Framing Social Criticism in the Jesus Movement: The Ideological Project in the Sayings Gospel Q

by

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Abstract

This dissertation concerns the ideological project of the Sayings Gospel Q, a written source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Although it has become increasingly popular to understand the earliest rural Jesus movement as emerging from a peasant milieu, proponents of this model have not yet taken the time to explore the ramifications for a highly stylized written document being the earliest evidence for this movement, as this project does. The analysis takes as its starting point the problematic category of “peasant” and tries to offer some theoretical clarity into the way the term is deployed. Although the term may still be useful for thinking about the social structure of ancient Palestine, Q does not seem to be a product of that group of people. On the contrary, Q is a sophisticated literary text, which has a number of affinities with other ancient literature, as well as interesting parallels with documentary papyri. Even so, Q does not appear to the product of elites, for the text is rife with tropes of social and economic marginality. In order to access the elusive “middling stratum” from which Q’s authors may stem, this project looks cross-culturally at middling figures, using the same sorts of data that have hitherto been used to characterize the Jesus movement as a peasant movement (anthropological and sociological studies of peasants).
Middling figures in similar contexts have a number of things in common, especially if such antecedent conditions as education and literacy skills are present: structural marginality, creativity and innovation, and the capacity to articulate social interests and facilitate reform. These features can be productively mapped onto Q in order to provide insight into the genesis of this text and its ideas. In fact, this comparison better explains Q’s project than the frequent appeal to its “peasant milieu.” Q’s ideological project is admittedly self-interested, but it nevertheless synthesizes a range of social experiences in ways that are fundamentally related to the middling social experience of its authors. It is thus a determined intellectual project, not the vestiges of oral traditions stemming directly from peasant villagers.
Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed to my intellectual development and hence to this project. Above all, I wish to thank my doctoral supervisor, John S. Kloppenborg, with whom I have been fortunate to have worked over the past five years. John has helped foster my growth as a scholar and as a teacher in ways that I could not have anticipated, by encouraging me to explore and develop my ideas, by giving me opportunities with work with him on his various research projects, and by always urging high standards for my work. He provided careful and critical feedback on each of the following chapters during the writing process, such that at many points in the subsequent pages, I hear our conversations in my mind when I read my words. I have also been privileged to observe John as a teacher of both graduates and undergraduates, and my model of what it means to be an ideal teacher and scholar will always, in some ways, reflect him. For these things, I am indebted to him.

The other members of my dissertation committee, John Marshall and Joseph Bryant, have provided valuable academic guidance in graduate seminars, in departmental colloquia and workshops, and in casual conversations over the years. My stellar colleagues and friends—far too many to name—in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto have supplied me with a scholarly climate of which I have been honoured to be a part. The staff in the department has also done an admirable job of keeping track of me and my work over the years, though I am but one of the many graduate students in the program, and I am grateful for their patience and hard work.

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Research for this dissertation was presented in a variety of venues before appearing here, and the feedback I received was immensely helpful as I developed my ideas. In particular, I would like to acknowledge those involved in the Q group of the Society of Biblical Literature, participants in the Context Group, members of the Colloquium for Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity in the Department for the Study of Religion (University of Toronto), and attendees of my graduate colloquium presentation in the Department for the Study of Religion (University of Toronto). This research was indirectly funded by a number of scholarships that I have been lucky to receive during my program: the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, the Connaught Fellowship for International Students, and the Naïm S. Mahlab Graduate Scholarship in Jewish-Christian Relations and/or Jewish-Muslim Relations. The Department for the Study of Religion was also very generous with travel funds each year.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to Herb Berg, who first taught me about a certain, seemingly mysterious Q document in an undergraduate course on Atheism and Unbelief. His course not only made me change my major, but it also made me change the trajectory of my life, as the academic study of religion had never been on my horizon before, to say nothing of graduate school. Although it would be a genetic fallacy to assume that this course dictated my development as a scholar, in this case, the line between here and there seems pretty clear.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABR</td>
<td>Australian Biblical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABRL</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Reference Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>AnthQ</td>
<td>Anthropological Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANRW</td>
<td>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASR</td>
<td>American Sociological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td>Bilica</td>
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<tr>
<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CurBS</td>
<td>Current Research: Biblical Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETL</td>
<td>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExpTim</td>
<td>The Expository Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFRS</td>
<td>Foundations and Facets Reference Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZPhTh</td>
<td>Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTS</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQP</td>
<td>International Q Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRSHSup</td>
<td>International Review of Social History Supplements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESHO</td>
<td>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPS</td>
<td>Journal of Peasant Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td>Journal of Roman Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSHI</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSNTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSSR</td>
<td>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTSR</td>
<td>Method &amp; Theory in the Study of Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovTSup</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum Supplements</td>
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<tr>
<td>P. L. Bat.</td>
<td>Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGG</td>
<td>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Studies in Antiquity and Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLSP</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLSymS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STDJ</td>
<td>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSK</td>
<td>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMANT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
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Introduction

In the latter part of the 20th century, a number of academic disciplines began to focus on the history of non-elite people instead of history written by and about “great men.” Similarly in the study of early Christianity, some scholars shifted away from merely studying Jesus and Paul and began to interrogate the ancient sources for non-elite perspectives, aided greatly by new archaeological finds and insights from sociology, cross-cultural anthropology, postcolonial studies, and the like. Along with this shift came a new realization that the peasant social experience was critical for understanding many of the traditions emerging from first-century Palestine and purporting to represent the earliest Jesus movement.¹ The concern to uncover peasant realities in the Jesus movement tends to focus on the Synoptic tradition (the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and the Sayings Gospel Q),² which preserves many rural social experiences and perspectives, as opposed to the more urban ways of life found in the letters of Paul. Q, in particular, is quite an early text stemming from the rural

¹ To list only a few works that will be mentioned throughout this study: Douglas E. Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2008); John Dominic Crossan, The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Richard A. Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); idem, Sociology and the Jesus Movement (New York: Crossroad, 1989); idem, Jesus in Context: Power, People, & Performance (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Richard A. Horsley with Jonathan A. Draper, Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance and Tradition in Q (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999). These works employ the peasant model to understand Christian origins, but differ in important ways about what that model is supposed to imply.

² Q (Quelle) is the hypothetical document posited to account for a body of material that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke have in common that they did not take over from the Gospel of Mark. On the assumption that Matthew and Luke used Mark and worked independently, it is necessary to posit a written source to make sense of their verbatim agreement in over 200 verses. This literary relationship is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.
Jesus movement in Galilee and so stands to benefit immensely from using new sociological models to understand its authors.

In the enthusiasm that resulted from adopting this new socio-scientific sensitivity, a number of problems have arisen. First, only a few scholars have considered the appropriateness of the peasant category for thinking about Christian origins. “Peasant” is simply assumed to be the most useful category for describing the presumed agrarian villagers who would have constituted the earliest Jesus movement in Palestine and whose interests are often represented in the Synoptic gospels and Q. But scholars of peasant studies, a distinct field of its own, are far from achieving a consensus regarding what the category means. Thus, “peasant” is not necessarily a self-evident category that can simply be imported into Christian origins scholarship without justification. So, before the emergence of Christian origins can be explained within a “peasant” context, the very definition of the category needs significant analysis. Second, the new attention to this social organization has not been able to account for the emergence of our main evidence for these movements—namely, sophisticated written texts. The stories preserved by the gospels, in particular, say next to nothing about those who would have written and formed these traditions, and on the contrary, they prefer to remember them as largely oral in their first transmissions. It is no doubt the case that some or even most of the material Q contains had its origin in an oral setting, but its final form is something that could only have been prepared and transmitted by a particular literate segment of ancient Palestinian society. Scholars have yet to work out a solid model for thinking about the relationship between this original oral tradition and the rather erudite texts that later authors produced, and more commonly, tend to proceed in the absence of a viable hypothesis. As Arnal observes:
The dominant representation of the origins of Christianity has tended to focus on the popular, the unlettered, the tale-telling of rural peasants about a great wonder-worker who promised an end to this wicked, unjust world. Many New Testament scholars are still wedded to schemes which stress, for example, the generative force of ‘oral tradition’ for the shape of stories about Jesus—with ‘oral tradition’ here imagined more or less as reflecting a peasant sensibility unmediated by letters or learning…. None of these views stands up to scrutiny, however.3

When it comes to Q, what complicates this situation even more is that, although Q must have been composed by a person or persons with relatively robust literacy skills, which were very restricted in the Roman Empire, the text adopts imagery and tropes which do not reflect elite or urban perspectives and proclivities, but rather more ordinary, rural experiences of life. Thus, of all the social locations possible to correlate with Q’s authors, only a small fraction are realistic, and evidence within the text suggests that Q did not emerge among either the socio-political elites or the economically exploited, illiterate “peasant” class.

Accordingly, this dissertation focuses on trying to access that elusive segment of society and discern their interests and abilities though a focused analysis of Q. One major obstacle to this endeavour is the nature of the social structure of the Roman Empire itself. Most scholars of early Christianity and the Roman Empire agree that this social structure was characterized by a small, ruling class, which wielded political, economic, and social power

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3 William E. Arnal “What Branches Grow out of this Stony Rubbish? Christian Origins and the Study of Religion,” SR 39.4 (2010): 562–63. An example of the view he challenges is found in Karl Kautsky’s reconstruction of earliest Christianity (Foundations of Christianity [trans. Henry F. Mins; New York: Russell & Russell, 1953]), 274): “This proletarian character is one of the principal reasons for our being so ill-informed about the beginnings of Christianity. Its first champions may have been eloquent orators, but they were not expert in reading and writing. Those were arts that were even further removed from the masses of the people than they are today.”
over a large, comparatively disadvantaged lower class. Although this binary social structure is crucial for understanding the important differences between antique Roman society and contemporary North American and European society (the contexts in which the vast majority of Christian origins scholarship has taken place), this dualism is sometimes overemphasized to the extent that the lower classes appear as a homogenous, plebian mass. This homogenization, even if done with the interest of highlighting the very real conditions of economic oppression and exploitation that many people experienced in this context, obscures a careful focus on people such as the authors of Q, who do not seem to fit neatly in either the elite or the “lower class.” Therefore, sociological studies of early Christianity must turn fresh eyes to this social structure if we are to discover who these figures are, what their motivations for writing this text might be, and where and how these “middling” figures fit within the socio-economic structure of ancient Palestine.

A related obstacle to trying to understand these middling figures is that there is very little textual evidence that preserves their voices. Documentary papyri from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt were penned by a specialized type of middling figures with administrative or scribal training, but only occasionally do we glimpse their ambiguous class allegiances or their own sense of professional identity or autonomy. The pursuit is not futile, however, because we are fortunate to have a great deal of cross-cultural data from other societies which express a similar binary social structure. Within these data, which are usually used to characterize the Jesus movement as one which reflects peasant interests, a new social actor comes into view, who is located structurally on the cusp between these binary social classes. This cusp position is often characterized by a condition of ambiguity and out-of-placeness,
which, although sometimes difficult to endure for the one occupying this position, can in turn generate intellectual creativity, innovation, political resistance, and social reform.

This methodological approach is thus self-consciously an attempt to isolate the “social location of thought” of Q’s authors as a means to begin to explain why the particular set of ideas in Q emerges when and how it does. To identify a social location of thought entails two related endeavours. The first is to identify a group “which is to be designated by the common structural position occupied by a number of individuals in relation to the larger whole.”4 The second is to ascertain a coherent set of experiences and interests that is characteristic of members of that group, so as to outline the ideological framework within which they interpret their experiences of the world. This is not a project of sociological determinism. “The social base,” Richard L. Rohrbaugh reminds us in his important essay on the concept, “is not the cause of other ideas, but the context in which other ideas are interpreted and understood as realistic possibilities.”5 Thus, following Barry Barnes and Karl Mannheim, he claims there is a distinction between the content thought to be held in common by a group, which is extremely difficult to predict, and the common context in which members interpret their experience, which is far easier for the scholar to access. So also in this project, I do not try to predict the content of Q based on the ideas and activities of analogous figures in other context, but I try to observe analogous conditions that lead to similar activities and expressions. Through this comparison, I maintain, we can gain valuable

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5 Rohrbaugh, “‘Social Location of Thought,’” 114, emphasis mine.
insights about the social experience of Q’s authors, even in the absence extensive data on the subject from antiquity.

My hypothesis when beginning this project was that the authors of Q could be conceived along the lines of other middling figures who become visible within or even lead other peasant movements, resistance movements, or groups that more generally advocate reform and challenge the socio-political elite in their society. There are many ways in which this hypothesis generates a fruitful analysis. However, the conclusions are born out only partially, because Q does not provide us with enough information to conclude that a fully formed, self-conscious social movement lurks behind its discourse—to presume a “religion” behind it is even more problematic. Nevertheless, my approach is to isolate common features and habits within the ideological products of middling figures in contexts that are chronologically and geographically distinct from Q’s but yet structurally similar, to see how they measure up to Q’s discourse. The comparison, I will argue, is quite telling, such that we can no longer conceive of the “success” of the Q group to be found in its ethical notions, which in themselves, even when they appear unconventional, are not especially unique in the ancient world, but rather in the way the ideas were shaped, directed, and framed so as to be potentially meaningful to a variety of people. This ideological work, I suggest, is the (limited) success of Q.

The transition from thinking about Q as a reflection of a rural Jesus movement comprised largely of peasants to concluding that its authors stemmed from a “middling” stratum of social actors has several steps. Chapter One begins with the model to be problematized: the peasant milieu of Christian origins. It examines how peasantry as an analytical concept came to be deployed in the study of early Christianity and looks closely at
exemplary studies that have relied strongly on this category. It then evaluates the utility of the category for thinking about the earliest Jesus movement and suggests that although the term’s referent is not always self-evident, it can still be a meaningful category for describing the context in which the Jesus movement began and some of the concerns embedded in the Synoptic tradition. At the same time, the term lacks the explanatory power to make sense of one activity that is central to the development of Christianity: the production of texts. Therefore, even within the peasant milieu, it was not peasants, strictly speaking, who were responsible for Q.

From this realization, Chapter Two seeks to construct a methodological framework for understanding middling figures in social contexts largely structured along the lines as the Roman Empire: a small socio-political elite class presiding over a larger, less powerful population. The analysis mainly relies on cross-cultural anthropological studies of peasant movements, but also considers insights from other sociological studies and treatises, to distill important characteristics of these figures so that they may be later analyzed with respect to Q’s authors. As noted above, by examining this body of data, another sort of figure comes into view, namely, a middling figure of ambiguous class affiliation. These figures are often some of the most visible in social movements that advocate reform or resistance and otherwise purport to represent the disadvantaged or dispossessed classes. Sociologically speaking, there are compelling reasons for why this is the case; in general, their liminal position in the wider social structure contributes to a social experience which is, in its own way, marginal, leading them to see themselves as akin to other dispossessed or non-elite people. This methodological approach never imports conclusions into the ancient world, but
rather asks if the scenarios presented through comparison make better sense of what we see in Q than previous efforts.  

Any project on the Sayings Gospel Q would not be persuasive without an awareness of where the Q hypothesis originates, and so Chapter Three provides the requisite background on the history of Q scholarship and the evidence that Q was a document written in Greek, probably in Galilee prior to 70 C.E. Because the primary comparative enterprise in my project takes place between Q’s authors and other middling figures, Chapter Four reviews the major scholarly hypotheses for Q’s authors, concluding that some sort of low-level administrative or scribal figure is the most compelling social identification. Giovanni Bazzana’s forthcoming monograph on the political theology in Q now makes this identification almost incontestable, in my opinion. In some ways, the identification of Q’s authors with scribal or administrative figures is tautologous, because scribes were the primary authors in the ancient world and it makes sense to suspect them behind the vast

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6 In no way do I claim to be an expert on the complicated historical contexts of the middling figures whom I use as points of comparison in Chapter Two. I admittedly depend strongly on the sociological and anthropological studies that I cite, especially when they treat topics that go far beyond the study of early Christianity, but I try to employ a diverse range of evidence so that my conclusions do not hinge strongly on any particular case. This is, however, the nature of an interdisciplinary study, as the study of religion conceived more broadly is by definition. Scholars of religion cannot be experts on every aspect of our data, especially if it crosses chronological and geographical divides, but we can bring it together with methodological sensitivity in hopes that it generates new ways of thinking about the data in which we do purport to be specialists.

7 As Mark Goodacre rightly notes, the hegemony of the Two-Document Hypothesis is often perpetuated without reflection in universities (The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem [Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002], 3–5). Even though my project deals with the social location of Q’s authors, not with the existence of Q strictly speaking, it is still prudent to briefly include this history of scholarship.

8 Giovanni Bazzana generously shared early chapter drafts of this study (Kingdom and Bureaucracy: Village Scribes and Political Theology in the Sayings Gospel Q [forthcoming]) with me, and his insights have been invaluable for my thinking about not only Q, but also documentary papyri and scribal figures in antiquity. His work is particularly useful for the analyses in Chapters Four and Five, and I look forward to seeing his finished monograph.
majority of documents. However, through the comparative project I propose, we can go
further with this identification and analyze how they, like other middling figures, negotiated
class allegiances; navigated multiple forms of discourses, some which had conflicting, some
compatible, ideologies; and tried to intervene in the hegemony of their social world in the
limited ways available to them. These dimensions are explored in Chapter Five, where the
ultimate comparative analysis of Q’s authors in light of other middling figures is carried out.

The study of Christian origins, originating as it did in theological studies, still often
maintains that the sayings and deeds attributed to Jesus were collected and preserved because
their content, in and of itself, was so unique and interesting. Numerous studies have shown
that assumption to be unfounded, for many of the ideas and forms of early Christian writings
have counterparts, predecessors, or analogues in other ancient discourse. Thus, even our
earliest sources for the Jesus movements, Q and Paul’s letters, are rather conservative texts at
the same time as they are unconventional or even innovative. This tension invites occasion
for thought: these authors receive traditions, rework them, create new traditions, and
disseminate them afresh. Conceived this way, we may surmise that Q is not a text that is
simply a vehicle for a set of common ideas about Jesus or about socio-economic conditions
in first-century Galilee, nor is it an utterly new tradition without precedence. On the contrary,
Q can be understood as a dynamic interaction between the authors and their social context.
For this reason, we see Q’s authors not only creating a text which reflects an identity that is
imbued with real experiences of social marginality, but we also see them appropriating the
experiences of those who were economically marginal in their social context. It is a continual
process of interaction between social actors and their social and cultural context. Q provides
us with a tiny window into this process of interaction and formation.
Introduction

When it comes to Q, although its authors may have much in common with middling figures and social activists discussed in the methodology chapter of this project, the question of representation of a particular group’s interests should never be idealized:

Intellectuals who claim to represent the oppressed had better recognize that the marginality which they celebrate in such a generic fashion first of all describes their own precarious position as outsiders within, as new entrants in the dominant cultural game, who occupy a mediating third position which is not only removed from the center but distanced from the standpoint of the oppressed themselves.  

Representation may thus not be a sincere enterprise. As I ultimately conclude with respect to Q, it may be a project which attempts to align different interests in the symbolism of the kingdom of God, but it is a largely self-referential enterprise. Moreover, upon further reflection, I conclude that this exactly is what we must expect from such an early moment in the Jesus movement. A fully formed, conscious identity of a Jesus-centered, “Christian” group that had trumped Judaism is not present in Q, so it is understandable that Q’s authors do not seem to be concerned with fully articulating that agenda yet. It is enough to justify their own minority position within Judaism with the resources at their disposal.

The analytical payoff of this project is both narrow and broad. It is narrow, because it helps us understand better a small group of Galilean authors who collected sayings attributed to Jesus, even composed a few of their own, and assembled them in a way that helped them better understand their own identity and relate to their social context. At the same time, it is broad, because it demands that we reconfigure a wide-reaching set of assumptions about the

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earliest rural Jesus movement, which is often seen as an originary moment in a long trajectory of Christian history. The notion of a singular trajectory is, admittedly, misleading and not an accurate description of the varieties of Christianity either in antiquity or today. Yet no matter how we configure the relationship between ancient Christianities and contemporary forms, Q occupies a very early point in this field of discourse, and we are justified in interrogating its impetus. Focusing on a narrow social stratum in which to understand the caretakers and transmitters of the Jesus movement preserved in Q thus changes the way we conceive of the earliest perceptible moments of Christianity. These moments are admittedly quite hazy, but by appealing to analogies and comparisons, we are able to generate a new set of questions about Christian origins and test whether or not they make sense. As I show in this dissertation, these new questions stand to make better sense of the Jesus movement in Q than other sociological models have.
Chapter 1


1 Introduction

Scholars of Christian origins are in general agreement that the rural Jesus movement in Palestine was sociologically distinct from that in the more urban milieu of the Graeco-Roman world. Whereas descriptors such as “rural” and “agrarian” have been adopted in the past relatively uncritically to describe the former context, there is now a substantial body of scholarship on the subject of peasant studies which is starting to inform this sociological modeling. Thus far, peasant studies have proved useful for describing the context of the rural Jesus movement, but there has yet to be a systematic analysis of the advantages and disadvantages that are entailed in applying this research to the rural Jesus movement in Palestine. Moreover, at this point, it is not clear how to reconcile the sophisticated literary products of the Jesus movement with this model. Toward this end, this chapter first outlines the history of peasant studies and then examines two prominent scholars who have translated this field of scholarship into the study of early Christianity. It then reflects upon the deployment of the construct “peasant” in Christian origins and assesses its heuristic utility. This discussion sets the stage for the following analysis of the Q document and the examination of how its authors negotiate their social context.

1 Sharon Lea Mattila engages in this project in her (as yet) unpublished dissertation (“Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’: Challenging a Model of his Socioeconomic Context” [Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago Divinity School, 2006]); she published a more concise version recently (“Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’? Problematizing a Social-Scientific Concept,” *CBQ* 72.2 [2010]: 291–313).
2 Historical Origins of Peasant Studies

The Western world started to attend to peasant communities after World War II when it became interested in Third World peoples and their role in global history. Theodor Shanin traces the roots of this interest even earlier to the Russian project of collecting data on peasant communities prior to World War I. The increasing realization of the political, social, and economic relevance of the global peasantry culminated in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, which was established in 1973 and is still currently published. The founding of this journal recognized the need to provide “a permanent forum and focus for the rapidly growing interest in peasant studies in many countries and disciplines, and to encourage the scientific study of peasantries, both contemporary and historical. Hitherto, scholarly periodicals have treated the peasantry in a peripheral way.” Thus, scholarship devoted exclusively to peasantry is relatively recent. Subaltern Studies, a related discipline, also helped bring the peasant social experience to the fore, as it is primarily interested in non-elite figures. Among scholars who work in these fields, both the definition and the analytical utility of the category

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are debated, but there is a general consensus that these figures are fundamental for understanding the past and have been greatly neglected in modern treatments of history.

The interest in peasants and non-elites is undoubtedly also tied to Marxist and Neo-Marxist scholarship. Karl Marx was deeply interested in peasantry as a social class, which he tended to describe as nearly self-sufficient, hostile to other classes, and economically exploited. Although Marx’s understanding of class was certainly modern and Western, it paved the way for a focus on non-elite peoples in other contexts. In his prison notebooks, Antonio Gramsci continued the Marxist interest in subaltern figures and the role of peasantry in developing and developed nations. Although these writings were unfortunately underdeveloped and somewhat disconnected, Gramsci was especially interested in the relationship between the rural Italian peasantry and the urban bourgeoisie. He hoped that the “organic intellectual” would play a decisive role in articulating the identities and concerns of

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7 Karl Marx, “Peasantry as a Class,” in *Peasant and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings* (ed. Teodor Shanin; Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 229–37, here 332. These characteristics are drawn from Marx’s discussion of peasant movements in France in the late 19th century.


9 According to Gramsci (*Selections from Prison Notebooks*, 14–23, 60, 75, and 334–335), the organic intellectual is produced from within the class whose interests he or she articulates and represents. This is opposed to the traditional intellectual, who is in service of the dominant class. Although the traditional intellectual is able to articulate the concerns of other classes, he or she has no inherent identification with them, and thus ultimately supports the hegemonic state. Creating a successful working class movement, for Gramsci,
those socially and economically marginal groups. More recently, Marxist historians have revisited historical archives to discern non-elite peoples throughout history. E. P. Thompson, for instance, explored the experiences of the working classes during the Industrial Revolution in England, for their experiences had largely been neglected in favour of elite accounts of the period. These scholars in no way exhaust Marxist and neo-Marxist interests in peasants and other non-elites, but they demonstrate the range of historical contexts to which this scholarship attends. Looking more closely at this scholarship, however, it becomes clear that peasantry is often understood in very different ways.

2.1 Peasantry as a Socio-Economic Type

Taking its cue in large measure from Marxist thought, many peasant studies construe peasantry as a socio-economic type. Under this framework, peasantry exists in constant tension with dominant social and economic powers. These powers, in turn, influence the mode of production in which peasants engage and thus largely determine their livelihoods. The mode of production is structured so as to induce peasants to create a surplus which can depended on organic intellectuals emerging from the lower classes and directing their constituency toward political action.


12 The distinction between peasantry as a socio-economic type and peasantry as cultural types is made by others. See, for example, Sidney W. Mintz, “A Note on the Definition of Peasantries,” *JPS* 1.1 (1973): 91–106; Even Mattila adopts it in her critique of the category (“Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’?”). Therefore, the conceptual distinction highlighted in this chapter builds on the differences already noted by others.

be siphoned off by more powerful parties. This understanding assumes that, whereas the peasants may not have been in dire poverty prior to the economic extraction by external forces, they rarely had a need to produce any surplus beyond that required for limited and local trade. Because, however, peasants are forced into these economic structures, they inevitably enter into relationships of social inequality as well. Inequalities of social and economic power often lead to situations of exploitation and subsequently crippling poverty.

This understanding is evident in Shanin’s remarks on peasantry. Peasants, he writes, are “small agricultural producers, who, with the help of simple equipment and the labour of their families, produce mostly for their own consumption, direct or indirect, and for the fulfillment of obligations to holders of political and economic power.”\(^\text{13}\) He further nuances this definition with several interrelated qualifications: the family farm is the basic unit of social organization; land husbandry is the means of livelihood; cultural patterns are influenced by organization of a small rural community; and peasants occupy a subordinate position vis-à-vis (elite) outsiders.\(^\text{14}\) The most outstanding feature, then, is the peasant mode of production and its relation to extractive power structures. Studying peasantry in this manner allows for investigations into discrete and quantifiable economic conditions. For instance, one can assess peasants’ access to limited resources, such as land and seed, trace the networks of lending which support their enterprises, or discern the social composition of the peasant communities. Examples of this understanding of peasantry are simply too numerous to list, for many studies focus on either the occupation of peasants or their relationship to

\(^\text{13}\) Shanin, “Introduction,” 3. Because Shanin’s introduction precedes 62 selected readings on peasantry, his definition appears to be representative for this collection of essays.

extractive and exploitative elites, indicating that this is a common way to discuss peasants. It should also be telling that this socio-economic type has engendered a distinct understanding of the “peasant economy.”

The construction of peasantry as a socio-economic type should not be assumed to imply that peasants are not internally differentiated or that their activities are homogenous. Case studies prove otherwise; for instance, James C. Scott has demonstrated in his study of Malaysian rice paddy workers that internal peasant disputes and status hierarchies are often overtly visible in village communities. Therefore, peasantry as a socio-economic type holds that peasants, as a whole and despite internal differentiation, occupy a similar social and economic position vis-à-vis the more powerful parties that determine their production and consumption patterns. On this point alone, peasants in different settings can be painted with the same brush.

2.2 Peasantry as a Cultural Type

Whereas Marxist and neo-Marxist scholars have tended to concentrate on the socio-economic experience of the peasantry, others have seen fit to make this socio-economic experience more abstract and conceive of as peasantry as a cultural type. Under this framework, peasant communities in diverse settings share certain cultural characteristics, such as hostility toward outsiders or innate disinterest in the accumulation of wealth. Robert Redfield’s work on “Great” and “Little” cultural traditions is a touchstone for peasantry as a cultural type and


contributes a model for thinking about peasant modes of life, as opposed to the different interests and habits of elite figures. In his influential work, Redfield juxtaposes “official,” dominant cultural expressions (the “Great” tradition) with folk expressions (the “Little” tradition), the latter of which are often produced by peasants and are not legitimated by producers of the “official” culture. Here one sees the development of the idea that peasants have a particular form of culture, instead of simply an economic role. From this reasoning, it is often hoped that “peasant culture” can account for disparate forms of peasantry across time and space, and ideally, foster comparative projects for thinking about peasantry as a universal phenomenon.

Scott has also contributed substantially to thinking about peasant culture, especially as it embodies forms of resistance over against the dominant culture. Building upon Redfield’s work on Great and Little cultural traditions, the thrust of much of Scott’s work is to argue for different kinds of discourse between dominant, elite groups and oppressed, subordinate groups: the hidden transcript of the subordinates versus the public transcript of the dominant. He focuses in particular on the various strategies (not always successful) by which subordinate figures resist elites who seek to exploit them. Although Scott contributes to the idea of peasant culture, he is more willing to see peasants as socially heterogeneous


18 Scott’s early work relied on his fieldwork in Malaysian villages, but his more general theories of subordinate cultures find their expression in Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
and differentiated than are others who regard peasant as a cultural category.\textsuperscript{19} Despite criticism,\textsuperscript{20} Scott’s work has been widely influential in drawing attention to non-elite experiences of power.

Peasantry as a cultural type, however, entails some problems. First, this conception runs the risk of assuming an essential constitution of peasants across time and space. Peasant communities may be similar in some ways, but to assume that peasants inherently act one way or another is methodologically problematic since it amounts to a form of stereotyping. Second, unlike the socio-economic type, it is difficult to quantify supposed cultural characteristics, such as hostility or resentment, and even more difficult to determine their precise causes(s). For instance, does hostility result from innate peasant qualities, from discrete situations of exploitation, or from the general perception in peasant communities that resources are limited? It seems too easy to answer these questions with an appeal to innate peasant characteristics. Not only is it problematic to make generalizations about cultural traits such as hostility toward outsiders or aversion to market activities, it may also even obscure a closer examination of local socio-economic dynamics if the explanations for these observed traits rely on stereotypical assumptions.

The entire history of peasant studies cannot be examined here. It is, however, sufficient to show that these analyses tend to divide into two groups: those that privilege the

\textsuperscript{19} See especially discussions in \textit{Weapons of the Weak}, in which Scott describes the social inequality among the Malaysian peasants whom he studied.

\textsuperscript{20} Giovanni Bazzana, “Arts of Resistance? A Critique of James C. Scott from the Point of View of Linguistic Anthropology” (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Context Group, Hiawatha, Iowa, March 2011). For example, Bazzana draws on linguistic anthropology to argue that Scott’s terminology (e.g., public, private, resistance) is often inconsistent within his own writings and often does not accurately reflect the data of the groups he studies.
socio-economic dimension of peasantry and those that privilege the cultural dimension. Put differently, some studies are interested in explaining how peasantry is embedded in a network of unequal power relations, while others seek to explain peasant reactions to this power based on a certain presumption of peasant culture. These two frameworks are not mutually exclusive, but they need to be carefully probed to retain analytical utility.

Thus, although the study of global peasannies is now a distinctive discipline, as indicated by its flagship journal *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, a wide range of sociological, historical, and anthropological research informs the work, and accordingly, the influences on depictions of the context of early Christianity as a largely peasant society are multi-faceted. A general consensus about the context of early—particularly rural—Christianity is that it was marked by stark social inequality and included a small elite group exercising political and economic power over a larger population, which was generally poor and illiterate.21 Although there were middling positions usually identified as “brokers” or “retainers,” there was no middle class.22 Some studies have nuanced this depiction of the antique social structure,23 but it is generally accepted as accurate. Most of the population in a province such

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22 See Thomas Francis Carney’s remarks on the highly fragmented class structure in antiquity (*The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* [Lawrence, Kans: Coronado Press, 1975], 121–22). In particular, patronage relations undercut the possibility of well-defined middle class interests (90, 94, and 171).

23 For example, Bruce Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle: A Revised Economy Scale for the Study of Early Urban Christianity,” *JSNT* 31.3 (2009): 243–78; Stephen Friesen, “Poverty and Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus,” *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323–61. It should be noted that both of these studies are interested in nuancing urban social groups. In rural areas, in which the social experiences of the lower classes are largely lost due to illiteracy, *inter alia*, it is much more difficult to provide this much-needed sensitivity.
as Roman Palestine can be described, in some way or another, as peasants, but what scholars intend to imply when using this terminology is not always clear.

3 Impact on Christian Origins

Scholarship on peasants has found its way into Christian origins in a somewhat peculiar manner. Many of the aforementioned studies on peasant societies are often combined with analyses of the social structure of Roman society, with the result that insights from modern peasant studies are mapped directly on to the underprivileged classes in the Roman Empire. The work of two scholars in particular, Douglas E. Oakman and Richard A. Horsley, provide two helpful case studies which demonstrate how the concept “peasant” is translated into the study of Christian origins. As I will suggest, the above distinction between peasantry as a cultural type and peasantry as a socio-economic type is often blurred, if recognized at all.

3.1 Social Stratification in Graeco-Roman Antiquity

Two studies on social stratification have been especially attractive to scholars of Christian origins—judging from the frequency of citations—and useful for drawing attention to non-elites in the Roman Empire, which in turn makes possible the appeal to peasant studies. Gerhard E. Lenski’s *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, which has been enormously influential toward this end, argues that a particular social organization is characteristic of agrarian societies. Although he admittedly draws together a wide range of data from a variety of agrarian societies, he maintains that their similarities outweigh their differences, such that it is justifiable to speak of the agrarian society as a generic type.  

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These similarities include (in comparison to less advanced horticultural societies): larger territories (often several million square miles); higher population size; superior military and engineering technology; endemic warfare; more urbanized communities; greater diversity and specialization in vocations; more frequent trade and commerce; and a tendency toward monarchical government.  

Thus, the Roman Empire—with its expansive territory, its population of perhaps 55 million, and its intricate tributary and trade network, among other features—exemplifies an agrarian type of society conceived along these lines. Having identified the characteristics of agrarian societies, Lenski then outlines the social structure therein. The government is predominantly monarchical, headed by a sole ruler and his or her governing class, together constituting only a fraction of the population. The non-ruling population comprises about 98% and can be subdivided into even more categories: the retainer class, the merchant class, the priestly class, the peasant class, the artisan class, unclean/degraded classes, and the expendables. The crucial thing to notice is that in agrarian societies, no middle class exists. The main structural distinction is between the binary categories of “ruler” and “ruled.” There are “middling” groups, which essentially contribute to the structural inequality, but according to Lenski, “peasant farmers … constituted a substantial majority of the population.” Therefore, in any given agrarian economy analyzed on Lenski’s model, the majority of the rural population is best described


26 According to Roger S. Bagnall, this population estimate is the “conventional figure” (*Early Christian Books in Egypt* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009], 19).


as peasant. Many scholars of early Christianity have built upon Lenski’s model, and it is clear that it is assumed to offer a foundational starting point for reconstructing the context of early Christianity in Palestine.

Ramsay MacMullen’s *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* is also cited with curious frequency and seems to contribute greatly to the peasant model of early Christianity. MacMullen introduces the concept of peasant in his overall analysis of rural-urban and class relations in the Roman Empire. His understanding includes not only agrarian labourers (referred to at times as “farmers”) but also small craftspeople and the like; this is a point of contrast with Lenski’s model, which distinguished between peasants and craftspeople. In the absence of sufficient data on ancient peasants, MacMullen incorporates data from modern Mediterranean peasant villages into his analysis of ancient Roman society with the following brief caveat: “Compressed into a composite form, they may suggest the details that our ancient evidence only allows us to guess. Analogies, to be sure, prove nothing, but they comfort conjecture.” The composite form that he then describes includes such

30 Interestingly, in a recent review of Lenksi’s contributions in *Power and Privilege*, Randall Collins (“Lenski’s Power Theory of Economic Equality: A Central Neglected Question in Stratification Research,” *Sociological Theory* 22.2 [2004]: 219–28) focuses not on the import of the structural framework that Lenski proposes in each historical period, but rather on his overall theoretical insight about the relationship between power and wealth. The “power theory of wealth” that Lenski extracts from his data predicts that “the degree of concentration of wealth in the future will be determined by the concentration of power” (227). Collins, moreover, claims that Lenski’s study is “a good skeleton of a theory” (228), but more work needs to be done in order to synthesize modern societal variation. Indeed, with the increasing popularity of postcolonial analyses, one suspects that Lenski’s modeling might change in important ways.


33 MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 14. In support of this analytical method (using modern peasant studies in the absence of data from the ancient world), MacMullen cites several studies on particular peasant groups in
characteristics as little differentiation in wage earning among peasants, inherent hostility and competing interests between the cities and countryside, crowded living conditions in the villages, and patriarchal structures of authority in the family.\textsuperscript{34} From this, he constructs a model of social conflict in ancient Palestine, stemming mostly from the extraction of taxes and rents from the peasants by the Romans.\textsuperscript{35} This part of his analysis is somewhat ambiguous, however, about the precise agents of extraction, for he designates them generally as “the Romans” but also argues that they were often absentee landlords or other urban dwellers.

MacMullen’s study should be given close attention, because it is cited by many scholars of Christian origins who describe the context of early Christianity as a peasant society.\textsuperscript{36} The influence of MacMullen’s study on this scholarship seems somewhat odd, because although it is thought-provoking, it is by no means an exhaustive study of Roman society, as it hardly exceeds one hundred pages.\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, while one can justify the use of MacMullen’s study in the study of Palestine in the First Century, it is not the case that this study is comprehensive enough to serve as an exhaustive study of Roman society. Instead, it is more useful to consider this study as an important contribution to the understanding of Roman society, not as an exhaustive study of the subject.

\textsuperscript{34} MacMullen, \textit{Roman Social Relations}, 15–17.

\textsuperscript{35} MacMullen, \textit{Roman Social Relations}, 36.


\textsuperscript{37} It is also interesting to note that a much more comprehensive later study on Roman society (albeit cited less frequently) describes MacMullen’s study as “especially useful” (Géza Alföldy, \textit{The Social History of Rome} in Syria, Turkey, Greece, and the like (151–52 n. 52). It is also interesting to note that he draws on his “own casual observations in the backcountry of Tunisia, Turkey, and over five months in a village in southwest Cyprus” (151 n. 52).
of modern peasant studies to illuminate ancient rural lifestyles, especially with the appeal to
cross-cultural anthropology, MacMullen does so with almost no reflection.\(^{38}\)

Despite the existence of other careful treatments of Roman society,\(^{39}\) it has largely
fallen to Lenski and MacMullen’s analyses of agrarian social stratification and social class,
respectively, in the Roman Empire to set the stage for scholars of early Christianity to locate
participants in the early Jesus movement. Within Paul’s letters, it is evident that the
communities are comprised of urban figures, whose livelihoods are not directly tied to
agricultural activities; in the earliest Jesus movement in Galilee, however, “peasant” becomes
a particularly useful concept for understanding many of the rural figures and situations in the
texts. Thus, we will now consider some specific examples of how peasantry as a category has
been deployed in the study of early Christianity.

3.2 Douglas E. Oakman

Peasantry as an analytical category has featured heavily in Douglas E. Oakman’s work on the
earliest Jesus movement, as evidenced especially by his recent collection of essays entitled

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\(^{38}\) Lest this analysis appear too critical of MacMullen, one of the important strengths of this study should be
noted: he synthesizes of a wide range of primary sources from Graeco-Roman literature to documentary papyri
in order to access a diverse range of social strata. Scholars of Christianity, in particular, have often used ancient
literature to make sense of Christian texts, but documentary papyri have only recently become significant.

