This book is a follow-up to the author’s previous volume, *Rethinking the Gospel Sources: From Proto-Mark to Mark* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004). In the present installment, Burkett focuses on three important questions in the study of Q: (1) whether or not Q actually existed; (2) whether or not it was a unified document; and (3) how to account for the plurality of its wording in certain instances. The book is divided into three sections. Chapters 1 and 2 cover introductory concerns, chapters 3–6 focus on establishing the unity of Q, and chapters 7–11 examine the original wording of Q as a means to explaining the plurality of wording in the double tradition.

The first chapter of the book is dedicated to defending Q’s existence. Here Burkett takes on the prominent critics of the Q hypothesis (Farmer, Farrer, Goodacre, Goulder) and argues that Q is a necessary component in any responsible attempt to explain the Synoptic interrelationships. The majority of the chapter consists of eight arguments against the idea that Luke used Matthew. Much of the conversation in this section is aimed at answering theories proposed by Mark Goodacre. In fact, Goodacre is one of Burkett’s most important conversation partners throughout the book. The eight arguments can be summarized as follows: (1) there is no place where both Matthew and Luke agree in inserting the same saying at the same place in Mark’s outline; (2) in different
instances either Matthew or Luke preserve an earlier form of a double tradition saying, which is only possible if they are drawing from an existing source; (3) sometimes Matthew preserves a more primitive form of the triple-tradition material and other times Luke does; (4) sometimes either Matthew or Luke include an overlap between Markan material and Q, thus creating doublets in each Gospel; (5) there are instances where a supposed third Evangelist (depending on the theory) copying from the two earlier Gospels frequently refuses to copy sources where they agree verbatim; (6) material common to Matthew and Luke begins after the infancy narratives and ceases prior to the resurrection narratives; thus, what Luke shared with Matthew was not the entire Gospel but certain parts of Matthew (viz., Q); (7) Matthew includes a layer of redaction unknown to Mark and Luke; (8) in the stage of oral tradition, Gospel material circulated independently; Luke’s organization better reflects this early stage than does Matthew’s.

The presentation here is straightforward and reasonable, though there are places where Burkett appears to be guilty of begging the question. For instance, how can he posit overlaps between Markan material and Q material (argument 4) if he has not yet established Q’s existence? For the most part, however, the author provides a plausible case for Q’s existence. The chapter closes with five additional arguments, all of which directly interact with Goodacre’s critique of the Q hypothesis. Together, these thirteen arguments form the basis for Burkett’s conclusion that Q’s existence is a necessary assumption for scholars working on the Synoptic problem.

Chapter 2 explores the *status quaestionis* on the unity and plurality of Q. Burkett interacts with important contributors and theories on both sides of the debate. Concluding that both sides make valid points, he sums up the discussion by writing: “On the one hand, the Q material manifests a degree of unity with respect to order and features of style and theme…. On the other hand, Q manifests plurality with respect to the degree of verbal agreement in parallels, a phenomenon suggesting that it may have existed in more than one version” (48). Burkett’s solution to this dilemma is that Q existed as a unified written document but Matthew and Luke also had access to Q parallels in the Markan source, as well as in M and L. This, he argues, is the best explanation for the different wording of Matthew and Luke in the double tradition and also allows for Q to have been a single unified written document.

Chapters 3–6 are brief chapters, and each is concerned with one argument for Q’s unity. In chapter 3 Burkett seeks to establish the core of an original unified Q document (see the chart on 55). Three criteria are used for establishing this core: common order in the parallels, recurring stylistic and thematic features, and the organization of sayings into larger groups. Against the backdrop of the established core, chapter 4 looks at other stylistic and thematic issues with a view to assessing noncore material in the double
tradition. Burkett locates a complex of sayings in the double tradition that did not come from Q. He gives this material the thematic label “on confession” (64–68) and proposes that this double-tradition material did not come from the original core of Q but from another independent source.

Chapter 5 looks at Q material unique to each Gospel. Various scholars have opined that some Q material was left out by one of the two Evangelists. Some locate one or two passages in Matthew and as many as five such passages in Luke. At one point in the chapter Burkett writes that “[s]cholarly humility should warn us that we may not always be able to accurately intuit the mental processes of the Evangelists” (71). This comment can only be regarded as ironic, since Burkett’s study, as well as the entire enterprise of Q studies, rests on such speculation.

Chapter 6, the final in the book’s second section, is concerned with the original order of Q. Burkett has already argued that the core of Q follows the same general order in Matthew and Luke. The question remains, How do we account for the Q material in Matthew and Luke that does not share a common order? The position generally held by scholars working on the question is that Luke better preserves Q’s original ordering. Burkett also assumes this to be the case, and, working under that assumption, he provides an extended chart wherein he offers his reconstructed order of the original Q (87–89).

The third section of the book consists of chapters 7–11, which are generally are longer and more substantive than those of the previous section. After introducing other reasons for verbal disagreement in chapter 7, the rest of the book’s third section is devoted to looking for Q parallels in other places. Chapter 8 examines parallels between Q and the Markan material. Chapters 9 and 10 are devoted to finding Q parallels in M and L, respectively. Chapter 11 closes out the book’s third section by looking at miscellaneous causes for the differences in wording. Burkett provides a brief concluding chapter and ends the book with several appendices that address issues such as “editorial fatigue” and questions about what the Evangelists composed and/or compiled.

In the end I am left with several impressions of this book. First, at one level Burkett’s model seems very clinical, almost as if the splicing and arranging of texts took place in a laboratory. His model sounds, at times, like an ancient example of a modern “cut and paste” method. This impression is further reinforced by Burkett’s comment that “the Evangelists functioned primarily as compilers rather than as composers” (250). Not only is this conclusion incorrect in my judgment (after all, the great contribution of redaction criticism was its discovery that each Evangelist was a theologian in his own right), but it gives little weight to issues of orality and how they might impact his proposal. Second, the book’s overall argument continues to reinforce my opinion that Q studies remain a highly
speculative enterprise that ultimately yields few, if any, assured results. These caveats aside, the reader of this book will find that it is thorough and offers a coherent argument. Though Q remains a hypothetical scholarly construct, Burkett offers a cogent defense for the existence and unity of Q.