/Luke 9.59-60'.

15 Michael Goulder, however, has attempted to expose errors in method in the way in which the wording of Q is calculated by the International Q Project and this is one of the few critical essays on the IQP to have been published – 'Self-Contradiction in the IQP', *JBL* 118 (1999) 506-17.

16 James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg, *The Sayings Gospel Q in Greek and English with Parallels from the Gospels of Mark and Thomas* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); see also James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Sayings of Jesus: The Sayings Gospel Q in English* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

17 It is true, of course, that there are those who combine belief in Q with Luke's knowledge of Matthew (e.g., Robert Gundry), but it is clear that the independence of Matthew and Luke is a (arguably *the*) major presupposition behind the task of reconstruction undertaken by the IQP.

and approach to a hypothetical document, while daring and imaginative in its ambition, is ultimately flawed and potentially misleading in its execution. I will focus on four main points: (1) the two analogies and the tension between them; (2) the relationship between textual criticism and source criticism; (3) the difficulties inherent in using critical texts to construct a critical text; and (4) the question of *Sondergut* and alleged 'single attestation' of Q texts.

1. THE TWO ANALOGIES AND THE TENSION BETWEEN THEM

The IQP is actually working with two textual analogies and in their language they refer sometimes to the one and sometimes the other; and the two are in fact in tension with one another. The first analogy is of a fragmentary text that has been excavated. This is clearly the analogy at work in *Pap. Q* to which we have referred already: minimal Q, that is, the words common to Matthew and Luke in double tradition, represents the tattered, partially preserved equivalent to a papyrus excavated in the desert sands. No doubt the discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas*, with which Q is often compared,¹⁸ has informed the choice of this analogy, and the development of the metaphor is evident in a great deal of contemporary Q scholarship, from Jacobson's introductory sentence that 'There are fragments of a document scattered through Matthew and Luke'¹⁹ to Burton L. Mack's triumphant declaration that 'the shards of a lost text have finally been pieced together',²⁰ and culminating in the title of John Kloppenborg's already essential *Excavating Q*.

The second analogy is different. Rather than thinking of Q as a tattered papyrus, it works with the idea of two textual witnesses, the careful comparison and detailed scrutiny of which will yield up a usable critical text. One of the witnesses is Matthew's Gospel and the other is that of Luke. Where Matthew and Luke agree, we have a strong witness to the text of Q. Where they disagree, each text is carefully analysed for the presence of a possible Q reading. Thus the IQP comment in the front of each volume of *Documenta Q* that 'the text of Q, though not extant on papyrus, is eminently worthy of being critically reconstructed and published'.²¹ This is the dominant analogy in the work of the IQP and is reflected in the huge enterprise that of reconstructing Q from its extant 'witnesses' Matthew and Luke.

There are difficulties with both of the analogies. The first, the metaphor of the tattered papyrus, is very much at home with the archaeological metaphors that dominate much recent Q study. I argued in *The Case against Q* that the use of the

18 On the comparison between Q and Thomas as shedding light on the Farrer Theory, see my *Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), Chapter 9.

19 Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 1.

20 Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1993).

21 *Q 11.2b-4v*.

archaeological metaphors tends to discourage questioning of the hypothesis, reinforcing the consensus view, especially in the minds of students coming to the topic for the first time. One can hardly ‘undiscover’ a document, and one is left with the tacit impression that Q sceptics are still at home talking about maps and routes while the rest of the party has long since left and begun to explore.²² But given that this analogy is used so readily and with so little discussion of its appropriateness, it is worth reminding ourselves of the considerable differences between the discovery of papyrus fragments and the discovery of Q. In one, the lacunae are the result of accident; in the other the ‘lacunae’ are the result of a substantial investment of intentional human effort, as scholars pour over Matthew and Luke, comparing them carefully and decontextualising source material they find there.