\(^{39}\) For instance, Peter Garnsey, “Peasants in Ancient Roman Society,” \textit{JPS} \textbf{3.2} (1976): 221–35; MacMullen has
another treatment of Roman peasannies (“Peasants, during the Principate,” \textit{ANRW} II.1 [ed. Hildegard
Temporini; Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1974]: 254–61), but even so, his \textit{Roman Social
Relations} still dominates the discussions in our field.
Jesus and the Peasants. He tends to view peasantry as constantly existing in a context of tribute-taking, or more generally, of power relations. Oakman adopts Alexander Chayanov’s understanding of peasant activities, which depicts them as primarily oriented towards feeding the family and making payments to whichever political figure is in a position to extract them. Thus, the peasant is embedded in an extractive, redistributive economic system and never produces goods in isolation. When Oakman explicitly defines peasant, the definition underscores this socio-economic dimension:

A peasantry is a rural population, usually including those not directly engaged in tilling the soil, who are compelled to give up their agricultural (or other economic) surplus to a separate group of power-holders and who usually have certain cultural characteristics setting them apart from outsiders. Generally speaking, peasants have very little control over their political and economic situation.

This definition of peasantry is echoed by other scholars of early Christianity. According to Dietmar Neufeld and Richard DeMaris, peasants are “persons who work the land and whose surpluses are transferred to a group of elite.... Peasants do not work the land to become wealthy but to feed themselves.” Elsewhere David A. Fiensy describes them as existing in “radical bifurcation in which a small group of aristocrats stands over against the mass of


41 Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 49–57. Mattila has criticized the adoption of Chayanov’s understanding of peasants on the grounds that it ignores important socio-economic differences among peasants and the variety of types of economic production in which they engage (“Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants?’” 291).


agriculturalists.”

According to Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, peasants balance precariously between internal economic obligations (such as the requirements of subsistence, the need to procure seed and feed, and a limited engagement in trade) and external obligations (such as social and religious dues and taxes). The emphasis in all these definitions is on how peasants are embedded in power structures and relate to dominant figures specifically through means and modes of production. Or, in the words of John Dominic Crossan, “The peasantry, as a major societal type, is being defined in a way that is not just rural or occupational but structural and relational.”

Oakman argues that persistent circumstances of debt had a decisive impact on the peasants of Roman Palestine. Debt resulted from a combination of factors such as rents, tithes, taxes, and tolls. If a “free” peasant failed to meet these various economic demands, he or she “could become dependent on some wealthy creditor…. When this was compounded with low productivity or successive bad years, default ensued…. The overall result of escalating debt … was the growth of tenancy and the landless class.” The consequence of this was a marginalized group of labourers who did not own the means of production and were thus continually in positions of social and economic dependency. Oakman finds these

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46 Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 125, emphasis mine.

47 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 11–39 and 199–242.

48 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 24–25.
material conditions to be reflected in the rhetoric of the Jesus tradition. To provide only one example, regarding the Lord’s Prayer, Oakman concludes that “[c]entral to the concerns of Jesus’ original Prayer was the reality of oppression, indebtedness, hunger, and social insecurity.” Thus, it is clear that in large measure, Oakman adopts the model of peasantry as a socio-economic type.

In Oakman’s definition above, however, he also accepts that peasants “usually have certain cultural characteristics setting them apart from outsiders.” This shifts from employing the concept of peasantry as a socio-economic type to peasantry as a cultural type. This is echoed in a later work, where he introduces the following justification: “I did not have to theorize the existence of peasants. I directly experienced the honour-shame, strong-group, gender-stratified, limited-good world of Mediterranean peasantry within the home of my maternal grandparents.” The point is not to question this description of the social interaction that was experienced, but rather to highlight that this starting point entails the assumption that the Mediterranean social order today mirrors that of antiquity.

This is a clear index of peasantry conceived as a cultural type. One consequence of this logic, discussed in more detail below, is that “peasant culture” is often treated as an explanatory

49 See especially the series of six essays in Jesus and the Peasants, 111–242.
50 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 242.
51 Oakman, “Was Jesus a Peasant?” 118.
52 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 4.
53 Were one to replace “peasant” with “religion” in this reasoning, many scholars of religion would hesitate at this logic. See especially, Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
device in and of itself, instead of conceiving of peasant cultures as products of their distinct socio-economic circumstances.

3.3 Richard A. Horsley

Peasants have also figured prominently in Richard A. Horsley’s work on the earliest Jesus movement, especially *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*. In large measure, Horsley’s understanding of peasantry accords with the socio-economic type. His many publications describe the conflict and exploitation that was characteristic of the Roman economy.

Economic exploitation of the peasantry, Horsley is sure to note, extends far back into Israel’s history, as witnessed by prophetic lamentation and condemnation of wealth in the Hebrew Bible, but under Roman domination, resources became far more scarce and thus exploitation intensified. By the time of Jesus, the Romans and the Jewish aristocracy both stood in a position of economic exploitation over the peasantry, extracting both dues for the Temple and tribute for Rome, together constituting a significant economic impact on the rural population. This amounts to “persistent conflict” between peasants and rulers. Therefore, according to Horsley, it is not surprising that the Jesus movement, arising from this


environment, would have expressed the idea that “heavenly monarchs were concerned about the economic welfare of their people.”

Horsley argues that this economic extraction in Palestine was especially burdensome for the peasantry, because peasants are historically uninterested in economic engagement outside of their networks of village exchange. In Roman Palestine, he claims, peasant participation in any economy of scale was almost non-existent; in Galilee in particular, the peasantry was largely “self-sufficient” and mostly uninvolved with widespread trade prior to the arrival of the Romans. With increasing economic demands by Roman and Jewish elites, however, peasants had to reorient their ways of life to increase production. Indebtedness, in particular, threatened to ruin many a peasant family:

Because of bad harvests or unusual demands for tributes, taxes, or tithes, already-marginal peasant families would fall into debt. Then failure to pay the debt would lead to one or more family members’ becoming debt-slaves, and finally to the loss of land. The greatest threat to peasant, and probably their greatest fear, was falling heavily and hopelessly into debt.

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59 Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Sociology in Galilee*, 83. In my own experience digging at Bethsaida in 2010 under the direction of Rami Arav, I have found this conclusion to be unsupported. Pottery finds at the site for the period under question and even earlier show evidence of interregional trade: oil lamps came from Jerusalem while other local pottery was produced primarily in Kefar Hananya in Lower Galilee. Thus, trade was clearly a significant factor in the Galilean economy prior to the Romans, even if limited in its scope. This should not be taken to mean that there was widespread trade for all manner of goods, but it does indicate that self-sufficiency and disinterest in market transactions are not supported by some of our primary evidence for trade.

60 Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 246.
The Jesus tradition explicitly responds to these situations that were detrimental for the peasantry in form of advocating the renewal of village communities. The kingdom of God becomes a symbol for the renewal of society in a manner that expressly benefits the peasantry. It is characterized by non-exploitative relationships, egalitarian social relations, and economic cooperation, and it generally tries to renew the ethics of mutual socio-economic support that were (ideally) supposed to be found in Israelite society of the past. Practically speaking, the kingdom entailed the alleviation of poverty, the cancellation of debts, and the cultivation of local support networks to quell violence and conflict.

Consequently, Horsley imagines that “[t]he renewed covenantal people of Israel were to have egalitarian social relations both in its ‘familial’ local communities and among the people as a whole” and that they were to “take responsibility for helping on another, even [their] enemies, in the local village community.”

According to his reconstruction of the Jesus movement, it makes sense that many of the anecdotal vignettes of the Synoptic tradition presuppose features of peasant life, such as “heavily indebted peasants who cannot possibly avoid loss of their land or their freedom, [and] tenant farmers and innumerable day laborers who have already forfeited their land or

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61 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 167–284.
62 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 248–51.
63 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 251–55.
64 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 255–79.
65 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 245.
66 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 273.

who must supplement their living by hiring themselves out.” 67 In some cases, conditions were so dire that peasants engaged in violence against one another: “many sayings of Jesus presuppose that Jewish peasants in local situations were at one another’s throats: angry enough to refuse needed loans, to take one another to court, even to kill one another.” 68 Not only does he reconstruct the socio-economic context of the Jesus movement with particular attention to the peasantry, but he also finds that the movement explicitly responds to this context, thus indicating that peasant concerns were at the fore of the movement. In this way, Horsley and Oakman share an understanding of the peasantry as caught in a web of socio-economic inequality and domination, and this has a direct bearing on their understanding of earliest Christianity.

Horsley’s use of peasantry, however, entails a more troubling dimension, indebted to assumptions about peasantry as a cultural type. For instance, he frequently assumes that peasants express a static form of “peasant culture,” characterized by a subsistence-oriented way of life. In the above quotation, for instance, we saw how he imagined the Jesus movement as promoting “egalitarian” social relations and internal village support to ensure that minimum subsistence requirements were met. In his understanding, moreover, peasant cultures act and think similarly across time and space, and their thoughts and actions typically involve an ethical or moral dimension that is lacking in the dominant figures that oppress them. For this reason, he can argue that Galilean peasantry is culturally continuous

67 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 13.
68 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 32.
with ancient Israelite peasantry, both embodying an ethic of “assistance and mutual support” within the village context. This ancient Israelite society becomes the source of ethics in the village renewal movement advocated by Jesus. Horsley is careful to note that social stratification still exists in these ideal peasant societies, but the ethical code to which the peasants adhere ensures that all village members are provided at the least the minimal level of subsistence. This essentialization of peasants leads to his use of the term as interchangeable with “common people,” as if peasantry is an ordinary state of being for rural dwellers. In other words, in his analysis, peasantry is depicted as natural, and dominant figures simply take advantage of these inherently productive, yet passive, people. While he gives due attention to the relationships of power that are brought to bear on peasants, he does not explicitly voice the idea that those relationships actually create the figure of the peasant. For Horsley, peasants seem to be a priori and only enter into these grossly unequal relations through circumstances not of their own making.

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70 Horsley, Covenant Economics, 33–49.

71 Horsley, Covenant Economics, 36–37. The imagination of the idealized peasant is also found earlier in Karl Kautsky’s Marxist reconstruction of Christian origins in Foundations of Christianity.

72 Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 117; idem, Jesus in Context, 269 and 272.
Horsley’s theoretical framework is based in large part on Scott’s work on hidden and public transcripts. Scott, as noted earlier, is greatly indebted to Redfield’s framework of Great and Little traditions. When Horsley redeployes these concepts, he uses them to argue that the earliest Jesus movement expressed a hidden transcript that embodied a form of resistance to the ruling elites in Roman Palestine. He also regards the Jesus tradition as a “Little” Israelite tradition that contradicted the “official” religion of Jerusalem. In this case, therefore, the scholarly genealogy that leads to the deployment of peasantry as a cultural type is very clear.

Thus, Oakman and Horsley have brought the analytical concept of peasantry to bear on Christian origins in a way that stands to make a great deal of sense of the social and economic inequalities in rural Palestine, yet at times, this analytical concept is blurred with a more nebulous notion of “peasant culture.” Therefore, it is obvious that the uses to which this

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74 Horsley is consistent on this point and argues for it in a number of recent publications. It appears in his work as early as *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (1989) and achieves its most explicit expression in his edited volume entitled *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Semeia 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

75 This is initially a compelling model, because it makes sense of the way that Q in particular appears to contest a variety of ideas in Judaism. However, I have not found this model to be especially rewarding for two reasons. First, it relies on the assumption that there was a “mainstream” or “official” Judaism in this period, and numerous recent studies have shown that Judaism had far more internal diversity than had previously been thought. One only need consider texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls to see that even seemingly ubiquitous symbols of Judaism such as the Temple were contested among different groups, and so what counts as “official” Judaism is not unambiguously clear. Second, if the Jesus tradition in Q came to represent a “Little” Israelite tradition that was promoted in Galilee, Q’s peripheral sense of identity when it comes to this locale is rather peculiar. As I explain later (p. 175), Q is explicitly at odds with the local population and so it is hard to understand them as championing a popular Galilean tradition.
analytical concept are put are not entirely consistent. Peasantry as a socio-economic type and peasantry as a culture type often become merged, which risks importing assumptions about an essentialized peasantry into discussions that gain little explanation from privileging a unique peasant culture. Not all scholars, however, have been as enthusiastic about this concept as Horsley, Oakman, and others.

4 Scholarly Resistance to the Term

Despite recognizing that the Jesus traditions preserved in such forms as the parables or the Sayings Gospel Q were formulated in an arguably rural context, some scholars prefer to avoid the term peasant. Sharon Lea Mattila problematizes the concept, especially as it has been used in historical Jesus scholarship. She similarly distinguishes between two ways of using peasantry as an analytical concept: a socio-economic type and a cultural type. As a cultural type, she maintains that peasantry essentializes peasants and ignores important differences among these communities in different contexts. As an economic type, peasantry is also a deficient concept, because it masks socio-economic inequalities within the peasant class and neglects a variety of heterogeneous activities of production in which so-called peasants are found to engage. She also notes that many scholars of early Christianity seem unaware that the definition of peasant is still debated within its own field.

76 Mattila, “Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’?”.

77 Mattila notes New Testament scholars’ “almost total disregard, if not ignorance” about the debate over the meaning of peasantry in the social sciences (“Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’?” 291). However, there are at least a few examples of scholars who have taken this literature seriously, rendering her critique less potent. Oakman, for instance, has specifically asked the question “what is a peasant?” (“Was Jesus a Peasant?” 117–18).
advocates jettisoning “historical peasant” as a viable concept, she unfortunately does not propose any alternative sociological category to make sense of the rural villagers who would have lived in ancient Palestine. She does, however, offer a counter-proposal to Horsley’s reconstruction of starkly unequal socio-economic conditions in Galilee, suggesting that the archaeological data for first-century Galilean villages witnesses to a diversity of social statuses and standards of living, especially in settlements such as Gamla and Yotapata.

A.-J. Levine also questions the utility of this term, although her critique is less comprehensive than that of Mattila. Although she wants to retain the term, she argues that the peasant model requires some adjustment. Citing Morten Horning Jensen’s recent reappraisal of socio-economic conflict in first-century Galilee, she maintains that archaeological evidence does not support an economically stressed population. Moreover, she argues that New Testament evidence clearly demonstrates that a variety of people occupying diverse social locations were attracted to Jesus’ message, and the tradition as a

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78 Mattila, “Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’?” 306.

79 Mattila, “Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’?” 309–12. She notes that in both of these settlements there were wealthy quarters among the types of residences. While these are important cases, they do not directly address Horsley’s portrait of the Jesus movement. Gamla and Yotapata are not the rural villages that Horsley has in mind, but rather, they are larger towns in which local elites resided.


81 Levine, “Theory, Apologetic, History,” 64–65. Jensen’s study (Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and its Socio-economic Impact on Galilee [WUNT II 215; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006]) primarily relies on literary evidence (the New Testament and Josephus) and archaeological evidence to evaluate the “picture of conflict” of Galilee. Although he concludes that Galilee was relatively harmonious under Antipas, his failure to think about this situation with any theoretical framework renders his analysis weak. He employs no cross-cultural anthropological, social, or economic theory to back up the conclusion. These theoretical frameworks are often extremely useful when dealing with the absence of data in antiquity. Admittedly, as this analysis has suggested, they should not be used as a vehicle to import essentializing characteristics of any group of people in the discussion; they can, however, help explain how certain social organizations function and are maintained.
whole seems to lack the impoverished peasant figure that is argued by so many to be characteristic of the movement.\textsuperscript{82} For these reasons, she is not certain that “reading him [i.e., Jesus] in light of the late-twentieth-century pedagogy of the oppressed” is productive.\textsuperscript{83}

The problems that Mattila and Levine point to need to be addressed but can be overcome in part by scholarly self-reflexivity on the use of the category peasant. Mattila is surely correct that most biblical scholars are largely unaware of the contested meaning of the term peasant in peasant studies proper; this is a problem that can easily be rectified by more awareness about the uses to which the term is put in studies on antiquity. Additionally, it needs to be noted which conception of peasantry—socio-economic or cultural—is claimed to be heuristically useful and why. Some of Levine’s objections are less sound, based as they are in an understanding of Jesus broadly targeting all social classes “[to] prepar[e] [them] to inhabit the Kingdom of Heaven.”\textsuperscript{84} This seems to overlook much of the Synoptic tradition that is very sensitive to social inequality.\textsuperscript{85} Moreover, her method of including other data from the New Testament that represents the perspective of later authors,\textsuperscript{86} to describe the

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\textsuperscript{82} Levine, “Theory, Apologetic, History,” 66. This variety of social locations challenges Horsley’s discussion of the followers of Jesus (\textit{The Spiral of Violence}, 208–31).

\textsuperscript{83} Levine, “Theory, Apologetic, History,” 68. The term “pedagogy of the oppressed” derives from William R. Herzog’s recent study of the parables (\textit{Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed} [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994]).

\textsuperscript{84} Levine, “Theory, Apologetic, History,” 68.

\textsuperscript{85} Her objection also seems to be informed by a theological presumption that Christianity was directed to a very broad audience in this period, and so theoretically available to everyone.

\textsuperscript{86} She rather generously mines the Synoptic gospels for data on the historical Jesus’ audience. She notes, for instance, that Mark 1:19–20 refers to boat-owners who had enough means to hire help and that Luke 19:1–10 depicts Jesus’ dining with a well-to-do tax-collector. She does not take these references in and of themselves as historical but ultimately concludes that the tradition “consistently depicts Jesus in the company of those of higher social status than peasants” (Levine, “Theory, Apologetic, History,” 66).
original adherents to Jesus’ message is not justified—certainly many later texts were produced in urban environment and were thus “written up” for those audiences. Finally, it should be noted that the use of archaeological evidence, especially Jensen’s study, by both Mattila and Levine is problematic. Jensen claims that there is no archaeological evidence for economic decline in Galilee in the early first century, and from there supposes that rural villages must have been flourishing. There have, unfortunately, been few rural villages dug in Galilee, and so it seems to be quite a leap to make this presumption about harmony in the countryside at this point. Moreover, Jensen focuses strongly on literary evidence to discern social conflict, which is no doubt problematic as that sort of evidence tends to reflect elite perspectives on social relations. Thus, Jensen has given an interesting interpretation of how elite texts depict socio-economic conflict, but the ultimate claim is hardly conclusive. Levine and Mattila, building on his conclusion, then understand the absence of archaeological evidence to indicate something positive about socio-economic conditions; that is to say, they assume that if archaeological remains do not witness to socio-economic stress or conflict, then there was none.

On the contrary, it would not be surprising if socio-economic conflict were absent from these data, as efficient economic extraction actually demands that the village structures and agrarian routines be maintained to some degree. Thus, the fact that “economic stress” under Antipas is not evinced in the archaeological record proves little. The same would apply in the case of cultural tensions—one should not necessarily expect to find those struggles expressed in archaeological evidence or even in literary remains (which were produced

mostly by elite figures and thus reinterpret conflicts and tensions for their interests). In any case, the issues that Mattila and Levine raise do not require that scholars of Christian origins jettison the term peasant altogether, only that they specify whom they imagine it to represent and that they neither homogenize nor essentialize that group of people.

More serious is the realization that the appeal to peasant experience as some kind of explanation for the emergence and growth of the Jesus movement invites an immediate problem: how to reconcile peasant realities of the tradition with the production of sophisticated texts. As noted in the introduction, Arnal has recognized the tension that results from imagining Christian beginnings as located in a predominantly peasant world and relatedly, being predominantly oral in form. \(^{88}\) The emphasis on the Jesus movement as a peasant movement—especially when it presupposes these idealized cultural characteristics of the peasantry—simply cannot account for the production of texts as sophisticated as, for instance, the Gospel of Mark \(^{89}\) or the Gospel of Luke. \(^{90}\) Interestingly, in Arnal’s treatment of

\(^{88}\) Arnal, “What Branches Grow out of this Stony Rubbish?” 562–63. Against this picture of an amorphous oral tradition at the center of the Jesus movement, Arnal has elsewhere noted, “The illiteracy of rural areas in the Roman Empire, especially in the Greek east, is sometimes exaggerated. We are not dealing with an ‘oral society’ in the strictest sense here at all: writing is available, and documents, and the ability to produce them, did exist” (“The Trouble with Q” [Paper presented at the Westar Seminar on Christian Origins, Santa Rosa, Calif., October 20, 2007], 184). This emphasizes that writing was not restricted to elite groups and was at least available to non-elites. However, it is difficult to imagine peasants having the resources to produce a text such as Q.


the Sayings Gospel Q, he largely agrees with the peasant description of Roman Galilee, but notably does not assume that peasants lie directly behind the text.\textsuperscript{91}

Thus, although some scholars question its utility, peasantry as some sort of analytical concept seems here to stay. With Horsley and Oakman’s works illustrating the recent interest in examining peasantry at the origins of the early Jesus movement, this enthusiasm raises the question of what analytical utility emerges from this enterprise.

5 Evaluation

The problem is not simply that there are two ways of understanding peasantry, one centering on socio-economic dimensions, and the other on cultural dimensions. Rather, these ways also entail certain assumptions about social experience in antiquity and elsewhere, which need to be explored in order to determine the utility of the term. It will be argued that the benefits of using the term “peasant” outweigh the shortcomings, but as with any potentially useful analytical concept, the shortcomings deserve attention as well.

There are a number of benefits that result from using the peasant category, or more generally the language of subordinate/subaltern, to think about Christian beginnings. First, the use of the peasant category draws special attention to the agrarian reality of Roman Palestine. It seems to be a point of consensus in peasant studies that peasants are almost always engaged in agricultural labour.\textsuperscript{92} Rather than simply informing the context of the

\textsuperscript{91} Arnal, \textit{Jesus and the Village Scribes}, 114 and 170. “Life in the countryside [of Galilee],” he writes, “was normally of the standard peasant sort” (114). He, of course, argues later that members of a literate class (scribes) produced Q.

\textsuperscript{92} Lenski notes some degree of differentiation among peasants in various contexts, such that some could engage in non-agricultural activities (\textit{Power and Privilege}, 277–78). His prime example, it should be noted, derives from thirteenth-century England, but the overall point is that a peasant class is characteristic of agrarian societies.

Jesus movement, this insight can be brought to bear in very specific and illuminating ways on the study of early Christianity, suggested, for example, by Oakman’s argument that the parables of growth have different implications for agricultural labourers than for urbanites. Thus, although there are non-elites in both urban and rural contexts, the Galilean and Judaean villagers whose interests are reflected in the earliest Jesus movement are a distinct group of people from the urban poor. Scholars are becoming increasingly vocal about the agrarian realities and village organization of first-century Galilee, in particular, the need to take these into account when thinking about the activities of the Jesus movement in that context. Defining this context as a peasant milieu helps to ensure that the social and economic relationships directly related to agricultural production and extraction are included in the analysis.

Second and related closely to the first point, the appeal to peasantry as a social form underscores the context of economic domination and exploitation in which Christianity would have arisen. As discussed above, both Oakman and Horsley use the term in a way that demands recognition of these wider power structures. This, too, is a point of consensus in


94 In texts produced in a rural village environment, we would expect, for instance, to find such things as attention to the particularities of agricultural labour, and especially the daily and seasonal routines and activities associated with it, as well as (ideally) some indication of the economic structure, especially in its exploitative capacity.

95 For example, Horsley, Archaeology, History, and Sociology in Galilee; Reed, Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus; Arnal, Jesus and the Villages Scribes; Freyne, Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels, 135–175.

Although scholars differ over the extent of influence, it is generally agreed that multiple forms of political domination were imposed on the population of Palestine, including the Herodian kingship, the Judaean aristocracy, and the Roman imperial presence. These political influences were at the same time economic influences. The Roman Empire, in particular, was interested in extracting resources, often via client kingdoms, from this peripheral province and channeling them toward the center. Thus, to describe the Jesus movement as emerging from a peasant society says much about access to social and economic power by those under discussion and remains consistent with the scholarship of peasant studies proper.

Third, given the emergence of postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, peasant studies, and related disciplines, the peasant category affords an opportunity to return some agency to adherents to the Jesus movement, instead of just viewing them as undifferentiated masses, constituting the “crowds” of which the canonical gospels often speak. The work of Scott and Thompson, in particular, are instructive in this respect. Thompson, although focusing on the English working class during the Industrial Revolution, employs a method that invites scholars to view non-elites in a new and attentive way. He argues that working classes and “crowds” are perfectly capable of acting with discipline and according to a moral code.

Crowds and peasant movements are not simply spasmodic, reactive outbursts, as subsequent


97 Hanson and Oakman, Palestine at the Time of Jesus, 103–20. See also, Lenski, Power and Privilege, 206, 210, and elsewhere.

98 Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance; Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class.
history might depict them, but are rather often calculated, sophisticated organizations of people. Similarly, Scott observes a variety of techniques and coping strategies in which subordinate peoples engage, and these strategies, too, are often calculated and deliberate.

When applied to the Jesus movement, this means that the Galilean peasantry, however else it might be imagined, was not constituted simply by labourers living at a subsistence level who only reacted to the most basic of biological imperatives; they were capable of creative resourcefulness and political organization, though the latter was no doubt limited by their position of powerlessness.

Fourth, there is a very practical benefit to describing the earliest Christians as peasants or subordinate figures: it makes it easier to compare these figures, as involved in a non-elite social movement, to other actors involved in non-elite forms of protest or resistance in other contexts. This is extremely important, lest one assume that the activities of these Jesus followers were somehow unique in their circumstances or unlike any social movement that has come after. While this chapter has cautioned against a comparison that too easily homogenizes the characterizations of different groups of peasants, a disciplined comparison can examine a number of forms of non-elite social movements in variety of contexts without essentializing the experiences of those involved. This process of

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99 A digression into the contested definition of “social movement” exceeds the bounds of this project. I prefer a relatively straightforward one, though. Marco Giugni, following Sydney Tarrow (“Social Movements in Contentious Politics: A Review Article,” American Political Science Review 90 [1996]: 874–83) and Charles Tilley (“Social Movements as Historically Specific Clusters of Political Performances,” Berkeley Journal of Sociology 38 [1994]: 1–30) states simply that social movements are “sustained challenges to power holders on behalf of an underprivileged population.” These challenges are “usually through non-institutional means” (“Concluding Remarks: Conceptual Distinctions in the Study of Political Altruism,” in Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective [eds. Marco Giugni and Florence Passy; Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001], 235–44, here 242). This kind of definition ensures that the label of social movement is not applied to any and all form of social organization but instead restricts it to those actually oriented toward some social change.
comparison, as Jonathan Z. Smith suggests,\textsuperscript{100} is as interested in noting differences as it is in describing similarities, with the ultimate goal of shedding new light on a situation or concept instead of simply equating two data points. With peasant studies, then, there is no need to equate first-century Galilean peasants with, say, modern Peruvian peasants in order to facilitate a rewarding comparison.

With these insights in mind, this category becomes particularly illuminating of one important set of data in the Synoptic tradition: the parables of Jesus.\textsuperscript{101} On the whole, the parables tend to preserve a relatively coherent, non-elite agrarian worldview, and several of them include activities that might be considered “peasant strategies”\textsuperscript{102} for dealing with limited social and economic power. Moreover, they often have particular resonance with people intimately engaged in agricultural production, that is, the peasantry; a handful of recent studies illustrate how effective the appeal to peasant experience can be. For example, Oakman’s discussion of the parables of growth in this respect was mentioned already above. He also outlines the implications for reading the Good Samaritan story if one takes into

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\textsuperscript{101} Whether or not these parables can actually be traced back to the historical Jesus is debated among scholars. This question, of course, differs also depending on which parable one considers. The assumption here is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to know if they originated with the historical Jesus, but more importantly, that it does not matter for the development of the tradition. Overall, many of the parables appear to preserve a relatively coherent, non-elite worldview, and that it itself is illuminating for the formative traditions of the movement.
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\textsuperscript{102} Cf. James C. Scott’s discussions of “weapons of the weak” (\textit{Domination and the Arts of Resistance}; \textit{Weapons of the Weak}), activities with which peasants resist and occasionally subvert the relationships of power and methods of economic extraction and exploitation which keep them marginal.
\end{quote}
account peasant values. Similarly, Rohrbaugh engages in a “peasant” interpretation of the Parable of the Talents, finding a very dark interpretation when peasant social experiences are taken into account. Likewise, Kloppenborg’s study on the parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard concludes that the original version of the parable evokes not only routine peasant experiences of viticulture, but also their perspectives on social status and power related to land owning and tenancy; Mark’s allegorized version of the parable, which has been heavily influenced by Isaiah, redeploy the story in such a way that it actually reverses the ideological interests of the parable away from non-elite concerns. Thus, there appears to be a core body of tradition that can be made sense of by a disciplined appeal to peasantry as an analytical category. In these cases, the analytical utility derives from recognizing the relationships of power in which peasants are situated and realizing that these socio-economic conditions affect their worldviews and values in a way that distinguishes them from more elite groups.

Even though the peasant category has a number of contributions to make to the study of early Christianity, there several potentially problematic issues that arise when this concept is deployed. The most obvious has been mentioned in passing already: lack of agreement regarding what the term actually indicates about the people to whom it is applied. For this

103 Oakman, “Was Jesus a Peasant?” 117–25. On Oakman’s reading, the Samaritan was not originally an exemplary figure but rather, from the Jewish peasantry’s point of view, “a cultural enemy, an evil man, and a fool” (122).
104 Rohrbaugh, “A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents/Pounds.”
105 Kloppenborg, The Tenants in the Vineyard.
106 The same criticism can be made of the term “subaltern” (Roy, “Subaltern Studies,” 2228). Scott has perhaps avoided some of the ambiguity of the terminology by frequently employing the term “subordinate” to refer to
reason, some scholars have recommended dropping the term altogether.¹⁰⁷ That peasantry can be understood as a socio-economic type and a cultural type highlights the lack of consistent definition. Shanin, in an attempt to retain analytical utility of the term across geographical and temporal divides, defines peasants as “small agricultural producers, who, with the help of simple equipment and the labour of their families, produce mostly for their own consumption, direct or indirect, and for the fulfillment of obligations to holders of political and economic power.”¹⁰⁸ This, of course, makes sense given peasants’ roles in agrarian economies, but Shanin’s definition, it should be noted, says nothing about the peasant ethic or moral system that is so prominent in some other peasant studies. Therefore, scholars of Christian origins should be wary that even in the discipline devoted to the topic, the clear referent of “peasantry” is not agreed upon by all.

Significantly, one should realize how one-dimensional the Jesus people often appear if they are described solely as peasants, because this category cannot exhaust their social or economic characteristics. This kind of depiction easily morphs into a “caricature” which leads to “a misspecification of the historic and potential role of peasants in economic development.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the peasantry is too often portrayed as only oriented toward non-elite people, but as some have suggested, his conceptual categories may sometimes be too broad to be analytically useful (so Bazzana, “Arts of Domination?”).

¹⁰⁷ Mattila, “Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’?” 291–95.
subsistence living and the activities entailed therein, which masks the complex relationships that peasants have among themselves and with non-peasants.\(^{110}\) As discussed above, Horsley’s deployment of the peasant category presumes that rural Galilean would not have been interested in anything but subsistence production, and thus would have been fundamentally hostile to outsiders, merchants, tax-collectors, and any sort of market transactions.\(^{111}\) This, in fact, gives Horsley the leverage to exclude any figures of higher social standing, such as tax-collectors and scribes, from the rural Jesus movement.\(^{112}\)

Daniel Thorner cautions against this reasoning:

> We should be careful not to slip into the trap of imagining a ‘pure’ type of peasant household which consumes practically everything it produces and practically nothing else…. We are sure to go astray if we try to conceive of peasant economies as

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\(^{110}\) Some scholars of peasant studies have begun to react to the tendency to homogenize peasant studies. For instance, when Marc Edelman outlines the colonial history of Costa Rica in order to set the stage for his discussion of contemporary rural social movements, he explicitly dispels earlier myths about the peasantry during the colonial period: “It is now abundantly clear that colonial Costa Rica was not always harmonious (what society is?) and did not consist primarily of uniformly poor, dispersed and subsistence-oriented rural households” (Peasants Against Globalization: Rural Social Movements in Costa Rica [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999], 45). This myth, he continues, was based on presumptions about the “relative lack of [economic] dynamism, [which] meant that egalitarianism, shared poverty, isolation, stagnation, and social harmony prevailed” during the colonial period (45). This is precisely the kind of myth that has prevailed in Christian origins about the rustic peasantry in ancient Palestine, seemingly isolated and undifferentiated, holding out against the Roman Empire. Even Redfield, who is partially responsible for the homogenized perception of the peasantry, admits that such values as “land ownership, hard work, and frugality” are not universal peasant values (Peasant Society and Culture, 115).

\(^{111}\) Scott, for instance, claims that peasant have a “traditional distaste for buying and selling” (“Protest and Profanation, Part II,” 231).

\(^{112}\) This is apparent in Horsley’s rejection of the Q people as scribes (Horsley, “Israelite Traditions in Q,” 98). He also rejects tax-collectors as having any significant interest or participation in the movement (The Spiral of Violence, 209–28). He has since recognized that scribes could be integral at creating an ideology of resistance to dominant political powers in the Roman Empire (Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009]), but his understanding of these figures, even though sensitive to the ambiguity of their social position, seems to be solely in terms of Judean scribes who produced apocalyptic texts and who were in service of the temple apparatus (8–14); for instance, he relies heavily Ben Sira for details about these “professional intellectuals who cultivated Judean cultural tradition” (16). As outlined in Chapter Four, a more multifaceted understanding of varieties of scribalism in antiquity is badly needed.
exclusively ‘subsistence’ oriented and to suspect capitalism where the peasants show evidence of being ‘market’ oriented.\textsuperscript{113} In Thorner’s opinion, it is “much sounder” to start from the recognition that “for ages peasant economies have had a double orientation toward both [household and market].”\textsuperscript{114} To be sure, Horsley’s depiction of the peasantry is motivated in part by the accurate realization that modern capitalism did not exist in the Roman Empire, but Thorner’s point is crucial to bear in mind. Peasants are clearly often able to produce beyond the subsistence level and may even have great interest in doing so; the issue is that most surplus is usually extracted by elites in the form of rents, taxes, or tributes. Rents, in particular, often cut deeply into any surplus produce that peasants are able to produce.\textsuperscript{115} Here it bears repeating again that peasantry always exists in a subordinate relationship to more powerful economic and political forms.\textsuperscript{116} In other words, peasants are not “naturally” inclined to produce only enough for subsistence-level living standards, but the end result is that they do so in the context of exploitative powers.

\textsuperscript{113} Thorner, “Peasant Economy as a Category in History,” 65. In general, Thorner points to five necessary criteria for peasant economies: (1) at least half of the population must be involved in agriculture; (2) more than half of the working population must be involved in agriculture; (3) a state power must exist as opposed to a kinship- or clan-based political structure; (4) a significant number of towns must exist and foster a different mode of life than in rural areas; and (5) the major unit of economic production lies in peasant households.

\textsuperscript{114} Thorner, “Peasant Economy as a Category in History,” 65.

\textsuperscript{115} Keith Hopkins, “Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C.–A.D. 400),” \textit{JRS} 70 (1980): 101–125, esp. 105. This claim can be supported with data from documentary papyri; for example, in discussing the economic conditions presupposed in the Parable of the Tenants, Kloppenborg synthesizes information from these documents to show the structure of rents, inputs, and outputs of viticulture (\textit{The Tenants in the Vineyard}, 317–19). In the typical estate of this sort, the landowner was responsible for many of the taxes, but rent payments constituted a significant burden for the peasant farmer. In fact, while the peasant farmer may have received a portion of the crop, it was quickly funneled toward various dues, religious obligations, and especially loan payments.

Akin to Thorner’s caution, Samuel L. Popkin also points out that a romanticized “myth of the village” often informs the idealized portrait communities, and observations about peasant modes of life become infused with moral dimensions. “A way of life that may have existed only for lack of alternatives is extolled as a virtue,” he observes, “What may have been the absence of incentives to change becomes a resistance to innovation and a defense of traditional ways.”

This does not mean that changes to peasant societies, especially those due to the modern advances of capitalism, do not drastically upset many peasant communities, but it suggests that the problems of capitalism might have more than one solution. Reverting to the pre-capitalist form is not necessarily “better.” Finally, the assumption that in times of hardship peasant villages will rally to support weaker members, on the basis of consent to a village-wide ethical code, should not be taken for granted. Jan Breman’s work on Indian peasants reveals that often the weaker members, who would be too burdensome on others, are deliberately excluded from economic support “long before everyone is reduced to the cultural minimum or subsistence line.”

Popkin also points out that there is a strong tendency to idealize preindustrial, peasant modes of life. “[R]omantic[izing] the portraits of peasant life” and “[e]xaggerating the virtues” does the disservice of presuming that any transformation of that social structure is “always detrimental.” These portraits feed into a picture of “presumed innocence and

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119 Popkin, The Rational Peasant, ix.

120 Popkin, The Rational Peasant, ix.
According to Liana Vardi, moreover, these romanticized portraits are historically situated and only start to emerge in post-Enlightenment thought. To reach this conclusion, Vardi traces the way that peasants were represented in early modern European art and poetry. In the Middle Ages, she finds that peasants were largely depicted in art (both paintings and poetry) as barbaric and anti-culture; their lifestyles were characterized by brutality, excess, or other dangerous potencies. Because of this, by the seventeenth century, there developed great fear and uneasiness of these presumed uncivilized and violent peasant communities, which led to imagery which depicted the countryside as relatively empty of people, and hence, “safe.” When peasants were depicted in these scenes, it was most often in relation to the bountiful harvest and the success of agricultural work, which symbolically diffused the threats of peasant rebellions or even peasant autonomy. The Enlightenment, as one might expect given its new ideals of equality and individuality, saw the complete transformation of this understanding, and artists began to celebrate the rural activities and lifestyle of the peasant. This new depiction sounds remarkably familiar to some modern, idealized descriptions of peasantry: “As a laborer, he was harmless and piteous and there a natural object of charity and paternalist concern. As an independent farmer, he was virtuous,

121 Popkin, The Rational Peasant, x.

122 Liana Vardi, “Imagining the Harvest in Early Modern Europe,” in Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge (eds. James C. Scott and Nina Bhatt; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 86–138, here 105–110. Note also Max Weber, Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology (eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich; trans. Ephraim Fischoff, et al; Vol. 2; New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 470: “That the peasant has become the distinctive prototype of the pious man who is pleasing to god [sic] is a thoroughly modern phenomenon… None of the more important religions of Eastern Asia [for example] had any such notion about the religious merit of the peasant” (Weber’s original Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft was published posthumously in 1922). Leaving aside the question of what makes the traditions Weber has in mind “more important,” we see that this corroborates the transition in the art world that Vardi discovers: the romanticized notion of the peasant that informs many contemporary studies emerges in a particular historical and cultural context.
hard-working, and devoted to his family.”¹²³ This figure is too often the one that scholars find when they look to antiquity for peasants. Indeed, according to Vardi, “[t]reating peasants as repositories of traditional culture,”¹²⁴ such as is often the result with Horsley and others, is a recent historical trend. This trend is not only historically situated, but it is also socially situated. Vardi notes that these morphing conceptions of peasantry in Europe have typically reflected elite perspectives, and thus finding these traditionally minded peasants in antiquity is the result of an enterprise of “other”-ing peasants, which began in the Middle Ages and reached its most recognizable form with modernity.

The traditions and cultural stock of a peasant society, such as those Horsley focuses on in the Israelite tradition, may espouse ideals of generosity and welfare, but these are often only rhetorical. Michael R. Weisser observes: “Even in the primitive, pre-industrial world, economic differentiation was so pronounced as to make absurd the notion that communalism was a dominant mode of economic relations either during or long before the advent of the modern era.”¹²⁵ To challenge these idealized portraits, Popkin proses the typology of the “rational peasant.” To do so, he counters the moral economy approach to peasantry, advanced by Scott, Hobsbawm, Wolf, and the like,¹²⁶ with his political economy approach.

