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**Kirk, Alan**

***The Composition of the Sayings Source: Genre, Synchrony, & Wisdom Redaction in Q***

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The present work, a revised version of Kirk's dissertation at the University of Toronto under John S. Kloppenborg, is a careful, interesting, strongly argued, and well-written, if somewhat verbose, analysis of the genre and composition of Q. In fact, it is a very important contribution to Q research and deserves careful attention.

The author self-consciously seeks to separate his approach from all, or nearly all, previous Q scholarship, which, he claims, was governed by the *Kleinliteratur* model. "*The Kleinliteratur* model for Q's formation, based on theories of the origins of the synoptic tradition advanced by classical form criticism, cannot be sustained and should be jettisoned once and for all," concludes Kirk (p. 399). In contrast to the diachronic approach, Kirk proposes a synchronic approach, which attends to the composition of Q as we have it and to the genre or genres to which it conforms. The result is a very different reading of Q, and one which will have to be taken very seriously. By way of anticipation, the result of this reading of Q is the abandonment of redaction history and stratigraphic analysis. Eschatology, which some have lately pushed into the nether regions, comes roaring back in this analysis. Moreover, Q turns out to have a strong, indeed "high," though not necessarily sophisticated, Christology. And against attempts, like Richard Horsley's recent efforts, to stress the oral character of Q, Kirk's analysis results in a Q that is a thoroughly literary production. On the question of whether Q is sapiential or prophetic, Kirk comes down hard on the side of sapiential.

In good Germanic tradition, Kirk begins with a *Forschungsbericht* (pp. 1-86), focusing on proposals regarding the compositional analysis of Q. His survey reveals a benighted scholarship unable to escape the specter of "the *Kleinliteratur* model" inherited from form criticism. To be sure, some efforts were made to approach Q as a literary whole, and to attend to its genre, most notably his mentor, Kloppenborg. Kirk here and later in his analysis of the composition of Q makes much of the diversity of the results, which, he claims, discredit the method. Previous methods "posited Q as an inchoate,

constantly expanding, amorphous collection of traditions, endowed by unlettered redactors with nothing but the most primitive structure. Within such a research regime Q scholars doing redaction histories have had no option but to grasp for whatever social-historical and theological development schemes might be made available to them by current thinking in the field. The lack of literary-critical controls upon such analysis has resulted in a Q compliant with the application of virtually any analytical model" (p. 65). Whether Kirk has found a kind of neutral, value-free "research regime," however, is quite debatable, for even if it has great value, it by no means avoids subjectivity.

Kirk next surveys instructional speech compositions in ancient wisdom literature-Egyptian, Jewish, and Greco-Roman (pp. 87-151)-though somewhat oddly for a synchronic approach, the Epistle of James, *Pirqe 'Abot*, and the Qumran sapiential material are ignored. Here, of course, Kirk builds upon the work done by Kloppenborg, although Kloppenborg, says Kirk, got distracted by his *kleinliteraturisch* fascination with stratigraphy. Kirk analyses a number of sapiential texts with instructional speeches to disclose their lineaments, such things as programmatic admonitions, more or less extended argumentation, a programmatic maxim, implicit or explicit threat of divine sanction, use of *inclusio*, the "gnomic center," and epitomizing gnomic sayings at the end of the composition.

Kirk identifies twelve instructional speeches in Q: 6:27-35; 6:37-42; 6:43-45; 11:2-13; 11:14-23; 11:29-35; 12:2-12; 12:22-31; 12:35-46; 12:49, 51, 53-59; 17:23-37 and the scattered verses 13:24-30; 14:11, 16-24, 26-27; 17:33; 14:34-35. These, along with other materials, have been assembled, by the same scribal editor who created the instructional speeches, into four "macro-compositions": an Inaugural Discourse (3:7-9, 16-17, 21-22; 4:1-13; 6:20b-49; 7:1-10, 18-35), a Mission Discourse (9:57-60; 10:2-16, 21-22), a Controversy Discourse (10:23-24; 11:2-13, 14-23, 24-26, 29-35, 39-52; 13:34-35), and an Eschatological Discourse (12:2-12, 22-31, [33-34], 35-46, 49-59; 13:18-21, 24-30; 14:11, 16-24, 26-27; 17:33; 14:34-35; 15:4-6, 8-10; 16:13, 16-18; 17:1-6, 23-37; 19:12-25; 22:28-30).