While both analogies are at home in the world of textual criticism, using both in the context of reconstructing Q draws attention to the important differences between them. Papyrology is a different enterprise from textual criticism proper, with its own name and its own tools and skills.²³ It analyses a particular papyrus, doing what it can to fill in lacunae in the most informed and plausible way possible. What Robinson and Vaage produced in *Pap. Q* was, on this analogy, the single papyrus shot through with its lacunae. The wording common to Matthew and Luke generates the fictional papyrus; the divergences generate the lacunae. Ultimately, however, this analogy was limited – it could not respond to the desire to reconstruct the wording of those lacunae and thus the need for the second, different but more useful analogy, according to which Matthew and Luke become two witnesses to Q in the manner of standard New Testament textual criticism. Neither text is of course comparable to a papyrus find – these are complete manuscripts in multiple copies, repeatedly copied throughout history. The dominance of this second analogy is effectively an admission of the weakness of the first one. The tattered papyrus Q is striking and so memorable, but in effect it proves inadequate to the task of analysing Q. Although the image endures in contemporary writing on Q, the International Q Project does not proceed as if Q is a papyrus. There is no assessment of palaeography or provenance, no counting of letters on lines, no attempt to ascertain the reading of smudges or uncertain letters, and so on.

The difficulty with the second analogy, though, is more serious because it is from this that the enterprise of engaging in something corresponding to New Testament textual criticism emerges, and we will turn to this next.

22 Goodacre, *Case against Q*, 5–7.

23 Cf. Edwin A. Judge: ‘Being ancient copies directly retrieved, papyri are distinguished from “manuscripts” preserved in libraries as the result of repeated copying during late antiquity and the Middle Ages’, ‘Papyri’ in Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd ed.; London and New York: Garland, 1997) 867.

2. TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND SOURCE CRITICISM

The use of the quasi-text-critical approach involves the presupposition (of course) that there is a text that can be reconstructed. Now there are analogies for scholars attempting to reconstruct texts that are no longer extant in their original form, Tatian's *Diatessaron* being one of the most obvious. But Q is not like this. The trouble for Q is not so much that it is lost as that it is hypothetical. This may sound like something of a quibble, but the distinction between 'lost' and 'hypothetical' is important. Where texts like the *Diatessaron* are attested in antiquity, Q (as far as we know) is not.²⁴ The sole reason for postulating the existence of the document is to solve a source-critical difficulty, the existence of the 'double tradition' on the assumption that Matthew and Luke used Mark independently of one another. In other words, at the heart of the IQP is the reconstruction of a document that is solely a source-critical postulate. While it might be objected that Q is 'attested' in the sense that its text is present in that double tradition material embedded within Matthew and Luke, all this does is to draw attention to the difficulty. If the best explanation for the double tradition material is that Matthew and Luke were both drawing independently on Q, what we have here is a source-critical issue. Attempts at approximating what might have belonged to Matthew and Luke's common source does not naturally lend itself to text-critical discourse.

The problem is not purely about nomenclature but relates also to the question of one's choice of natural dialogue partners. By aligning itself with the enterprise of textual criticism rather than source criticism, the discussion tends to avoid contact with the significant minority of scholars who do not accept the existence of the document that they are attempting to reconstruct. Since the IQP does not, on the whole, take the opportunity of engaging with those who believe that they can explain the features of Matthew's and Luke's texts without appeal to the hypothetical document,²⁵ it is arguable that the project generates a false confidence in its presuppositions, methods and results. Constructive engagement with those who do not accept the existence of Q, which would have been possible had the IQP construed itself as belonging within the discipline of source criticism, might have nuanced their approach at the same time as widening their appeal.²⁶ In the end, the study of the

24 It is worth adding that for much of its history Q was thought to be attested in antiquity by Papias, but this is not a view held by any current Q proponent. See Michael Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (JSNTSup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 28–33; Robinson et al., *The Critical Edition of Q*, xx–xxxii; Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, Chapter 7.

25 Note that I am here discussing the IQP as a whole as it is represented in its publications (particularly *Documenta Q* and *Critical Edition of Q*) and not the work of individual members of it, some of whom have engaged extensively with alternative synoptic theories, especially John S. Kloppenborg and Robert Derrenbacher, Jr.

26 The issue can be seen particularly starkly in relation to *Q 11.2b–4*, an entire book on the Lord's Prayer, which does not refer once to Michael Goulder's discussions, either in 'The Composition of the Lord's Prayer', *JTS* 14 (1963) 32–45 or *Luke*, in spite of the fact that these are often at the detailed, linguistic level, touching on issues of Matthean composition, Lucan redaction and so on.