¹²³ Vardi, “Imagining the Harvest,” 125.
¹²⁴ Vardi, “Imagining the Harvest,” 86.
¹²⁶ It is telling that the approach to peasant studies that Popkin is critiquing here—the one which gets imported too easily into the context of early Christianity—tends to focus on economies that are transitioning or have transitioned to capitalism.
Popkin’s description of the moral economy approach should be noted in full, for it reflects conclusions reached above:

Peasant protests frequently accompany state making, commercialization of agriculture, and colonialism. Moral economists link the protest movements to a (presumed) loss of subsistence, security, and welfare by the peasantry during these changes. They interpret violence as a defensive reaction against capitalism and as an attempt to restore the precapitalist structures that provided peasant welfare. They argue that the change in welfare is due to changes in the key suprafamily institutions—the village and the patron-client relationship. They assume that peasants are antimarket, prefer common property to private property, and dislike buying and selling.... The transition to open villages with private property and open land sales, and the transition to contractual, single-stranded ties with landlords, they argue, force peasants into the market where their welfare invariably suffers.127

Popkin does not deny that these observations are accurate in some cases, but he stresses the rational128 action of the peasant in his or her social context. Therefore, his approach focuses on the political dimension of peasant village, on the assumption that it has conflict and tension built into it, in the same way that the world external to the village does. Moreover, in some village activities that require cooperation, such as village fire-fighting or other defense,


128 Popkin is careful to note that he is not “committing [himself] to the view that individuals are solely concerned with material commodities or money incomes.” Rationality, for him, means that “individuals evaluate the possible outcomes associated with their choices in accordance with their preferences and values.” The peasant is self-interest but in a way that is “primarily concerned with the welfare and security of self and family.” Moreover, “what is rational for an individual may be very different from what is rational for an entire village or collective (The Rational Peasant, 31).
Popkin predicts that free riders will always take advantage if they perceive they can get away with it. The patron-client relationship is one important social form that explicitly reinscribes conflictual relationships within the village, because it is in the patron’s interest to keep the clients in competition for patronage to prevent collective organizing and possibly overthrowing.  

One could also raise the critique that continually emphasizing the social and economic conflicts in which the peasant is embedded overstates the situation of domination, and that this picture of domination is not always justified. Roy has claimed that subaltern studies—and here one should also include “peasant studies” because Roy regards peasantry as a central focus of subaltern studies—too often presume that non-elite figures can only be studied in the context of domination. This emphasis often presupposes that the colonial or dominant power is fundamentally oppressive and that the natural response of the dominated group is resistance. The point that domination and resistance are often overemphasized is probably accurate, but somewhat irrelevant for this discussion. Peasantry conceived as a socio-economic type only comes into being through contexts of domination—there is no “natural” form of it. If the relations of power were removed, the social configurations of inequality and exploitation would transform, and peasantry as an object of scholarly analysis would not exist. Thus, somewhat ironically, the critique that peasantry is too often studied in the context of domination is accurate. This context is not necessary analytically limiting.

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130 Jensen, for instance, has criticized both Horsley and Arnal for emphasizing a “picture of conflict” in Roman Galilee under Herod Antipas. Jensen’s own reading of the evidence suggests that the conflict is overstated. See above pp. 36–38.
131 Roy, “Subaltern Studies.”
however. Within contexts of domination, we can discern agency, resistance, accommodation, rational calculation of interests—all manner of things. Especially when we see authors or leaders of peasant movements who are able to articulate particular interests of peasant groups, “domination” need not dictate the conclusions that we come to about these figures.

Perhaps the most important problem is one that has already been mentioned in the above analysis: the imprecise distinction between peasantry as a socio-economic economic type and peasantry as a cultural type. When peasantry is used as cultural type, that culture is often supposed to have an essential cultural pattern or a certain form of morality: peasants are inherently hostile towards urban dwellers, they resent the accumulation of wealth, or they are naturally non-competitive and undifferentiated. These are often idealized conceptions of peasantry, and they are typically in the service of contrasting the morality of peasants or subordinates with that of powerful elites who impose exploitative structures. This depiction, which may be true in some situations, is by no means certain. In his critique of Karl Kautsky’s Marxist reconstruction of early Christianity, which portrays the movement as a form of undifferentiated “primitive communism” that was later corrupted by the Church, Roland Boer argues that this notion of peasantry is a naïve and idealistic interpretation. Rather, according to Boer, economic differentiation and competition were present from the beginning in the Jesus movement, although it was not the same form as that required by

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132 On this point, Mattila (“Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’?” 295) finds that “[Horsley’s] ‘peasants’ constitute in effect a unified rural class with no significant internal socioeconomic conflicts of interest.” Steven Feierman points out that the concept of peasantry is useless in analyses if it presupposes a “static mode of subsistence and a state form of consciousness” (Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania [Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990], 25). Moreover, the assumption that “traditional” societies are naturally opposed to change comes from an outdated dichotomy between traditional and modern societies, which has recently been challenged. On the contrary, tradition is not always “an obstacle to change but…an essential framework for creativity” (S. N. Eisenstadt, “Intellectuals and Tradition,” in Intellectuals and Tradition [eds. S. N. Eisenstadt and S. R. Graubard; New York: Humanities Press, 1972], 1–19, here 3).
Roman social organization. Moreover, the idea that peasant societies are hostile toward all outside institutions is not consistently supported. For example, Steven Feierman describes how Tanzanian peasants resisted attempts by the British to improve their farming techniques, but they were perfectly willing to accept other changes, especially new forms of education, if they perceived that they would improve themselves and gain an advantage on other tribes. Thus, the fact that a practice is “foreign” is not inherently grounds for rejection; what matters is the perception of making things easier or more difficult. In this example, British farming techniques, which radically altered the terrain to control erosion, were perceived to make farming activity more difficult and less rhythmic; access to education were perceived only to benefit the peasants. Especially in some of Horsley’s descriptions of the peasant, the end result is that the majority of ancient Palestinians seems like humble villagers, who were uninterested expanding in trade and economic activity and were not in any sort of competition with one another. Equally problematic is Horsley’s use of the term peasant as interchangeable with common or ordinary people. This usage lacks any explanatory power; after all, how does one say anything meaningful about “ordinary” people?

The same data that the model of peasantry as a cultural type seeks to explain, I would suggest, can be dealt with using the model of peasantry as a socio-economic type. In other words, if one finds peasantry struggling to meet the demands of production, peasants expressing hostility towards outsiders, and peasants (very) occasionally participating in

133 Roland Boer, “The Actuality of Karl Kautsky: On Materialist Reconstructions of Ancient Israel and Early Christianity,” The Bible and Critical Theory 3.3 (2007): 40.1–23. By arguing that the economic activity and competition in pre-Roman Palestine was different than that required later by the Romans, Boer still leaves room for the social and economic conflicts that inform the early Jesus tradition.

134 Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals, 139–140 and 190–91.
revolts, one need not posit an essential set of “peasant characteristics” to account for this. Rather, as in the case of first-century Palestine, there are quantifiable factors—such as various levels of economic extraction in the forms of taxes and rents and overt socio-economic equality—that explain this without importing cultural assumptions into the analysis. Both models try to explain the same phenomenon, but the socio-economic one tends to specific historical and economic circumstances while the cultural one falls back on the truism “that’s what peasants do.”

6 The Utility of Peasantry as an Analytical Concept

Given the above analysis, peasantry as a socio-economic type is the best way to deploy this concept. It is possible to understand peasantry as a cultural type, but this entails many problems that need to be dealt with before deploying the term as such. To be clear: there is nothing *apriori* problematic about using cross-cultural models to help explain social and economic relationships in different contexts. The problem comes when theoretically unjustifiable propositions—such as the immutability of cultures, the inherent qualities of a socio-economic group, and the ethical codes of non-elites—are taken for granted, are assumed to be “natural,” or are imported into these explanations with little reflection. Therefore, this analysis does not mean to suggest that peasants in first-century Galilee cannot have anything in common with, for example, late twentieth-century Malaysian peasants. It only maintains that the cultural dimensions and the socio-economic dimensions of these

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135 While outright revolts were possible, they were (and are) quite rare: Stephen L. Dyson, “Native revolts in the Roman Empire,” *Historia* 20 (1971): 239–74; idem, “Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire,” *ANRW* II.3 (ed. by Hildegard Temporini; Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1975), 138–75.

Peasantry is a separate discussion and thus far, scholarship of the early Jesus movement has tended to merge these analyses into one overall model of peasants.

Thus, the question of the utility of the peasant category comes down to recognizing this distinction between peasantry as socio-economic type and peasantry as a cultural type. It must also be realized that the model of the Jesus movement as a peasant movement is not a grand unified theory of Christian origins. In other words, it can by no means explain everything about the early development of this tradition. If it is intended to expose the agrarian orientation of the majority of the population in ancient Palestine and if it is also meant to denote the villagers’ economic production in the context of extraction and exploitation—that is, the term at once implies a mode of production and a set of unequal social relationships—then this is a designation that is heuristically useful. The analytical utility thus derives from recognizing the specific relationships of power in which peasants are situated and realizing that these particular conditions determine their worldviews and values in a way that distinguishes them from more elite groups. This fits well with the emerging consensus that Galilee and Judea were socially and economically conflicted in this period.136

Therefore, peasantry as a sociological category should be retained, because it defines relationships of power which indicate situations of economic exploitation and overt social inequality. These relationships simply do not come to light were scholars to simply describe the Jesus movement as emerging among “villagers,” “the poor,” or even “farmers.”

136 Almost all scholars of early Christianity who are cited in this chapter take this view. However, there are some notable voices of dissension: Mark A. Chancey, The Myth of the Gentile Galilee (SNTSMS 118; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); idem, Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus (SNTSMS 134; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jensen, Herod Antipas in Galilee. Although Chancey and Jensen agree that the Romans politically and economically controlled Palestine, they argue that the effect on the population was less extreme than others suggest.
modern concept of peasantry, indebted to Marxist scholarship, sociology, anthropology, and the burgeoning field of peasant studies proper, stands to bring all of this information into the analysis, if the category is used with the necessary theoretical reflection. It remains useful “so long as it is understood that this label gives us a set of questions to ask, and that it does not specify answers.”  

7 Conclusion and Relevance to the Current Project

The discussion of the peasant model of Christian origins in Roman Palestine is immediately related to the task at hand, which seeks to understand the ideological project of Q’s authors. There is currently no compelling way for explaining how the peasant concerns came to expression in this text, save for occasional nebulous models of oral tradition somehow coming to the ears of literate people who decided, for whatever reasons, to record them in fixed form.  

In order to think through this problem, it is necessary first to analyze the implications of describing the context of Q as a peasant milieu, as this chapter has done. By regarding peasantry largely as a socio-economic type, one gains insight into the particular material conditions and socio-economic relationships in this context, and one is then able to ask how Q’s authors factor in to this context alongside the peasants. For a number of reasons that I discuss in Chapters Three and Four, Q should be considered a text of relative sophistication. Furthermore, although its social critique is marked by non-elite concerns and sense of social and economic powerlessness, peasants simply would not have had the

137 Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals, 25.
138 Arnal refers to this as a conception based on the idea that oral tradition “more or less as reflect[s] a peasant sensibility unmediated by letters or learning” (Arnal “What Branches Grow out of this Stony Rubbish?” 562–63).
learning or resources to produce a text such as this. The question to be explored in Chapter Five, then, concerns how Q’s authors relate to the peasants in its Galilean environment and why their concerns seem to be so prominent in the text.
Chapter 2

The Sociology of the Middle in Antiquity

1 Introduction

In describing the relationship between Jesus and the rural peasants which comes to expression in Q and the Gospel of Mark, Horsley seems to acknowledge the inadequacy of the binary model of social structure in ancient Palestine on which he elsewhere relies so strongly:

Cross-cultural studies suggest that it is precisely such people with experience beyond a village and contact with outsiders who tend to become leaders in movements of renewal or resistance. Some of the principal leaders of the Jesus movements were apparently ‘downwardly mobile’ people with direct experience of indebtedness to the very power holders who were oppressing the people with heavy taxation and interest on loans prohibited by covenantal law. These leaders would have an unusually poignant sense of how the Israelite ideal of a life of cooperation and justice in semi-independent, self-sustaining communities was disintegrating.\(^1\)

Unfortunately, his solution—the existence of mediating “peasant prophets”\(^2\) to facilitate the emergence of the Jesus movement—is not a sociologically defensible description. It not only adopts the insider terminology, but it is also only relevant to “religious” movements and

\(^1\) Horsley, “Jesus Movements and the Renewal of Israel,” 37.

\(^2\) Horsley, “Jesus Movements and the Renewal of Israel,” 23 and 32.
renders any comparison of them with other social movements impossible. Thus, we need to explore new ways to conceptualize the people who produced our earliest Christian texts and understand what they were doing. In order to do this, the analysis offered in this chapter addresses different ways that scholars outside of Christian origins have examined and described middling figures, that is, those who cross the boundaries between elite and non-elite populations, such as social activists, intellectuals, and even some types of administrative figures, who will be directly comparable to the authors of Q. The goal is to distill important characteristics of these figures and demonstrate that they have distinct social experiences that deserve special attention. The crucial caveat that no coherent middle class existed in antiquity should not preclude us from trying to offer a sociological description of middling figures when we do suspect their presence behind the evidence, nor should it discourage us

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3 If one relies on terminology of “prophet,” then the label essentially adopts the insider’s perspective on this figure. That is, he or she is considered a prophet within a particular group. The label is a description of how the person is treated by insiders but indicates nothing about how wider society regards this figure. For this reason, attempts to compare “prophets” end up comparing those who are labeled thus on the basis of subjective, insider criteria.


5 Carney, The Shape of the Past, 90, 94, 121, 171, and elsewhere. In contrast, Emanuel Mayer has recently made the claim that a discernible middle class is evident in ancient sources (The Ancient Middle Class: Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE—250 CE [Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 2012]). Claiming that the resistance to conceiving of a middle class in antiquity is based only on a Marxist interpretation of class, Mayer relies instead on Weber’s model of social class, which is “suitable and perfectly adequate for the study of antiquity” (12). Weber’s model posits that class identity is based not only on one’s opportunities for economic success but also one’s status within different reference groups, and Mayer argues that this allows us to focus on living conditions and cultural preferences instead of simply analyzing activities related to production. His study is, however, not especially relevant to this project. For one, he focuses mainly on urban centres (25–60), wherein he could discern an evident commercial class, which for him, is easily converted into a coherent middle class. Moreover, he does not provide evidence that members of this group saw themselves as such, nor does he speculate if they aspired higher up the social ladder. And, despite his insistence that Weber’s class model focuses on economic opportunities, he seems to want to emphasize cultural and aesthetic preferences in the “middle class” that he has discerned (100–212). This dimension would not be helpful to my project, which, as I have repeatedly argued, is very much concerned with social experience based on access to means of production and consumption.
from trying to explain such things as the production of texts by appealing to this distinct social experience. “[T]he notion of ‘class’ itself,” as Bruce Longenecker notes, “is a relatively modern construct, at least in the sense of a ‘class’ consisting of an identifiable stratum of society with a relatively stable shared profile and common socio-economic interests in relation to wealth production.” Thus, although there was no clearly articulated middle-class consciousness in antiquity, it does not follow that middling figures simply did not exist at all. More probably, there were not enough middling figures to constitute a recognizable class, and crucially, there was no mechanism in place to articulate a class consciousness or even a basic set of social or economic interests which would be common to this strata. Furthermore, the institution of patronage, which created vertical socio-economic relationships between patrons and clients and discouraged horizontal ones, “virtually precludes” solidifying a middle-class ethos and identity.

Ethnographic studies on peasant movements demonstrate that peasants are often aided and directed by identifiable middling figures, and I suspect that such figures are responsible for Q. This chapter accordingly explores, in an analogous fashion, some of the roles and functions that these middling figures can have in other contexts—using the very same kinds of data (that is, cross-cultural peasant studies) which have hitherto been used to characterize the Jesus movement in Galilee as a “peasant movement.” In light of these nuances, the continuing focus on the “peasant” milieu of the rural Jesus movement indeed seems somewhat odd.

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6 Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle,” 268.
7 Carney, The Shape of the Past, 90, 94, 121, and 171.
2 A Note on Comparison

The comparative nature of this enterprise cannot be overstated: the aim is not simply to use comparative data to put a new label on the Q people, but rather to suggest that new insights to the Q people’s activities and interest can be illuminated through this comparison. As Smith has argued, comparative projects should always have at least three dimensions: the two phenomena which are being compared, and a third phenomenon or concept on which the comparison will shed light. Thus, this chapter will not claim, for instance, that the Q scribes are identical with the intellectuals that Antonio Gramsci had in mind to lead the communist revolution in Italy or with the “peasant intellectuals” that Steven Feierman identified at the fore of Tanzanian resistance to German and British colonialism. Rather, a more sophisticated question is being asked: what kind of similar roles and functions do middling figures play in social movements, and how does this help us understand the production of something like Q?

3 A Note on Terminology

Already in 1922, Max Weber had begun to appreciate the roles that mediating intellectuals play in the development of religious traditions, especially “salvation religions.” According to Weber, salvation religions tend to emerge among relatively privileged social strata. Although their charismatic founder figures can theoretically come from any social location,

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8 Smith, Drudgery Divine, passim.

9 The qualifier “mediating” is meant to indicate people who do not simply produce or consume ideas but who mediate and direct them in ways that make it meaningful to both producers and consumers.

they are “normally associated with a certain minimum of intellectual cultivation.” ¹¹ When a salvation religion reaches the masses, “to whom intellectualism is both economically and socially inaccessible,” ¹² it changes its character, focusing more on an individual figure of salvation with whom the masses can cultivate a personal relationship. Intellectual figures, however, continue to guide and reframe the tradition to make it viable in new social contexts; since Weber initially had in mind priests and theologians, he imagined this framing to take place through production of scripture or commentary. Even so, he also realized that some of the most prominent reform movements, such as those resulting in Buddhism and Sufism, had resulted from the innovations by small groups of intellectuals. ¹³

These elite individuals might be the most visible figures of reform in traditions, but Weber acknowledged another type, characterized by what he called “pariah intellectualism” (Pariaintellektualismus). For the present analysis, it is worth noting his description of them: Members of this class include people at the edge of the minimum standard of living; small officials and incumbents of prebends, who generally are equipped with what is regarded as an inferior education; scribes, who were not members of privileged strata in periods when writing was a special vocation; reciters; and practitioners of similar free proletaroid callings. Above all, we must include in this category the self-taught intelligentsia of the disprivileged (“negatively privileged”) strata, of whom the classic examples are the Russian proletaroid peasant intelligentsia in Eastern Europe and the socialist-anarchist proletarian intelligentsia of the West…. Above all, there must be

¹¹ Weber, Economy and Society, 486.
¹² Weber, Economy and Society, 487.
The Sociology of the Middle in Antiquity

included the classic manifestations of the Jewish laity, including Pharisees, the Chassidim, and the mass of the pious Jews who daily studied the law. \(^{14}\)

Straddling classes and thus not bound by typical social conventions associated with either the elite or the masses, they are capable of an “original attitude toward the cosmos,” \(^{15}\) which I take to mean a sort of intellectual creativity not necessarily expected in others. This description, although occupying mere paragraphs in his treatise on the sociology of religion, is quite instructive for setting the stage, because it is precisely these kinds of figures with whom this chapter will be concerned. \(^{16}\) According to Weber, these figures are located in the middle class of their societies. The middle class, as noted, is not a sociological concept that translates well to antiquity and so that dimension of this ideal type will not be emphasized. Others, however, have undertaken similar efforts to identify and understand these figures, but classification does not operate on a standard model by any means.

Whereas the problems entailed in using the peasant category are clear from Chapter One, the terminology for middling figures is hardly any better. Indeed, terminology in the secondary literature on this subject varies widely, and a handful of examples will illustrate this. For instance, Gramsci writes of intellectuals who are on the “cusp” of social classes;

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\(^{16}\) Critics are quick to fixate on how Weber’s socio-historical location, embedded in modern capitalism and rationalism, influenced his theories of religion, but nevertheless, his discussion provides a useful starting point for thinking about the genesis of new ideas in religion. A digression into the problematic nature of the category “world religions,” on which he focused so strongly, exceeds the bound of this present discussion, but it will suffice to say that “world religions” are no longer taken for granted as self-evident to scholars. Instrumental in reevaluating the utility of this category has been Tomoko Masuzawa’s ground-breaking study *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005).
Redfield describes “hinge” figures who connect the peasantry to the elite.\textsuperscript{17} Lenski, whose model was given close attention earlier, opts for the “retainer class”, which underscores their position in supporting the elite.\textsuperscript{18} Eric Wolf identifies “middle peasants” in peasant societies.\textsuperscript{19} The terminology of “intellectuals”/“intelligentsia”\textsuperscript{20} has also become routine, sometimes qualified as “public”,\textsuperscript{21} or “popular” intellectuals. Feierman blurs the categories even further by speaking of “peasant intellectuals.”\textsuperscript{22} These examples certainly do not exhaust the way that middling figures have been conceived, but I will argue that there are productive reasons for thinking of the Q people with some of these terms. “Intellectual,” in particular, should not be taken as an objective category, but rather one that refers to the \textit{function} that individuals have within a wider reference group. It is prudent to expand briefly

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17 Redfield, \textit{Peasant Society and Culture}, 44.


20 Weber considered the intelligentsia to be an observable social class, made up of “propertyless” figures who specialized in bureaucratic tasks and skills (\textit{Economy and Society}, 305). As noted, he also devoted substantial attention to the role that intellectuals play in developing religious traditions. Russian Marxists tended to view the intelligentsia negatively, as a class either made up of the bourgeoisie or those supporting their interests. Hence, Lenin’s infamous remark, “[The] intelligentsia is not the ‘brain of the nation’, it is the ‘feces of the nation’” (“Letter from Lenin to Gorky [September 15, 1919].” [Archived online in the Library of Congress: http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/g2aleks.html; accessed May 14, 2013]). Gramsci, by differentiating between organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals (the latter of the sort denounced by Lenin), was able to retain some utility for the term and ensure that “intellectual” is not simply a slur but a category which explains ideological interests and class allegiances (see more below).

21 The category of public intellectuals is the least relevant to this study, because it presupposes a group of intellectuals which is visibly active in the dominant socio-political context. Many theorists who work on the roles of public intellectuals afford them a kind of occupational and intellectual autonomy that is not applicable to peasant societies or to antiquity in general. Moreover, because Q does not evidently represent the interests of a “public,” we should be cautious about comparing Q’s authors to public intellectuals. They are intellectuals in terms of creating an intellectual product, but not in terms of articulating or even influencing the fundamental, dominant beliefs and values of a society, which tends to be how public intellectuals are understood in modern contexts.

22 Feierman, \textit{Peasant Intellectuals}.
on the concept of “intellectual,” because the usage here differs so much from its generic usage.

Gramsci’s remarks on intellectuals are instructive. Writing in the early twentieth century, Gramsci was struggling with the problem of how to cultivate a revolutionary consciousness in Italy. He saw the potential to develop a successful working class movement, but to do so would mean coordinating the interests of the rural peasant and urban workers. This task would require sophisticated ideological work in order to persuade these separate groups that their economic interests were, in fact, like-minded. This ideological work, in turn, could not be accomplished by just anyone; it required the disciplined intellectual work of a group who would sincerely represent the interests of both the peasants and the workers.

In order to broach the subject of creating successful ideological alliances, Gramsci drew a distinction between organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals. He was not satisfied with the conventional dichotomy between the “intellectual” and the “non-intellectual,” based as it were “almost exclusively on comparative evaluations of cerebral activity.”

Gramsci wanted to see intellectualism as a kind of skill that could potentially be cultivated in all people, were the conditions right. A person is an intellectual, he supposed, if they function as one, meaning if they exercise “technical” or “directive” capacities, within a particular group; they need not rise up the social hierarchy to achieve this status. Organic intellectuals are juxtaposed with the traditional intellectuals; the former emerge from the group they purport to represent. In this way, organic intellectuals have the ability to articulate

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the concerns of a particular group of people because they originate within it. Traditional intellectuals, on the other hand, are not generated from within a particular constituency and have no “organic” connection to it. Thus, they view the group’s needs from without and have no experiential insight to their consciousness. Traditional intellectuals are termed as such because their interests are essentially conservative and reproduce “traditional” social structures that legitimate their positions. They are often in the service of the state and may attempt to function as intellectuals for groups that they do not represent. Therefore, they can never be the impetus for extreme social criticism or reform, because it is not in their interest to challenge the order that it responsible for their status. The real impetus for social change, according to Gramsci, comes from the working class producing its own organic intellectuals, who could articulate the identity and value of its own class and facilitate political action. At this point, we see that the old binary between “intellectuals” and “masses” breaks down, because mediating intellectuals can be found in a variety of social groups. Depending on the type, organic or traditional intellectual, the relation to the subordinate class will be quite different.

Gramsci’s theory was, of course, an attempt to solve a particular political problem in twentieth-century Italian society and his real interest was the transition from capitalism to a new society, but his theory of organic intellectuals is suggestive. Scholarship on peasant

25 Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks, 97.


Societies has tended to assume too strongly that education and literacy were mostly restricted to the elite. While it may be true that formal education was rarely found outside of the elite classes in antiquity, it does not follow that creativity, innovation, and other skills must be restricted to them as well. These faculties can come from any social class.

In other words, “intellectual” here is based on the role one plays in creating new ideas, directing social groups, or otherwise facilitating the emergence of social movements. Indeed, social movements often “create spaces for ‘ordinary people’ to become ‘intellectuals’, that is, individuals who problematize the routines and beliefs of everyday life and reflect upon them in a meaningful way.”

Thus, my interest is not in any and all middling figures, but those who have identifiable and directive roles in social movements.

Since no simple change in terminology will suffice, this chapter will investigate a variety of instances of middling figures functioning in their wider social contexts, in the hopes that some of their functions and activities may be comparable to, and illuminating for, the people behind Q. If we can identify similar interests and goals among middling figures, we may get closer to explaining why the Q people became invested in a project which at first glance seems to benefit the peasantry. Overall, it must be stressed at the outset that none of these categories is intended to be applied as a mere description of the Q people. Rather, I intend for these categories and theoretical frameworks to offer new and productive ways to think about a social stratum for which we have very little data in antiquity.

3.1 Conceptualizing the Middle in Antiquity

Not all scholars have been satisfied with the simple recognition that there was no middle class akin to the one in the modern, post-Industrial Revolution context, and it is important to begin this discussion with the recognition that there have been noteworthy attempts to rectify this, especially in urban contexts. In 1983, Wayne Meeks began to pay close attention to the individuals that made up Pauline communities, finding a great diversity of social statuses and occupations among the communities addressed in his letters. More recently, Stephen Friesen has proposed a new “poverty scale” for the urban populations in the Roman Empire. He argues that the economic levels of the urban populations can essentially be sorted into seven categories: imperial elites (.04%), regional/provincial elites (1%), municipal elites (1.76%), moderate surplus (7%), stable near subsistence level (22%), at subsistence level (40%), and below subsistence level (28%). Despite the new categories which flesh out a binary model, the model still shows that approximately 90% of the urban population was at or below the subsistence level, with no surplus resources and probably little vertical movement on the socio-economic scale.

In assessing Friesen’s model, Bruce Longenecker argues for several adjustments to his original scale based on a reevaluation of the method used to calculate the percentage of the population in each category. He suggests that the fourth category of figures with


31 So also, Longenecker concludes, “despite the potential of his model to move beyond binary schemas, Friesen tends toward a binary model nonetheless” (“Exposing the Economic Middle,” 267.)
moderate surplus ("middling groups") ought to be revised to 17%. The fifth category, stable but near subsistence level, should be revised to 25%, while at subsistence level should be 30%. Finally, the most economically marginal, those below the subsistence level, comprise 25% of the urban population. His revisions, he claims, "make visible the ‘excluded middle’ that has largely been missing from more binary models of Graeco-Roman economic stratification." This category includes, according to Longenecker, those in the employ of civil magistrates such as "scribes, messengers, lectors, and heralds" and freedmen, who could all be potentially upwardly mobile.

Both Friesen and Longenecker conclude that the social hierarchy in the Roman world was far more complex than has previously been described, and according to Longenecker, the middle social stratum, straddling those who are unambiguously elite and non-elite, has been greatly underestimated. Corroborating this, Nelville Morley and Walter Scheidel argue in separate articles that nearly 20% of the population could be situated between the wealthy elite and the poor masses. Friesen and Longenecker, of course, are dealing with urban population and, so their scales, no matter how accurate, cannot simply be mapped onto the rural context of Q. At the same time, these studies are largely descriptive, and few have tried to access the social experience of middling figures and provide any compelling explanation.

32 Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle,” 264.
33 Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle,” 267.
34 Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle,” 264.
for their attraction to or alignment with the Jesus movement. Moreover, even with these recent advances in conceptualizing the middle, the motivation for pursuing a more nuanced model is sometimes unclear. Longenecker, for instance, hopes that his revised economic scale will help answer questions about social relations in Paul’s community. He also suggests that this new scale might assist us in identifying the “poor” whom Jesus addresses, but raises appropriate questions about the extent to which the scale is applicable to rural context.

In light of these attempts to reevaluate the social hierarchy of the ancient world, it seems remarkable that, for the most part, biblical scholars have tended to overlook the function of middling figures in social movements. As we will see, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians of these movements might use different terms, but in many cases, they appear to be talking about the same sort of figure: a structurally marginal figure who occupies a pivotal position between the elite and the non-elite population—whether it is the peasantry, the rural or urban poor, or more generally, the lower classes of a given society. This is no doubt a precarious social location, for it is often unclear both to the one who occupies it and to outsiders where the occupant’s allegiances lie or should lie. Yet from this standpoint of marginality, many suggest—albeit in very different ways—that a certain creativity is frequently engendered, which often embodies explicit social criticism and can lead to important reforms.

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36 Meeks (The First Urban Christians) briefly discussed status inconsistency, and John Gager (Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975]) examined perceptions of deprivation as motivating forces for associating with the Christ groups.

4 Characteristics of Middling Figures in Analogous Contexts

4.1 Structural Marginality

One of the most consistently documented characteristics of middling figures is that they are structurally marginal. Structural marginality refers to the location of these figures as peripheral to the major groups in any given society and is thus “the predicament of ambiguous belonging.” People who experience this ambiguity are marginal not only to the socio-political elite but also to the larger, underprivileged group that constitutes the majority of the population. Structural marginality often correlates to economic marginality (i.e., lack of access to material resources), but it need not necessarily do so: one can be socially marginal without being economically marginal. In fact, the perception of social or economic marginality can be just as important as the reality of it.

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39 Research on relative deprivation in the field of sociology has tried to pursue this very topic. Relative deprivation refers to a condition in which a person perceives themselves to lack resources based on a comparison with others; they may or may not be absolutely deprived of said resources. Often ideological alliances between two different social groups form, because a more privileged group perceives itself to be marginal or disenfranchised, causing its members to identify with a group that actually is. The classic example of this is the participation by white, middle-class youths in the Civil Rights Movement. On the concept of relative deprivation, see Ted R. Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Jerry D. Rose, Outbreaks, the Sociology of Collective Behavior (New York: Free Press, 1982); Iain Walker and Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Relative Deprivation Theory: An Overview and Conceptual Critique,” British Journal of Social Psychology 23 (1984): 301–10; W. G. Runciman, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth-Century England (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966); J. Neff Gurney and K. J. Thierry, “Relative Deprivation and Social Movements: A Critical Look at Twenty Years of Theory and Research,” The Sociological Quarterly 23.1 (1983): 33–47.
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In contexts where there is not an identifiable middle class (such as the Roman Empire, but also many recent colonial situations), people located in the middle are often, by definition, located on the margins of those above and below them on the social hierarchy. For instance, in his classic study on peasant society, Robert Redfield realized that there appeared to be a small group of “hinge” figures who connect the peasantry with the elites. The hinge stratum consists of such figures as administrators, priests, some merchants, and “professional and wealthy people who live their mental lives in part away from the town where they dwell.”40 Their primary functions tend to be to provide goods and services that link the peasants to elite, the latter usually located in urban areas. Similarly, Wolf observed what he deems “middle peasants.”41 Many of these middle peasants had acquired skills such as literacy and gained employment in urban centres, rendering them disconnected from the rural contexts from which they originated. These figures nevertheless stand out as distinct from the peasantry, having relatively secure access to land, some social mobility, and limited surplus resources. In some ways, however, Wolf suggests that middle peasants can be more economically vulnerable than impoverished peasants. Because they often own larger tracts instead of renting, they tend to stay with their land in difficult economic circumstances, instead of abandoning it to pursue employment in an urban centre.42 Unlike Redfield, Wolf

40 Redfield, Peasant Society and Culture, 44.

41 Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, 291–92.

42 This statement is based on Wolf’s case studies. The economic situation in Roman Palestine, while structurally different, may have nevertheless required that many peasants remained tied to the land even if other economic opportunities were available elsewhere. Kloppenborg (“The Growth and Impact of Agricultural Tenancy in Jewish Palestine [III BCE–I CE],” JESHO 51 [2008]: 31–66) demonstrates that Ptolemaic estates in Palestine expanded during the Hellenistic period, probably at the expense of smallholders (48). This had two effects on the structure of labour in the region. On one hand, it meant that situations of tenant farming increased, because the average peasant could not afford to provide for his or her family by only farming a small plot,
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does not claim that middle peasants *necessarily* function to link the town and countryside, but their modest resources may nevertheless have that effect. Peasants who are well-off may do such things as send their children into towns to work or to access education unavailable in the countryside. In the case of pre-colonial peasants in Vietnam, for example, Popkin found that there was a strong incentive (in the form of exemption from the draft) to send one’s son to study for the mandarinate in larger towns when it was financially possible. 43 These kinds of activities create a “hinge” connection between the peasantry and the elite, often resulting in the middle peasant’s divided loyalties between town (urban elites) and country (rural peasantry). 44 Because of this contact between town and countryside, the exposure to new ideas, and the possible divided loyalty, Wolf suggests that the middle peasant becomes a potential “transmitter” of urban unrest and political ideas. 45 At the same time, he also observes how insecure their social location may be. Middle peasants may adopt bureaucratic positions, and even if they have genuine sympathies with their constituency, they have which was likely not among the most productive land available anyway. On the other, larger estates required different influxes of seasonal labour throughout the year, which created a pool of (rather expendable) day-labourers (57–59). Focusing specifically on Galilee, Fiensy (“Did Large Estates Exist in Lower Galilee in the First Half of the First Century CE?” *JSHJ* 10 [2012]: 133–53) argues that most estates during the time of Jesus were “modest” (133) and that “the extreme distance between the elites and the lower class, found elsewhere in the Roman empire, and evidently in Judea, was diminished in Galilee” (151). Fiensy’s evidence, we should note, deals primarily with the wealthy population of Sepphoris and its local landholdings. Furthermore, the title of this article seems to be an odd way to frame the question. Whether estates were objectively “large” or “modest” says little of the effect that may have had on reorientation the production activities of the local population. Estates of any size beyond subsistence production would require workers, drawn primarily from the local peasantry.


44 This is also something that Kaster notes concerning education opportunities in antiquity. Schools for scribal training could “bridge the divide between town and country—although that is not to say it regularly did so” (Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 21).

45 Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, 292.
“limited ability ‘to do anything’”46 about the problems the rural peasantry have. Moreover, even when “hinge” figures have some ability to act on behalf of disadvantaged groups, he or she does not inevitably improve their lives, or even act as a beneficial bridge between the wealthy and the underprivileged classes. For instance, when Gramsci was trying to sort out the potentialities of intellectuals in Italian society, he identified a small group who acted as middlemen between Italian peasants and the landowners. Far from introducing new goods or services to the countryside, these intermediaries and regulators had little innate connection to the peasants and only acted to reinforce a situation of socio-economic exploitation of the peasants by the elites.47

Lenski’s understanding of retainer class also reflects the structural marginality described above.48 In his interpretation, retainers include servants, administrators, soldiers, foremen, and the like, who predominantly act in service of the elites. As such, the retainer is a special kind of middling figure—but not the only kind (although some have tended to interpret Lenski to be claiming such). They are, he claimed, “elevated above” the “mass of common people” but still “bounded to the peasant class.”49 This results in their being “marginal to both classes.”50 In addition, Lenski argues that retainers “constantly” seek to

46 Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, 288.
47 Cammett, Antonio Gramsci, 203.
48 Lenski, Power and Privilege, 243. Lenski’s interest in using this term was to denote explicitly the way these figures depend on and support the political elite. This is an important clarification, since this discussion will question whether or not this is the only relationship that middling figures can have toward political elite.
49 Lenski, Power and Privilege, 245.
50 Lenski, Power and Privilege, 245.
improve their situations by trying to increase their autonomy and privileges.\textsuperscript{51} This last point seems to be somewhat unfounded—indeed, the only evidence he cites are instances of military coups—but we will see momentarily that structural marginality is often an impetus for social reform, self-interested or otherwise. Herzog, building on Lenski’s typology, claims that the retainer class of the Roman Empire contained a “narrow portion of the population,” which “existed precariously between the patronage of the aristocrats and the ruler who exploited them, on one hand, and the bitter hostility of those whom they themselves exploited, on the other.”\textsuperscript{52} This, too, is somewhat overstated, for marginality does not necessarily equate to alienation. Retainers and other middle strata occupants ought not to be viewed as completely disconnected from those above and below them, and certainly, as I argue below, “bitter hostility” need not be the only emotional connection to the lower classes.

Some recent peasant studies have singled out these structurally marginal figures. For instance, in Feierman’s description of the roles of intellectuals at the end of Tanzania’s struggle for independence from the British,\textsuperscript{53} he describes the peasant intellectuals’ structural marginality as a “very strange sort of shadow world” in which educated peasants suffered a “double disadvantage.” They had lost their local support among the peasantry due to their brief affiliation with the colonizers, but were excluded from political activity. “Many of these men,” he explains, “had lived through peasant childhoods but no found no opportunity to

\textsuperscript{51} Lenski, \textit{Power and Privilege}, 247.

\textsuperscript{52} Herzog, \textit{Parables as Subversive Speech}, 144.

\textsuperscript{53} The British formally occupied Tanzania from 1919–1961.
leave the rural folk from amongst whom they were drawn." In short, they had, ironically, acquired status markers, such as education, that elevated them over the peasantry, but being excluded from political elites, it was difficult to fit in with the socio-political elite, thus rendering them socially marginal. Helen F. Sui describes a similar situation of alienation in imperial China. Chinese literati were “cusp” figures, because on one hand, they were “privileged in terms of education and access to political office and wealth,” but they were bound by moral responsibility to express criticism of “political excess.” Thus, they vacillated between supporting the political elite, which legitimized their status, and acting as a mouthpiece for the concerns of the peasantry regarding the indulgences and corruption of the ruling class. As such, neither class was willing to embrace them entirely.

Sociologists often use the concept “status inconsistency” to describe this kind of situation in which an individual possesses some high status markers, such as education or wealth, but also has some low ones, such as a humble birth or a base occupation. The resulting status of the person is often ambiguous, not fitting neatly in any identifiable social class, and is hence socially marginal, producing a social experience which can weigh heavily on a person. Lenski, one of the key thinkers on this topic, posited that status inconsistency was closely related to social change. He argues:

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54 Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals, 223–25.
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[T]he individual with a poorly crystallized status [i.e., a person experiencing status inconsistency] is a particular type of marginal man, and is subjected to certain pressures by the social order which are not felt (at least to the same degree) by individuals with a more highly crystallized status. Conceivably a society with a relatively large proportion of persons whose status is poorly crystallized is a society which is in an unstable condition. In brief, under such conditions the social system itself generates its own pressures for change.⁵⁷

Lenski’s examples of people who lack status consistency are noteworthy (albeit outdated and somewhat stereotypical): “college professors, Jewish businessmen, Hollywood actors, and the Protestant clergy.”⁵⁸ These figures tend to rank high on some but not all status indicators.⁵⁹ Importantly, they may seem well-off in the greater scheme of things, but owing to the social value assigned to one or more of their status indicators, they often experience a disconnect from those of both unambiguously high and low status.