The macro-compositions are all arranged in "ring compositions" with "central sayings" in each. Moreover, it is possible to see a number of unifying features such as "recurring key words" (which Kirk prefers to "catchwords") as well as the linear development of themes. To probe one example, the Controversy Discourse begins and ends with a macarism (10:23; 13:35), as well as with λέγω ὑμῖν sayings (10:24; 13:35). The composition as a whole "works out in a linear, escalating manner a coherent, socially aggressive rhetorical strategy of *counter-definition* and *delegitimation*" (pp. 311-12, his emphasis). An inversion occurs between the beginning of the composition, with its promise of sightedness (10:23-24), and the end, where sightedness is denied another group (13:34-35). In between is the "central saying" in 11 :26b about the last state of the person being worse than the first, which clearly signals the inversion to occur at the end.

This linear elaboration, however, is not really carried forward by the text itself--unless it is assumed to do so. The units of text within the composition do not themselves call attention to any linear movement in the text. It would be unfair to say that the linear elaboration is simply in the eye of the beholder. Nevertheless, the objectivity of the "literary-critical control" that Kirk seeks simply does not exist. Kirk has a very plausible reading but it is not the only possible one.

The components of the macro-composition are the following: blessing upon the insiders (10:23-24), Lord's Prayer (11:2-4), commendation of prayer (11:9-13), Beelzebul controversy (11:14-23), return of the unclean spirit (11:24-26), request for a sign (11:29-35; including the saying about light in 11:33 and the sound eye in 11:34-35), the woes (11:39-52), and the lament over Jerusalem (13:34-35). (Kirk regards the Matthaean location of Q 13:34-35 as preferable to the Lukan location). The scribal editor has used three of the instructional speeches (11:2-13; 11:14-23; and 11:29-35) and encased them in a composition built up from materials from other, unspecified sources. It is not surprising that scholars have not previously regarded these as parts of a unified composition since they seem like quite independent pieces; it is not until one tests the proposition that they represent a coherent whole that the idea becomes plausible. That is Kirk's challenge and contribution. And indeed, it is possible to discern, with Kirk, a recurring theme here of sight (10:23-24; 11:34-36; 13:35; and the request for a visible sign in 11:29-32). Kirk discerns a logical flow at the opening of the composition: Jesus announces in 10:23-24 that he "constitutes the new axis between heaven and earth" (p. 314). This is then followed by his instruction for an alternative cultic activity: prayer (11:2-13). The claim put forth in these verses is then challenged in the Beelzebul controversy (11:14-23) and the demand for a sign (11:29-35), where Jesus asserts his superiority to previous figures. This is followed by a critique of the "official purity apparatus and cult" in 11:39-52, with its ominous conclusion, and the further announcement of the end of the cult in 13:34-35.

But, to remain with this one macro-composition, Kirk's analysis is not without problems. For example, the opening parts of the composition are addressed to insiders (10:23-24; 11:2-13), while the rest is addressed to apparent outsiders and opponents. Kirk does not address this problem. Elsewhere, he suggests that such a switch in audiences "is not unusual, if infrequent, for an instructional speech" (p. 221 n. 237), yet elsewhere the switch in audiences (between 12:22-31 and 12:33-34) is taken as a sign of a literary disconnect (p. 227). Again, Kirk is quite aware that detecting "ring composition" is rather subjective business, and he admits that to some it might be "incomestible" (p. 306) and some are "repelled" by it (p. 400). He even concedes that one can "ignore or even choose to reject evidence of ring composition and still have a unified, self-contained, linear composition to reckon with and appreciate" (pp. 400-401). But many of the arguments for ring composition are the same as the ones for linear composition.

