

D.T. Roth

Prof. D.T. Roth, Boston
College.

E-mail: rothdi@bc.edu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/>

0000-0003-1467-8966

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BOOK REVIEW

The formative stratum of the Sayings Gospel Q: Reconsidering its extent, message, and unity

L. Howes, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), pp. 393, WUNT 2.545, ISBN: 9783161600944

This volume presents a discussion of select Q passages within the broad framework of John S. Kloppenborg's stratigraphy of Q set forth in his 1987 monograph *The formation of Q*. In that publication, Kloppenborg proposes three redactional layers in Q: the "formative stratum" (Q¹), the "main redaction" (Q²), and the "final recension" (Q³). Howes indicates that he accepts "Kloppenborg's proposed stratigraphy for the most part", but intends to focus on individual texts that, in his view, have been "wrongly ascribed to the main redaction instead of the formative stratum" (p. 2). Thus, the main purpose of this book, the vast majority of which presents "reworked and elaborated" versions of previously published articles, is to argue that Q 10:21, 23-24 (Chapter 1); 11:33-35 (Chapter 2); 12:39 (Chapter 3); 12:42-44 (Chapter 4); 12:58-59 (Chapter 5); 13:25 (Chapter 7); 14:16-21, 23 (Chapter 8), and 19:12-13, 15-24 (Chapter 9) were part of Q¹ and not Q² (p. 8). In addition, Chapter 6 argues that the parables of the mustard seed and leaven in Q 13:18-21 (also located in Q¹ by Kloppenborg) present "God's kingdom as a present reality that provides for people's material needs in this life" (p. 193). Chapter 10 presents the manner in which Howes understands the literary unity of Q¹. A brief, concluding Chapter 11 reflects on central topics

of Q's formative stratum, creative redaction, the parables of Jesus, and the historical Jesus. An appendix (Annexure A) contains a Greek reconstruction and English translation of Q¹, as reconstructed by Howes.

In nearly all of his discussion, Howes applies the methodology established by Kloppenborg for distinguishing between redactional layers in Q and provides arguments for the characteristic forms, characteristic motifs, and implied audience of the passages he discusses belonging to the formative layer. That is to say, Howes labours to demonstrate that the verses listed above are to be included with the material of the formative layer: the forms are maxims and aphorisms (not *chreia* with prophetic and/or apocalyptic logia), the motifs are sapiential reflections on God's kingdom (not apocalyptic judgement), and the implied audience is exclusively the Q people as insiders (not insiders and outsiders). Although Howes is certainly at liberty to work within his preferred framework for understanding Q, it is unfortunate that he sets forth a simplistic and superficial dichotomy of scholarly reaction to Kloppenborg's stratigraphy, contending that those who disagreed with it "rejected it out of hand without engaging the detail of his exegetical work" (p. 2). Howes' bibliography includes numerous scholars who view stratification models of Q as too hypothetical to be useful (for example, Christopher Tuckett, Joseph Verheyden, Ruben Zimmermann, and the present reviewer, among others). To dismiss their arguments and concerns out of hand is not helpful. Howes may be convinced not only that Q 11:33-35 can be reconstructed from Matthew 5:15; 6:22-23 and Luke 11:33-35, but also that the displacement of Q 11:33-35 by Q's main redactor and the combination of Q 11:33 and Q 11:34-35 for the first time by those responsible for Q's formative stratum can be identified (p. 52). A significant number of Q scholars, however, fully understanding the exegetical work, remain deeply sceptical of such an analysis across *three* levels of hypothesised redaction.

Many of Howes' readings present possible perspectives from the vantage point of poor and struggling peasants in ancient Galilee, although at times his belief that the formative stratum of Q brings us very close to the historical Jesus, who was, in Howes' view, a non-apocalyptic "social sage," giving expression to both his sapiential nature and his concern for those at the bottom of society" (p. 326), seems to be shaping the reconstruction and understanding of Q. In addition, there are times when Howes' interpretations are less than convincing. For instance, it seems unlikely that his view that Q 11:33 "is primarily about the ancient social value of reciprocal sharing" (p. 36) or that the supposed "positive, optimistic, pleasant, idyllic, and inviting tone of the saying ... testifies against it being directed at the out-group" (p. 47) will convince many. It is also doubtful that the idea that the parable in Q 14:16-21, 23 is about "inclusivity across the board" (p. 228) will be broadly persuasive.

It also appears that the compiling of previously published work may occasionally have led to some confusion. For example, in Chapter 3, Howes unequivocally states that Q 12:39 “does not qualify as a parable” (p. 60). After quoting B.B. Scott’s definition of a parable that includes a reference to a parable employing “a short narrative fiction”, Howes admits that “some might argue that the text presupposes a narrative and therefore qualifies as a parable” (p. 60). Yet, he himself argues that “one would expect a parable to concisely narrate not only the events that led up to the robbery, but also the robbery itself, the ensuing events, and the culmination” (p. 60). It is therefore surprising when, in the very next chapter, Howes admits that Ulrich Luz “is technically correct when he points out that Q 12:42-46 only presupposes a narrative and does therefore not formally qualify as a narrative” but then himself claims “even so, the text’s clear presupposition of a narrative qualifies it as a parable” (p. 81)! Furthermore, it is unfortunate that Howes did not rework his earlier publications more extensively. In general, although it seems that the author consulted some scholarship that appeared after the original publication of an article, often the works cited do not extend past the original date of publication. In addition, it would have been helpful to expand beyond the heavy dependence on English-language scholarship in Howes’ articles, especially given the existence of considerable German Q scholarship and the publication of this monograph in the series *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*. As it is, although the monograph includes references to select German works by scholars of a previous generation (for example, Dieter Zeller and Paul Hoffmann) and a few English-language works by Ruben Zimmermann and Jens Schröter, the bibliography contains, for example, only a single essay entry for both Detlev Dormeyer and Christoph Heil; a single conference presentation by Arne Bork, and no works whatsoever by Marco Frenschkowski, Michael Labahn, or Markus Tiwald.

In sum, therefore, Howes’ volume may well be important to consider as part of the landscape of contemporary Q studies, and it can be appreciated as an attempt to further one particular, stratigraphic, and largely Anglocentric approach to Q. If one shares a whole series of assumptions with Howes, his study could be viewed as a stimulating attempt to consider redactional layers in Q in a slightly different way. At the same time, however, those with a different approach to Q and scholars concerned about some of the shortcomings mentioned earlier may find the work’s contribution to Q scholarship more broadly to be somewhat limited.