Most scholarship on status inconsistency and the accompanying social marginality deals with modern forms. Yet even in antiquity, there are suggestive cases. For instance, in assessing the sociological basis for Epicureanism’s appeal, Bernard Frischer reasons that Epicureanism, like other sub-cultures, “offered the deracinated and alienated intellectual a

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⁵⁹ Lenski’s study, relying on data from twentieth-century Detroit, is not automatically relevant to the people in the Roman Empire. Moreover, the factors which he identified as contributing to one’s overall status—income, education, occupation, ethnicity—certainly indicate different things in modern Detroit than in antiquity. In some ways, however, they are remarkably similar: wealth, education, occupation, and ethnicity were also crucial to one’s identity in antiquity. These factors contributed to one’s overall social identity, especially as it reflects one’s honor or shame.
home in a consciously constructed community that embodied a genuinely positive and legitimate alternative to the dominant culture of Greece.\(^6^0\) The sense of marginalization, probably more perceived than real, was a “major sociological burden” that philosophers had to bear.\(^6^1\) I have argued elsewhere that there is good reason to think that tax-collectors would have experienced this kind of structural marginality as well.\(^6^2\) They probably had a reasonable amount of income and perhaps sufficient literacy to maintain their accounts and records, yet because their occupation ultimately benefited the elite at the expense of the underprivileged, they suffered resentment from the local population. This is corroborated by the generally negative attitudes toward tax-collectors in a variety of ancient sources, from rabbinic texts to documentary papyri.\(^6^3\)

This characteristic of middling figures will be crucial to understanding Q’s authors. Anticipating the assessment of recent hypotheses for Q’s authors (Chapter Four), one of the most compelling theories describes them as low-level scribal or administrative figures. It will be useful to understand these figures as socially marginal, in that they apparently did not fit neatly into the peasant population or the elite population of Roman Palestine. Scribalism could have many different expressions and hence could have a number of effects on one’s status. Routine copying, for instance, was not especially honourable, even if those doing it

\(^6^3\) Epictetus, *On Discourse* 3.15; Lucian, *Menippus* 11; Tacitus, *Annals* 13.50; P.Mich.6.425 (Karanis, August 26, 198 C.E.); SB 16.12678 (2nd-3rd c. C.E.); b. B. Qam. 94b; m. Ned. 3.4; m. Toh. 7.6.
also had the capability of composing literary and documentary texts as well. Moreover, Q’s authors’ scribal training and their role in local villages would no doubt set them apart from the routine activities of most of the peasantry. In fact, they may have cultivated a sense of professional autonomy, at least prior to the socio-economic development in the early first century, which introduced a new bureaucratic sector into Tiberias and Sepphoris, likely affecting their independence.

The main point to take away from this discussion is that it is rather ordinary to find a group of socially marginal figures in societies in which a middle class, as defined by economic features, is absent. They remain visible in our sources precisely because they have important functions, which will be discussed in more detail below. This ambiguity may be considered a great social and psychological burden, in the opinion of some, but it also affords middling figures a relatively unique vantage point on society.

4.2 Creativity and Innovation

Structural marginality, in turn, affects the social functions that middling figures can carry out. Dick Pels points to the frequently observed “structural linkage between marginality

64 As I discuss in Chapter 4, documentary papyri demonstrate that village scribes could developed a unique professional identity such that they could even organize an occupational “strike” if they saw fit (see p. 193).

65 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 164.

66 This is opposed to Mayer’s recent understanding of a middle class in antiquity, discussed earlier in this chapter. Despite noting similar occupational patterns among the group he defines as a “middle class,” his uniting factor of the middle class identity is primary aesthetic tastes and consumption patterns (see p. 61 n. 150), akin Bourdieu’s understanding of class (Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste [trans. Richard Nice; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984]).

67 This is not a functionalist analysis in the standard sociological sense of the term, and so social function should not be taken to imply a positive contribution to society. Rather, “function” simply implies the activities that these figures carry out in the wider groups.
and intellectual creativity.”68 That occupying marginal social locations results in innovation and creativity is not guaranteed, but it is suggestive for thinking about where the impetus for new social movements is generated. Moreover, this insight can illuminate the project of the Q people: an ambiguous social status, coupled with creatively fertile ground that is often found among middle social sectors in many societies, results in social criticism.

It is easy to point to the way that marginality has negative consequences such as economic misfortune or social ostracization. Frischer, for instance, described the inability of Epicureans to become adequately socialized outside of their own group.69 Marginality, however, can also have positive consequences, if indeed creativity and innovation can be considered positive. For one, marginality forces one to experience society in ways that the majority of the population does not. This might entail, for instance, obtaining employment without the traditional support of the family or acquiring education that most in one’s social location cannot access. Having minority experiences, in turn, can grant one a distinct vantage point. According to Pels, “The only ‘changeling’ in the social world, who is forced into transcendence of place and is able to view transpositionally is the marginal person or the ‘outsider within’…. This enables him/her to operate local transcendences, take third positions, and forge partial connections.”70 To simplify Pels’ complex language somewhat, the idea is that, due to his or her structural marginality, the structurally marginal person has experiences and makes connections that are otherwise not evident to one at the center of a particular social configuration.

68 Pels, The Intellectual as Stranger, xi-xii.
69 Frischer, The Sculpted Word, 53.
70 Pels, The Intellectual as Stranger, 175.
Moreover, structural marginality can lead to the perception of autonomy, which can encourage creativity. As Pels argues regarding intellectuals’ position vis-à-vis mainstream society, “Such an autonomous life form [i.e., that of the marginal person] creates a broad margin of play for estranged experiences, distanced behaviors, and alienated personalities, and hence affords a proliferation of perspectives which are likely to differ from those which arise from everyday routines.”71 This, in short, is the source of creativity which gives rise to projects and enterprises which embody social criticism. An excellent example of this phenomenon is the emergence of Stoicism. Brent D. Shaw finds that Stoicism emerged and was propagated by “outsiders,” such as “Hellenized Anatolians, Cypriots, and Syrians, or by Greeks who lived in peripheral borderlands.”72 Although Stoicism became more firmly rooted in the Greek world as it developed, Shaw notes that starting in the second century B.C.E., Stoic philosophers experienced a new kind of cultural marginality: “they were outsiders to the Roman Empire that now embraced them.”73 And here is the crux: the Stoics’ structural marginality led to the impetus to reconfigure the ideology to make sense of their new circumstances. So Shaw:

If I am correct, it was the outsider element in this world, those Hellenized ‘barbarians’ and fringe members of the Greek cultural world—men who were at once outside the political world of the old *polis* and yet who had sufficiently absorbed its

cultural expression—who were ideally positioned to develop an ideological structure required by the new order.\(^\text{74}\)

In some cases, the social function of many intellectuals\(^\text{75}\) actually relies on their social marginality, especially if they see their role as producing social criticism. This kind of figure, Arthur M. Melzer argues, “is necessarily defined by a posture of detachment, alienation, and nonconformity: he is the outsider, the misfit, the bohemian. He has not compromised, conformed, or sold out.”\(^\text{76}\) Thus, occupying a structurally marginal position can help one achieve the conditions necessary for non-conformity. Pels regards marginality as a necessity for social criticism; it is the “duty and privilege” of intellectuals, he continues, to occupy the margin and to be outsiders to the status quo in order to foster innovation, develop new perspectives, and give rise to social critique.\(^\text{77}\) Indeed, the intellectual figures that Gramsci had in mind to foster the national revolution in Italy were necessarily ambiguous. On one hand, they needed to be distinct from others in workers’ movement, but on the other, “[t]o be able to act and function in a meaningful way, intellectuals need to be


\(^{75}\) Barbara Misztal argues that intellectuals inherently have creativity, which is a condition to establishing their authority to speak in the public sphere, although the study in which she claims this admits that it attempts no sociological study of the concept (Intellectuals and the Public Good: Creativity and Civil Courage [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 7).


\(^{77}\) Pels, The Intellectual as Stranger, 223.
recognized and accepted as (ideological) leaders by the rank-and-file." Thus, their status was frequently in flux, depending upon the function they performed in different groups.

As with creativity, innovation emerges mostly from the periphery. As discussed above, nearly a century ago Weber claimed that marginal intellectuals were the great innovators in the world’s dominant religions and responsible for major reform movements within them. Pels agrees: “[S]ocial and conceptual innovation (in the above sense of heretical, code-breaking change) is usually born at the margins and promoted by ‘strangers’.” In this way, Frischer claims that it was precisely the marginal position of the Epicurean philosopher, both social and geographical, which allowed them the freedom to develop their tradition. It “enabled the mind to escape the inertia of unreflectively native traditions and so furthered the formation of a philosophical disposition.” Indeed, this makes sense. For figures in powerful or dominant positions, there is little good reason to question the status quo which keeps him or her in a position of supremacy.

Pels goes so far as to claim that “the dominated and the marginal not only see differently but also see more and better.” On one hand, this seems overstated: each person is socially situated and we should not automatically assume a non-dominant viewpoint is “better” simply because it is marginal. Yet Pels’ position is not without support. Sandra Harding corroborates his claim, by suggesting that structural marginality and its view from the periphery has fewer blinders than other more central positions:

79 Pels, The Intellectual as Stranger, 192.
80 Frischer, The Sculpted Word, 53.
81 Pels, The Intellectual as Stranger, 158, emphasis mine.
[T]he view from the perspective of the powerful is far more partial and distorted than that available from the perspective of the dominated; this is so for a variety of reasons. To name just one, the powerful have far more interests in obscuring the unjust conditions that produce their unearned privileges and authority than do the dominated groups in hiding the conditions that produce their situation.\textsuperscript{82}

The maintenance of ideology, for her, obscures the possibility of a dominant group having an objective perspective on society. So in some ways, it is compelling to speak of the privileged insight on social affairs that marginality may afford an individual.

Here also, modern peasant studies support the creative and innovative function of middling figures. In concluding his discussion of peasant wars of the twentieth century, Wolf describes a commonality among his case studies: the emergence of a bureaucratic sector accompanying capitalism, which was disconnected from the production of goods and consisted of people who were only “purveyors of skills.”\textsuperscript{83} These skills, however, had been procured from non-native institutions and were based on literacy, in particular a “specialized acquaintance with a corpus of literature which departs from the traditions of the country and suggests new alternatives.”\textsuperscript{84} He continues:

The new literati partake of the reflected glory of this traditional evaluation of literacy, but at the same time their acquaintance with nontraditional sources makes them participants in a communication process which far outstrips the inherited canons of knowledge. They operate in a communication field vastly larger than that of the past,

\textsuperscript{83} Wolf, \textit{Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century}, 288.
\textsuperscript{84} Wolf, \textit{Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century}, 288.
and full of new learning which suggests powerful visions not dreamed of in the inherited ideology.  

In other words, Wolf is describing this kind of privileged vantage point that structurally marginal figures can have and how it leads to new sources of creativity: they literally have more exposure to new ideas (“corpus of literature” and “new learning”). It is precisely their social position that fosters creativity. And this experience can be put to productive uses (to entertain “powerful visions”) and to link otherwise disconnected groups of people. When they adopt leadership or spokesperson roles in popular movements, they “act as interpreters and mediators, communicators and translators; they enable dialogue between disparate groups, across communities and across differences.”

In the absence of structural marginality, this mediating role is more difficult, and thus innovation and reform are less likely to be generated.

In sum, it seems clear that occupying a structurally marginal position has the potential to engender in an individual a kind of creativity that is not likely from a more dominant position. This could result in, for instance, social criticism of the larger social order that renders one peripheral. Given more time to develop, this could manifest in political ideologies that imagine entirely new alternative social, political, or economic relationships.

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87 An example will clarify the difference between trying to reform a tradition and trying to create an alternative. Kyu Sam Han (*Jerusalem and the Early Jesus Movement: The Q Community’s Attitude Toward the Temple* [JSNTSS 307; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2007], 58–71) describes different responses by marginal literati to the affiliation of the Koryo (Korean) kingdom with Buddhism during the monarchy period (918–1170).
Whereas many thinkers have discussed this situation with reference to more visible political figures, who intervene in social configurations and challenge long-held traditions, we can even imagine the way that this might happen on a much smaller scale within a small group, which perceived itself to be rejected or persecuted and thus created within a text or other ideological project a new set of circumstances which invested it with power.

4.3 The Capacity to Articulate Class Concerns and Facilitate Social Movements

Creativity and innovation, in turn, can lead to important social reform, because the people who foster them often do so while simultaneously entertaining new or alternative social relations either at the discursive level or in tangible social forms. In the course of this, marginal figures are often found articulating class concerns, even consciousness, on behalf of those who cannot or do not. Especially if they have a specialized body of knowledge or skill set, then they stand ready to “articulate issues of importance in their societies.”

Through deliberate framing activity, middling figures give voice to the concerns of the lower classes, which transforms a series of disconnected grievances into a coherent ideology. While peasants or other underprivileged groups might have specific demands which would make their production activities easier on them, intellectuals often do the

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C.E). He identifies “moderate” critics of the temple system, whose goal was to reform, not abolish, the temple. A more extreme version of this criticism, proffered by Confucians, tried to displace the temple system altogether, suggesting such things as putting the monks to death and encouraging the village, not the temples, to be the “socio-symbolic center” (71). The former merely critiqued a problematic expression of the temple system, while the latter envisioned an entirely new social order in which temples were not central.

88 Misztal, Intellectuals and the Public Good, 1.
ideological work of construing their demands as a particular movement with a coherent message of protest. In particular, they “define the problems of subaltern groups, articulate their grievances, and frame their social and political demands.” This was the crucial function that Gramsci hoped organic intellectuals would accomplish in the twentieth century by coordinating the interests of the rural and urban masses for a unified national Italian revolution. Gramsci saw the potential to unite these groups into one unified working class, but without deliberate ideological work, the rural peasants and the urban poor could not imagine themselves as part of the same group. But whether or not intellectuals succeed in accomplishing a revolution, they may nevertheless succeed at attempting to forge a collective identity and to “create an image of a specific community,” which “may legitimately claim its collective rights.” In this way, for example, Redfield’s “hinge” figures functioned in European peasant communities to help peasants recognize their identity as a group and understand their relation to other communities. He describes “a few people with urban manners and some learning who manage those affairs of the peasants which relate to the national state” who despite expressing visible separation from the peasantry, “talked politics and perhaps literature, organized and led all patriotic celebrations, and provided something

89 Baud and Rosanne, “Introduction,” 1.
90 Baud and Rosanne, “Introduction,” 2.
for the peasants to recognize as better than themselves.”\textsuperscript{93} Within these sorts of activities, identity is formed and expressed.

Especially in peasant movements, the goal is to elevate the peasantry to a more powerful position vis-à-vis landlords or government officials in order to have their demands met; thus, these framing figures are found challenging the position that peasants are always subordinate to elites. Intellectuals often become innovators who “produce new interpretive frames and new languages for articulating collective interests, identities, and claims.”\textsuperscript{94} Wolf, for instance, identifies the tendency for these figures to align ideologically with peasant interests:

For such “marginal men” political movements often provide a “home,” of which they are otherwise deprived by their own skills, their social positions, and their divorce from traditional sources of power. Increasingly, these “intellectuals” of the new order press their claims against both economic and political power holders. What they need is a constituency; and that constituency is ultimately provided by the industrial workers and dissatisfied peasants whom the market created, but for whom society made no adequate social provision. In all six of our cases [Mexico, Russia, China, Viet Nam, Algeria, and Cuba] we witness such a fusion between the “rootless” intellectual and their rural supporters.\textsuperscript{95}

The “constituency” that Wolf identifies, in turn, benefits from having spokespeople who will represent their interests.

\textsuperscript{93} Redfield, \textit{Peasant Society and Culture}, 61–62.

\textsuperscript{94} Rutten and Baud, “Concluding Remarks,” 198.

\textsuperscript{95} Wolf, \textit{Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century}, 289.
Feierman’s ethnography of Tanzania provides a valuable example of middling figures who facilitate social action. Among peasant movements in mid-twentieth century, Feierman found that the peasant leaders who were most effective at elaborating the movement’s ideology were those who had some primary education and had worked as low-level functionaries in the government. They had returned from “the world of clerks” to a peasant mode of production (farming), and they brought their skills with them. These skills could come from a variety of experiences: “experience at trade, in the Christian or Islamic community, at work as petty functionaries, or at work as minor servants in the courts of chiefs.” When the British hoped to capitalize on the political structure of the chiefdoms, they ran into some difficulties. Not only were most “awe-inspiring” chiefs difficult to control, but also the literate “peasant intellectuals”—who had incidentally gained their skills of literacy by serving as functionaries for both German and British occupiers—resisted promulgating the conservative colonial discourse which had been fused with Christian values. The literate peasants instead created a popular counter-discourse to support the chief, including visions of “transferring sovereignty to the peasant majority, or of pitting administration into the hands of the best-educated, or of ending advancement on the basis of birth to a chiefly line.”

96 Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals, 23.
97 Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals, 24.
98 In this context, chiefdoms were under the ultimate control of kings; the British hoped to control the villages by influencing these kings. This colonial structure was essentially the opposite of the earlier German one, which sustained control by destroying the local chiefdoms and promoting Muslim natives to act as agents of domination, instead of leaving the village political structure in place (Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals, 120–153).
99 Feierman, Peasant Intellectuals, 153.
ideology, was forced to resign. In short, the very peasants who had benefited from the colonial education system used the skills they learned to help the indigenous people resist colonial takeover of the native system of government.

There are also instances of “outside” intellectuals (“traditional” intellectuals, in Gramsci’s terminology) who become advocates for popular movements, even though they have no original association with them. Pablo S. Bose describes the popular intellectuals who assisted a mass indigenous movement which opposed building dams in India’s Narmada valley.\footnote{Bose, “Critics and Experts, Activists and Academics,” 133–57.} Bose describes one Medha Paktar, who although coming from a middle-class background, became a political activist and ended up assisting the protest movement. Because she had some post-secondary education, Paktar was able to become a spokesperson for the movement in three main ways: “rais[ing] questions regarding the costs and benefits … challeng[ing] the specifics of dam construction … [and] link[ing] the struggles in Narmada with the emerging global social justice movements against neoliberalism and globalization.”\footnote{Bose, “Critics and Experts, Activists and Academics,” 141.} The inhabitants of the valley, many illiterate farmers and tribespeople, simply did not have the skills or the experience to frame their protest in this way. This is very suggestive, because Paktar’s project is analogous to what we see in many “religious” texts: discrete situations of socio-economic injustice are linked with an ideological or cosmological system in which they can be effectively critiqued.\footnote{Bose argues that the “outside” advocate is quite common today. Those people “who write about issues, give speeches to crowds, negotiate with governments, study the impacts of the proposed plans, organize rallies and marches, and act as the face and voice of social movements are still overwhelmingly drawn from the upper and middle classes of educated elites” ( “Critics and Experts, Activists and Academics,” 155). This insight, of course, brings up the question of whether or not these figures are legitimate voices for the movements they represent.}
The reasons for the ideological alliances between these kinds of middling figures and subordinate groups are varied. The simplest explanation, no doubt true in many cases, is that these figures align with these movements because they themselves once derived from that constituency. In addition, the experience of social or intellectual marginality may engender in a person a certain affiliation with people who are economically marginal. When Lenski studied status inconsistency, he discovered that there was a strong correlation between experiencing it and participating in social activism. Individuals with status inconsistency, he found, could be important loci for leadership in social change and revolution, because of the inherent instability in their status. He concludes that these people “seek to alter the existing social order which they often come to view as the source of their difficulties … they may also seek to undermine the social position of members of the influential classes in society.”¹⁰³ They are, furthermore, the most likely to be involved in voluntary social associations for non-sociable ends.¹⁰⁴ What all this suggests is that it makes a great deal of sense that we often find middling figures, instead of the most oppressed, initiating social change.

Moreover, it is often the case that distinct social experiences, instead of abstract ideological developments, lead these middling figures to have newfound sympathies or

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allegiances to the lower classes. Siu, for instance, suspects that the “quiet empathy with the peasants” that Chinese intellectuals began to show in the 1980s was a product of “the years of exile in the countryside [which] have given writers a more realistic understanding of the peasants.”\(^\text{105}\) I do not want to put too much emphasis on the “experiential” dimension to the ability of middling figures to represent or speak for others, as if that somehow leads to a more accurate description of the lower class or peasantry. But Siu’s suggestion does imply that there might be at least greater attention to the peasantry and more attempts to articulate their interests and voices if those writers experienced a rural way of life. Perhaps, then, for intellectuals to experience a peasant mode of life results in a greater \textit{quantity} of discourses concerning the latter, if not a better \textit{quality}.

We should expect to find occasional incongruences between the ways that subordinate peoples actually experience life and the ways they are stylized in texts and other ideological products stemming from intellectuals or activists. Subordinate groups, however, are able to influence middling figures’ perception of their experiences. Marc Becker, for example, describes an interesting situation in 1930s Ecuador wherein urban leftists were able to create an ideological alliance with indigenous Indians to facilitate the spread of communism. The indigenous people needed urban leftists for their ability to articulate their concerns before government officials, but this was not simply a one-way street. In exchange, “rural subalterns created, on the basis of lived experiences, a penetrating analysis of

\(^{105}\) Siu, “Introduction,” 19.
exploitation that urban intellectuals often lacked.”¹⁰⁶ “[I]ndigenous communists and urban intellectuals,” Becker continues, “were able to imagine together a more just social order, and this lent direction and meaning to a common struggle for social justice.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, the relationship of representation was dynamic, and the indigenous people had some say in how the urban intellectuals imagined their experiences.

The success of social movements—success here defined very loosely as the ability to accrue members or followers—is related to the ability of a middling figure or intellectual to articulate successfully the interests of the lower classes. Several factors play into the success of peasant movements specifically, as Popkin argues. First, if an organizer uses “terms and symbols” that resonate with the peasantry, it will be more successful.¹⁰⁸ This often means that a framer must utilize rural imagery, among other things. Another way to achieve credibility and success is to capitalize on the hinge figures which connect urban and rural populations and use their established ties to the native peasantry. This ensures that the mobilizing figures are well-known and trusted in the villages.¹⁰⁹ Also, successful movements will have a strong, even if only ideal, ethical code, so that peasants are persuaded that the movement does not simply serve the interests of the leaders.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, success often depends on framing the reform in terms of local, tangible consequences, instead of abstract


¹⁰⁷ Becker, “Indigenous Communists and Urban Intellectuals,” 64, emphasis mine.


Immediate goals, such as gaining more plots of land or getting out of an acute state of debt, are more persuasive than promises to overthrow the landlords or abolish wealth discrepancies. Therefore, even when activists have in mind lofty goals of improving the conditions for the poor, they must offer tangible benefits as well. The synthesis between abstract goals, which often embody thoroughgoing social criticism, with specific benefits, requires deliberate ideological alignment. Success also depends on accruing others to the movement who can mobilize resources and spur reform. For example, when Gustavo Gutiérrez encouraged the Catholic Church to advocate for peasant reform in Peru, he attempted to wed a large Catholic constituency to the peasant movement, under the ideological frame of liberation theology. The Catholic constituency brought not only financial resources but social and political currency to advocate for the poor. In this case, Gutiérrez had to do the ideological work of convincing the Catholic community that the peasantry was a group about which it should be deeply concerned.

Thus, the function of advocacy is a consequence of the structural position of the middle, which puts the occupier in contact with multiple ways of life and modes of production, and provides the skills needed for articulating the interests of the lower class. If we keep in mind that many of these middle figures either came directly from the lower classes or at least have good reason to sympathize with them, this begins to explain why in the world they would be found at the fore of these kinds of social movements.

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5  Ambiguity: Advocates, Allies, or Manipulators?

We have seen that middling figures, especially in intellectual capacity, are often at the fore of social criticism or the emergence of new social movements. Because they often have a familiarity with many social and political institutions, have a special skill set or training, and may experience a kind of structural marginality that causes them to identify with underprivileged group, they are frequently found articulating the interests and concerns of people who, for whatever reasons, cannot or do not do so themselves. Sociologists have tried to find a reason why this kind of allegiance may occur, appealing to such concepts as status inconsistency and relative deprivation, but in some cases the allegiance is simply a function of the advocate being tied by kith or kin to the underprivileged population. But we should not somehow conclude that these figures consistently act selflessly to encourage equality, justice, or reform in their societies. On the contrary, they can often be explicitly conservative in their ideologies and deliberately manipulative in their tactics.\textsuperscript{113} In the early twentieth century, Gramsci realized this:

\begin{quote}
In order to analyse the socio-political function of the intellectuals, it is necessary to recall and examine their psychological attitude toward the fundamental classes which they put into contact in the various fields. Have they a ‘paternalistic’ attitude toward the instrumental classes? Or do they believe they are their organic expression? Do
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{113} Some even questions if unmediated political altruism ever exists. Giugni, for instance, concludes that the matrix of interests behind every act of political altruism is far too complex to suppose any simple explanation for these phenomena (“Concluding Remarks,” 235–324).
they have a ‘servile’ attitude towards ruling classed, or do they think that they themselves are rulers, an integral part of the ruling classes?\textsuperscript{114}

Heeding Gramsci’s remarks, we should, thus, explore the possibility that middling figures and intellectuals might have other interests at stake than simply improving the lots of peasants or other underprivileged groups—there are indeed a range of ways middling figures can relate to these groups.

Roseanne Rutten and Michiel Baud identify a special kind of intellectual figure, the ally, who “lend[s] their expertise to a specific movement.”\textsuperscript{115} Employing a broad definition of intellectual to encompass one who directs or mobilizing groups, à la Gramsci, there are numerous examples of figures in peasant movements who seem to be sincere in their concerns for underprivileged groups. For instance, during the subsistence crises in Vietnam after World War II when the landless labourers were extremely economically vulnerable, the real impetus for organizing peasant movements came from those slightly better off: tenants and smallholding “middle peasants.”\textsuperscript{116} In pre-revolutionary Russia, Thorner notes the “hundreds upon hundreds of college students, doctors, nurses, [and] university teachers … [who] quit their urban life and attempted to ‘go to the people’.\textsuperscript{117} Similarly, Feierman found instances when literate peasants in Tanzania realized that some members of their local peasants were receiving less education than other tribes and took visible steps, such as

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\textsuperscript{114} Gramsci, \textit{Selections from Prison Notebooks}, 97.
\textsuperscript{115} Rutten and Baud, “Concluding Remarks,” 197.
\textsuperscript{116} Popkin, \textit{The Rational Peasant}, 251.
\end{flushright}
building private libraries, to rectify it.\textsuperscript{118} In concluding his study on Costa Rican peasant movements, Marc Edelman observes that the major players in these movements tended to have “shallow roots, if any at all, in the countryside,” thus suggesting that the leaders of the Costa Rican peasant movements were not really peasants at all but figures of higher social standing, who became allies with the peasant movements, finding points of similarity within common communist ideology.\textsuperscript{119} Describing the relationship between urban (Marxist) intellectuals and rural indigenous peasants in Ecuador during the 1930s, Becker recalls one José M. Amaguaña, who was “one of the few literate Kayambis” who wrote to the Minister of Government and Social Welfare on behalf of the peasants to explain a recent confrontation at a hacienda. Becker argues that Amaguaña did not appropriate the peasants concerns for a wider leftist agenda, but rather articulated in a way that the peasants simply could not. “In the petition,” Becker describes, “Amaguaña does not assume the voice of the expelled workers, but attempts to explain the situation from the point of view of an indigenous worker on the hacienda.”\textsuperscript{120}

The alliances, moreover, are sometimes \textit{deliberately} created, because they are not immediately evident to the underprivileged or peasant classes. This is evident, for instance, in the rhetoric employed by Cao Dai leaders in Viet Nam when they tried to attract peasants to their movement during the 1940s and 1950s in order to become spokespeople for them. One of the leaders—of which over 60 percent had been administrative functionaries for the

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\textsuperscript{118} Feierman, \textit{Peasant Intellectuals}, 139–40.
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\textsuperscript{119} Edelman, \textit{Peasants Against Globalization}, 193. His questioning probably hinges on issues of terminology, but this is more support for the idea that a middling or mobile figure directs these movements.
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\textsuperscript{120} Becker, “Indigenous Communists and Urban Intellectuals,” 59.
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French—is reported to have persuaded the peasants, “Don’t call me a great mandarin…. Let’s be brothers.”¹²¹ In this way, this Cao Dai leader envoy explicitly tried to align the social identities of Cao Dai adherents with the rural peasantry. Gramsci hoped something similar would happen between the rural Italian peasants and the urban workers, but no one would step forward to accomplish the ideological work necessarily to align their interests. The identification of middling figures with the masses, then, is not always perceived to be natural. That relationship is an ideological construct, and thus it takes intellectual work to create and sustain it.

Although there are good reasons for thinking that middling groups are structurally marginal in such a way that would lead them to identify with underprivileged groups, advocate on their behalf, or otherwise support their interests, there is contrary evidence that middling figures do not always play this role and sometimes have outright antagonistic relationships with them. When biblical scholars use Lenski’s typology, they often emphasize the deliberation with which the retainer class participates in the exploitation and oppression of the underprivileged. Thus in his study of the parables, Herzog describes the bureaucratic roles of retainers in a vivid narrative:

Bureaucracies were born out of the need of usurping aristocrats to remove important ruling functions from the hands of competing aristocrats, who could use them to build a base of power that could eventually challenge their own rule. Therefore, rulers developed a retainer class to staff the bureaucracy necessary to implement their

¹²¹ Jayne Susan Werner, “The Cao Dai: The Politics of a Vietnamese Syncretic Religious Movement” (Ph.D. Diss., Cornell University, 1976), as cited in Popkin, The Rational Peasant, 198. This is illustrative of numerous and common ways that groups promote egalitarianism—whether in rhetoric alone or in reality—to attract new members.
political goals, to extract the resources required to maintain and extend their political control, and to legitimate their rule. By drawing on nonelites to fill these roles, the ruler simultaneously eliminated aristocrats from fulfilling vital political functions, thereby reducing the aristocrats’ power, and created competition among the children of nonelites for these lucrative positions.  

Moreover, “rulers constantly used retainers against each other in their efforts to control the bureaucracy’s tendency toward autonomy.” The picture that emerges from this description of mid-level administrators is nothing akin to what has been suggested above. These figures actively support the elite and thus participate in the oppression of the lower classes. With this in mind, Herzog interprets the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18:23–35 extremely darkly. In Herzog’s reading of the parable, the scene imagines a conflict “between the ruler and an important retainer in his court,” but also introduces a secondary conflict within the retainer class. What is interesting in this interpretation is the idea that the retainer class, despite supporting the elite, was itself internally fragmented by its own competition. This perhaps reflects the status ambiguity that these figures would have experienced, rendering them structurally marginal.

We should not either be excessively confident that simply occupying a marginal positions will necessarily yield an accurate articulation of any knowledge. Bourdieu notes, for instance, that advocates for others are always, in essence, speaking for themselves

122 Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, 140–41.
123 Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, 145.
124 Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, 136.
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simultaneously. Nor should we romanticize intellectual figures, as if somehow they have unique privileged perspectives on some objective truth. Rather, like other social actors, they are situated within a set of conditions not of their own making. Misztal is sure to caution that although intellectuals have played important roles in opposition to political regimes, colonial projects, and the like, they have also historically supported fascism and other violent political agendas. It is probably only these sorts of figures Herzog has in mind behind the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, not the kind who have “organic” ties, to use Gramsci’s term, to the lower classes.

Finally, we must concede that middling figures often deliberately exploit or misrepresent the lower classes. For example, in the post-colonial Vietnamese context there are reports of deliberate manipulation of the peasantry by representatives of the Catholic Church in order to encourage conversion and increase the Church’s influence. Popkin relates, “If a rich man, for example, stole the land of a poor man, and if the poor man converted to Catholicism, the priest would then go to court to plead his case.” Sometimes this intervention conveniently resulted in the Catholic villages increasing their landholdings, in addition to accruing converts. Peasants, of course, stood to gain by using the Church’s

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127 Envoys of the Catholic Church do not automatically come to mind as middling figures or intellectuals but Peña has demonstrated that they can productively be considered as examples of Gramsci’s organic intellectuals (“Liberation Theology in Peru”).

justice system,\textsuperscript{129} which was perceived to be more just than the one controlled by the mandarins, but the Church did not lack self-interest. More recently, critics have explicitly critiqued activism that borders on manipulation or misrepresentation. When environmental activists Arundhati Roy and Medha Patkar tried to lend their services to those indigenous people who were protesting building dams in the Narmada Valley (India), some considered them “glory-seekers … leading a manipulated flock down a destructive path.”\textsuperscript{130} Although Roy and Patkar saw themselves as advocates for the indigenous inhabitants of the valley, critics claimed that the concerns of the locals “were being subsumed to the interests of a global, affluent upper-middle class of environmentalists.”\textsuperscript{131}

Roy and Paktar probably did not have nefarious goals, given that they were driven by environmental motivations. The intent to manipulate peasant concerns need not always be deliberate, though. Becker explores how illiterate peasants in Ecuador from 1926–1944 tried to get their voices heard by the government. Before socialist reformers appeared in Ecuador, indigenous people relied on local scribes, called \textit{tinterillos}, who “offered their Spanish-language skills and educational training to draft legal petitions and provide related services.”\textsuperscript{132} Despite offering these services, the scribes were not strongly involved in any of the peasant movements. Moreover, Becker speculates that because the \textit{tinterillos} had to write the petitions in Spanish, they “undoubtedly saw it as part of their mandate to polish the

\textsuperscript{129} Popkin relates that peasants perceived Cao Dai courts to be more just than mandarin courts (\textit{The Rational Peasant}, 201).
\textsuperscript{130} Bose, “Critics and Experts, Activists and Academics,” 149.
\textsuperscript{131} Bose, “Critics and Experts, Activists and Academics,” 150.
\textsuperscript{132} Becker, “Indigenous Communists and Urban Intellectuals,” 44.
‘uneducated’ peasant’s wording so it would be more presentable to an educated, urban audience.” The final petitions probably reflect “the tinterillos’ own stereotypes and assumptions.” Thus, in this case, the scribes had no ulterior motive when misrepresenting the peasantry in these petitions; it was simply a product of the process of translation and the assumption in many colonized societies that indigenous peoples are “backward” and “rustic.”

It is quite possible, moreover, that there is some honour and prestige to be earned by engaging in activism for subordinate groups, such that involvement which seems selfless is actually quite self-interested. Perhaps Roy and Paktar’s involvement in the popular dam protest was perceived this way by the critics who accused them of being “glory-seekers.” In antiquity, however, there seems to be a serious risk to one’s reputation to associate with disreputable and very impoverished people. Hence, MacMullen’s “lexicon of snobbery,” which collects many references by Greek and Roman authors that indicate the “range of prejudice felt by the literate upper classes for the lower.” Thus, we can imagine that some middling figures in antiquity would see little to be gained in allying with the poor or peasants. For example, in assessing the social status of grammarians in late antiquity, Kaster argues that many of them were inherently conservative in the doctrines they taught, so as not to upset that the status quo that marginally benefited them. The grammarian “was not about to challenge or renovate radically the tradition that fortified him” and “neither would he be

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134 MacMullen, Roman Social Relations, 138–141.
expected or encouraged to do so by the *litterati* outside that niche, whose own interests were scarcely less involved.”

In sum, even though we quite regularly see middling figures in agrarian societies, there is no consistent relation between them and the lower classes. There are many instances in which they can advocate for subordinates and help them challenge elite policies that oppress them, but they can also exploit or manipulate them for their own self-interest. Manipulation, to be sure, is not always intentional. Given all these possibilities, this project will interrogate Q in Chapter Five for evidence of its authors’ relationship to the Galilean peasantry.

6 Cautions

The beginning of this chapter warned that this discussion would deal with figures who had been given a variety of labels by scholars. Indeed, no single category has been proposed to synthesize all these figures or to describe the Q people. There are, however, even more pressing cautions that must be considered when examining middling figures. For one, Pels speaks rightly of the “danger of homogenizing and over-generalizing something like a nomadic state” and the need to be extremely specific lest we overlook important differences between “privileged ‘migratory elites’ [intellectuals, activists, and the like] … and underclass strangers: victims of political exile, ethnic cleansing or economic poverty.” This is a real concern and so the major point of not idealizing these figures is well taken. He continues his cautions by noting the easy collapse in recent social and political thought between “the

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condition of *marginality*, which refers to the relatively privileged situations of intellectuals (including marginal and subaltern ones) as ‘dominated dominants’, and the less ambiguous and contradictory condition of *oppression/exploitation* of the dominated as such: those who literally have ‘nothing to lose but their chains’.¹³⁷ There is thus a certain tension that results from the suggestion that social or intellectual marginality and economical marginality can be viewed as the same sort of thing. He explains, noting the qualitative difference between alienation and oppression/exploitation:

This requires a much more precise demarcation between the conditions of *alienation*, which situates the intellectual outsiders as ‘dominated dominants’ in the social field, and that of *oppression* or *exploitation*, which describes the situation of the dominated tout court…. Subjugation, Haraway rightly presumes, is not sufficient ground for a critical ontology; instead, oppression and exploitation normally invite quite contrary reactions of particularism, closure, and apathy. This requires a novel recognition of intellectual elites as special groups, whose distinctive ambitions engage them in productive, ‘consciousness-raising’ tension with their primary constituency—in a form of reflexive elitism which counts on their *interested interaction* rather than disinterested identification with the ‘masses’ which they claim to represent.¹³⁸ In other words, there might be *explanations* of the tendency for marginal figures to feel connected to economically oppressed people, but to *equate* their lived experiences does violence to the truly underprivileged.

¹³² Pels, *The Intellectual as Stranger*, 190.
¹³³ Pels, *The Intellectual as Stranger*, 174, emphasis original.
Moreover, this discussion does not intend to endorse an older yet frequently resounded position that those in marginal social positions are able to view circumstances “better.” Some theorists, we have seen, claim this, and in some contexts, it is no doubt accurate. But, knowledge and ideologies are always situated, be they at the centre or the periphery of a given social structure. Pels speculates that “there is a residual asymmetry between central and marginal positions which at least suggests that it is easier to see the centre in its full centricity and systematicity from the margin” but still cautions that marginality always involves “a blind spot” as well.\textsuperscript{139} We should take seriously the implications of a new kind of knowledge and worldview generated from the margins (whether social, economic, cultural, or the like) and see if it helps account for new ideological frameworks in religious traditions.

Drawing on social-scientific studies, many biblical scholars have recently emphasized the collectivist nature of ancient persons.\textsuperscript{140} This emphasis, which is meant to stress the extent to which individuals in ancient Mediterranean evaluated their identity on the basis of wider groups such as family and village networks, should not be taken to mean that we cannot interrogate the discrete interests and actions of individuals on the assumption that they can never express creativity or act against their reference groups. To do so would be to overlook the impetus for social reform and change. Baud and Rutten note that “[m]any studies tend to invest social movements with an agency of their own, and fail to take a closer look at the men and women who are instrumental in interpreting conditions and articulating

\textsuperscript{139} Pels, \textit{The Intellectual as Stranger}, 223.

The enthusiasm to describe antique society as “collectivist” might discourage us from looking for this individual agency. A related area of possible concern is the recent stress on the socio-economic context of the emergence of Christianity. This is no doubt a critical context, but the individual figures may become lost in excessive structuralism. Thus, I have in this chapter perused some fruitful points of comparison with the Q people, in order to put their individual social experience and creative agency back into focus, realizing that individuals are still deeply embedded in their socio-cultural context. A social movement, such as the Jesus movement in Q, is, after all, “a field of actors, not a unified entity.” We would do well to identify individual interests, competencies, and agencies of these actors when possible.

Furthermore, many of these theorists presuppose a bounded notion of “society” which will not be immediately applicable to Roman Palestine. Indeed, as Horsley has pointed out in numerous places, especially when critiquing Theissen’s original functionalist description of Christian origins, whose society we have in mind and which social location one considers marginal, matter. Ancient Palestine was at once a complex matrix of Graeco-Roman culture and political structures enmeshed with Jewish culture and vestiges of their government. Thus, the mediating figure who stands to critique a particular expression of Jewish society, may have no insight into the wider Roman world that was experienced elsewhere in the

141 Baud and Rosanne, “Introduction,” 2.
142 William A. Gamson and David S. Meyer, “Framing Political Opportunity,” in Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings (eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald; Cambridge: 1996), 275–90, here 293.
143 Horsley, Sociology and the Jesus Movement, 68–71.
Mediterranean. This is a point of extreme caution, especially against recent depictions of the Jesus movement as “anti-Empire.”