Synoptic Problem has to centre on dialogue between those with differing views. It remains a problem because there is a majority opinion rather than unanimity; one persuades others of one's case by continuously engaging with dialogue partners who are involved in the same discipline. What is happening in the IQP's work is the bypassing of one's natural dialogue partners – fellow source-critics – and instead joining in another discipline, textual criticism, which is not well suited to what is being attempted.

3. THE DIFFICULTY OF USING CRITICAL TEXTS TO GENERATE A CRITICAL TEXT

The 'witnesses' for the order and wording of Q with which the IQP are working are the Critical Texts of Matthew and Luke as found in N-A²⁷. This draws attention to a problem – the IQP are effectively creating one 'Critical Text' on the basis of two other 'Critical Texts', the latter treated on the whole as if they are direct witnesses to the text that they are trying to reconstruct. The difficulty here is that there is an assumed precision about the project that is actually more ambitious than the employed tools allow.²⁷

The point will benefit from an illustration. The Critical Text of Q features at Q 4.16 the single word *Nazara*, Ναζαρά, at a rating of {B}.²⁸ This single word is thought to have appeared in Q because, it is said, this unique spelling is unattested anywhere else in either Matthew (4.13) or Luke (4.16),²⁹ and, furthermore, it occurs

Later editions of *Documenta Q* do adjust this problem in so far as they add Goulder's opinions to the database, but even here they are contextualised in accordance with the quasi-text-critical process so that Goulder's views are listed 'Pro' and 'Con' particular Q readings rather than being integrated in such a way as to allow profitable reflection on the source-critical issues.

27 One of the few critical comments available on this method is found in J. K. Elliott, 'Book Notes', *NovT* 54 (2002) 410–13, in which he is briefly reviewing Thomas Hieke (ed.), *Documenta Q: Q 6.20–21: The Beatitudes for the Poor, Hungry and Mourning* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001) and remarks 'The textual base is N-A27 and it is significant that the v.1. + τω πνεύματι in mss. of Luke (and shown in the apparatus to NA27) does not figure large in the discussions excerpted here. Few commentators look to the *apparatus* of their Greek testaments' (411). And the problem is worse than Elliott realizes, because the IQP are doing this in something that is purporting to be text-critical. One might say that if one is going to construe the work as text-critical, then it is important to take textual criticism itself seriously.

28 See Q 4.1–13, 16 and *Critical Edition of Q*, 42–3. In *JBL* the Critical Text initially rated this at {C}, only a 'hesitant probability', 'The International Q Project Work Session 16 November 1990', *JBL* 110 (1991), 494–8 (495). The change is not recorded in the Critical Text in Q 4.1–13, 16, 463–4, but is registered in the later version in *Critical Edition of Q*, ad loc.

29 James Robinson's evaluation states that 'Matthew. 4.13 and Luke 4.16 are the only two places in the NT where Ναζαρά occurs, in precisely the same position in Matthew and Luke' (Q 4.1–13, 16, 438); Shawn Carruth comments, 'In such material it is remarkable that the place name Ναζαρά is spelled in a way that neither evangelist uses elsewhere though both make reference to Nazareth in other contexts' (Ibid., 441).

in precisely the same place, just after Q 4.1–13 (the Temptation narrative).³⁰ However, the spelling *does* occur elsewhere in Matthew, but only if one is not relying solely on the text of N-A²⁷, but is looking also at the apparatus. For in P⁷⁰(vid.), three third-century papyrus sheets of Matthew (2.13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23; 3.1; 11.26, 27; 12.4, 5; 24.3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15), as well as Origen and Eusebius, the spelling Ναζαρά occurs in Matthew 2.23, on the previous occasion on which the town was mentioned in Matthew, something that is not mentioned by the IQP.³¹ Examples like this draw attention to the inherent difficulty of constructing a ‘Critical Edition’ on the basis of two other ‘Critical Texts’ and treating the latter as if they are witnesses to a text in the usually accepted sense. If they had had all the data in front of them, would they have been so confident in assigning this supposedly ‘unique spelling’ to Q 4.16?³² A decent case could be made for the Matthaean origin of this spelling,³³ but it is a case that cannot be made on the basis of the data considered by the IQP. In focusing on critical texts of Matthew and Luke as if they were two papyri each independently witnessing to a common source, the quasi-text-critical approach has, ironically, led the IQP to pay less and not more attention to textual variants in Matthew and Luke. And the lack of attention to such textual variants can only artificially reinforces confidence in the project.