There are some "meta" concerns with this type of analysis as well. Kirk's approach, in effect, allows form to take precedence over content, or, more precisely, the putative linear

development trumps the content of the component textual units. Thus, the Inaugural Discourse turns out to be dominated by a *synkrisis* that examines the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus in order to elevate the latter and relativize, while acknowledging, the former. This takes up most of the composition. But sandwiched between the John/Jesus bookends is the Sermon on the Mount/Plain. When the text is read, as Kirk suggests, Jesus' preaching becomes subordinated to the christological interests of the editor. Of course, this problem may be due to the Q editor, not to Kirk. If Kirk is correct, the importance of the Sermon within Q is greatly diminished, and we have the beginning of a trend in which the teachings of Jesus are eclipsed by his regal grandeur. Of the christological *synkrisis* in the Inaugural Discourse, Kirk says that it "cannot be written off as the contribution of the last in a putative series of redactional activities; rather, it is thoroughly constitutive of the formation of Q's text" (p. 383).

It could be argued that the loose connections of sayings in a collection reflect not a lack of literary skill but a deliberate effort to preserve the integrity of each saying. If Kirk is correct, Q is not a sayings collection, and we would be right in seeing the sayings as almost little cogs in a literary machine, lacking their own individual integrity and punch. But, of course, it has long been noted that Q is not simply a collection of individual sayings but a collection of speeches with assorted sayings scattered among and between them.

Interestingly, Kirk seems chary of calling Q a gospel (see p. 377, n. 382). Yet if his analysis is correct, it would seem that we have more reason than ever to claim Q as the first gospel, or at least the earliest extant gospel. Having demonstrated, at least to his own satisfaction, the rather intricate connections that weave the Q materials into a unified composition and make it coherent and rhetorically compelling, Kirk, at the end, dismisses this as simply "the application of a few relatively simple organizing techniques" (p. 403), so that "Q is hardly an innovative literary achievement" (p. 403). That may be true within the antique literary world as a whole, or even within contemporary Jewish literature, but it certainly must represent, if he is right, a breakthrough in the early Jesus movement.

Moreover, if Kirk is right, the line between author and redactor becomes blurred. His or her contribution is extensive: "*the same hand(s) as produced the [twelve] small speeches arranged the larger compositions*" (p. 399, his emphasis) and also brought other disparate materials into a coherent composition. As for the purpose of Q, Kirk asserts that "Q is a particularistic 'boundary' text whose paraenesis functions both to *recruit* and *resocialize*" (p. 399, his emphasis), which would seem to be pretty much the same purpose as a canonical gospel. However, he also sees other purposes at work. Commenting on a feature of one of the smaller instructional speeches (6:27-35), Kirk says that "this confirms our view of Q's text as a communicative event intensely engaged in a socially aggressive manner with its social context" (p. 165). A further hint of Q's ethos is found in the Eschatological Discourse, which reflects, says Kirk, "the conviction

of impending crisis, expectation of an imminent reversal, and corresponding sense of alienation from doomed contemporary society and its conventional values. . ." (p. 306).

But if the Q editor/author assembled a well-woven cloth, where did he get his materials? Since Kirk eschews diachronic analysis, he may perhaps be excused for ignoring this question, but it will not go away. "Q has no recoverable redaction *history* leading up to the redaction which gave its text the form it presently displays" (p. 399, his emphasis), Kirk claims. But he does not deny that the individual units that make up Q can have their own history; for example, the chreia in Q 11:14-20 had already undergone elaboration before it reached the Q redactor (p. 186), and 12:35-38 is said to have been "appropriated . . . from the pre-Markan tradition" (p. 231). More troubling is Q 12:33-34, which Kirk seems to treat as a later addition, but without explaining how we are to understand this (p. 227). In fact, this incongruity is finessed in the table of contents, where 12:33-34 is included as part of an instructional speech, though in the body of the text it is seen as a *non sequitur*. Kirk has made a strong case for taking Q "as is" and seeing it as an example of the instructional genre, but diachronic issues cannot be simply ignored.

Having broached the subject of "the literary unity of Q" over two decades ago, I must confess some satisfaction in seeing a rigorous attempt to demonstrate that unity. This is a work that deserves, and surely will receive, careful attention by Q scholars and others. In many ways, it represents a new chapter in Q research, and the author is to be thanked and congratulated. The editors are to be thanked for a book almost free of typos.