7 Conclusion

The task in this chapter has been a complex one. Working from anthropological and sociological studies, as well as from the insights of social theorists, I have tried to distill important characteristics of middling figures in societies that are largely divided between a small dominant group and a substantial lower class in order to suggest new avenues for thinking about middling figures in antiquity. Contrary to the model critiqued at the outset of this project (Chapter One), we should not imagine that Roman society neatly divides into peasantry and elite; rulers and ruled; haves and have-nots; or any other binary classification—even in rural areas. Those categories have some utility as social descriptors, but they lack explanatory power, especially when considering the emergence of new social groups, such as the one responsible for Q.

It is not a far-fetched theory to think that one can come to identify with a different, especially marginal, reference group, particularly if one’s economic circumstances alter such that a new reference group comes into view. Pels, building upon statements by Altusser and Harding, argues that one can come to adopt a marginal perspective over time, and “[i]n principle, therefore, it is not necessary to have lived the experience of oppression in order to

144 One might also object that Q is essentially a “religious” text and has little to do with the political movements used as illustrations above. This criticism can be addressed easily. As Horsley and others have convincingly shown, religion and politics (and culture and economics) were not discrete spheres in antiquity. Moreover, scholars of social movements have become increasing aware of the “cultural stock” that religions provide to new social movements; religions offer “a familiar framework and cultural reservoir from which to draw ideas and symbolic resources that are emotive, and that may be part of the ‘common-sense’ beliefs of their constituency” (Rutten and Baud, “Concluding Remarks,” 206).
understand other oppressed identities. If we locate the scribes behind Q in a grey area between elites and peasants, one could suppose that such scribes sometimes derive from the peasantry and hence are, in some sense also peasants. In some ways this is accurate; many scribes no doubt came from peasant population, which might ostensibly maintain the binary I hope to challenge. On the other hand, it is important to account for the transformed social status that would result from the experience of a new occupational and a new structural relationship vis-à-vis the elites and the peasants. Scribal status should not be viewed as aggregative: scribes were not simply peasants with education. They became a new social actor, assigned a new value on the basis of their new relationships. They had a service to offer to villagers, who in turn consumed this service for a price. Relatedly, they were now an asset to elites, making possible the things that benefited them most, such as loan documents, tax forms, legal paperwork, etc. This new status came with potentially new social roles, which I have tried to access in this chapter by appealing to cross-cultural data.

We return, then, to one of Gramsci’s insights, with which this chapter began: middling, intellectual figures stand to direct the development of new social movements. Gramsci, however, was almost too idealistic in his conceptualizing of the organic intellectual. There seems to be no compelling reason to assume that members of the same social location always or “naturally” identify with one another, especially if some have accrued a different range of social experiences and skills, nor do I think the examples I have offered throughout this discussion consistently illustrate this kind of figure. But Gramsci did imagine a situation in which traditional intellectuals could transform into organic intellectuals in order to retain

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145 Pels, The Intellectual as Stranger, 172.
legitimation.\textsuperscript{146} This idea would accord well with Arnal’s proposal of the increasing obsoleteness of the scribes responsible for Q in early first-century Galilee. Perhaps in order to retain a sense of relevance, Q’s scribes fashioned a text which expressed the peasants’ concerns through the mouth of Jesus. As caretakers of this Jesus tradition, these scribes made the peasantry into a kind of constituency and hence retained their legitimacy and autonomy, even in the face of socio-economic changes which had deleterious effects on their overall status. I have here suggested why this association could happen and have offered some analogous examples for comparison. What remains to be demonstrated is how Q both preserves and expresses what we might think of as typical peasant interests but also reworks them into a decidedly non-peasant product, that is, a highly stylized Greek document.

\textsuperscript{146} Steven J. Jones, \textit{Antonio Gramsci} (Routledge Critical Thinkers; New York: Routledge, 2007), 89–90.
Chapter 3

The Problem of Q

1 Introduction

Chapter One argued that the peasant milieu of Christian origins in rural Palestine is very compelling, but only if the peasant category is used with great reflexivity and with the goal of indicating something simultaneously about the mode of production and the social relationships in ancient Palestine. Retaining peasantry as an analytical concept for thinking about the emergence of the Jesus movement behind Q invites further questions about how the concerns of the peasants and their worldview came to be so central to the text. It is unclear which specific social mechanisms facilitated this, and so we should ask specific questions about the people responsible for Q and their interests and motivations. To set the stage for this undertaking, this chapter will establish the “data” of Q—its literary characteristics, date, and geographical provenance in order to assess recently proposed social descriptions of the Q people in the next chapter. In particular, it will include a brief history of the Two-Document Hypothesis and the road to Q, as well as evidence that Q was a source written in fairly good Greek in Galilee prior to the Jewish War (66–70 C.E.).

2 A (Very) Brief History of the Synoptic Problem

An analysis of the Sayings Gospel Q cannot proceed without at least some initial attention to the Synoptic Problem, or the question of the literary relationship of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Although the road to the Two-Document Hypothesis (also called the Two-Source Hypothesis), the most economical solution to the Synoptic Problem, is discussed in greater detail in many other studies, it is still important to highlight critical moments in its
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development here, because its critics often charge that it owes its dominance to routine and unquestioned perpetuation.¹

Although one could trace the Synoptic Problem back to Augustine of Hippo, who first endeavoured to articulate the relationship between the canonical gospels (De Consensu Evangelistarum I.3²), its real genesis can be found in the Enlightenment. In the late 18th century, Hermann Reimarus had begun to notice overt contradictions among the canonical gospels that were impossible to ignore. Some contradictions could not be harmonized or reconciled, and he thus concluded that they represented inventions by the gospel authors.³ Instead of trying to “solve” the contradictions by hypothesizing a literary relationship among the texts, Reimarus simply accepted what Augustine had asserted centuries prior: that the canonical gospels were written in the order presented in the canon. Others, however, were not satisfied with Reimarus’ accusations of deliberate fabrication on the part of the gospel

² “Isti igitur quattuor evangelistae universo terrarum orbe notissimi, et ob hoc fortasse quattuor, quoniam quattuor sunt partes orbis terrae, per cujus universitatem Christi ecclesiam dilatari ipso sui numeri sacramento quodammodo declararunt, hoc ordine scripsisse perhibentur: primus Mattheus, deinde Marcus, tertoio Lucas, ultimo Johannes, unde alius eis fuit orde cognoscendi atque praedicandi, alius scribendi.” Here Augustine claims that Matthew was written first; Mark was written next and used Matthew, and Luke followed and consulted both Mark and Luke (this scenario is loosely designated as the Augustinian Hypothesis). John was the final gospel to be written. As Henk J. de Jonge has argued, Augustine was less concerned with the literary relationship among the texts than with their theological relationship: they all work together to convey unique parts of Christ’s life (“Augustine on the Interrelations of the Gospels,” in The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck [ed. Frans Van Segbroeck, et al; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press; Uitgeverij Peeters, 1992], 2409–17). Thus, while Augustine still affirms the canonical order and value of these texts, this is nevertheless an important moment in the history of the Synoptic problem, because he recognizes that the Synoptic texts have different versions of events and sayings that need some reconciliation.

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authors and began to posit Ur-texts behind the Synoptic gospels to explain their similarities.\footnote{G. E. Lessing, “Neue Hypothese über die Evangelisten als bloss menschliche Geschichtsschreiber betrachtet,” in \textit{Theologischer Nachlass} (Berlin: Voss, 1784), 45–72; Johann Gottfried Eichorn, “Über die drei ersten Evangelien: Einige Beiträge zu ihrer künftigen kritischen Behandlung,” in \textit{Allgemeine Bibliothek der biblischen Literatur} 5 (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1794), 759–996.}

In the course of this development, one of the major challenges was to assess the role that the Gospel of Mark played in the literary relationship between Matthew and Luke. Mark has little independent content or order when compared with Matthew and Luke, and so in theory, it could either be a source or a conflation of the other two. The first critical model for this relationship was the Griesbach hypothesis, proposed by Johann Jakob Griesbach, positing the first option: that Mark was a conflation of Matthew and Luke; this solution remains influential today although it is not the dominant view.\footnote{Today, the hypothesis has been disconnected from Griesbach in particular and is known as the Two-Gospel Hypothesis. William R. Farmer, \textit{The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis} (Dillsboro, N.C.: Western North Carolina Press, 1976 [1964]); David L. Dungan, \textit{A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels} (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1999).}

Lachmann observed that the very same evidence used to posit Mark as a conflation could actually be used to posit Mark as a source, or rather, that Mark’s sequence represents the original sequence of episodes, and both Matthew and Luke are explicable alterations of that order.\footnote{Karl Lachmann, “De ordine narrationum in evangeliis synopticos,” \textit{TKS} 8 (1835): 570–90.} The lack of independent content and order, however, only suggested that Mark was medial—either a conflation or a source of Matthew and Luke. Building on this and other theories for an oral or written sayings source, Heinrich Holtzmann proposed the model that came to be known as the Two-Document Hypothesis (2DH), although he designated as “Λ” what later came to be known as “Q”.\footnote{Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, \textit{Die synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter} (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1863).} He argued that Matthew and Luke independently used a logia source (Λ) in addition to an Ur-
Mark to compose their gospels. Some three decades after Holtzmann, Johannes Weiss, while rejecting any Ur-Mark theory, simply denoted the shared source of Matthew and Luke as Q, an abbreviation for the German term *Quelle.*\(^\text{8}\) By the time this model appears in Paul Wernle’s work, it is for all intents and purposes the Two-Document Hypothesis. The hypothetical sayings source is now conventionally referred to as Q: “Diese—hypothetische—Quelle sei mit Q bezeichnet.”\(^\text{9}\)

As a solution to the Synoptic Problem, the Two-Document Hypothesis entails two major elements: the priority of Mark and the independent use of Mark by the authors of Matthew and Luke.\(^\text{10}\) Once these facets are rendered compelling, a second source (Q) is posited to account for the information shared between them but not derived from Mark. Thus, although a primitive sayings collection potentially provides a useful theological connection to Jesus and his first followers,\(^\text{11}\) the positing of Q must, methodologically speaking, come after conclusions about Markan priority and Matthew and Luke’s independence.\(^\text{12}\) There

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\(^{9}\) Paul Wernle, *Die synoptische Frage* (Leipzig; Freiburg im Breisgau; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1899), 44. For a detailed overview of this history of scholarship, see also Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 267–328.

\(^{10}\) There is great debate about whether or not Matthew and Luke had contact with one another. Advocates of the 2DH argue that they show no evidence of each other’s redactional additions to Mark or Q, nor do they ever place Q material in the same place relative to Mark after the Temptation story (see Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 29–38). A handful of outstanding minor agreements remain against Mark a challenge to the 2DH (Frans Neirynck, *The Minor Agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark: With a Cumulative List* [BETL 37; Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1974]. The most vocal proponents of a relationship of dependency are those who reject Q as a part of the solution to the 2DH and suggest that Luke simply took over material from Matthew. For instance, Goodacre believes Luke used Matthew and Mark as a source, but preferred Mark and so felt free to dismantle and rearrange Matthew’s material (*The Case Against Q*).

\(^{11}\) See, for example, Andreas Lindemann, ed., *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus* (BETL 158; Leuven: Peeters, 2001).

\(^{12}\) Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 12–43.
continue to be challenges to the Two-Document Hypothesis, mostly notably in the form of the Two-Gospel Hypothesis and the Mark-without-Q Hypothesis, but neither of these hypotheses has yet been able to undermine the parsimony and persuasiveness of the Two-Document Hypothesis. It continues to make the most sense of most of the Synoptic literary relationships.

Although Q had its infancy thus in discussions of the Synoptic Problem, eventually scholars began to focus on Q as an independent text, reflected in the new nomenclature “Sayings Gospel Q.” As a “gospel”, Q began to be situated within a specific socio-historical context and was recognized to have a distinct theology that reflects that context. It is here that this project picks up, by treating Q as a deliberate and thoughtful composition which can offer many insights about its authors and their social experience. To access those insights, it is necessary to outline the specific literary characteristics of Q.

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13 The Two-Gospel Hypothesis, also called the Neo-Griesbach Hypothesis, holds that the Gospel of Mark was written after the Gospel of Matthew and Luke and conflated both of them for his composition (see Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem*). Christopher Tuckett has demonstrated how difficult it is to make this case (The Revival Griesbach Hypothesis: An Analysis and Appraisal [SNTSMS 44; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983]). The Mark-without-Q Hypothesis is Mark Goodacre’s updated version of the Farrer-Goulder Hypothesis (Austin Farrer, “On Dispensing with Q,” in Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot [ed. Dennis E. Nineham; Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1955], 55–88; Michael D. Goulder, *Luke. A New Paradigm* [2 vols; JSNTSup 20; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989]) which maintains that Mark was written first, Matthew used Mark, and Luke used both (*The Case Against Q*). Kloppenborg (“On Dispensing with Q? Goodacre on the Relations of Luke to Matthew,” *NTS* 49.2 [2003]: 210–36) demonstrates that Goodacre’s model is problematic on a number of grounds, especially because it has to posit a scenario in which Luke “likes” Mark better than Matthew. Moreover, Goodacre’s reasons for Luke’s omission of so much Matthean material are not compelling, and the acrobatics he must go through to explain Luke’s transformation of Matthew’s Sermon are unpersuasive.

14 As far as it has been reconstructed Q does not have a title, and its authors likely would not have labeled it as a gospel. The nomenclature of “gospel” reflects the demand to take Q seriously within biblical studies: “So when we call Q a ‘gospel,’ it is to make the point that Q deserves to be considered as a decisive proclamation of a new state of affairs for humans, not simply relegated to the status of a ‘source’ of Matthew and Luke” (John S. Kloppenborg, *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Sayings and Stories of Jesus* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008], 61). See also John S. Kloppenborg, “The Sayings Gospel Q: The People behind the Document,” *CurBS* 1 (1993): 9–34, here 9; Arland D. Jacobson, *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q* (FFRS; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1992), 3–4 and 30–32.
3 Q as a Written Document

The Two-Document Hypothesis invites further speculation about the dynamics involved in Matthew and Luke’s composition, namely, whether they consulted a written source or instead, accessed a body of oral tradition. As will be demonstrated below, strong agreements in word order and sequence make it almost certain that Q should be regarded as a written source; reliance on oral tradition simply would not yield the many instances where Matthew and Luke agree nearly verbatim in double tradition material.¹⁵ The conclusion that Q was once a written document, in turn, will have direct bearing on the social identity of its authors.

Rather than beginning with the assumption that Q was written and searching for evidence to support it, it is prudent to start from literary observations in Matthew and Luke and see what patterns and features emerge. The most striking observation is that there are often extremely high verbal agreements in the double tradition material between Matthew and Luke, which seems to demand that they had access to a written source.¹⁶ Several examples of this pattern of agreement strongly suggest Matthew and Luke’s dependence on a

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¹⁵ Hereafter, “double tradition” will refer to the body of material that Matthew and Luke have in common with one another that is absent from Mark.

¹⁶ See also April D. DeConick, “Human Memory and the Sayings of Jesus: Contemporary Experimental Exercises in the Transmission of Jesus Traditions,” in Jesus, the Voice, and the Text: Beyond the Oral and the Written Gospel (ed. Tom Thatcher; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University, 2008), 137–80. DeConick concludes that the ability to recall verbatim accounts is extremely limited, rarely extending beyond twenty words unless a person has prior familiarity with the material. Moreover, Kloppenborg has compared other instances of ancient source use to Matthew and Luke’s use of Mark and shown that Matthew and Luke’s copying practices appear to be even more disciplined than their contemporaries’, which makes it even less likely that double tradition material is the vestige of an amorphous oral tradition (“Variation in the Reproduction of the Double Tradition and an Oral Q?” ETL 83.1 [2007]: 53–80).
written source. John’s announcement of the coming one in Q 3:7–9 (Matt 3:7–10 par. Luke 3:7–9) is a persuasive case:\(^{17}\):

| Matt 3:7 Ἰδὼν δὲ πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Γεννήματα ἐγινόντω, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς: 8 ποιῆσατε οὖν καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας; 9 καὶ μὴ δόξητε λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, Πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραὰμ, λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγείραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραὰμ. 10 ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἁξίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται, πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται. | Luke 3:7 Ἐλεγεν οὖν τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ὅχλοις βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, Γεννήματα ἐγινόντω, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς: 8 ποιῆσατε οὖν καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας; 9 καὶ μὴ ἄρξησθε λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, Πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραὰμ, λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγείραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραὰμ. 9 ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἁξίνη πρὸς τὴν ρίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται, πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται. |

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\(^{17}\) The reconstructed Q text used in this dissertation comes from: James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Hermeneia Supplement Series; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). The *Critical Edition of Q* (hereafter, *CEQ*) is a publication which results from an international team of scholars working on issues in Q’s reconstruction such as wording and sequence and is collectively known as the International Q Project (hereafter, IQP). On this project, see James M. Robinson, “A Critical Text of the Sayings Gospel Q,” in *The Sayings Gospel Q: Collected Essays* (eds. Christoph Heil and Joseph Verheyden; BETL 189; Leuven: Leuven University Press; Uitgeverij Peeters), 309–17. The parallel material between Matthew and Luke is also derived from the *CEQ*, which in turn are according to the Greek text in the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (1993).
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The words that are underlined once in the above passage agree perfectly; those underlined twice indicate the same lexical item with a different grammatical case. This pattern of agreement would be highly unusual were the authors not consulting a fixed text, given that the author of each gospel could theoretically rearrange many of the words and still retain the same semantic sense. Similarly Q 12:22b–31 (Matt 6:25–34 par. Luke 12:22–31) displays strong agreement:

| Matt 6:25 | Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὡμίν, μὴ μεριμνάτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγετε. [ἲ τί πίητε,] μηδὲ τὸ σῶμα τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος. 26 ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπείρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἁποθήκην, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτῶν. 27 καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε. κατανοήσατε τὰ κρίνα πῶς αὐξάνουσιν: οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν. 28 λέγω δὲ ὡμίν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομὼν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. 30 εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἄγρου σῆμερον ὄντα καὶ αὐριον εἰς κλίβανον
| Luke 12:22 | Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὡμίν, μὴ μεριμνάτε τῇ ψυχῇ τί φάγετε. μηδὲ τὸ σῶμα τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος. 23 ἢ γὰρ ψυχὴ πλεῖόν ἐστι τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος. 24 κατανοήσατε τοὺς κόρακας ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ταμεῖον οὐδὲ ἀποθήκη, καὶ ὁ θεὸς τρέφει αὐτούς: πόσῳ μᾶλλον ὑμεῖς διαφέρετε τῶν πετεινῶν. 25 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν; 26 εἰ οὖν οὐδὲ ἐλάχιστον δύνασθε, τί περὶ τῶν λοιπῶν μεριμνᾶτε: 27 κατανοήσατε τὰ κρίνα πῶς αὐξάνει: οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθει. 28 λέγω δὲ ὡμίν, οὐδὲ Σολομὼν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. 28 εἰ δὲ ἐν ἄγρῳ τὸν χόρτον ὄντα σήμερον καὶ αὐριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς
Again, phrases underlined once demonstrate precise agreement;\(^{18}\) those underlined twice have similar lexical items but may differ on minor grammatical points. The extent of agreement in these verses is thus exceptionally high. Finally, Q 4:1–13 (Matt 4:1–11 par. Luke 4:1–13), the Temptation story, proves helpful in arguing for a written Q.

\(^{18}\) Not withstanding some minor reordering of the words.
| διαβόλου, 2 καὶ νηστεύσας | ἡμέρας τεσσεράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσεράκοντα |
| νύκτας τεσσεράκοντα | ύστερον ἐπείνασεν, 3 Καὶ προσελθὼν ἐπὶ τὸν ἄρτο καὶ νηστεύσας ἡμέρας τεσσεράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσεράκοντα ὑστερον ἐπείνασεν, 3 Καὶ προσελθὼν ἐπὶ τὸν ἄρτον εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Εἰ νῦς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰπὲ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι αὐτῶν ἀρτοὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ. | 2 ἡμέρας τεσσεράκοντα | πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, καὶ ἤμετα τῶν θηρίων, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ, 2 ἡμέρας τεσσεράκοντα | πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου, καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὔδὲν ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις έκείναις, καὶ συντελεσθεισῶν αὐτῶν ἐπείνασεν, 3 Εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ διάβολος, Εἰ νῦς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰπὲ τῷ λίθῳ τούτῳ ἵνα γένηται ἄρτος, 4 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Γέγραπται ὅτι οὐκ ἐπὶ ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ πάντι ῥήματι ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος θεοῦ. 5 Τότε παραλαμβάνει αὐτὸν ὁ διάβολος εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν, καὶ ἔστησεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ πτερύγιον τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Εἰ νῦς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, βάλε σεαυτὸν κάτω: γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Τοῖς ἄγγελοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἄροισίν σε, μὴ ποτε | 121
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>προσκόψῃς πρὸς λίθον τὸν πόδα σου.</td>
<td>7 For he said to him  ΄Ηησοῦς. Πάλιν γέγραπται,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου.</td>
<td>Οὔκ εκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ιησοῦς, Πάλιν γέγραπται,</td>
<td>Πάλιν γέγραπται, Κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ιησοῦς, Πάλιν γέγραπται,</td>
<td>Ἐγγενὲς δὲ αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ ἔστησεν ἐπὶ τὸ πτερύγιον τοῦ ἱεροῦ, καὶ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>διάβολος εἰς ὅρος ψηλὸν λίαν, καὶ δείκνυσιν αὐτῷ πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν, 9 καὶ ἔστησεν αὐτῷ,</td>
<td>Ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἀροῦσίν σε μήποτε προσκόψῃς πρὸς λίθον τὸν πόδα σου, 12 καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ ΄Ηησοῦς ὁ Ἐρημητής, Οὐκ εκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ταῦτα σοι πάντα δώσω ἐὰν προσκυνήσεις μοι.</td>
<td>Ταῦτα σοι πάντα δώσω ἐὰν προσκυνήσεις μοι.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is a particularly useful passage for demonstrating Matthew’s and Luke’s dependence on a written source, because it is clear that they both consulted an additional source beyond the Gospel of Mark for this story. Only the phrases bolded in all three versions could have possibly come from Mark (double underlining, once again, indicating similar lexical items despite minor grammatical differences), but there is clearly a great amount of material that Matthew and Luke could not have taken over from Mark (underlined). Since they have so much in common with each other that is not derived from Mark, it is difficult to account for this as coincidental but independent expansions on Mark. Rather, this passage is one of a handful of “Mark-Q overlaps,” places where both Mark and Q appear to have independent versions of a similar account. Were we to assume Q was merely an oral tradition, we might imagine some synthesis of Mark and Q’s version of the story, or at the least some evidence that Matthew or Luke developed the story in different ways. On the contrary, Matthew and Luke’s extremely close agreement again suggests that they were consulting a written source.

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19 Matthew’s final clause (ἰδοὺ ἄγγελοι … διηκόνουν αὐτῷ), marked with a broken underline, appears to have come from Mark. On the Two-Document Hypothesis, this means Matthew merged Mark’s few details with Q’s more comprehensive version of the story.

The Problem of Q

Besides sharing a great deal of common vocabulary and reproducing the order of the words similarly in the double tradition, the sequence of the sayings is also often the same, suggesting again that Q was written and that Matthew and Luke consulted a fixed source. Consider the following examples of the location of double tradition material compared to Mark’s outline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew’s Order</th>
<th>Mark’s Order</th>
<th>Luke’s Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sermon on the Mount (Q 6:20–49)</td>
<td>1:21</td>
<td>Sermon on the Plain (Q 6:20–49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parable of the Lost Sheep (Q 15:4–5a, 7)</td>
<td>3:19</td>
<td>Woes Against the Pharisees (Q 11:42, 39b, 41–43–44)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:42–48</td>
<td>10:1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:13–52</td>
<td>Parable of the Lost Sheep (Q 15:4–5a, 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:37–40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woes Against the Pharisees (Q 11:42, 39b, 41–43–44)</td>
<td>13:33</td>
<td>Parable of the Entrusted Money (Q 19: 12–13, 15–24, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parable of the Entrusted Money (Q 19: 12–13, 15–24, 26)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

From the above chart, it is evident that Matthew and Luke both have similar content that they did not derive from Mark (the Sermon material, the Parable of the Lost Sheep and of the Entrusted Money, and the Woes Against the Pharisees). Yet this material occurs in nearly the same relative order in each gospel, save for a slight rearrangement of the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Woes. Moreover, it is crucial to note that Matthew and Luke attach these
double tradition passages to Mark at completely different places, and show no awareness of where the other has located the material.\(^2^1\) Coupled with strong agreements in vocabulary, the common sequence of words and sayings makes a persuasive case that Matthew and Luke were consulting a source with a fixed (i.e., written) order.\(^2^2\)

The authors of Q also appear to be acquainted with a number of ancient literary conventions and genres. As many have shown, Q appears to fit well within the genre of ancient instructional literature, which is a subset of a wider category of ancient sayings collections, and shows many literary affinities with these traditions.\(^2^3\) F. Gerald Downing has also observed similarities between Q and the biography of “lives” of Cynic philosophers, although the connection between Q and Cynicism has not been especially well-received (see

\(^2^1\) On any solution to the Synoptic Problem that claims Matthew and Luke were not independent, one would have to come up with an explanation for why Matthew or Luke found the other’s placement of this and other material problematic—in addition to explaining why they preferred a different location.

\(^2^2\) On Q as a written document, see the helpful and concise discussion in Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 56–60. See also, Alan Kirk, *The Composition of the Sayings Source: Genre, Synchrony, & Wisdom Redaction in Q* (NovTSup 91; Leiden: Brill, 1998). It seems likely that Matthew and Luke probably had different version of Q. Whether or not some verses are missing from reconstructed Q remains a problem, but it is not crucial for the present analysis.

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Chapter Four). This alone does not prove that Q was a written document instead of oral tradition, but it seems much more likely when viewed alongside such texts as the Sentences of Sextus, the Wisdom of Solomon, or even the chreia collections of Diogenes Laertius.

Beyond simply knowing and utilizing aphoristic wisdom forms, which in theory could be accumulated through oral tradition, Ronald Piper also suggests, following Hermission, that collections of aphoristic wisdom point to a deliberately-molded, written composition, often of the very same sort as that seen in Proverbs, Ben Sira, or Qoheleth, instead of sedimentation of an amorphous oral tradition.

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24 F. Gerald, Downing, “Quite Like Q: A Genre for ‘Q’: The ‘Lives’ of Cynic Philosophers,” Bib 69 (1988): 196–225; idem, “A Genre for Q and a Socio-Cultural Context for Q: Comparing Sets of Similarities with Sets of Differences,” JSNT 55 (1995): 3–26. Downing observes, for instance, that Q focuses on one person (Jesus) and the teachings attributed to him and that the loosely connected traditions, only some of which are formally narratives, function both to set the stage for authoritative pronouncements by Jesus and to demonstrate Jesus’ relationship to other authoritative figures. These tendencies are well-attested the genre of “lives” of Cynic philosophers. There are even, he notes, lives of Cynics that are relatively short in length (e.g., Demonax), just like Q. Instead of viewing Q as a kind of Cynicism, however, it is important to observe that this formal construction could be used in a number of ways: “The chriae collection was not exclusively Cynic … [it] was quite adaptable to various sorts of contents” (Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 163).

25 Ronald A. Piper, Wisdom in the Q-Tradition The Aphoristic Teaching of Jesus (SNTSMS 61; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7; so also, Kloppenborg, Formation of Q, esp. 244. James Dunn (“Altering the Default Setting: Re-Envisaging the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition,” NTS 49 [2003]: 139–75) and Terence C. Mournet (Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q [WUNT II 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005]) have recently explored the notion that some of Q was oral while other passages stem from a written collection. This kind of sensitivity is initially quite compelling, because it offers a solution to the wide variation in agreement among double tradition passages in Matthew and Luke: verbal similarities between, say, Matthew and Luke’s versions of the return of the unclean spirit (Q 11:24–26) are quite high, while the similarities between their parable of the great banquet (Q 14:16–24) are very low. There are, however, significant problems with this model conceived thus. In assessing this model, Kloppenborg examines other patterns of agreement when a written source is known (“Variation in the Reproduction of the Double Tradition and an Oral Q?” 53–80). He concludes that the variability that Dunn, Mournet, and others have observed can be explained by a number of literary techniques, such as paraphrasing or revising, and do not automatically point to an oral body of tradition being incorporated into a written body. Curiously, in the course of this comparison, he observes that Matthew and Luke’s preservation of some Q passages is often higher than one would expect from authors consulting sources. The “wooden borrowing” (77) of Q by Matthew and Luke therefore suggests authorship by “the libraries or archivist/scribe, whose role included both simple transcription and a degree of genuine composition” (78). Thus, not only is variation in agreement to be expected when an author is consulting a source, but there is more than one explanation for that phenomenon and oral tradition is only one.
Furthermore, according to Jacobson, Q has an evident literary unity. By systematically comparing the literary forms in Q and the Gospel of Mark, Jacobson demonstrates that they have distinct literary profiles. On one hand, Mark tends toward conflict stories, miracles stories, and parables. Q, on the other hand, is characterized by macarisms, woes, and prophetic threats. This difference might simply be a function of their differing genres (Mark is a narrative, while Q is a sayings collection), yet even when they have formal or conceptual similarities, such as the mission discourse or the use of John the Baptist, these traditions are put toward very different ends. For Mark, Jacobson argues, the major concern is to establish Jesus’ identity through the unfolding narrative; for Q, the concern is to express a Deuteronomistic worldview. In fact, he observes, it is the concern for Deuteronomistic theology that appears to be the source of Q’s literary unity; it influences the very forms that Q tends to employ. Thus, instead of an amalgam of random sayings, Q rather appears to be a deliberate composition with an evident literary style. And at some points, the deliberate nature of the composition is seen to address particular problems that the Q people might have encountered in legitimating their movement. For instance, according to Arnal, Q 3:7–9, 16–17, a collection fraught with hermeneutical problems when one is searching for a

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26 Arland D. Jacobson, “The Literary Unity of Q,” JBL 101 (1987): 365–89. The unity of Q has also been corroborated by a number of other studies, which conclude that Q has a coherent narrative, spatial organization, theology, and style. For instance, Kloppenborg, “City and Wasteland: Narrative World and the Beginning of the Sayings Gospel (Q),” in How Gospels Begin (ed. Dennis E. Smith; Semeia 52; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 145–60; Harry T. Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary (Biblical Tools and Studies 1; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 79–154. Fledderman notes in particular the “extensive” and “sophisticated” (88) use of catchwords in Q, the structuring and linking functions of which amount to a “powerful argument” for the unity of Q (90).

27 Recently, Michel Labahn (Der Gekommene als Wiederkommender: Die Logienquelle als Erzählte Geschichte [Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 32; Leipzig: Evangalische Verlagsanstalt, 2010]) has pointed out that while Q is not a narrative, it presupposes a narrative world and would thus benefit from narrative criticism. So also, Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 106–10.
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singular interpretation of the figure of John the Baptist, is probably a creation of the Q community, which tried to define Q’s movement vis-à-vis the Baptist’s movement.²⁸

Some interesting details in Q’s content might accord well with a written text, as opposed to oral tradition. For instance, Q attaches a strong value to the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, indicating that its authors may have seen themselves as some kind of intellectuals. Kloppenborg has suggested that the topics lauded within the text are particularly concerned with learned pursuits:

In accord with scribal values, the Sayings Gospel places a premium upon both clarity of perception, especially when it comes to matters of guidance (Q 6:40, 41–42), and good speech, the characteristic mark of good thinking (Q 6:45). Guidance and moral examples are also the subjects of the sayings on judging (Q 6:37–38), scandal (Q 17:1–2), and forgiveness (Q 17:3b–4). This reflects the self-consciously ‘public’ character of the scribal pursuit: although the scribe necessarily requires leisure not at the disposal of the peasant or hand-worker, the scribe’s responsibility is ultimately to the public and public approbation in the form of honour and fame crowns the sage’s achievement.²⁹

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In addition to privileging the processes of learning/reasoning, the text also appeals to the authority of written texts at several points (Q 4:1–13; 16:17\(^{30}\)). It is not prudent to push this line of reasoning too far, for surely the pursuit of wisdom and the cultivation of learning need not be confined to written document, but when considered alongside the formal observations above, it becomes quite compelling.

Thus, the argument that Q was a written source follows from internal observations about the text of Q as well as external observations about the affinities that Q shares with other ancient genres and rhetorical forms. According to the Two-Document Hypothesis, the only way that Matthew and Luke could have ended up with such strong similarities in wording and sequence would be their use of a written document. This does not mean that multiple recensions of Q did not exist, nor does it imply that what has been reconstructed in the CEQ is the full extent of the text.\(^{31}\) Rather, it establishes the extremely high likelihood that a written text, looking somewhat like the CEQ, must have existed and must have fallen into Matthew and Luke’s hands. That Q shows evidence of thoughtful and deliberate literary organization and some noteworthy rhetorical flair only strengthens this conclusion.\(^{32}\)

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\(^{30}\) Q 16:17 is an especially illustrative example, because it argues on the grounds of the physical expression of a written text (Matthew 5:18: ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία; Luke 16:17: μίαν κεραίαν). That is, the author imagines the literal appearance of the written words on the page, which can be observed by anyone with the skills of literacy.


\(^{32}\) At this point, it is prudent to include some remarks on Q’s compositional history, which is a very complex issue, potentially affecting a number of things, such as the date of Q’s composition and the identity of its authors. Not only are there competing theories of the text’s major redactional moments but there are also those who see no evidence at all for a compositional history and regard Q as a text composed all at once. Although many parts of the present project do not require attention to different literary strata within Q, these will be important in some sections. This project adopts Kloppenborg’s stratigraphic model from *The Formation of Q*, which understands Q as having a formative layer (Q\(_1\)=Q 6:20b–23b; 27–35, 36–45, 46–49; 9:57–60, 61–62; 10:2–11, 16, [23–24?]; 11:2–4, 9–13; 12:2–7, 11–12, 22b–31, 33–34; [13:18–19, 20–21?], 13:24; 14:26–27; 14:34; 15:4–7, 9–10; 16:13, 16, 18; 17:1–2, 3–4, 6, 33 [see now, *Excavating Q*, 146]) that was subsequently framed by a redactional layer (Q\(_2\)=Q 3:2–3, 7–9, 16b–17; 6:23c; 7:1–10, 18–28, 31–35; 10: 12, 13–15; 11:14–
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15, 16, 17–26, [27–28], 29–32, 33–36, 39b–44, 46–52; 12:8–10, 39–40, 42b–46, 49, 50–53, 54–59; 17:23–24, 37b, 26–30, 34–35; 19:12–27; 22:28–30 [Excavating Q, 143]), in addition to a few tertiary additions (Q35Q 4:1–13; 11:42c; 16:17 [Excavating Q, 152–53]). This compositional model is the most compelling for the following reasons. First, it stems, not from an a priori assumption that Q must have a certain kind of redactional history, but rather, from the desire to understand the genre of Q and its organizing principles. Thus, it takes as its starting point observations about what unifies and frames the document in its final form and isolates the literary seams, logical progressions, and formal juxtapositions in order to discern how seemingly self-contained units were put together. Second, although thematic interests did not determine the literary analysis, the resulting strata are nevertheless thematically coherent in addition to being formally coherent, which makes the method that much more persuasive. Third, this model did not result from judgments about the historical Jesus or the social history of Christianity (even though many have found it useful toward those ends). There are more recent models that largely take over and tweak Kloppenborg’s stratigraphic model, such as those proposed by Burton L. Mack (The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q & Christian Origins [San Francisco, Calif.: HarperCollins, 1993], 260–61; “The Kingdom That Didn’t Come: A Social History of the Q Tradents,” in Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers [ed. David J. Lull; SBLSP; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], 608–635, here 610) and Leif E. Vaage (Galilean Upstarts: Jesus’ First Followers According to Q [Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994], 107–20). The reception of these altered models in Q scholarship has been less than enthusiastic, often because the adaptations result from attempts to make Q fit a prior model of social history and not from literary observations.

Kloppenborg’s stratigraphic model has received important critiques, especially that one can imagine a singular moment of composition for the text (Richard A. Horsley, “Questions About Redactional Strata and the Social Relations Reflected in Q,” in Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers [ed. David Lull, ed., SBLSP 28; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989], 186–203), but they are not fatal to this model. Indeed, one of the strengths of the proposal is that each stratum of Q has its own affinities with other antique forms of literature: Q1 roughly corresponds to the kinds of forms found in other wisdom or instruction texts, such as aphorisms, imperatives, and the like, while Q2 loosely resembles a collection of chreia (short, sometimes narrative, episodes involving a literary character which serve to illustrate a character trait or teaching). Q3 does not have a well-defined literary profile, but it may be heading in the direction of an antique biography. Moreover, other documents, such as Proverbs, the Didache, and the Manual of Discipline, betray similar evidence for multi-stage composition, indicating that Q’s composition is in line with other ancient texts. Another important criticism to address is the accusation that Kloppenborg began with a set of assumptions about the earliest form of Q, especially that it was a wisdom text, and presumed that apocalyptic and polemic materials were later additions. As noted, however, the method employed in The Formation of Q began with literary observations about the structure of the document, not assumptions about content in Q.

Other criticisms—such as the charge that the model starts from the assumption that Q exists or that it relies too confidently on the ability of scholars to reconstruct most of Q (Dennis Ingolfsson, “Kloppenborg’s Stratification of Q and its Significance for Historical Jesus Studies,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 46.2 [2003]: 217–32, here 231)—do not speak to the primary goal of The Formation of Q, and frankly, if these criticisms were implemented programmatically to dismiss other works resting on the same foundations as Kloppenborg’s analysis, they would surely stunt the forward progression of Q scholarship. Given that hypotheses “are our ways of configuring and accounting for data in a manner that seems best to respond to the nature and diversity of that data” (Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 3), it seems reasonable to see where they may take us in disciplined analyses.
4 Q as a Greek Text

Following from the argument that Q was a written composition, it makes sense to ask what the original language of that composition was, for that too will yield insight about the authors. Although there has been some debate, the most likely language of composition for Q is Greek. The most compelling argument for Q’s composition in Greek was made by Nigel Turner, who concluded that there were evident markers in a text that was originally composed in Greek as opposed to being translated from another language into Greek.

When compared to other contemporary Greek literature, Q contains indicators that suggest it was originally penned in Greek: (1) μὲν ... ἐ δ constructions; (2) coordinating particles placed secondarily in sentences; (3) genitive absolutes; (4) articles separated from their substantives by modifiers; (5) hyperbaton; and (6) subject-verb order, as opposed to verb-subject order characteristic of Semitic languages. These occurrences would typically not be present in a text that had been translated into Greek from another language. Indeed, they reflect somewhat sophisticated Greek, taking full advantage of the flexible nature of the language, especially indicators (4) and (5). This style is perhaps even more complex than that often seen in Mark’s gospel. Turner also notes that Q has a high proportion of New Testament hapax legomena, and significantly, many of them are Septuagint words, indicating that the authors were probably familiar with the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. And although Turner did not delve into the composition of Q to make his argument, the frequent catchword compositional techniques in the text, hinging on Greek lexical items, also suggests

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a Greek original. Finally, we can note, of course, that Matthew and Luke must have known a similar version of Q in Greek to account for their strong agreement in vocabulary and word order.