4. SONDERGUT AND ‘SINGLY ATTESTED’ TEXTS

Another difficulty with the self-construal of the IQP’s work as text-critical relates to the language of single attestation, sometimes used when discussing *Sondergut* passages, those passages that occur in Matthew alone or Luke alone. For a good example of this, consider the following quotation from Alan Kirk’s *The Composition of the Sayings Source*:

The IQP’s decision to exclude 12.35–38 (unattested in Matthew) from Q is based upon the consideration that standard arguments advanced for its inclusion, while not without weight, are insufficient to warrant a far-reaching text-critical decision.³⁴

30 In addition to the previous footnote, note John S. Kloppenborg’s evaluation, which includes the comment that ‘The coincidence in the use of the rare Ναζαρά by both Matthew and Luke, and their general agreement in using this immediately following Q 4.1–13, give reasonably strong support for the supposition of a Q Vorlage’ (Ibid., 441).

31 See now on this Michael Goulder, ‘Two Significant Minor Agreements (Matthew 4.13 Par.; Matthew 26.67–8 Par.)’, *NovT* 45 (2003) 365–73.

32 Note in particular John S. Kloppenborg, *Q 4.1–13, 16*, ‘In the case of Matthew, the shift from Ναζαρέτ (2.23) to Ναζαρά in 4.13 in an otherwise similar formula supplies additional corroboration of the presence of some other factor influencing Matthew’s choice of orthography’ (441).

33 See Goulder, ‘Two Minor Agreements’.

34 Kirk, Alan, *The Composition of the Sayings Source: Genre, Synchrony and Wisdom Redaction in Q* (NovTSup 91; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 227.

While Kirk is here agreeing with an IQP decision not to include a Lucan passage in its reconstruction of Q, the language used is revealing. The passage is not absent from Matthew, or unparalleled in Matthew, but it is 'unattested'. It is a 'text-critical decision' that has been made, and this on the basis of the careful weighing of arguments.³⁵ But this is unhelpful language in which to couch the discussion of passages that occur in only one Gospel. There is no meaningful sense in which a text that occurs in Matthew alone or Luke alone 'witnesses' or 'attests' to the presence of that passage in Q.

This is a troubling element in the quasi-text-critical approach and it focuses the difficulty with the whole enterprise. For where one is attempting to reconstruct a known text attested in antiquity, that has direct manuscript witnesses, one has to take all elements in the witnesses as seriously as possible, even singly attested elements. But Matthew and Luke, and – assuming the Two-Source Theory – their relationship to Q, is nothing like this. Q is a source that has been overwritten and embedded in a broader narrative in which there are hundreds of verses that are unique to Matthew and unique to Luke. Such verses cannot be described as 'singly attested' Q verses any more than we would think of calling them 'singly attested' Marcan verses.

The discussion of *Sondergut* highlights an important issue, that we have simply no idea what the textual limits of Q were.³⁶ Extant texts embodied in manuscript or papyrus, even when incomplete, have known parameters. They are fixed entities which both include and exclude. But we simply do not know where the parameters of Q might have been located, how much is absent from both Matthew and Luke, how much is present in Matthew alone and how much is present in Luke alone. And this ignorance is important, because it is at the heart of source-criticism as a discipline. The text-critical approach to Q discourages the reader from thinking clearly enough about the inevitably partial, incomplete and uncertain business of discussing a hypothetical source.

At best, the witness to Q in Matthew and Luke is the indirect witness afforded by common use of a source. To use the language appropriated from directly witnessed, extant documents here is potentially misleading. Once again, the traditional language of source-criticism is much more useful for a source-critical enterprise than is the borrowed language from textual-criticism.

35 See Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 119, n. 11, for a similar example, in discussion of Q 17.28–30: 'This saying, which stands in parallel with Q 17.26–27, is attested only in Luke.' He then refers to John S. Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels: Synopsis, Critical Notes and Concordance* (Sonoma and Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 1988) 194.