A minority of scholars have tried to argue that Q was composed in Aramaic. Some have taken more modest approach and suggested only parts of Q betray Aramaic composition. Dale C. Allison, for instance, argues for an Aramaic to lie only behind Q¹, based mostly on “strongly Semitic” features. Many of these arguments, however, have significant weaknesses. For instance, whereas some would hold that Q contains Semitic names, Semitic constructions (such as qal wehomer formulations), or Semitic idioms, Kloppenborg counters these arguments by pointing out that this is to be expected if Q were produced in a Semitic environment. Moreover, for an Aramaic Q to have ended up in both Matthew and Luke would presuppose that the authors of Matthew and Luke not only had

34 Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, passim.
36 Dale C. Allison, The Jesus Tradition in Q (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 48. Note that Allison’s stratigraphy differs from Kloppenborg’s in The Formation of Q. His Q¹ consists of 9:57–11:13 and 12:2–32. Whereas Kloppenborg establishes the stratigraphy based on literary observations and evidence of redactional activity (see pp. 129–30 n. 32), Allison starts from Dieter Zeller’s assumption about the earliest form of the Jesus movement as missionaries, only later to be complemented by settled communities (8). On this assumption, it is no surprise that Q material dealing with the mission charge and encouragement in the face of anxiety and adversity end up in the formative layer.
knowledge of both Aramaic and Greek but in some cases, such as Q 3:7–9 or 11:24–26, had nearly identical translation habits.\textsuperscript{38}

As one would expect, parts of Q appear at home in an Aramaic environment,\textsuperscript{39} but this only confirms that they originated in a Semitic context, not necessarily that the text was composed in Aramaic. In short, Turner’s argument has yet to be undermined, for he demonstrated, based on identifiable grammatical features evident in other texts known to be Greek originals, that the initial moment of Q’s composition was very likely Greek. It is possible that the features that Turner points to could be the result of mimesis—that is, Q’s authors deliberately transformed an Aramaic tradition in such a way as to mimic an original Greek composition, but this hypothesis seems needlessly complex.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38}Fledderman dismisses attempts to account for Matthew and Luke’s variants in double tradition material on the basis of an Aramaic Vorlage. “In no case,” he finds, “would an appeal to different translations of an Aramaic original make any better sense than “a straightforward redactional explanation” (Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 157)

\textsuperscript{39}Ronan Rooney and Douglas E. Oakman, “The Social Origins of Q: Two Theses in a Field of Conflicting Hypotheses,” BTB 38 (2008): 114–21, here 116–18. Rooney and Oakman suggest that Q 9:57–58 (perhaps a connection between “birds” and the name Sepphoris) and Q 11:2b–4 (the presence of Abba, as well as ἐπίούσιον, which “undoubtedly” represents a “wooden translation” [117] of an Aramaic original) may have had especially strong resonance with an Aramaic speaking audience.

\textsuperscript{40}Parenthetically, what is rather interesting about the question of Q’s language of composition is what is apparently at stake in the subtext of the question. For some, if Q is written in Aramaic, then this puts us one step closer to approaching the actual words of Jesus (e.g., Allison, The Jesus Tradition in Q, 60–62). For others, having Q composed in Aramaic locates the Jesus tradition firmly in the context of the “native” Jewish culture in Galilee, instead of among Graeco-Roman outsiders. This discussion is thus not unrelated to the question of what language was spoken in Galilee in the first century, still a contentious issue for those trying to reconstruct the cultural character of that locale. In this debate, language is often taken as an indicator of culture: Greek indicates Hellenism while Aramaic or Hebrew point to Judaism (e.g., Chancey, Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus, 122–65). This presumption not only relies on a superficial understanding of the relationship between language and culture (especially that language is the expression of a particular cultural essence), but also, on a too rigid distinction between Judaism and Hellenistic culture in this period. But as Arnal has recently shown, there is much at stake when defending the “Jewishness” of Jesus (The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity [Religion in Culture: Studies in Social Context and Construction; London: Equinox Publishing, 2005]) and Greek traditions do not serve that purpose as well as Aramaic ones. Thus, the question of Q’s original language has serious ramifications for imagining the cultural context out of which the Jesus movement arose, even if these consequences are based on questionable assumptions about the relationship between language and culture.
5 The Date of Q

Establishing a probable date for Q is also significant for understanding the social location and experience of its authors. This is made difficult by the paucity of data within Q and the fragmentary nature of some of the reconstructed sayings. Consequently, the dating of Q is mainly built on logical conclusions about the relationship of Q to other Jewish and Christian texts, Q’s knowledge of contemporary socio-political situations, and reasonable socio-historical assumptions about its literary development.

The first, perhaps exceedingly obvious, factor in dating Q is that the text knows about the figure of Jesus. The kind of knowledge that Q displays about Jesus, however, differs from more traditional canonical accounts: it notably lacks an infancy narrative and a passion narrative. Yet although Q does not include a passion narrative or develop the salvific knowledge of Jesus’ death, several scholars have demonstrated that Q is not unaware of his death. Daniel A. Smith, for instance, argues that Q is well aware of Jesus’ death, but it understands it in terms of ascension instead of resurrection. More recently, Michael Labahn has used a narrative analysis of Q to argue for the significance of Jesus’ death in the overall story within Q. He suggests that Q is structured as an arc between the past (the time of Jesus) and the future (the return of Jesus). The death of Jesus is the historical moment after which the addressees of Q can place themselves in the narrative and use its space to make

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41 Daniel A. Smith, *The Post-mortem Vindication of Jesus in the Sayings Gospel Q* (Library of New Testament Studies 338; London and New York: T & T Clark, 2007). Q, after all, does have conceptual language for resurrection (Q 11:31–32), but does not apply this to Jesus’ death. In a later work, Smith describes how these two traditions about death with originally independent and were only merged in later Christian passion narratives (*Revisiting the Empty Tomb: The Early History of Easter* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010]).

42 Labahn, *Der Gekommene als Widerkommender.*
sense of their own current situation, facing rejection from contemporaries yet nevertheless still expecting the return of Jesus as the Son of Man. Thus, Q speaks from the space between the death of Jesus and his expected return (e.g., Q 12:39–40). The text contains at least minimal reflection on his death (Q 11:49–51; 13:34–35), fitting it within the expectations of its Deuteronomistic framework.  

Therefore, its composition can assuredly be dated after at least 35 C.E.

Q’s role in the Two-Document Hypothesis also offers some help for dating the text. Clearly Matthew and Luke had access to Q, or something very much like it, when they were composed. Therefore, Q must have reached its final form well before the year 80 C.E., based on traditional (and approximate) dating for Matthew and Luke, especially if it was “in circulation” in any meaningful way in order to end up in their hands (that is, long enough to


44 Dating both Matthew and Luke has recently become more contentious. Richard I. Pervo has argued for a very late date for Luke-Acts, based, among other things, on evidence that the author knew Paul’s letters as a collection, as well as Josephus’ writings (Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists [Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2006]). Using this reasoning, he locates composition at the beginning of the second century, c. 115 C.E. Joseph B. Tyson (Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006]) concludes a similar late date (120–25 C.E.), based on Luke-Acts’ apparent familiarity with the ideas of Marcion of Pontus. I have very tentatively recently suggested a new terminus ad quem for Matthew, based on Matt 17:24–27. If Matthew used Mark, he must have been writing after 70 C.E., and thus the story about the Temple tax could feasibly be interpreted as a commentary or reflection on a contemporary situation of taxation, which included the post-70 Jewish tax. If this is so, he must have been writing before Nerva’s reforms of the fiscus Judaicus in 96 C.E. Nerva’s reforms made (1) the tax applicable only to those who openly practiced Judaism (i.e., not Christians, who along with perhaps sympathizers of Judaism, had the tax applied to them under Domitian) and (2) the persecutions applicable only to those who concealed their Jewish origin to avoid paying. On this reform, see the very good analysis in Marius Heemstra, The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways (WUNT II 277; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), esp. 70–71: “[T]he accusation of ‘living a Jewish life’ directed against non-Jews became part of the prosecutions by the fiscus Judaicus under Domitian, but Nerva put an end to that, because he considered this to be a calumnia (‘wrongful accusation’).” Traditional dating for both Matthew and Luke tends to be rather earlier, though, usually a decade or so after Mark, which itself was probably written just after 70 C.E. (John S. Kloppenborg, “Evocatio Deorum and the Date of Mark,” JBL 124 [2005]: 419–50; William E. Arnal, “He Is Going Before You to Galilee: The Gospel of Mark as Reflection on Exile and Identity,” in Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith [eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox Publishing, 2007], 57–67).
become an authoritative source deserving of incorporation and/or expansion). As mentioned above, there may have been multiple recensions of Q in circulation as well, although the specific details of the different editions and the time involved in their development are difficult to pin down. If several editions of Q were in circulation, it would be wise to factor in some time for this when dating Q.

The most useful evidence for establishing a more precise date comes from internal evidence regarding what sort of knowledge Q has about contemporary events. Perhaps the most outstanding event during this period in Palestine—based on frequent references in many other contemporary texts—is the Jewish War (66–70 C.E.), and within that conflict, the razing of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple by Titus in 70 C.E. Although the destruction of the Temple is not the pivotal moment in Christian origins and Second Temple Judaism that it was once considered to be, it still appears to be a traumatic incident for many Jewish groups. Matti Myllykoski, for instance, has suggested that the Jewish War is a compelling backdrop for the composition of Q. He begins from the observation that all parts of Q, even the material not explicitly marked as apocalyptic or polemical, reflect a period of crisis. A situation of crisis, he admits, is difficult to reconcile with the date of Q proposed by most redaction critics, who tend to claim that since Mark was unaware of Q, it

45 Older opinions used to hold that the split between Judaism and Christianity was definitive after the destruction of the Temple, but more recent studies have found this to be unpersuasive. See, for example, Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Stephen G. Wilson, Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 C.E. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Daniel Boyarin, Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity (Divinations: Rereading Late Antique Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

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must be dated pre-70 C.E. Thus, he tests two possible moments of crisis within (or shortly after) which to locate Q: the Caligula crisis c. 40 C.E. (proposed first by Gerd Theissen) and the Jewish War in 70 C.E. Theissens’s suggestion of a date in the 40s relies on two major premises: that the Temptation story is a metaphor for Caligula’s placement of his statue in the Jewish temple and that the people behind Q experienced persecution in their mission to convert people. Myllykowoski finds that the metaphorical reading of the Temptation story is problematic, because it seems to be at odds with the ways that Matthew and Luke understood the story and it makes better sense functioning as a paradigmatic and parentetn story, encouraging followers of Jesus to endure their hardships. Evidence for a situation of persecution in this period is not especially strong either, because the textual evidence is ambiguous, save for possibly 1 Thess 2:14–16. The more likely possibility, he contends, is that Q was written during or after the war.

Following Paul Hoffman, who argued that Q 13:34–35a reflects the final stage of the Jewish War, Myllykowoski sees this kind of polemical language most plausibly pointing to the nearness or presence of Roman troops in Jerusalem. Also following Hoffman, he focuses closely on the Son of Man language in Q, which represents an apocalyptic figure

49 Paul Hoffman, “The Redaction of Q and the Son of Man: A Preliminary Sketch,” in The Gospel Behind the Gospels: Current Studies on Q (ed. Ronald A. Piper; NovTSup 75; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 159–98. Hoffman observes: “The saying looks back to the vain efforts on Israel’s behalf and reflects the imminently expected, or perhaps already completed (?), destruction of Jerusalem in the framework of the deuteronomistic view of history as a rejection of the envoys” (192). Verse 35b alters this framework, though, by appending the expectation of Jesus’ return. Because he sees in Q an unambiguous knowledge of the fall of Jerusalem, Q represents “a decisive turning point in the separation of those Jewish-Christian groups of followers of Jesus out of the hitherto clearly evident national-religious association with the Jewish national community, and it makes the constitution of a separate religious grouping which was conscious of its own identity in its belonging” (196). For reasons outlined in Chapter Five, this perspective on the Q group is something I cannot share.
reflecting the community’s situation of crisis. One problem that Myllykoski recognizes in this scenario is Q’s lack of specificity regarding an apocalyptic timetable—an odd feature if Q was looking back on the events of 70 C.E. and interpreting them apocalyptically. This is not the problem some have claimed, he suggests, noting that “Q’s issue with apocalypticism is not that of imminent expectation, but that of signs.”

There is thus good reason why Q does not offer explicit ways to recognize apocalyptic events. Although Q 17:23–35 seems to presuppose peaceful conditions, he thinks that the Jewish War still provides the most compelling background to Q 17:23–35, in the same way that it illuminates Mark 13.

In sum, Myllykoski settles on concluding that “the author of Q largely used sayings material that was produced during the critical years of the Jewish War.” Q 17 reflects a gradual return to normalcy when the document was put together c. 75 C.E.

Myllykoski’s interpretation is not unreasonable, especially if his starting point, that Q represents crisis literature, is affirmed. There are, however, some problems with viewing the Jewish War as the original setting for Q. First, Q, unlike many other Jewish and Christian texts from later periods, simply shows no unambiguous knowledge of this event, even when

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50 Myllykoski, “The Social History of Q and the Jewish War,” 179–85. He agrees with Kloppenborg and Mack that Q 9:58 is the only Son of Man saying in Q and so does not try to defend the idea that Q contains two Son of Man figures, one apocalyptic/future and one non-apocalyptic/present (181). On the other hand, he disagrees with Hoffman that the Son of Man language was introduced later in Q’s composition c. 70, while the earlier material had been collected in the late 60s, because such a social history model would presume a period of about 4 years, at most, for the development of a crisis mentality (183–84). Rather, for Myllykoski, the crisis mentality was there from the beginning and imbues all of Q.

51 Myllykoski, “The Social History of Q and the Jewish War,” 185.

52 Mack, A Myth of Innocence, 315–24. Mack, for instance, finds passages from Josephus which talk about messianic pretenders just before the war. Similarly, Myllykoski observes that Q 17:23 especially may reflect the possibility of “pseudo-messiahs” (“The Social History of Q and the Jewish War,” 195).

53 Myllykoski, “The Social History of Q and the Jewish War,” 199.
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it employs apocalyptic language. For instance, the Temptation narrative, one of the latest additions to Q,\(^5^4\) takes for granted that the Temple is still standing (Q 4:9). Although this is a legendary story about Jesus, it seems odd that Q would not even have on its horizon the Temple’s destruction or the fate of Jerusalem, unless it was composed in a time when it was still an unlikely event. Second, Q is overtly hostile toward Jerusalem and Temple in several places (Q 11:49–51; 13:34–15), and one would think that the actual or even impending destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem would be immensely useful for the rhetoric of Q: it would underscore and justify the authors’ negative judgment against Jerusalem. Q unfortunately does not explicitly comment on this event at all. Interpreting Q 13:34–35 as a reference to the destruction of the Temple often hinges on the meaning of ἀφίεται, translated in the CEQ as “forsaken.” This term, however, should be taken to mean “abandoned”—a condition which could result from many things—so as to avoid importing assumptions about the destruction of the Temple into this oracle where it is simply not explicit. According to Jonathan L. Reed, this passage only depicts Jerusalem as a “spiritually barren city” and that it is “deserted.”\(^5^6\)

Third, despite Q’s expectation of future divine intervention, it does not frame this expectation as if it were in the midst of a great crisis or decline (contra Myllykoski). Q certainly experiences rejection, perhaps even persecution, but this need not be a singular “crisis.” Moreover, Q expects divine intervention to come suddenly, at an unanticipated hour

\(^{5^4}\) See pp. 129–30 n. 32.

\(^{5^5}\) So, Kloppenborg, “City and Wasteland,” 155.

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(Q 12:40) in the midst of ordinary affairs. People will be working in the fields and the mills (Q 17:34–35) and engaging in other routine activities (Q 17:26–27, 30). Myllykoski is correct that Q resists offering signs of future apocalyptic events, but that still does not make much sense of Q 17:26–27, 30—where visual observations about the coming destruction are at the fore of the description of events. True, there are no signs mentioned, but the scene is vividly recounted. This situation of normalcy could be compared to the more acute crisis situation with which the Gospel of Mark associates the end times to set in high relief Q’s presumption of relative normalcy. 57 For these reasons, chiefly for the observation that Q does not use references to the destruction of the Temple when it would be immensely rhetorically useful, it is thus difficult to imagine Q being composed during or after the destructive events of the Jewish War. 58

We may also note Arnal’s brief attention of the affinities between redactional material in Q and 1 Thessalonians. The Deuteronomistic themes in Q2 appear to have a strong semblance with “Paul’s rather uncomfortable use of deuteronomistic language” in 1 Thessalonians. This affinity might indicate that “such language was being used in Christian circles generally, at around the same time, to rationalize negative experiences.” 59 Arnal admits to the very speculative nature of this comparison. Indeed this language of Israel’s

57 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 165.

58 Myllykowoski supposes that Q’s framing of divine intervention in the midst of ordinary affairs must refer to a date after the War, around 75 C.E. (“The Social History of Q and the Jewish War,” 199). As noted, it is difficult to understand why Q would have made no mention of these events when they would have worked so well in its argument. Moreover, he provides no evidence that things returned to a definitive state of “ordinariness” by 75 C.E. Fledderman also opts for a date around 75 C.E., but also provides no compelling reason for why Q would have left out unambiguous references to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 157–59).

59 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 167.
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disobedience to God and their punishment continues to show up in later texts, for instance, Mark 12:1–9 and Hebrews 3:16–18, so this does not provide a strong chronological anchor point.

Finally, the compositional process of the document should be considered in dating Q, especially the time required for secondary redaction and tertiary additions. If we allow for a reasonable amount of time between redactional activity, especially given the altered outlook of the authors that is observable between Q¹ and Q², we reach an earlier date for at least the formative stratum. Even taking this into account, Arnal maintains that the compositional date of Q¹, at least, may “no longer determinable,” although “an earlier date, such as the 30s or 40s seems preferable to a later one.” Such an early date has generally been avoided by others, but Q is generally fixed prior to the Jewish War, in the early 60s C.E.

In sum, then, the composition of Q stands somewhere in the early 60s C.E. The document may refer things earlier than the late 30s (such as the socio-economic situation in Galilee under Herod Antipas in the 10s and 20s C.E.), but it speaks of them from a standpoint after which Jesus has died and incorporates them into a theological framework which makes sense of his death and of the contemporary situation of the Q people—that is,

60 It is not always wise to conflate redaction history with social history. The main concern is that this conflation will entail some irresponsible conclusions, such as the suggestion that the Q people did not initially care about the epic history of Israel at the beginning of their movement. This is, of course, illogical reasoning: that Israel’s epic history dominates the redactional material only indicates that Q’s authors found it rhetorically useful at that point. Literary history should not be totally disconnected from social history, though; in the case of Q, the evidence is suggestive that the authors’ social experience changed in some important way from the formative layer to the major redaction, which maps a growing pessimism onto an earlier confidence in the project in Q¹. This interpretation is made very enthusiastically by Mack (“The Kingdom That Didn’t Come”; The Lost Gospel), even though he engages in the intentional, but problematic move of altering Kloppenborg’s literary stratigraphy to fit his own model (The Lost Gospel, 260–61).

61 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 172.

62 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 97–155.
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the framework of Deuteronomistic theology. And although Q probably emerged in a period of social and economic upheaval, it does not show any particular awareness of the specific events of the Jewish War with Rome. Should we be able to fix Q to a specific geographical location, we could begin to ask questions about the way that Q’s authors relate to their specific environment.

6 The Geographical Provenance of Q

Establishing a geographical provenance for Q is equally significant for discerning the authors’ social experience and how this experience could contribute to the presentation of Q. Yet, as with ascertaining a date for Q, this is plagued by a similar paucity of data. Q is not a traditional narrative, and although many locations are mentioned, there is no “homebase” mentioned for either the character of Jesus or for the authors. Moreover, although Q might contain evidence of coherent “schooling” mentality, as suggested by Braun, it cannot be linked to any specific schooling environment or to any specific urban-dwelling literate group. Thus, as with Q’s date, conclusions about its provenance are again related to proving the most likely location to the exclusion of others.

Internal evidence is again the most sensible place to start. Q mentions eight places by name Bethsaida (Q 10:13), Capernaum (Q 7:1, 10:15), Chorazin (Q 10:13), Sidon (Q 10:13–14), Tyre (Q 10:13–14), Jerusalem (Q 4:9; 13:34), Nineveh (Q 11:32), and Sodom (Q


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10:12). Nazareth is also included in the IQP’s reconstruction, but its grammatical form is problematic (Naζαρύ), as is its location in the text. These cities and villages are not, however, of equal likelihood for locating Q, and so we may begin by disqualifying several places. Two cities, Nineveh and Sodom, can be immediately discounted because they were no longer living cities in the first century. Of course, they and the stories from Israelite traditions which they evoke remain essential in the narrative world of Q, in order to underscore the impending judgment that Q imagines (e.g., Q 10:12; 11:29–32; 17:26–27). Yet it is clear that when Q refers to these cities, it banks on their symbolic efficacy to raise the threat of destruction and judgment. The authors could probably not care less about the actual social and economic activities of these defunct settlements.

When it comes to the others, they also tend to function symbolically, even though they were nevertheless “living” settlements in the first century. Both Tyre and Sidon were thriving coastal settlements, and the canonical gospel narratives occasionally picture Jesus travelling there (e.g., Matt 15:21; Mark 7:24). Like Nineveh and Sodom, they, too, are invoked as literary devices, and in this case, their function (as Gentile cities) is to shame “this generation” (Q 10:13–14) and its lack of response to Jesus and the Q people. There is no

65 This discussion is largely dependent on Jonathan L. Reed’s compelling essay on this topic, “The Social Map of Q.” I know of no better and more persuasive treatment of this topic than Reed’s. His starting point uses not only place names but topographical details in Q in order to reconstruct Q’s social map, defined as “a community’s shared symbolic system or spatial and social orientation” (18).


67 Kloppenborg, “City and Wasteland.”

68 Reed, “The Social Map of Q,” 22.
indication that the Q people see themselves as part of those populations, nor does the text suggest any strong familiarity with the locations. Thus, despite the fact that these were “real” cities, they factor in Q only at the rhetorical level.

Jerusalem proves to be more problematic. On one hand, Q is so negative about Jerusalem that it is hard to imagine the authors thinking of themselves as “Jerusalemites.” It is “the focus of unbelief and non-acceptance” and is a “theological death trap” for its rejection of the prophets and the message in Q. Similar to Tyre and Sidon, Jerusalem is largely symbolic; the civic institutions and population of the city of Jerusalem are given no attention. As Reed puts it, Jerusalem in Q is “not merely the capital of Judaea, nor the city perched along the Kidron Valley, nor even that point in Palestine where thirty-one degrees north latitude and thirty-five degrees east longitude intersect”; the references are entirely metaphorical. It appears in the context of the legendary Temptation story, as the site of the Temple (Q 4:9), and it is clearly personified in Q 13:34–35 as an utterly violent and disobedient woman. Although, as with Tyre and Sidon, Jerusalem was a significant political, cultural, and economic influence on Palestine in the first century, Q gives these facets little attention.

The cities treated so far are critical within Q’s rhetoric, but they do not offer any plausible setting in which to think about the production of Q. Jerusalem is not impossible, but Q simply does not treat this city as a place in which it experiences routine activities or familiar faces. The remaining geographical locales are, curiously, all Galilean towns or

70 Reed, “The Social Map of Q,” 18.
The Problem of \(Q\) villages. Nazareth (Na\’zārēθ) can be discounted because, as noted, its place in \(Q\) is difficult to
determine and its grammatical form is so odd.\(^{71}\) Thus remain Bethsaida, Capernaum, and
Chorazin as possibilities. There are some very interesting things about these three Galilean
locations. They are all relatively small towns.\(^{72}\) Moreover, they are relatively obscure when
viewed within the wider context of Palestine. In particular, Chorazin is not mentioned
anywhere else in the Synoptic tradition,\(^{73}\) and \(Q\) mentions it only in passing, without
bothering to explain its significance—social, economic, geographic, or otherwise. Arnal also
points to the “extreme localization of these references,” all “within about 5 km of one
another.”\(^{74}\) To underscore this localization, Arnal contrasts this narrow geographical spread
with the narratives in the canonical gospels, which have Jesus traversing not only Galilee, but
Samaria and Judea. In \(Q\), the actual activity that can be discerned from the scattered narrative
bits is concentrated in this localized setting (especially \(Q\) 7:1, 3, 6b–9, 10). This suggests
both a strong familiarity with Galilean geography, especially around the northern rim of the
lake, and also a fairly intimate knowledge of the local village networks in this region.

Although \(Q\) is not known for restraining itself from criticizing its opponents (“this
generation” \([Q\ 11:29, 51]\), “Pharisees” \([Q\ 11:42–43]\), those coming out to be baptized \([Q\ 145\])

\(^{71}\) The most frequently attested spellings of Nazareth are Na\’zārēt and Na\’zārēθ. Walter Bauer, A Greek-

\(^{72}\) Population estimates vary but are currently much more modest than they once were. Reed estimates
Capernaum’s maximum population to be 1,700 in the time of Jesus (Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus, 62–
99). Chorazin was comparable to Capernaum; Bethsaida, somewhat larger. None of these towns compare in
population size to Sepphoris and Tiberias, which Reed estimates to be between 8,000–12000 and 6,000–12,000,
respectively.

\(^{73}\) Ivan Havener, ed., \(Q: The Sayings of Jesus\) (Good News Studies 19; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier:
1987), 43.

\(^{74}\) Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 160.
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3:7], and others), the Galilean towns receive particularly harsh rhetoric, suggesting that Q’s authors had experienced personal affront or rejection from them. Capernaum, notably, bears the brunt force of this criticism (Q 10:15), being relegated to Hades whereas Bethsaida and Chorazin are not. 75 Coupled with this, the story of the centurion at Capernaum, one of the only real narrative episodes in Q, figures so centrally that it underscores the significance of this town as “perhaps the most attractive single location for the location of the people responsible for Q at both major stages.” 76 So also, Reed writes, “Since the few narrative sections of Q are obviously the work of the Q community and cannot be placed on the historical Jesus’ lips, they present by inference a likely locale for the Q community. Jesus actively ministers only in Galilee, specifically Capernaum.” 77 He emphasizes the likelihood of this locale by noting that if concentric circles were plotted on a map of Palestine, linking all of Q’s place names into a “social map,” Capernaum would be at the center of these circles. 78 Nineveh and Sodom, as mythic and symbolic settlements from Israel’s past, join to make a large ring on Q’s metaphorical horizon. Tyre, Sidon, and Jerusalem, as living but still figurative references in Q, comprise a smaller circle within it. At the center, Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida link to make a tight, central loop. Capernaum’s location in this core ring, in addition to its literary prominence in Q, suggests its centrality.

Whether or not we specify Capernaum as the precise location of the Q people is not of great issue. While it is persuasive, a general Lower Galilean location is very valuable for

75 Reed, “The Social Map of Q,” 22.
76 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 164.
explaining the social experience of Q’s authors. It is possible that the Q people should be located in a city or town which is not named within the document, but that would be pure speculation. The bottom line is that Q’s authors have an intimate familiarity with relatively obscure Galilean towns and do not make a serious claim to any other major city or village.

It should be recognized that these locations appear mostly in Q², not in the formative layer of the document. The significance of this need not be overstated; at the very least, it simply indicates that at the time of Q¹’s composition, it was not important—for whatever reason—for the authors to make any spatial or geographical claims or to cast judgments against any particular settlements. Q’s redactors included these place names because they were integral to the group’s interests at that point in time. That is, it became ideologically and rhetorically useful to invoke mythic cities from the past and contemporary Gentile cities as shaming devices or to pronounce woes on villages that were the sources of rejection.

One problem with locating Q specifically in Galilee is that Q shows no evidence of its two most important towns in this period: Sepphoris and Tiberias. Sepphoris was refounded by Herod Antipas in 4 B.C.E. (Josephus, Ant. 18.27), while Tiberias was built anew circa 20 C.E. (Josephus, Ant. 18.36–38). Unlike the three Galilean villages mentioned in Q, these towns would have had not only much larger populations but also more developed administrative and bureaucratic structures. The lack of references to these cities is a

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79 Lower Galilee, as several have recently argued, was experiencing deliberate efforts at monetization and urbanization during the first part of the first century (see p. 142 n. 63).
81 On the population of Sepphoris and Tiberias, see Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 62–69. Both cities had administrative functions in Lower Galilee; for instance, each was at one time home to the debt archives, which would have required systematic maintenance and accounting to keep up with debt obligations.
somewhat odd, although not insurmountable, problem—indeed many Galilean towns and villages are left out. This absence has not deterred some scholars from suggesting the people responsible for Q were once Tiberian scribes in the employ of the Herodians.\(^82\) It is plausible that if the Q people were employed in these cities or had patrons there, it would be exceptionally unwise to criticize them publically.\(^83\) This, again, is just speculation, and so most scholars conclude that locating Q in the general vicinity of Lower Galilee makes the best sense.

7 Conclusion

The discussions in this chapter have shown that Q is far more than a free-floating collection of sayings from the hazy origins of the Jesus movement. It is a stylized Greek document that stems from Galilee before the war. These observations about Q’s literary characteristics, in turn, narrow the social locations from which the document can originate, a question to which the next chapter turns.

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\(^82\) Rooney and Oakman, “The Social Origins of Q,” 121.

\(^83\) Since Q does not include any reference to these cities, positive or negative, Arnal feels the absence of these names is “hardly indicative” of an origin in either locale (*Jesus and the Village Scribes*, 164).
Chapter 4
Scholarly Opinions of the Q People

1 Introduction

The initial questions about the literary nature of Q and its role in the Two-Document Hypothesis eventually evolved and culminated in the extensive reconstruction with the Critical Edition of Q. The more recent focus has been on the social location out of which Q developed, generating interest in the historical context of first-century Galilee. Even more recently some scholars have built upon these conclusions about the “data” of Q—its literary character, its date, and its geographical provenance—in order to specify the social location of the Q people\(^1\) in ancient Palestinian society.\(^2\) In a review of this scholarly conversation in 1993, Kloppenborg identified four major facets of recent socio-historical descriptions of the Q people: (1) radicalism and itinerancy\(^3\), (2) the role of “sympathizers”, (3) the Cynic hypothesis, and (4) local renewal, local resistance.\(^4\) These dimensions are related to one

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\(^1\) Most proposals for the authors of Q consider them in the plural instead of just a solitary individual speaking to/for a community. This seems to be the best tactic, given that Q quite clearly has a group mentality in that it imagines a constituency loyal to the movement against outsiders.

\(^2\) The early interest in the Q community or group was predominantly theological, as Kloppenborg notes, based largely on “[t]he categories of form criticism, [which] were invoked to produce a description of the ‘community’, mapping the contents of the document onto various ecclesial functions: catechesis, exhortation, mission, polity and discipline, instruction on the last things and so forth” (Kloppenborg, “The Sayings Gospel Q,” 12). The terminology of “community” remains problematic (Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 170–71; Sarah E. Rollens, “Does ‘Q’ Have Any Representative Potential?” MTSR 23.1 [2011]: 64–78).


another in important ways. Radicalism and itinerancy, whether voluntary or involuntary, goes hand in hand with the notion that settled “sympathizers” supported these wandering preachers on their mission. The so-called Cynic hypothesis, in turn, relies strongly on the radical itinerancy model and is thus a subset of it.

In his germinal study *Sociological of the Early Palestinian Jesus Movement*, Gerd Theissen proposed a portrait of the Jesus movement that encompassed the first two facets listed above: radical itinerancy and settled sympathizers. Taking his cue from structural–functionalist sociology, his interest was in analyzing the structure of the movement based on how different roles contributed to its overall success. Based on a rather eclectic use of (mostly) the Synoptic gospels, he concluded that the earliest Christian communities were comprised of three main roles: wandering charismatics, settled householders that were sympathetic to, and hence supported, the charismatics, and the Son of Man/bearer of revelation figure. Wandering charismatics were crucial in his portrait, for they constituted the core of the movement, responsible for spreading Jesus’ message and embodying a radical lifestyle of voluntary homelessness and beggary. It was these wandering charismatics whose lifestyles were preserved in such passages as Q 9:57–10:16 and Q 14:26. Although

5 Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*.


8 Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Theissen built upon Paul Hoffman’s earlier conclusions about Q, especially that the mission charge was central to the ethos of Q (*Studien zur Theologie der Logioenquelle* [Neu testamentliche Abhandlungen Neue Folge 8; Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1972]). Theissen used more than just Q material to support his depiction, but Q sayings are central.

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charismatics and sympathizers existed in a kind of symbiosis, sympathizers were not, according to Theissen, an authentic embodiment of the new Christian ethic, because they were still embedded in Judaism.\(^\text{10}\)

These roles, he admits, did not simply come into being *ex nihilo*. They emerged within the Jesus movement as a response to a variety of factors impacting Roman Palestine such as debt, taxation, peasant exploitation, tensions between the town and countryside, political conflicts with Jerusalem, and conflict with the local Herodian aristocracy, *inter alia*.\(^\text{11}\) The context of the Palestinian Jesus movement is thus stitched together from a number of important issues, although none are given extensive attention in his analysis. Having established this context within which to think about the movement, he proceeds to analyze its function and ask whether or not it was successful. In short, he finds that the movement functioned to help people deal with the “aggression” and “anxiety” which resulted from social, political, and economic conflicts within Palestine. The ethics expressed in Jesus’ teachings redirected these feelings to other figures, reversed them in favour of love and forgiveness, and transferred them to the symbolic level.\(^\text{12}\) Despite these positive functions, however, he concludes that Christianity, conceived of as a renewal movement of Judaism, ultimately failed, because it had too many points of contention with the Jewish tradition which preceded it. Such a message of radicalism, he argues, could only flourish in more cosmopolitan and Hellenistic locales.

\(^{10}\) Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, 8.

\(^{11}\) Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, 31–95.

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Theissen’s thesis has been adapted by others, and mostly notably, put to work to support the so-called Cynic hypothesis. The most enthusiastic and comprehensive treatments of the Cynic hypothesis have been proposed by Burton L. Mack, Leif E. Vaage, and F. Gerald Downing. For instance, in Vaage’s extended analysis in *Galilean Upstarts*, he argues that all major sayings in Q have their closest parallels, not in Jewish wisdom or prophetic sayings, but in Cynic speeches or epistles. For Mack, while there are verbal similarities among Cynic sayings and material attributed to Jesus, what is equally important is the countercultural stance taken toward conventional values and norms. And whereas Downing started from observations about Q’s generic affinities with “lives” of Cynic philosophers, he ultimately became convinced that the issue was one of direct influence: Cynicism was reflected in the Jesus tradition because its tradents were strongly influenced by Cynics or deliberately styled themselves as such. These portraits have all built on Theissen’s original proposal, because they envision the earliest Jesus movement as a “radical” movement promoting unconventional ethics and an alternative lifestyle. What is more, in this comparative process, Mack and Vaage tried to match the Cynic hypothesis to a particular model of social history of the Jesus movement in Q, which they, in turn, tried to fit

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14 Vaage, *Galilean Upstarts*.  
16 Downing, “Quite Like Q,” 222.
with Q’s compositional history. They presumed that the earliest material in the tradition was Cynic-like and so made Q’s compositional history reflect that presumption.

While Theissen’s proposal represents one of the first thorough-going attempts to incorporate sociology into study of earliest Christianity, it was based on a particular assumption about literary history correlating to social history. That is, it presumes that sayings were only preserved in the tradition because they reflected the social reality that they purported to describe. Theissen never entertains the notion that depictions of “radical” ethics, such as loving one’s enemy or offering endless forgiveness, could be idealizations which were never expressed in reality.

There are, however, even more damning critiques. A decade after Theissen’s study, Horsley published Sociology and the Jesus Movement, which challenged nearly every dimension of Theissen’s proposal. Horsley began by charging that Theissen had deployed a number of categories such as “Judaism” and “society” as if they were self-evident. By relying on these nebulous categories, Horsley maintained that the resulting context that Theissen constructs for the Jesus movement is vague and poorly construed. Moreover, the functionalist approach, once vogue in sociology, underestimates the seriousness of social and political conflict or tries to view this conflict solely for its positive contribution to the development of a particular society. Theissen, unfortunately, had simply assumed that the functionalist approach was suitable for this analysis. Contra functionalism, Horsley is

18 Horsley, Sociology and the Jesus Movement, 30–42.
19 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 69.
correct to point out important socio-economic inequalities and conflicts in this setting: whose Judaism, whose society, and who benefits from whatever supposed function we are talking about matter a great deal for the analysis. In addition, the textual evidence which supposedly supports the existence of wandering charismatics is ambiguous, at best. To take just one example, the passage on hating the family (Q 14:26) does not automatically imply that the community was comprised of people who had literally abandoned their families. Most would agree that this passage works at the metaphorical level and concerns the absolute commitment of potential followers to the Jesus movement. Moreover, some of the primary evidence for itinerancy, namely, Q 10:2–16, is framed from the perspective of those who are settled, not charismatic itinerants, and thus we have no way of knowing if actual itinerants are in view or if this is just a construct of the group. At the very least, this realization suggests that proponents of radical itinerancy have largely ignored compositional questions in their efforts to construct a bi-partite movement of itinerants and sympathizers.

20 Horsley, Sociology and the Jesus Movement, 37, 69–70.
21 Horsley, Sociology and the Jesus Movement, 44.
22 Dieter Zeller, “Redaktionsprozesse und wechselnder ‘Sitz im Leben’ beim Q-Material,” in Logia: Les paroles de Jésus—The Sayings of Jesus: Mémorial Joseph Coppens (ed. Joël Delobel; BETL 59; Louvain: Peeters; Louvain University Press, 1982), 395–409, here 404; Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, 193. The qualifier “charismatic,” indebted to Weber, is also odd; not only does Theissen fail to explain what exactly charismatic is meant to imply, but he uses it freely “in a psychological manner, implying some sort of personal endowment” (Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 182). So also, Theissen’s use of charisma is “a vague and theologically resonant category” (Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 70).
23 In addition, the apparent multiple audience in the mission discourse (esp. 10:2 and 10:3), even if they are fictive, suggests there is already in Q a highly stylized and deliberate collection of sayings that needs not be a direct reflection of any specific community activity (Kloppenborg, “The Sayings Gospel Q,” 17–18).
Not only is Theissen’s starting point weak and his data problematic, his overall methodology has serious drawbacks, and in particular, the reading of wandering charismatics into the earliest Synoptic traditions and the Didache was based on ambiguous textual evidence, contested readings, circular reasoning, and problematic application of sociological theories. Arnal, for instance, points out that a prior assumption about itinerancy seems to dictate Theissen’s portrait. The prior assumption, he suspects, comes from the so-called mission charge itself (Q 9:57–10:16), a passage which offers almost no specific details about travel or lifestyle, leading Arnal to wonder if “the details of this lifestyle stem in fact from Theissen’s imagination.” Moreover, he finds that the itinerancy hypothesis is “romantic without being realistic.” No one has been able—or even tried—to explain how the relationship between wandering charismatics and settled supporters would have played out;


26 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 69.

27 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 71. He follows up with an extensive list of questions that need to be answered before this proposal should be considered viable:

[What kinds of circumstances would have made itinerancy possible or impossible, plausible or implausible for the itinerants in the concrete context of first-century Galilee? Does the geography and demography of the area imply the possibility or likelihood of extended travels? Would these travels have involved longer or shorter distances? What kinds of technology would have been necessary for such travels? Would the itinerants have required and used sandals, and walked by foot, or would they have traveled with pack animals? Did such travelers attach themselves to other parties on the road? Or would the distances involved have been so negligible as to make all of these considerations superfluous? If the itinerant carried no provisions with them, what did they eat while on the road? Were they dependent for hospitality in transit as well as when they arrived at a given destination? Would the authorities, local, Herodian, or Roman, have permitted the behavior that Theissen describes? Would Cynic-like figures have been tolerated in such an environment? Where and how did these characters propagate their message: houses, village squares, marketplaces? He continues with a series of questions concerning how settled people would have received these itinerants, but I think the point is clear.

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they have merely described it, loosely configuring various passages from the Synoptic gospels to support the picture. Draper likewise takes issue with Theissen’s proposal on a methodological level. He notes how Theissen’s sociological imagination is deeply indebted to Weber, although in a rather undisciplined fashion. For instance, although “charisma” features heavily in his portrait, he never outlines how this charisma and the authority it fosters is legitimated or sustained.\(^{28}\) Weber was also quite clear that charisma was ultimately \textit{routinized} for the survival of the tradition, but as Draper points out, Theissen does not really “envisage ritualized begging as a right of successors of the charismatic leader.”\(^{29}\) On the contrary, it is fairly clear that local, settled groups eventually became loci for the Jesus movement, especially as reflected in Paul’s letter and Acts, and so no itinerant activity was ever routinized in any systematic way.\(^{30}\) Moreover, the likelihood of charismatic preachers adopting voluntary homelessness and relying on economic support from settled villagers seems to have little basis in reality.\(^{31}\) Finally, when it comes to textual support for this picture, Draper, like Horsley, finds it to be lacking; the \textit{Didache}, in particular, says nothing about “wandering” or “charismatic” apostles.\(^{32}\)

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Draper, “Wandering Charismatics and Scholarly Circularities,” 36.\(^{28}\)
\item Draper, “Wandering Charismatics and Scholarly Circularities,” 38.\(^{29}\)
\item Paul himself might be a mobile figure, but almost everyone with whom he interacts, whether it is in Jerusalem or elsewhere, appears to be settled and he certainly does not adopt a lifestyle of homelessness or beggary.\(^{30}\)
\item Kloppenborg, “The Sayings Gospel Q,” 22; Arnal, \textit{Jesus and the Village Scribes}, 70–72.\(^{31}\)
\item Draper, “Wandering Charismatics and Scholarly Circularities,” 41. Draper notes that the prophets seem to be characterized as charismatic, but Theissen seems to conflate the \textit{Didache}’s treatment of apostles and prophets (44).\(^{32}\)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
These trenchant critiques, coupled with the realization that itinerancy in such a small region as lower Galilee was nothing akin to itinerancy in Syria or Asia, virtually rules out the utility of this model for thinking seriously about the social location and experience of the Q people. The adaptations of it by Mack and Vaage, moreover, rely on overt alterations of Q’s stratigraphy, even though this stratigraphy was originally based not on a particular understanding of the earliest Jesus movement, but on literary observations. To tweak the stratigraphy to match presumptions about social history of the group is methodologically problematic.

In general, the Cynic hypothesis has received a lukewarm reception, as well, in large part because the scholarly discussion focused on whether or not the Q people should properly be identified as Cynics, which has affected how this proposal has been explored. On one hand, some such as Downing have focused on solely on the issue of genealogy and direct influence (that is, the earliest Christians should be described as Cynics or they were directly influenced by them). This way of viewing the analysis has been especially attractive to critics of the Cynic proposal, since it allows them to discount the hypothesis once a genealogical connection between Cynicism and the Jesus tradition is acknowledged to be weak. On the other hand, others, such as Mack and Vaage (although Vaage occasionally slips into a genealogical argument by asking whether or not there were Cynics in Galilee) have explored the analogical comparison, which examines Cynic writings alongside the Jesus tradition and

33 Kloppenborg (“The Sayings Gospel Q,” 22) notes that in the geographically constrained region of Lower Galilee, itinerancy “would have looked more like morning walks.”

34 See pp. 129–30 n. 32.

tries to explain similarities in discourse. Unfortunately, many scholars balked at the Cynic proposal in any incarnation, because it entailed many theological difficulties when it was applied to Christian beginnings. In any case, while the analogy is interesting and probably deserves much closer attention, the explanatory power of the Cynic hypothesis has not yet been convincing. As Arnal reminds us, “Cynic” is not a social location, but a kind of discourse in which different social locations can participate, and thus, describing Q’s rhetoric with an appeal to it tells us little about the authors’ social experience.

At this point, two major hypotheses remain: (1) the Q people were a group of prophetic performers advocating a program to renew local village communities based on ancient Israelite ethics; and (2) the Q people were (or had formerly been) low-level scribes whose recent displacement and rejection in Galilean villages is reflected in much of Q’s rhetoric. When Kloppenborg wrote the review of recent opinions in 1993, Horsley had only outlined the first hypothesis in a handful of publications; now it is a key feature of his scholarly repertoire and in his opinion, is at the root of the entire Jesus movement, not just Q. And whereas Kloppenborg had cautiously proposed that the Q people were village scribes, this has now been explored at length in at least one monograph, Arnal’s *Jesus and* 

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37 Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, 58.

38 For example, Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*; idem, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*; idem, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee*; idem, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance*; idem, *Jesus in Context*; idem, *Covenant Economics*; idem, ed., *Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q* (Semeia 60; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); idem, *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant, and the Hope of the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011); Horsley with Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me*. As noted, he has also begun to focus on scribal figures who produced apocalyptic texts of resistance (*Revolt of the Scribes*), but this is difficult to reconcile with his depiction of the Jesus movement (see p. 182 n. 110).
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the Village Scribes. There are other, more general proposals, such as identifying Q’s authors (and audience) as “gentile Christians,” but these sorts of labels tell us very little about the social experience, technical capacities, and motivations of this authors. Because this project questions how the Q people related to actual socially and economically marginal people in their historical context, collectively understood by the heuristic category “peasantry,” it is necessary to evaluate the strength of these remaining two proposals before trying to undertake that question.

2 Prophetic Performers

The idea that the Q group consisted of prophetic performers of an overtly Israelite body of popular tradition was first put forth by Richard A. Horsley. Versions of this theory have appeared in a number of publications, but most thoroughly argued in a collection of essays (some authored by Jonathan A. Draper) entitled Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q. In several of these essays, he contends that the Q people deliberately modeled their activities on the careers of the past prophets of Israel and viewed themselves as continuous with this tradition. The social criticism in Q, which expresses popular sentiments of the native Galilean population, as opposed to the elite form of the tradition centered in Jerusalem, amounts to a form of social and political resistance, which is rooted in ideals assumed to have been held since the emergence of the Mosaic covenant.

39 It will also be tested extensively against documentary papyri in Bazzana’s forthcoming Kingdom and Bureaucracy.

40 Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 163–66.

41 Different forms of this argument appear in a number of Horsley’s works. The arguments tend to revolve around one basic premise: the Jesus movement expressed social and economic ideals of the ancient Israelite
The Jesus movement in Q, moreover, has the same characteristics as the one behind the Gospel of Mark. Horsley’s proposal is in direct opposition to the radicalism and itinerancy model, which he rejects in numerous publications. Rather than disconnecting from traditional societal norms and values as the itinerancy model does, Horsley sees the Jesus movement renewing and rejuvenating them in local communities as a response to outside political and economic pressure.

According to Horsley, the performance of the speeches in Q amount to a renewal of the Israelite covenant. In particular, Q 6:20–49 is a tightly knit discourse which renews the Israelite covenant, and the “most obviously covenantal contents” of this collection come in Q 6:27–36. He is skeptical of any interpretation of this discourse which emphasizes its “sapiential” character as opposed to its “covenantal or prophetic” character. This reconstruction requires heavy emphasis on the prophetic dimension of Q, so Horsley leans strongly on passages which have overtly prophetic contents or contain conceptual parallels to such texts as Jeremiah or the Lives of the Prophets.

period, which was fundamentally opposed to the socio-economic structure of Palestine under Roman domination.

42 Horsley, Sociology and the Jesus Movement; more recently, see Horsley, “Jesus Movements and the Renewal of Israel,” 23–46.

43 Most stridently, Horsley, Sociology and the Jesus Movement, 30–64.


The renewal of the Mosaic covenant is not only proposed in ethical maxims or prophetic criticism in Q; it is also imagined in the conceptual domain “the kingdom of God.”

The kingdom of God, for Horsley, refers to the expression of this renewal program and the rejuvenation of rural villages in the face of those who would oppress or exploit them, and it is the “principal, unifying theme of the whole document.” It is also “the focus of Q discourses as well as the comprehensive agenda for preaching, practice, and purpose in Q.”

Q 11:2–4, is a petition “to effect the kingdom by providing the most concrete concerns for the villagers.” In the absence of these necessities, Q 12:22–32 reassures the hearers and encourages them “to focus single-mindedly on the ‘kingdom of God,’ which symbolizes the renewal of Israel precisely in its social form, the village community.” So whereas others have viewed Q’s concept of the kingdom of God as a rhetorical device that need not refer to anything outside the text, Horsley seems to claim that the kingdom achieved tangible expression in the renewed socio-economic solidarity of the Israelite villages.


49 Horsley, “The Kingdom of God as the Renewal of Israel,” 269–70.

Q’s mission speech (9:57–10:16), he also contends, supports the picture of a group of prophetic performers encouraging their movement to spread. Previous models that have stressed the individual itinerant or disciple behind the mission speech are flawed, because they import a modern, individualized interpretation into the picture.\(^{51}\) Although the passage is ostensibly about sending out envoys to preach and heal, the mission speech is better interpreted as the commissioning of a prophetic mission. It is introduced by Q 9:57–62, which alludes to “Elijah’s commissioning of Elisha for prophetic mission for the restoration of Israel,” a reference which ought to control the interpretation of the following material in the mission speech.\(^{52}\) While Q never actually mentions either figure, Horsley reckons that the audience would have connected this account with the call of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19–21 on the basis of the similar request to fulfill family obligations before serving and the shared vocabulary of plowing (τὸ ἀρωτρὸν in Q; ἀροτριάω [related to ἄρω] in 1 Kings). This introduction “placed the mission squarely in the Israelite tradition of popular prophetic movements of renewal of village Israel over against the oppressive rulers taking their cues from foreign rulers.”\(^{53}\)

It is critical to note that the strongest evidence for the interpretation of the mission speech as a prophetic commissioning comes in Q 9:61–62, a passage whose presence in Q is contested. Horsley argues for its presence in Q, but the \emph{CEQ} does not include it. If Horsley is correct that this passage was included in Q and that the entire unit would have evoked the

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\(^{52}\) Horsley, “Prophetic Envoys for the Renewal of Israel,” 234.

\(^{53}\) Horsley, “Prophetic Envoys for the Renewal of Israel,” 249.
call of Elisha in the audience, this strengthens Horsley’s reading of Q. Elijah and Elisha were clearly important prophets in the Israelite tradition—whether they were uniquely “Northern” is a debated question (more below). This would mean that the call to follow Jesus in Q deliberately frames the activities along the lines of Israel’s prophets. Horsley also points to an allusion to Moses (Q 11:20) “by the finger of God” to strengthen the connection to the Mosaic covenant.54 Thus, by embodying the popular Israelite tradition and advocating resistance to oppressive leaders, the people behind Q become prophetic preachers just like Elijah and Elisha. For Horsley, then, Q reflects a Jesus movement in which “[the] mission and the workers involved in it were understood in prophetic terms, a prophetic extension of Jesus’ own prophetic mission by a prophetic movement.”55

The prophetic character of Q’s discourse is supported even more by the thoroughgoing theme of refusal to repent on the part of the imagined addressees. The refusal to repent or respond appears in a number of places, such as the woes against Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum (10:13–15) and the lament over Jerusalem (13:34–35). This evidence leads Horsley to conclude that Q deliberately adopts a prophetic mode of speech in order to criticize the current form of Israelite society and to argue for a return to restored Israel that reflects a former golden age before decline. This golden age is based in ancient Israelite tradition and envisions a society in which social and economic exploitation did not occur, and the villagers fostered mutual support for each other. By situating their critique

55 Horsley, “Prophetic Envoys for the Renewal of Israel,” 248, emphasis mine.
within a narrative of Israel’s epic history, the prophetic identity of the Q people is further underscored.

A significant part of Horsley’s reconstruction of the Q people involves the oral performance of the material in Q, such that he regards Q as organized into distinct speeches, readymade for recital. These speeches must be orally performed in order to have the intended effects, whether that was to periodically renew the covenant or to facilitate the expansion of the movement by rehearsing the mission discourse. To be clear, Horsley argues for regular performance of Q: the performance “in the presence of a group of people constituted those people as a renewed covenantal community” which was “acting as a part of a wider movement of the renewal of Israel.”

Evidence for the performance of Q, he maintains, is located within the text itself. For one, Q uses performative language: “‘Behold, I send you’ constitutes sending. ‘Woe to you’ declares the curse. ‘Whoever hears you hears me’ proclaims and actualizes the authority of the envoy’s proclamation as Jesus’ and even God’s proclamation.” When Jesus and other performers recited the speeches, they were “enacting the role of the new Moses in delivering the covenant renewal discourse.” Moreover, such speeches as Q 6:20–49 easily break down into identifiable stanzas made up of measured verses. This is suggested to Horsley both by the English and Greek versions of Q. The parallel constructions of the verses and the repetitive sounds are typical features of oral

56 Horsley, “The Kingdom of God as the Renewal of Israel,” 260.
57 Horsley, “Prophetic Envoys for the Renewal of Israel,” 234.
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This oral performance would have been addressed to the populace at large, for he assumes that “Q consisted of discourses addressed to ordinary people” and was “not simply a device for preservation of Jesus-sayings.” Thus, the final reconstruction of the Q people uses Q as a direct window to live performances of its speeches. These performances, moreover, only make sense against the backdrop of social inequality and economic exploitation that Horsley and others have found to be rife within ancient Galilee and Judea.

What gives the model of prophetic performers an interesting twist is that Horsley situates it within a wider a peasant movement, building on James C. Scott’s Moral Economy of the Peasant, which we may review briefly. According to Scott, peasants tend to develop a moral economy based on their own definition of socio-economic justice, which often responds to the injustice that peasants experienced from more powerful figures outside the community. Peasant communities tended to be oriented toward subsistence production, which guarantees a minimum standard of living for everyone in the community. Unfortunately, colonial and other exploitative practices generally violate the precepts of the moral economy of the peasant. Scott maintains that scholars should examine the genesis of peasant revolts on the basis of the internal moral economy of the peasant community and its violation, not the external factors of economic production, debt, and the like. Although factors differ from region to region such that it is difficult to predict when an outright peasant revolt will result, some factors, such as state repression, correlate strongly with the outbreaks


of peasant revolts. Moreover, an economically undifferentiated peasant community is more likely to revolt, not only because all members are prone to feel socio-economic disruptions at the same time, but also because it is easier for them to organize.\(^\text{62}\)

These observations, Horsley contends, can be directly applied to the context of Q to gain insight into the people behind the text.\(^\text{63}\) For one, the moral economy of the ancient Israelites is reflected with the Mosaic covenant in the Hebrew Bible, which is in turn presupposed in the many allusions and references to Israelite tradition in Q. The speeches in Q “articulate the concerns of the moral economy of the peasantry rooted in the Mosaic covenant.”\(^\text{64}\) Q 6:20–49, which renews the covenant according to Horsley, is one of the most obvious expressions of the moral economy of the Israelite peasantry because it “focuses on local economic relations that are disintegrating into mutual hostility.”\(^\text{65}\) The solutions reflect precisely the moral economy that Scott identified in so many peasant communities. Concerns for the basic subsistence ideals are also found in Q 11:2–4, 9–13 and Q 12:22–31. These speeches embody the popular Israelite tradition, based in the Mosaic covenant, as opposed to the official “Great Tradition” produced by the priests and other Jewish leaders. This terminology is taken over from Scott’s development of Redfield’s work on Great and Little traditions, which drew a distinction between the official version of a cultural tradition (often

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\(^{62}\) Horsley, “Moral Economy and Renewal Movement in Q,” 144–47.

\(^{63}\) Horsley, “Moral Economy and Renewal Movement in Q,” 144.

\(^{64}\) Horsley, “Moral Economy and Renewal Movement in Q,” 149.

\(^{65}\) Horsley, “Moral Economy and Renewal Movement in Q,” 149.
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religion) and the popular version, which may mirror aspects of the former but often reworks it in such a way as to appeal to and include non-elites.  

Horsley’s overall reconstruction of the Q people is strongly connected to his assertion that the population of Galilee was fundamentally different than that of Judaea in the first century, and that the former is continuous with the Northern Israelite population prior to the Assyrian conquest in 722 B.C.E. Despite the fact that archaeological evidence suggests habitation in Galilee drastically dropped after the Assyrian conquest, Horsley finds it difficult to believe that the entire population was destroyed or deported, and he cites a few references to show that the Assyrians still placed administrative posts to control the region. Thus, it is more likely, he argues, that a small peasant population remained in Galilee and was relatively disconnected from the Judaean population in the South. When the vast majority of the Judaean population was taken into exile to Babylon in the 6th century B.C.E., the rupture between the two populations was even more defined. Those who remained in Galilee were descendants from Northern Israelites tribes, and thus their popular tradition reflected figures who were important in that locale (e.g., Elijah and Jonah). It is this background, Horsley maintains, against which we must read Q.

67 Analyses of pottery remains show that Lower Galilee was largely uninhabited for nearly a century after the conquest (Zvi Gal, Lower Galilee during the Iron Age [trans. Marcia Reines Josephy; Dissertation series, American Scholars of Oriental Research 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992], 79–83). There appears to have been gradual resettlement thereafter, which drastically picks up, coinciding with the Hasmonean expansion during the 2nd c. B.C.E. See also, Mordechai Avi’am, Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee: 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys: Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods (Land of Galilee; Vol. 1; University of Rochester Press, 2004).
There are a number of interrelated issues that need to be clarified before assessing this portrait of Q’s authors. First, Horsley’s argument concerns the production of Q as it stems from prophetic performers, and in focusing solely on its production in an oral context, he overlooks important literary features of the text. In fact, Horsley rejects any compositional model for Q, which allows him to imagine the text as a unified script for performances, from which small speech units can be extracted for impromptu recitation. Second, there is a socio-historical argument about the respective cultural and ethnic identities of Galilee and Judaea, but as I show momentarily, the stark regional distinction he wants to make is based on a misreading of archaeological evidence and problematic assumptions about cultural continuity. Third, the “Northern Israelite” popular tradition, made to represent as a “Little” tradition on Scott’s model, is used to support the oral performance and production of Q.

Few scholars would contest Horsley’s argument that Q does indeed participate in and draw upon Israelite prophetic discourse; this is almost a tautological conclusion given the content of Q. Moreover, certainly many of Q’s formal units could be described as prophetic discourse, such as the woes (Q 10:13–15; 11:39–44, 46–48), and the laments over wisdom (Q 13:34–35) and the rejected prophets (Q 11:49–51); even if they are not prophetic sayings on form-critical grounds, their content often refers to prophetic themes (judgment, disobedience, rejection, etc.). And the many references and allusions to Northern Israelite figures and locations are relatively clear, especially if Q 9:61–62 is included in the


70 Redaction critics differ on how precisely Q’s prophetic material was incorporated into the overall composition. For example, Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q; Sato, Q und Prophetie; Dieter Lührmann, Die Redaktion der Logienquelle (WMANT 33; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969). Horsley relies on none of these compositional models and is skeptical of their conclusions.
reconstruction of Q. Furthermore, Horsley’s reconstruction of the Q people, as continuous with a popular Northern Israelite tradition, stands to make some sense about why Q’s authors were particularly upset with Jerusalem and the Temple apparatus. According to Horsley, the religious and political authority in Galilee had been isolated from that in Judaea for centuries, and the new attempts to bring Galilee into the sphere of Jerusalem were the source of great resentment.

Despite this, however, there remain a number of problems with constructing a group of prophetic preachers lying behind the text of Q. For one, Q may share many affinities with prophetic discourse in other texts, but it is not a prophetic book. Indeed, it lacks one of the most important prophetic speech forms: the direct speech of God. On the contrary, parts of Q more closely conform to the ancient instructional genre or ancient sayings collections. And even when prophetic literary forms enter the picture, they are subordinated to wisdom forms, whose main function is persuasion not judgment. That a text uses prophetic figures does not necessarily make it a prophetic text; Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sira, for instance, mention prophetic figures. Furthermore, prophetic critique as a literary form is the product of

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72 Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, 36.

73 Even Sato, who argued that Q’s genre is best understood as a prophetic book (Q und Prophetie), could only do so by excluding such passages as the Parable of the Great Banquet and the Parable of the Entrusted Money, because they did not conform to prophetic speech forms or functions (Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 136–43, esp. 141).

74 Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 141–43; cf. Piper, Wisdom in the Q-Tradition.
learned elites or semi-elites, not peasant villagers arguing for the renewal of their society.

Horsley may think his reconstruction immune from this criticism, because he has argued that Q represents a popular, oral performance, instead of a written document produced by elites, but this is unpersuasive—his oral script is derived from the reconstructed text of Q. Thus, Horsley still ends up with the problem of having to relate a relatively elite literary product to peasant villagers. And even when it comes to the moral economy in the Hebrew Bible texts, which are supposedly “more compelling”\(^{75}\) for understanding this economic system, Horsley never explains why it is that the “moral economy” of the ancient Israelite came to be preserved in elite literary products. More recently, Horsley has begun to focus on Judaean scribes who authored apocalyptic texts as forms of political resistance,\(^{76}\) but this, too, is a form of communication disconnected from local village performances. Moreover, it is unclear why he thinks the popular resistance in Q must take oral form, while it is perfectly reasonable for him to imagine resistance taking written form in apocalyptic texts.

As Rooney and Oakman point out, there is simply no evidence for the oral performances that Horsley imagines.\(^{77}\) Indeed, the models of oral tradition on which Horsley builds his analysis concern “pre-state societies lacking extensive writing in the service of political elites,”\(^{78}\) unlike the elaborate system of administration that facilitated the expansive Roman Empire. Furthermore, formal features that supposedly make Q a transcript of an oral

\(^{75}\) Horsley, “Moral Economy and Renewal Movement in Q,” 147.

\(^{76}\) Horsley, Revolt of the Scribes, 8–14.


performance (stanzas, repetitive patterns, and the like) are not convincing;\textsuperscript{79} the
“performative language,” such as woes and curses, are not unique to oral performance—they
exist, after all, in the written texts of the New Testament. These formal features, we should
also note, are based on the \textit{Greek} reconstruction of Q, and it is unclear how the oral
performance of a Greek text should be imagined to occur in predominantly Aramaic-
speaking village communities of Galilee. Horsley offers no compelling case for how a highly
stylized Greek composition would have been received by Aramaic-speaking villagers.

Relatedly, the village renewal that the prophetic performers champion likely has no
basis in reality. That \textit{ideals} of reciprocity exist in the Mosaic covenant is no indication that
they accurately reflect the actual practices of ancient Israelite society.\textsuperscript{80} In fact, one could
make the exact opposite argument: the need to codify these ideals in the ancient Israelite
tradition probably reflects a situation in which they were \textit{not} practiced. Furthermore, the fact
that these sentiments appear in a \textit{written} code, may reflect, as many other elite literary
products do, the values of a small segment of society. And often, there is reason to think that
those values are so strongly idealized that they may bear little semblance to reality.\textsuperscript{81}

Horsley’s contention that the Galilean population was fundamentally different than
the Judaean one has not been well-received, based as it is on a mistaken assumption about
what happened in Galilee after the Assyrian conquest. Admittedly, there must have been


\textsuperscript{80} Boer, “The Actuality of Karl Kautsky,” 40.6–40.16.

\textsuperscript{81} An excellent example of this phenomenon is discussed in John D’Arms’ \textit{Commerce and Social Standing in
Ancient Rome} (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1981). Contrary to elite Roman rhetoric and even legal
proscriptions against engaging in many forms of commercial activity in the late Republic and early Empire,
D’Arms finds that wealthy Romans found many loopholes which enabled them to indirectly engage in and
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some regional differences between Galilee and Judaea in the first century, but Reed convincingly demonstrates that it is very unlikely that the population of first-century Galilee is somehow genealogically continuous with the Israelite population that lived there in the 8th century B.C.E. Reed, Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus, 23–61; idem, “Galileans, ‘Israelite Village Communities,’ and the Sayings Gospel Q,” in Galilee Through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures (ed. Eric M. Meyers; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 87–108.

Archaeological remains tell a different story: the settlements in Galilee, for all intents and purposes, died out after the Assyrian conquest, and only begin to re-emerge in the Hellenistic period, with the strongest growth coinciding with the Hasmonean expansion. As for the content of Q, there does not seem to be any good reason to differentiate its content as “North Israelite” as opposed to simply Jewish. Reed does admit that Q contains many instances of what might be deemed “Northern or Israelite traditions,” especially prophetic imagery. This is, however, not a “revival” of these traditions. On the contrary, these references:

represent one particular Galilean community’s carefully crafted epic imagination to locate themselves on their social map. They pictures themselves in the role of prophets proclaiming new rules for social intercourse, family structures, and personal relationships…. The Q community linked itself with the Northern prophets, but we

82 See p. 167 n. 67, which explains Zvi Gal’s pottery analysis of Lower Galilee in this period. Gal could find no evidence for pottery in Lower Galilee in the period after Assyrian conquest, but it starts to reappear again in the Persian period and later. This is confirmed by recent excavations at Bethsaida, where there is pottery before the Assyrian conquest but it completely disappears when they arrive, only gradually returning in the Hellenistic period. The extent of the destruction during the conquest is also evident at Bethsaida, where many “clinkers” have been found. Clinkers are “slugs of basalt, mud-brick or plaster, pottery, and even metal fused together by the intense heat of a fire with a temperature of at least 1,000 to 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit” (John T. Greene, “Tiglath-pileser III’s War Against the City of Tzer,” in Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee [Vol. 3; eds. Rami Arav and Richard A. Freund; Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2004], 63–82, here 79 n. 3). Because clinkers require such extreme heat to produce them, they likely result from the use of an accelerant during a determined and deliberate military campaign.


should not confuse their imagined origins with reality. In that sense, how they imagined themselves was not why they were.  

Thus, the need to make an actual, historical connection between the people behind Q and pre-Assyrian conquest Israelites, à la Horsley, is not cogent.

Horsley’s interest in connecting first-century Galilee to the Northern Israelite population may be tied to his need to expose essential cultural differences between the population of Galilee and that of Judaea, which in turn serves his model setting of the Little (popular Galilean) tradition in opposition to the Great (elite Judaean) tradition. He has been keen to emphasize that the fractures in Israelite society were between the “taxers” (i.e., the Judaean elites and Romans) and the “taxed”—the entire population of Galilee and the Q people are imported into the latter category of this mould. But this would mean that Q somehow came to represent the interests of all Galileans and that their worldview would have been “typically Galilean” during this period. Given the text’s noteworthy hostility within its own context (esp. toward Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and more generally toward

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85 Reed, “Galilean, ‘Israelite Village Communities,’” 107, emphasis mine.

86 This model has also been served by his characterization of Galilee as having a culture of resistance, especially through forms of social banditry and other popular movements (see especially, Richard A. Horsley, “Josephus and the Bandits,” Journal for the Study of Judaism 10 [1979]: 37–63; idem and John S. Hanson, Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus [Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985]). However, Kloppenborg shows that the amorphous category of “social banditry” is made to encompass a number of different things, and to paint them all with the same brush of “social banditry” exaggerates the evidence and conflates different phenomena (“Unsocial Bandits,” in A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Sean Freyne [eds. Zuleika Rogers with Margaret Daly-Denton and Anne Fitzpatrick McKinley; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009], 451–84). See also, Anton Blok, “The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 14.4 (1972): 494–503. Blok questions the way that Eric J. Hobsbawn originally conceived of bandits in Bandits (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

87 Just as problematic, it appears that methodologically, Horsley has started with this model of social history, which emphasizes popular forms of resistance as well as periodic covenant renewal, and made Q fit within it, instead of taking Q on its own terms, both socially and compositionally, and seeking a model to account for it.
“this generation”), this connection seems questionable. If anything, the Q group is at odds with the local population within which it is embedded, leading to repeated experiences of local rejection. Incidentally, the Great and Little tradition explanation of cultural differences would still be compelling without trying to construct a culturally distinct Galilean population that was genetically tied to the population that existed prior to the Assyrian conquest. It could be employed by arguing (à la Reed) that although both Galileans and Judeans have a similar cultural heritage, it was ideologically useful for the Q people to deploy Northern Israelite traditions such as the Jonah narrative and the Elijah/Elisha stories for their text. This “cultural stock” provided readymade vessels to voice criticism of people who would reject them. They need not invent new figures, nor even capitalize on the rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem—Israeli traditions provided suitable prototypes.

The notion of the Q people as prophet performers makes very little sense of the “data” of Q that was outlined in the previous chapter. As noted above, Q bears the marks of a text originally written in Greek. It is rather difficult to imagine the Q people performing these sorts of speeches—in Greek—for an audience. If Q is indeed a transcript of a set of performances, we would need to account for an audience that could understand it, a situation not impossible for ancient Galilee (for certainly there were Galileans with Greek language facility), but it does not work well on Horsley’s model. Additionally, Horsley’s reconstruction makes no attempt to account for the great literary competency that the Q people appear to have possessed. Clearly, they were familiar with sapiential and prophetic

89 Greek was certainly not unknown in Galilee, but the most common spoken language would have been Aramaic. Therefore, Q as a Greek text puts us in touch with discourse that would probably not be on the lips of most of the peasantry.
literature, and even some forms of composition evident in documentary papyri (see below). Considering Piper and others’ analyses of Q’s rhetorical argumentation, one must reckon with the literary sophistication in the document, which is often structured in such a way that would be difficult to imagine it in a spontaneous, popular performance. Indeed, much of Q’s theological coherence rests with the structure of the document, especially evidence of redaction at key points in the text. Moreover, Q’s redaction cannot be accounted for by the amalgamation of oral discourse—on the contrary, the redaction appears to impose a deliberate organization on a formative body of tradition. These are characteristics of a literary document. And of course, as explained in the previous chapter, the extent of the verbal agreement in the double tradition make it obvious that Matthew and Luke consulted a written document.

As with the “Cynic” label, “prophet” is not a sociological (still less a compositional/literary) category, and thus is not analytically useful for determining the social location of the Q people. Moreover, it is the insider language of religious discourse and does not offer any information about the social experience of the people to whom it is applied. To say that the Q people were prophetic preachers simply accepts their identity at their word within the document. In other words, Q no doubt presents its authors and their mission as continuous with Israel’s prophet of old, yet for scholars to simply accept this as

90 For example, the various instructions on and encouragement about spreading Q’s message and in 9:57–11:13 are buttressed by a collection of “consequences” which would result from failure to receive the message positively, especially Q 11:21–32.

91 Since Lührmann’s recognition of redactional and organizational features of Q (Die Redaktion der Logienquelle), it has been clear to most that Q has characteristics of literary texts.

92 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 58. “Prophet” may be a role that one can adopt in a particular context, but it should not be used as self-evident for academic analysis.
the proper social description of the authors evinces poor methodology. Bruce Lincoln has explicitly cautioned against the tendency to accept insider category in the study of religion:

When one permits those whom one studies to define the terms in which they will be understood, suspends one's interest in the temporal and contingent, or fails to distinguish between “truths”, “truth-claims”, and “regimes of truth”, one has ceased to function as historian or scholar. In that moment, a variety of roles are available: some perfectly respectable (amanuensis, collector, friend and advocate), and some less appealing (cheerleader, voyeur, retailer of import goods). None, however, should be confused with scholarship.93

Scholars must ask what is behind the self-presentation in religious texts and ask whose interests are served by it. Horsley would thus do well to ask, for instance, what ideological currency might stem from claiming to inherit prophetic authority, as Reed did with the notion of “Northern Israelite” discourse. Q might have us believe that the people behind it were prophetic performers arguing for social justice and mutual support within Galilean villages, but it does not add up to a compelling portrait for the actual authors. In sum, almost no aspect of this reconstruction stands up to scrutiny. Not only is the reconstruction not sociologically defensible, but there is also no evidence in first-century Galilee for the kind of performances proposed by Horsley and the evidence from the text of Q invoked to support these performances is tenuous at best. Finally, this reconstruction relies too strongly and too uncritically on the self-presentation of the Q people within their own text.

3 Village Scribes

The major rival to Horsley’s reconstruction of the Q people is that of the Q people as village scribes. This portrait in many ways makes more sense of the data of Q than does the portrait of prophetic performers. In particular, the village scribes hypothesis possesses one crucial explanatory feature that Horsley’s lacks: it is able to account for the apparent literary faculty that would have been required to produce a text such as Q.

The argument for village scribes behind Q, first proposed by Kloppenborg and fleshed out in more detail by Arnal, holds that Q’s form and content are best explained by thinking of the authors as mid- or low-level administrative figures. These figures are extensively attested in documentary papyri, because they functioned to facilitate many economic and legal exchanges and interactions within the Graeco-Roman world by creating loan contracts, drafting petitions, penning marriage agreements, and the like. As “middling figures”—situated between villages, for whom they served as literate intermediaries, and administrators at the levels of the village, toparchy, and kingdom—they were subject to

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94 Kloppenborg, “Literary Convention, Self-evidence and the Social History of the Q People”; Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes; Ronald A. Piper (“The Language of Violence and Aphoristic Sayings in Q: A Study of Q 6:27–36,” in Conflict and Invention: Literary, Rhetorical, and Social Studies on the Sayings Gospel Q [ed. John S. Kloppenborg; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International: 1996], 54–73). Piper describes the people initially responsible for Q as scribes with “one foot in each camp” between the elite and non-elite populations (66); they appear to have lost confidence in the administrative institutions in which they were once central players. So also, Bazzana’s forthcoming study (Kingdom and Bureaucracy) will attend to many of the verbal and conceptual similarities between Q and documentary papyri. Alan Kirk also views Q’s authors as scribal figures, but he imagines them to have somewhat higher social status and training, akin to the authors who produced the Wisdom of Solomon or Ben Sira (The Composition of the Sayings Source, 399).

pressures created by the flux of agricultural production and shifts in administrative
organization, for example, the shifts of the capital of the Galilee from Sepphoris to Tiberias
and back to Sepphoris. Urbanization processes in rural areas, in particular, could threaten the
livelihood and autonomy of village scribes by creating a new administrative structure to
supplant them.  

Just like the proposal that the people responsible for Q were prophetic performers, the
village scribe hypothesis begins with a number of observations within Q. These can be
divided into observations about (1) the form of Q and (2) the content of Q. The former is
perhaps the most compelling, but the latter is important as well. As described in greater detail
above, Q was composed in Greek and appears to be familiar with a number of ancient literary
traditions and genres, especially ancient instructions and sayings collections, but there are
even more curious dimensions to Q’s form that belie scribal authorship. For instance, Arnal
has convincingly demonstrated that Q employs the compositional technique of gender pairing
in its sayings, which appears often as a compositional technique in contemporary
documentary papyri. When Q gives examples, it tends to include a “male” version and a
“female” version. For instance, Q 17:34–35 juxtaposed two (presumably male) people in a
field with two women in the mill. Q 11:31–32 couples the Queen of the South with the men
of Nineveh to criticize the audience for their lack of repentance. Q 13:18–21 pairs a man

96 Arnal explores the effects of progressive urbanization and monetization under Antipas on the local
administrative structure in Lower Galilee in the period prior to Q’s composition (Jesus and the Village Scribes,
168–203).

97 Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q; Robinson, “LOGOI SOPHON.”

98 William E. Arnal, “Gendered Couplets in Q and Legal Formulations: From Rhetoric to Social History,” JBL
planting a mustard seed with a woman adding yeast to flour. Rather than being indicative of a gender-inclusive community, Arnal finds counterparts to this compositional technique in documentary papyri and concludes that this was simply a common way to exhaust the legal potentialities of commands and injunctions. In this way, Arnal demonstrates that the Q people’s scribal provenance has direct bearing on the organization of the text.

Bazzana explores this identification at great length. In one particularly persuasive chapter, he argues how the Lord’s Prayer (Q 11:2b–4) reflects conventional language of official petitions found in documentary papyri. Rather than being a transcript of the direct speech of Jesus, his study suggests that the Lord’s Prayer is heavily stylized in the manner that scribes framed official petitions. According to Bazzana, the Lord’s Prayer even shows strong affinities with the kinds of amnesty offered in royal decrees from the Ptolemaic period, such as P.Tebt. 1.5. The idea is not that the Lord’s Prayer is somehow an insincere passage that was fabricated to match the constructions in documentary papyri, but rather that when the time came to write these traditions down, the authors made them conform to their expectations, as scribes, for what a successful petition would look like. As with the observations about gender pairing, the specific literary form of Q is explained by this social description. These observations make it highly unlikely that it was the product of a peasant

99 So also Q 15:4–7, 8–10 pairs a man seeking a lost sheep with a woman searching for a lost coin. Some pairing, which may not seem overtly gendered, reveals itself to be under closer inspection. For instance, Q 12:24 refers to harvesting activity (a typically male form of labour), while Q 12:27 balances the rhetorical structure with a reference to spinning (a domestic and hence, typically female form of work).

movement, because this literary faculty takes some leisure and probably some financial
resources to develop.  

Moreover, Q is not only preoccupied with the content of its teachings, but also the
more abstract issue of how its teachings are authorized and transmitted: the text is concerned
with “clarity of perception,” “guidance,” “good speech,” and “moral examples,” which
reflect the “self-consciously ‘public’ character of the scribal pursuit.” That is, from a
literary point of view, it reflects the interests of scribes and the self-authorization of their own
activities as custodians and transmitters of this body of material.

Furthermore, Q is familiar with a number of urban bureaucratic institutions and the
protocols for navigating them. For instance, it understands the realities of the legal system (Q
12:58–59); it knows about the frequency of divorce and the legal ramifications associated
with it (Q 16:18); and it is familiar with urban banquets (Q 13:28–29; 14:16–23) and
marketplaces (Q 7:31–35; 11:43). One should not imagine that mere references to an urban

101 There was no public education in antiquity. Parents were responsible for their children’s primary education,
and if they had the means, they could pay for private tutoring. Administrative skills would likely be acquired
“on the job” or through apprenticeships. See Marietta Horster, “Primary Education,” in The Oxford Handbook
Moreover, the kind of scribal skills required to function in the Temple would have been even more prized and
required a significantly higher investment of time and money. It is also relevant that literacy rates in the
geographical area under question were so low that they virtually eliminated the possibility of “peasant
composition.” Meir Bar-Ilan (“Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries C.E.,” in Essays in the
Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society [Vol. 2; eds. Simcha Fishbane and Stuart Schoenfeld;
Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992], 46–61) concludes that reading literacy was less than 3% in the first century, but in
rural areas, was likely near 0%. So also, Catherine Hezser (Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine [Texts and
Studies in Ancient Judaism 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001]) finds that literacy rates in Roman Palestine
were lower than elsewhere in the Roman Empire.


103 This perspective on the legal system, as I and others have suggested (Sarah E. Rollens, “‘Why Do You Not
Judge for Yourselves What Is Right?’: A Consideration of the Synoptic Relationship between Mt 5,25–26 and
Lk 12,57–59,” ETL 86.4 [2010]: 449–469; Piper, “The Language of Violence and Aphoristic Sayings in Q”),
preserves a notably marginal perspective. That is, the Q people may have familiarity with the legal system, but
that experience has not led to great confidence in the system.

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environment—or a rural environment, for that matter—will give us any definitive location for the Q people. But what is most telling is that Q often uses these visible examples to make its arguments: i.e., these situations have rhetorical currency from their perspective.

This social description may seem somewhat ordinary or even tautological: Q is a written document; scribes wrote things; therefore, Q was written by scribes. As is argued in the final chapter of this study, this social identification can explain the way that Q absorbs and redeploy ideas in its social setting, such that the scribal hypothesis is not simply a description of Q’s authors: it is an explanation for their intellectual product.

There is no reason to assume that the Q scribes were the elite scribes of Jerusalem or any larger urban centre. In fact, Q’s vitriolic rhetoric against Jerusalem (13:34–35) and what it stands for suggest otherwise. Rather, their compositional techniques suggest that Q’s authors were engaged (at some point) in relatively mundane activities: drafting petitions, creating marriage and divorce contracts, and penning other legal documents. These “unsung ‘middling’ figures,” Braun suggests, “rank[ed] well below other public intellectuals, such as the rhetorician, the sophist, and the philosopher, on scales of public recognition, honor, income, and opportunities of upward advancement, even though the grammarian/scribe shared some of the competencies for which the latter are known.”