36 On this point, see further Nicholas Perrin's and Eric Eve's essays in this volume.

CONCLUSION

I do not want to give the impression that there is not a useful analogy between textual criticism and source criticism. Of course there is. One of the pioneering biblical text-critics of the previous century, B. H. Streeter, was also a pioneer source-critic, and his *Four Gospels*³⁷ is a testament to his expertise in both disciplines, all the more interesting in that he often used analogies from textual criticism in his source criticism. Both disciplines are, after all, about critical historical enquiry using literary texts with a view to reconstructing the past. The cause for concern in contemporary Q scholarship, however, is that textual criticism is no longer getting treated purely as a partial analogy for doing source-critical work, but it is treated *as the vehicle for doing source criticism itself*. This is troubling because the textual critic's tools are not always the ideal ones for engaging in source criticism and, further, it generates a misplaced confidence as well as a misleading impression, obscuring the important fact that the same data could be explained – I would say more plausibly explained – in a quite different fashion that avoids the postulate Q.

However, I have avoided peddling my own favoured solution to the Synoptic Problem, the Farrer Theory, which affirms Markan Priority but is sceptical about Q.³⁸ But I cannot resist concluding with some reflections on the effect that the quasi-text-critical approach has on alternative synoptic theories. In one of his rare comments on the matter, James Robinson acknowledges that the IQP has avoided discussion of the existence of Q:

The IQP has indeed refrained from entering into the never-ending discussion over the existence of Q, and has preferred to concentrate its energy . . . on seeking to reconstruct the text of Q, on the assumption that this may in the end be a more compelling and useful argument for its existence.³⁹

But in what sense can the reconstruction of Q act as an argument for its existence without the process becoming circular? Elsewhere, Robinson has hinted that one of the values of the Critical Text of Q is that it will enable scholars to do redaction-criticism of Matthew and Luke on the basis of the new text.⁴⁰ Given that this text was reconstructed on the basis of redaction-criticism of Matthew and Luke, it is particularly difficult to imagine how this might proceed, once more, without the real danger of circularity.

37 B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, Treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, and Dates* (London: MacMillan, 1924).

38 See Goodacre, *Case against Q*.

39 James M. Robinson, 'Introduction' in Robinson, *Sayings Gospel Q*, 65, n. 160.

40 James M. Robinson, 'The Jesus of Q as Liberation Theologian', in Ronald A. Piper, ed., *The Gospel behind the Gospels: Current Studies on Q* (NovTSup 75; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 259–76 (260)

Consider, moreover, one of the most well-known arguments for the existence of Q: the notion that sometimes Matthew sometimes Luke has the more primitive version of double tradition sayings, something that is now crystallised in the Critical Text of Q. Will we see in the future scholars pointing to the alleged original versions of these sayings in the IQP's reconstruction and comparing these to Matthew and Luke, so re-entrenching the argument? Perhaps so, and perhaps too, if we are not careful, we will forget that the IQP reconstructed Q with this presupposition basic to its own thought-process, often considering questions about Matthaean and Lucan terminology in their discussions.⁴¹

The optimism about the Critical Text is at the moment quite high. Consider John Kloppenborg's words:

The reconstruction of Q is likewise a matter of probabilities. This fact does not make the resultant text any less usable than the text of the New Testament, nor, by the same token, any less subject to the caution that should attend the use of the reconstructed text of the Greek New Testament.⁴²

Kloppenborg has chosen his words carefully, but actually it is far from clear that the reconstructed text of Q is as usable as the reconstructed text of the Greek New Testament because ultimately, for all the appearances to the contrary, it is source-critically and not text-critically reconstructed, and source-critically reconstructed documents are inherently much less usable than text-critically reconstructed ones, lacking direct witness to their character, contents and parameters. My title poses a riddle: when is a text not a text? And I can now provide the answer: when it's a source. For a source ultimately points beyond itself to some other body or bodies where it belongs. And while Q looks to me very much at home in one of those bodies, the Gospel of Matthew, far be it from me to suggest that that is its natural home or that we should allow it to stay there. Instead I will simply suggest that what we have in the IQP should be treated with care and that, in the long run, reports of the discovery of Q might turn out to have been greatly exaggerated.

⁴¹ On the topic of Matthaean terminology in Q, see further Goulder, 'Self Contradiction', the reply of Robert A. Derrenbacher, Jr. and John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, 'Self-Contradiction in the IQP: A Reply to Michael Goulder', *JBL* 120 (2001), 57–76, and Michael Goulder, 'The Derrenbacher–Kloppenborg Defense' *JBL* 121 (2002), 331–6.

⁴² *Excavating Q*, 104.