There are some criticisms of this hypothesis. Horsley cannot accept this picture of the Q people, claiming that Q in fact evinces a “decidedly antiscirbal stance.” This view

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104 This position is reached quite easily and unreflectively, for example, by Mack (“The Kingdom That Didn’t Come,” 627–32).
106 Horsley, “Israelite Traditions in Q,” 98.
apparently results from his narrow understanding of scribes in antiquity.\(^{107}\) On his social modeling, the Pharisees, whom Q explicitly attacks (Q 11:39b–44), are constructed as exemplary of the scribal group, and so by definition, Q is “antiscribal.”\(^{108}\) Moreover, the disconnect of scribes from the lower classes is indebted to Lenski’s sociological modeling, discussed earlier in the project.\(^{109}\) If Horsley were not building on Lenski’s model, then scribes would need not automatically be aligned with the ruling institutions, and the “antiscribal” nature of Q would not be so evident. To be sure, Horsley needs this understanding of in order to read Q as a “hidden transcript” which embodies a “Little” Israeliite Tradition over against the “Great” Jerusalem Tradition controlled by the Pharisees and other leaders.\(^{110}\)

\(^{107}\) Herzog echoes the assumption that retainer figures were singularly resented by the lower classes by arguing that “the people among whom Jesus worked hated the retainers because they were the visible figures who carried out the policies of the elite” (Parables as Subversive Speech, 148).


\(^{109}\) Egyptian papyri make clear that there were various kinds of scribes in antiquity, from royal scribes to village scribes (βασιλικός, γραμματέας, τοπογραμματέας, κωμογραμματέας, and the like). While their work sometimes explicitly benefited the elites, they could also act in much more mundane ways which do not necessarily betray them as “siding” with the elites. For instance, the simple act of writing on behalf of an illiterate person, which is extremely well documented among legal papyri, primarily benefits the peasant population by facilitating local agreements and transactions. See Herbert C. Youtie, “Because They Do not Know Letters,” Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 19 (1975): 101–8.

\(^{110}\) Recently, Horsley has begun to focus on the way that some scribes could set themselves apart from the ruling elite and resist political powers (Revolt of the Scribes). He notes, for example: “Ben Sira’s instructional speeches to aspiring scribes show that at least some scribes, despite their vulnerability to their patrons, both criticized the aristocracy and saw it as part of their responsibility to mitigate the oppressions of the poor by the powerful” (12). This mitigation appeared in the form of apocalyptic texts such as 1 Enoch and Daniel. This is a marked development in his thinking about retainer figures, but it seems difficult to reconcile with his depiction of the Q people. The middling scribal figures (9–14) that he has in mind are still strongly embedded within the Judaean ruling class, for they are “‘sages,’ that is, wise scribes, the professional intellectuals and government advisors of the Judean temple-state” (8). This seems a far cry from the popular prophetic figures he imagines behind Q. To use this recent work to illustrate his newfound acceptance of scribes within the Jesus movement would be, in my opinion, to misread how Horsley himself seems to understand scribes, which is unfortunately still a rather narrow conception.
Scholarly Opinions of the Q People

The particularities of this identification have been met with some criticism by others as well. Rooney and Oakman tentatively suggest that the earliest material in Q was put together by “Jesus-scribes within the Herodian administration in Tiberias (up to 54 C.E.)” who were “‘secular’ and preoccupied with ‘eudaimonistic’ wisdom. Their original contact with Jesus and/or Jesus-memories had to do with daily administrative or royal-account tasks.”\textsuperscript{111} Despite this, the authors wonder if “scholars may have rushed to judgement in assuming scribes sympathetic to Jesus,” for they, like Horsley, consider scribalism to be part and parcel of “the establishment,” and in opposition to the peasantry.\textsuperscript{112} But if we discard prejudgments about the precise relation of scribes to the Jesus movement, the social description of the Q people as village scribes or administrative figures is the most compelling one to date: it takes into account the content of Q and its literary character and is thus able to explain the specific forms that many passages in the text take. I will argue that scribes, especially lower status ones, are middling figures. To be sure, the implications for this identification have not been thoroughly outlined yet, because as the critics of this reconstruction demonstrate, there remains no clear way of conceptualizing scribes within the wider social hierarchy of the Roman Empire.

3.1 Scribes in Antiquity

Despite several important studies, scribes are remarkably undertheorized in antiquity, leading to some of the sweeping generalizations about them that inform some depictions of earliest Christianity. This is, in part, due to the nature of the evidence for them. On one hand, we

\textsuperscript{111} Rooney and Oakman, “The Social Origins of Q,” 118.
\textsuperscript{112} Rooney and Oakman, “The Social Origins of Q,” 118.
have ample evidence for them in the thousands of literary texts, official documents, private letters, legal forms, and other writings produced by them. On the other, their social experiences are simply not apparent in most of this material. Moreover, in biblical studies proper, the depiction of these figures is no doubt influenced by the New Testament, whose characterization of them is exceptionally problematic, demonstrating a patent interest in depicting them as a unified group who opposed Jesus.113

Another problem is the assumption, encouraged by Lenski and others, that scribes are part of the retainer class and thus singularly support political and social elites. As noted, this is evident in Horsley’s understanding and scribes and informs his objection to describing the Q people as village scribes. According to Horsley, scribes and other bureaucratic functionaries such as tax-collectors114 are not only in the employ of the socio-political elite, but they are also ideologically aligned with them. Therefore, these figures would not have been found in the earliest Jesus movement, which explicitly opposes this institutional structure. As noted, however, this reflects a very narrow understanding of scribalism. At this point, then, it will be useful to complement the discussion of Q’s authors with a review of how scribes have been analyzed by scholars, even though not all categories will be immediately applicable to Q.

113 Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 242 and 266–68. Saldarini points out that scribes have far more diverse interests and functions than those to which the gospel authors have confined them.

114 *Contra* Horsley, it has recently been suggested that because of social and economic contexts in ancient Palestine, the Jesus movement may have specifically targeted those who facilitated elite domination in order to forge new ideological allegiances that undermined the elite (Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 280–97; Rollens, “Tax-collectors in the Jesus Movement”).
Anthony J. Saldarini, for example, outlines the social roles of scribes in Jewish society, recognizing that unlike the other figures in his study (Pharisees and Sadducees\textsuperscript{115}), scribes were widespread throughout the Roman Empire. His primary concern is how Jewish sources portray them. The Hebrew Bible tends to invest scribes with leadership or teaching responsibilities, indicating that their position often garnered great respect and resulted in quite high status, occasionally even overlapping with duties of priests.\textsuperscript{116} With Greek and later Roman influence in Palestine, a new class of scribes developed in order to facilitate the administrative tasks associated with controlling the region,\textsuperscript{117} but many others were still connected to the Temple and the Judaean elite, based on evidence in such sources as *Ben Sira* and Josephus.\textsuperscript{118} In assessing Josephus’ frequent references to different sorts of scribes, Saldarini finds that even though the ability to read and write “was crucial to their place and function in society,”\textsuperscript{119} their precise status was dependent on their relation to the ruling classes.\textsuperscript{120} If they had elite patronage and functioned within communities as teachers or other learned figures, they might cultivate great respect and honour. Without elite patronage, they

\textsuperscript{115} As he is wont to do in order to keep scribalism mostly separate from the Jesus movement, Horsley occasionally lumps Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes together as “rival scribal factions” (Horsley, “Jesus Movements and the Renewal of Israel,” 23–46, here 25). His point in doing so is to jettison the “sect” terminology with which they have traditionally been described, but this levels important differences to which others are more sensitive.


\textsuperscript{117} Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 249.


\textsuperscript{119} Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 264. Kaster also recognizes the limited skills that scribes possessed: “[T]he grammarian himself was embedded in a social system where what mattered were wealth, distinction, and eloquence amid a population vastly poor, anonymous, and illiterate” (*Guardians of Language*, 13).

\textsuperscript{120} Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, 264.
even became quite mediocre figures.\textsuperscript{121} This mediocrity of some of these posts is evident in one of Josephus reports, which recounts Herod’s sons being threatened with demotion to village scribes (\textit{Antiquities} 16.203; \textit{War} 1.479).

Even though he admits the existence of scribes of different statuses,\textsuperscript{122} Saldarini’s description mostly focuses on scribes described in or presumed behind elite literary products—that is, the most visible scribes in Jewish society. The evidence is weighted in favour of these visible figures, as one would expect, for it is they who were often responsible for the creation and preservation of documents which we use as evidence for them. Saldarini turns briefly to evidence in inscriptions to access scribal figures in the Jewish community in Rome, but again, the interest is solely focused on how scribes functioned in \textit{Jewish} society. In short, most of Saldarini’s treatment understands scribes as producers of Jewish literature and interpreters of Jewish law, which is certainly accurate for some scribes. The social location of the scribe, however, is significantly wider than this and encompasses everything from elite, Temple scribes to local village officials, to those with just enough literacy to pen petitions and other formal documents. To focus on only elite Jewish scribes downplays or overlooks altogether the important variety of scribes in antiquity.

Using a somewhat different typology than Saldarini, Dennis Duling takes Lenski’s vertical ranking of agrarian societies as a starting point for a more sophisticated discussion of different kinds of scribes in antiquity. He maintains that Lenski’s model, which groups all scribes into one category, treating them “always and everywhere the same,” is an

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{121} Kaster, \textit{Guardians of Language}, 99. \\
\textsuperscript{122} Saldarini, \textit{Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society}, 274.
\end{flushleft}
“oversimplification.” To correct for this oversimplification, Duling expands on Saldarini’s discussion by identifying six different kinds of scribes: (1) royal or bureaucratic scribes in the direct employ of the government, (2) public and private secretaries, (3) village or other local scribes, (4) scribes serving voluntary associations, (5) scribes who function as teachers, and (6) Torah scholars. This typology makes an important distinction between official secretarial functions (perhaps accounting or other recording keeping, liaison activity, and the like) and the routine functions of village or local scribes. Duling’s typology is aimed at identifying the scribal figure behind Matthew, but notes at several places that Q’s authors would fit in the local scribe category and appear to possess less training than Matthew.

Elsewhere, Kim Haines-Eitzen has examined Christian scribes in the second and third centuries, because these figures have been somewhat overlooked in favour of scribes of earlier and later periods. Her aim is to counter the assumption that scribes were mechanical copyists. On the contrary, she contends that it is important to look at the social function of literacy, especially toward the low end of the social hierarchy, where most Christian scribes during this period can be found. Like Saldarini and Duling, Haines-Eitzen proposes a tentative typology for scribes, recognizing that any binary rubrics (“professional vs. non-professional, public vs. private, literary vs. documentary, or administrative officials vs. literary copyists”) are “fraught with problems” when faced with the complexity of ancient

125 Duling, A Marginal Scribe, 265 and 278.
One category that does seem to consistently match most of the evidence, however, is “a low-class/status scribal profession,” which must be distinguished from highly educated elite authors.

Haines-Eitzen’s initial distinction is between public and private scribes. In the second century C.E., there is evidence for a new form of scribal copyist associated with the spread of book dealers and public libraries. This kind of scribe was responsible for copying literary texts at the request of the public, and as such falls under her wider classification of “public professional scribes.” Also in this category are public scribal officials and administrative scribes, who may have in turn employed clerks and other assistants to do the actual copying for them. She contrasts these public functionaries with private secretarial scribes. They were private in the sense of being “individually hired, contracted, or employed.” By providing discrete services, these figures facilitated the administrative dimension of the Empire. These services included drafting letters, petitions, legal contracts, and the like for private parties. For most of these routine services, scribes rarely bothered to identify themselves in the texts. But it is these low-level functionaries, both public and private, who seem to be the people responsible for copying literary texts as well. Although the typical assumption is that there was a “wide divide” between scribes who functioned as copyists and those who drafted documents or letters, she finds evidence that some scribes were able to function in both

127 Haines-Eitzen, Guardians of Letters, 22.
128 Haines-Eitzen, Guardians of Letters, 22.
130 Haines-Eitzen, Guardians of Letters, 29.
capacity, to produce documents and to copy literary texts.\textsuperscript{131} In one instance, she notes that a scribe who was employed by a lawyer seems to have penned a literary text known as \textit{Chaereas and Callirhoe}.\textsuperscript{132} Part of the reason for this multifunctionality, she speculates, is that possessing several skill sets afforded a scribe more opportunities for employment.\textsuperscript{133}

Haines-Eitzen is most interested in those early Christians who copied and distributed literary texts in the second and third century, and so does not attend much to viewing scribes as \textit{original} composers of documents. But some of her insights are suggestive: for one, it is often the very people responsible for the routine administrative tasks in Graeco-Roman society who are also responsible for early Christian texts. Moreover, she points out routine copying especially was not necessarily a job which accrued honour. Hence, there was a sector of low-level copyist “that permitted the elites to avoid writing, and in particular copying.”\textsuperscript{134} Thus it stands to reason that a good portion of the low-level scribes did not cultivate a great amount of respect, in the eyes of elites, no matter how rare their skills were and how necessary they were to both elites and non-elites.

In prefacing his study of how the village scribe model makes sense of the political theology in Q, Bazzana offers perhaps the most comprehensive discussion to date of these sorts of low-level scribal functionaries, namely the \textit{komogrammateus}, or village scribe, based

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Haines-Eitzen, \textit{Guardians of Letters}, 32.
\item Haines-Eitzen, \textit{Guardians of Letters}, 32.
\item Haines-Eitzen, \textit{Guardians of Letters}, 34.
\item Haines-Eitzen, \textit{Guardians of Letters}, 21.
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\end{footnotesize}
on his review of hundreds, if not thousands, of documentary papyri. Some characteristics of these figures are especially relevant to this project. The most obvious are, of course, that village scribes had reasonable literacy skills and related, “not a negligible degree of schooling.” They partook in some “privileges” of urban elites but at the same time shared the “suffering and incessant toil” with rural villagers, even if they may have been appointed from outside of the village in which they worked, which was evidently quite common. Moreover, the cultural and ethnic identity of these sorts of figures is often telling. Menches, Bazzana notes, is one very visible figure during the Ptolemaic period, whose name signals his Egyptian origin, although he apparently used the Greek name Asklepiades elsewhere. In short, it often appears that these figures often “possessed two ‘identities’, which could be performed at different times and in different social contexts.”

As evidenced by such documentary papyri as P.Tebt. 1.167 (116 B.C.E.), their duties involved such things as supervising the allocation and production of land in a given region for purposes of taxation, and importantly, providing detailed reports on these matters for their superiors. Moreover, Bazzana also concludes that an important dimension to these administrative activities was to act as conduits of the sovereign’s political ideology to the villages; in this capacity, they “managed” the villages with efficient, bureaucratic flair.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{135} Bazzana, } \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{136} Bazzana, } \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{137} Bazzana, } \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{138} Bazzana, } \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{139} Bazzana, } \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{140} Bazzana, } \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).\]
instance, he finds papyrological evidence that village scribes were often charged with diffusing or resolving problems of the villagers (P.Tebt. 3/1.703, ll. 40–49) and were generally responsible for maintaining good management of the countryside (P.Tebt. 3/1.703, ll. 215–324).\textsuperscript{141} The goal of this sort of management was to preserve a harmonious and efficient kingdom.

In later centuries, the office of the \textit{komogrammateus} became a liturgy, meaning that it was “imposed as a compulsory service on those villagers who met certain property and financial criteria,”\textsuperscript{142} but in from the Ptolemaic period and into the early first century, it was still a paid position, which could be rather prestigious, as illustrated by the Menches archive.\textsuperscript{143} At the same time, this office required a significant financial obligation to the village; that is, one had to pay for this privilege. Menches, A. M. F. V. Verhoogt notes, appears to have the support of a wealthy patron called Dorion, who can help Menches front his contributions in food stuffs to the village.\textsuperscript{144}

Like Hains-Eitzen, Bazzana is interested in the social experience of scribes. Toward this end, he appeals to Anthony Giddens notion of “distanciation,” which is a kind of social

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\textsuperscript{141} Bazzana, \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming). He also includes the interesting illustration of UPZ 1.110 (164 B.C.E.), which concerns keeping cattleherds happy so that they will continue to provide their animals for public service.
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\textsuperscript{142} Bazzana, \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming), drawing upon Naphtali Lewis, \textit{The Compulsory Public Services of Roman Egypt} (Papyrologica Florentina 28; 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed.; Firense: Gonnelli, 1997); cf. Livia Capponi, \textit{Augustan Egypt: The Creation of a Roman Province} (Studies in Classics; New York; London: Routledge, 2005), 45.
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\textsuperscript{143} A. M. F. V. Verhoogt, \textit{Menches, Komogrammateus of Kerkeosiris: The Doings and Dealings of a Village Scribe in the Late Ptolemaic Period} (120–110 B.C.) (P.L. Bat. 29; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 54.
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\textsuperscript{144} Verhoogt, \textit{Menches, Komogrammateus of Kerkeosiris}, 55–60. It is unclear what kind of distribution mechanisms are in view once Menches makes this payment “to the village” (ἐν τῇ κώμῃ). Who actually receives this payment and what does s/he do with it from there?
\end{flushright}
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alienation enhanced by such activities as the introduction of writing into a given context and
the ability to manage and access limited resources.\textsuperscript{145} The supervisory activities of village
scribes, their endless documents to facilitate the Graeco-Roman bureaucratic apparatus, and
their ambiguity between their superiors and the local peasantry makes them excellent
candidates to experience this kind of distanciation and to hence be considered alongside the
other middle figures from analogous contexts that were described earlier in this project.

Furthermore, Bazzana draws the important conclusion from Giddens that the “administrative
ties” of the village scribes linked the worlds of the city and countryside.\textsuperscript{146}

Crucially, there is also evidence that village scribes did on occasion perceive
themselves to be a distinct group and were aware of their mediating function for groups
above and below them on the social ladder. For one, it is clear from documentary papyri in
Egypt that village scribes would often consult one another on legal matters, indicating that
they saw themselves to have a certain amount of autonomy, and their administrative reports
virtually guarantees that there was a kind of “scribal communication network.”\textsuperscript{147} We know,
furthermore, that even relatively well-known scribes, such as Menches, were addressed with
language of fictive kinship by others of equivalent status, suggesting a kind of occupational

\textsuperscript{145} Bazzana, \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming). Bazzana relies on Anthony Giddens, \textit{The Constitution
of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration} (Berkeley: University of California, 1984) and idem, \textit{A

\textsuperscript{146} Bazzana, \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{147} Examples of scribal communication networks are evident in papyri: P.Tebt. 1.16 (Kerkeosiris, 115–114
B.C.E.) and P.Duke.inv.794 (Oxyrhynchus, 88 C.E.). Often multiple scribal positions (e.g., village scribes,
royal scribes) are witnessed in these documents, underscoring that the reports and communications were often
between figures of different status.
familiarity. Scribes also apparently gathered for meetings and legal appeals that were in their common interest or part of their official duty. There are also hints at minimal attempts to “organize” by scribes in order to negotiate en masse. In a fascinating example from the Menches archive, Verhoogt discerns a “strike” of village scribes, who “evinced all manner of subversive behavior,” including everything from “not delivering reports to abandoning their posts for more than a month.”

There was apparently an even lower-level administrative figure than the village scribe, one who perhaps worked in a more piecemeal fashion. This is the kind of scribes that Alan Millard notes “earned their living through clerical tasks, in administrative offices or on the street.” The necessity of these figures to accomplish routine administrative tasks that were part of everyday village life is undeniable. Although Millard notes some overlap, he distinguishes between these sorts of functionaries and scribes in Jewish circles, who had

148 P. Tebt. I.55 (Arsinoites, 120–110 B.C.E.); P. Tebt. I.19 (Arsinoites, June 6, 114 B.C.E.). Menches, in turn, addresses his equals in the same fashion (P. Tebt. I.12 [Arsinoites, Sept. 4, 118 B.C.E.]). Verhoogt suggests that this term only indicates that the correspondents are “of equivalent status in the bureaucratic hierarchy” (Menches, Komogrammateus of Kerkeosiris, 72). Even so, when Menches writes to superiors, he includes their official titles, implying a greater social distance.


150 Verhoogt, Menches, Komogrammateus of Kerkeosiris, 149. The strike is witnessed by P. Tebt. I.24, 25, and 28. The cause of the strike is unclear, but Verhoogt supposes that the administrative changes instituted by Ptolemais VIII Euergetes II set it off, seeing as the strike immediately followed his many decrees from 119–118 B.C.E. (149).

151 Allan Millard, Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus (Understanding the Bible and its World; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 168. These figures come into view in the vast number of legal documents that include the routine construction “x wrote this because y is illiterate.” Examples are innumerable, but for instance, the contract in P. Mich. V.346a (Arsinoites, 12–13 C.E.) ends with the following: ἔγραψεν ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ Ἡρώδης Ἡρώδου ἀξιωθεὶς διὰ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι αὐτόν γράφ[ε]+ ("Herodes, son of Herodes, wrote for him at his request because he is illiterate."). See Youtie, “Because They Do not Know Letters.”

152 Millard, Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus, 176–79.
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attained a “special nuance” as “the academics of the day.”\textsuperscript{153} In imagining that these figures followed Jesus and transcribed his words, Millard confidently asserts that non-professional local scribes stood “able to make notes of a preacher’s words if they wished.”\textsuperscript{154} This idealized category does not seem likely as Q’s authors, because as Bazzana shows, Q’s language is quite ordinary in administrative circles. That is, the Q scribes were not simply folks who stamped documents; the imagery they use and the formal constructions that they expect passages to take reflect a \textit{routine} familiarity with administrative duties.

These discussions underscore the crucial point that scribes in antiquity were not as uniform as the gospels might have us believe. They ranged in training experience, skill level, as well as social status and prestige; they were sometimes in the service of a group from whom they were derived (village scribes in rural areas), sometimes not (native scribes employed by a non-native ruling class). How much of this is relevant to the people behind Q? We can be quite certain that the Q people are not the elite scribes in the Temple, given their strong polemic against Jerusalem and their tendency instead to personally address local cities within Galilee. There is no evidence either that Q’s authors were Torah scholars or even teachers in any official capacity,\textsuperscript{155} despite their affinities for wisdom and learning. The low or middle level functionaries seem to be a better fit, for it explains many literary features in Q, as noted above.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Millard, Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus}, 168.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Millard, Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus}, 182.
\textsuperscript{155} If we imagine scribal training to be modeled on apprenticeships, such as the ones idealized in \textit{Ben Sira}, a proven scribe probably trained an apprentice. There would be teaching involved, of course, but this should be distinguished from the kind of teacher or tutor available to be hired by families for children (see Horster, “Primary Education”). In a slightly later period, Kaster begins to identify schools for grammarians in places that would later become important towns (\textit{Guardians of Language}, 20).
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3.2 Structural Relationship to Peasants

Kaster has detected a tendency in ancient “literate culture” to create and perpetuate a distinction from other groups,156 which is an ordinary move for social formation and legitimation. This distinction may be reflected in products of “literature culture,” but it is unclear the ways in which this would manifest in social interaction. Affiliation with a scribal group evidently could afford one great prestige and honor, even social mobility, but this was by no means guaranteed.157 Even if a scribe of more modest means managed to acquire honour through this occupation, should we imagine a definitive rupture between them and their more modest social origins? On the contrary, for understanding the role of scribal and literate elements within the Jesus movement in Q, hiving these figures off too absolutely from peasants and other groups is not especially useful.

The once dominant way of thinking about Graeco-Roman society was to view a tiny, extremely powerful, elite controlling a mass of urban and rural poor. This model is largely imported into discussions of rural Palestine, subordinating an undifferentiated mass of peasants to a small ruling elite. Some scholars who deal with urban environment have rightly begun to question this model and have begun to differentiate these sweeping categories.158 As one might expect, this is easier to accomplish in urban areas, where there exist inscriptions and other data that provide access to these middling groups. In rural Galilee, this evidence is

156 Kaster, Guardians of Language, 15.
157 Kaster, Guardians of Language, 15–31. Although it is difficult to make generalizations about the experience of scribes in late antiquity, Kaster finds that the prestige, acquired honour, social mobility from an individual’s occupation was greatest among those who were already part of the upper classes (23). By late antiquity, few from the “lower orders” could still access the grammarian’s school (26).
158 Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies”; Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle.”
much more rare, but given the above analysis of Q’s literary quality and its authors, the text stands to be evidence for this “in-between” social sector, which was not ideologically allied with the urban elite but was neither undifferentiated from the peasantry. If we take seriously Kaster’s suggestion that at least ideologically the scribal class appears to have seen itself as a distinct group—despite great variation in what they actually did on a day to day basis—we may surmise that the Q people saw themselves apart from the unlettered villagers who engaged in routine agrarian tasks in the Galilean villages. Arnal agrees that the contents of Q do not immediately suggest a peasant project: “Destitute people do not aim to improve their conditions by writing about it—that is something done by intellectuals, students, college professors, scribes.”\(^{159}\) Although they do not always occupy elite positions or even overtly benefit the elite, scribes should probably not be lumped in with the peasantry.\(^{160}\)

Even though the scribal hypothesis for the Q people seems coherent, few have dealt with the tension that results in imagining Christian origins in this way: if the Jesus movement in Q originally spoke to the concerns of rural agrarian villagers (i.e., peasants),\(^{161}\) how did

\(^{159}\) Arnal, “The Trouble with Q,” 135.

\(^{160}\) Indeed, Jonathan L. Reed (Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus, 189–95) has noted how Q discusses agricultural activities in passive language, perhaps indicating that the authors themselves did not participate in this work. Interesting support for this distance from rural lifestyles is found in Santiago Guijarro’s article on representations of domestic space in Q (“Domestic Space, Family Relationships, and the Social Location of the Q People,” JSNT 27.1 [2004]: 69–81). Guijarro maintains that Q’s perspective on domestic spaces seems to indicate they lived in “traditional Palestinian houses,” not the “farmhouse, the more characteristic type of rural house” (79). Importantly, Q’s authors also reference urban buildings several times. This does not mean that they were unfamiliar with peasant activities, but it rather indicates that the point of view from which they compose the document is derived from a somewhat different worldview.

\(^{161}\) According to Milton Moreland, there can be “no doubt that the sayings of Jesus in Q are interested in the basic economic structures that are central to peasant concerns” (“The Jesus Movement in the Villages of Roman Galilee,” in Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q [ed. Richard A. Horsley; Semeia 60; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2006], 159–80, here 174).
this tradition get “written up” by scribes?\textsuperscript{162} Even Horsley appears to think it is reasonable to assume that the concerns of peasants may be reflected in more elite literary products, asserting:

In many, perhaps most, traditional agrarian societies it would not be possible to assume or to hypothesize that the peasantry would have shared somewhat the same perspective as the intellectuals. As ‘retainers’ the latter would ordinarily have been supported by and beholden to the governing class. But, as probed already above, late second Temple Jewish [sic] society may have been different in this regard … at least some scribes and scholars had become semi-independent of their own rulers and hostile to the imperial regime…. [B]ecause the whole people, including the scribal-scholarly ‘retainers’ were subject to overlords, the experience of the literate, at least since the Hellenizing crisis of the early second century, now paralleled or resembled the subjugation the peasants had experienced for centuries.\textsuperscript{163}

Emerging in this time was “a small semi-independent intellectual but not economic middle stratum, however small, devoted to the preservation of the traditional way of life, oriented toward popular concerns, and eager to influence, even willing to offer resistance to, the ruling aristocracy.”\textsuperscript{164} Unfortunately, the only evidence he cites to explain the middle stratum’s interest in “popular concerns” is the shared situation of political domination, which

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\textsuperscript{162} I borrow the phrase “written up” from Douglas E. Oakman, who originally used it to ask about the circumstances leading an oral Jesus tradition to be “written up” into texts (Jesus and the Peasants, 299). It seems to me that this disconnect still remains even without the appeal to oral tradition: how did peasant/marginal concerns get written up into a relatively sophisticated literary form?
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\textsuperscript{163} Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 130–31.
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\textsuperscript{164} Horsley, Jesus and the Spiral of Violence, 18. Earlier discussions noted Horsley’s recent development in thinking about scribes and its relevance to this project; see p. 47 n. 112 and p. 182 n. 110.
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is not especially explanatory. And later, he backs off from recognizing important ramifications of this group of intellectuals. “The resentment of such self-aware members [“middle strata” earlier qualified as “those with some education or some regular contact with imperial society”] of the subject society,” he writes, “may well be rather intense; but they are in a position to have a more ‘realistic’ sense of the actual imperial power relationship and therefore to hold to a more ‘conservative’ stance.”

Therefore, he ends up with a somewhat ambivalent notion of how scribes would have fit into Palestinian society in this period: they have the potential be an intellectual source of political resistance, but do not tend to have creativity or innovation in their thinking. Moreover, although they may have perceived the problematic nature of social and economic conditions, self-interest would have precluded their interests in doing anything to radically upset the status quo.

Part of the problem with this kind of reasoning is that this “middle stratum” to which Horsley and others refers, often in the terminology of the “retainer class,” should not be expected to be geographically or ideologically homogenous. In other words, attitudes and allegiances could probably vary greatly, depending on one’s proximity to power structures.

Horsley’s comments do, however, contain latent support for the idea that there might be mutual ideological concerns between middling intellectuals and peasants, which underscores even more that more nuanced understanding of these so-called “middle stratum” figures in the context of the Jesus movement is badly needed.

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165 Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 16. In a similar vein, Kaster argues concerning grammarians in late antiquity, “[I]f the grammarian within his institutional niche was not about to challenge or renovate radically the tradition that fortified him … neither would he be expected or encouraged to do so by the litterati outside that niche, whose own interests were scarcely less involved” (*Guardians of Language*, 206).
4 Conclusion

At this point, we may recap: although several hypotheses have been put forward regarding the people behind Q, I have argued that the text bears evident markers, in both form and content, of being the product of scribes, not of being the vestiges of a series of prophetic speeches. Recent studies on Q’s affinities with documentary papyri, in addition to literary texts, make this nearly incontestable. Although scribes could have certainly come out of local peasantry, grouping them in that category has not been especially explanatory for thinking about the production of Q. The authors may not have been peasants, strictly speaking, but they certainly used tropes of social and economic marginality and even imagery that would appeal to them. Therefore, the next chapter explores Q’s ideological project, first examining the notion that peasant concerns are embedded within the text, and second, relating Q’s authors’ identity and activities to the characteristics of middling figures outlined in Chapter Two.
Chapter 5

The Ideological Project in Q

1 Introduction

Chapter Two examined the “social location of thought” of middling figures, by exploring the following features that they tend to have in common, especially if other antecedent conditions such as education or literacy skills are present: (1) structural marginality, (2) creativity and innovation, and (3) the capacity to direct social movements and even instigate reform. These characteristics, I will now suggest, can be productively mapped on to the Sayings Gospel Q to help us make sense of such perplexing questions as what exactly is the kingdom of God and whether or not the Q group was a “success”—issues that have yet to be resolved by scholars. The comparison will not be perfect, but precisely where the comparison breaks down will yield new insights about the people responsible for Q and how we should understand the group associated with the text. Although I will explore the suggestion that peasant concerns are embedded in Q, it will not be possible to read Q as simply a reflection of their interests or even of a program that intentionally benefits them. Nevertheless, imagery which would have appealed to peasants factors into Q’s rhetoric and makes possible a (limited) ideological alliance between multiple groups.

The lens for the analysis in this chapter is largely synchronic. That is, the entirety of Q will be examined, as if it were received at a particular moment in time. While it remains important to understand the diachronic composition of texts such as Q, which show
noteworthy developments in ideas and agendas,\(^1\) it is also a legitimate endeavor to seek to understand how the text as a whole would have been received and would have functioned upon completion. Moreover, although the reconstruction of Q should not be considered a “finished” text in any definitive sense, especially because the authors of Matthew and Luke both saw fit to rework it, we can examine its latest perceptible redactional moment for clues about the authors’ interests and ideological project. Before exploring these points of comparison with analogous middling figures, it is necessary first to examine a selection of Q material that has been supposed to exemplify typical peasant concerns, recalling many of the scholarly portraits of the Jesus movement sketched in Chapter One.

2 Peasant Concerns in Q?

Since there have been several in-depth studies on the rural context of the Galilean Jesus movement that rely strongly on Q (discussed in Chapter One), this section will treat only a selection of paradigmatic passages that have often been thought to preserve peasant concerns. The understanding of “peasant” here is the most analytically useful one that emphasizes more the social-economic experience of this social location, and less the nebulous cultural characteristics which many presume to be common in peasant communities. Although it will not be disputed that “peasant imagery” (i.e., images that reflect a class of rural, economically

\(^{1}\) While there are competing compositional models for Q, the most compelling was proposed by Kloppenborg in *The Formation of Q* (see pp. 129–30 n. 32). A few have correlated social history to these literary strata (e.g., Mack, *The Lost Gospel*; Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*). I and others have suggested different ways that certain ideas in Q develop from the formative layer to the redactional layer (Sarah E. Rollens, “Conceptualizing Justice in Q: Narrative and Context,” in *Metaphorik und Narrativität in der Logienquelle / Metaphor and Narrative in Q* [WUNT; eds. Ruben Zimmerman, Michael Labahn, and Dieter Roth; Mohr Siebeck 2013] [forthcoming]; John S. Kloppenborg, “Nomos and Ethos in Q,” in *Gospel Origins and Christian Beginnings: In Honor of James M. Robinson* [eds. James E. Goehring, Jack T. Sanders, Charles W. Hedrick, and Hans Dieter Betz; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1990], 35–48). This compositional history and ideological development will become important in only some sections of this chapter.
exploited agricultural labourers, and the like) is present in Q, it is important to realize how this imagery is put to use within the text. This imagery is often harnessed in Q for a different ideological ends, such that we must question the extent to which Q is indeed a “representation” of peasant interests.

2.1 Q 6:20b–23

Q’s beatitudes are perhaps the most explicit site to try to perceive peasant interests, for there, Jesus’ pronouncements bless the poor and the hungry and promise them a reward in heaven. The blessing of the poor, referring (ostensibly) to literal poverty, is usually preferred over Matthew’s “spiritualized” redaction. In this, many have seen a kind of championing of the lower classes and an explicit critique of the rich. Thus, one interpretation of this passage is that Jesus is extending this blessing to all who meet the criteria of economic disadvantage in his original context, in other words, the peasants. This reading is even more attractive if Luke 6:24–26, the accompanying woes on the rich, are included in the reconstruction of Q. The audience for the unit in 6:20b–21 indeed addresses a very broad audience that is only

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2 Christopher Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q* (Peabody, Mass., and Edinburgh: Hendrickson and T. & T. Clark, 1996), 223; Thomas Hieke, ed., *Documenta Q: Q 6:20–21: The Beatitudes for the Poor, Hungry, and Mourning* (Documenta Q; Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2001), 78–140, esp. 137–40. Note Goodacre’s rejection of this evaluation and his case that Luke redacts Matthew’s version (*The Case Against Q*, 133–51). In his view, Luke’s preference for eschatological reversal and his interest in “the underdog, the outcast, the poor, the downtrodden, [and] the marginalized” (135) create a compelling set of factors to explain why Luke transformed Matthew’s version into his own. However, it is “independently clear” that Q has its own interest in poverty in relation to the kingdom (Hieke, *Documenta Q*, 138). Another problem with Goodacre’s scenario is that *Thomas* 54 contains a version of this beatitude which is not “spiritualized.” Thus, while Goodacre’s theory about Lukan redactional interests is plausible, to accept it wholesale, one would also have to accept *Thomas’* knowledge of the Synoptics, an argument he has tried to make more recently (*Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas’s Familiarity with the Synoptics* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012]).

3 This is the minority opinion among participants of the IQP; on this debate and the likelihood of this Sondergut being in Q, see Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels*, 26; idem, *Excavating Q*, 90–101; see also, Daniel Kosch, “Q: Rekonstruktion und Interpretation: Eine methodenkritische Hinführung mit einem Exkurs zur Q-Vorlage des Lk,” *FZPT* 36 (1989): 409–25. For the majority opinion of the IQP, see Neirynck, “The Reconstruction of Q and IQP/CritEd Parallels,” 53–148, esp. 58.
narrowed to focus on a smaller group of people loyal to Jesus in 6:23, which is itself a redactional addition to the original tripartite series.⁴

Even with such sparse references to realistic circumstances in this passage, some have made much of the socio-economic implications of these blessings. Horsley understands these beatitudes as concerning “the basic human necessities of food and shelter,” characteristic of peasant villagers, who occupied “a different social location from that presupposed in gnomologia, [the latter] which required study and reflection.”⁵ Moreover, he maintains that they reflect “unusually difficult economic circumstances.”⁶ Crossan goes even further in his nuancing and concludes that Q’s term for “poor” (πτωχός) implied not only economic destitution (“the pauper, the man who was altogether without resources”)⁷ but also social disadvantage: “The ptōchos was someone who had lost many or all of his family and social ties.”⁸ These dimensions feed into his interpretation of the historical Jesus who is rejected from all sides.⁹ In these sorts of interpretations, “poor” and the “hungry,” in particular,

⁵ Horsley, “The Contours of Q,” 82. His interpretation is stated in this way, because he is challenging the argument that Q is a collection of written gnomologia, as opposed to an expression of oral preaching.
⁷ Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 272.
⁸ Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 272.
⁹ Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 274.
become broad categories thought to extend to average people (i.e., peasants, “the poor,” 10 “society’s marginalized,” 11 or the destitute 12) in the Q community’s social setting.

However, against these interpretations, Arnal has demonstrated that the effort to read literal economic circumstances into this unit is misguided. Noting the redactional history of Q 6:20b–23b, he claims that before this unit was even put to use in Q, it “had come to refer to something other than literal poverty or destitution,” 13 namely the thoroughgoing inversion that characterizes the social program promoted by Q. While 6:20b–21 may in isolation have had strong socio-economic valences, the final two beatitudes greatly shift the focus of the unit to emphasize the social experience of rejection that those affiliated with Jesus had experienced. The point of the entire unit as it stands in Q is to describe “inversions” that were entailed in the social program proffered by Q. 14 The inversions, moreover, are in one sense, treated as rewards but also as intentional consequences of affiliating with this movement. 15

This means that the drive to identify an actual poor/hungry/mourning audience behind these

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12 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 270–73.
14 Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, 188.
15 Kloppenborg, “Blessing and Marginality,” 52: “Q 6:22ab23ab addresses itself to persons whose predicament is in some way their own making rather than a ‘state’ in which they find themselves.”
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references is futile. The references function rhetorically, in service of promoting an ideology, not describing an audience.

Even if we were to continue to focus on who is presupposed the lie behind the terminology of “poor” and “hungry,” confusion still remains. On one hand, commentators are correct in observing that the blessings are formulated in the second person plural and hence address a wide audience, and the focus is only narrowed to a smaller group with v. 23. However, in the latest perceptible redactional moment, the unit’s audience is narrowed even further by the addition of 6:20a, which directs the speech to the disciples. 16 Thus, this whole unit is directed at Jesus’ disciples (ἐις τοὺς μαθητὰς ἡτοῦ). It may be tempting to universalize this message and to conclude that Jesus’ statement is meant to console the typical exploited and impoverished peasant in his midst, but in its presentation formulation, this is more a comment on Jesus’ disciples and hence the Q group. After all, Q elsewhere imagines itself alongside Jesus in a long line of prophets who have been rejected by those to whom they are sent (Q 7:35; 11:49–51; 13:35–35). Thus, the blessings of the poor and the hungry, in Q at least, while perhaps reflecting very real circumstances of poverty and hunger, are simultaneously a commentary on the status of Jesus’ disciples and the Q group. The material is explicitly framed such. If the message were meant to have broader application,

16 Kloppenborg (The Formation of Q, 240) once suggested in passing the idea that Q might being using “the poor” to refer to the disciples or community, as is done in 1QpHab 12:2–10; 1QH 2:32–34; 5:13, 18, 20–22; 18:14. So also, Fledderman realizes that this is addressed to the disciples, but then makes the more sweeping statement that “the poor” in Q is “a synonym for the disciples” (Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 323). It is one thing to say that the label of “poor” is directed at the disciples, but quite another to say that it is a synonym—especially in a text that is so preoccupied with socio-economic issues.
one would expect Q to employ other terms such as ὀχλος and cognates, as seen in Q 3:7, 7:24, and 11:14.

We may surmise the following about the references in this passage. On one hand, the first two beatitudes may preserve blessings which originally had actual economic disadvantage in view (especially if Luke 6:24–26 is in Q as well), but the references have been redirected to be a commentary on the social situation of the Q people. This is clear by framing the unit as directed toward the disciples and by the appended blessings in 6:22–23, which orbit around the theme of rejection. Concerns for socio-economic disadvantage are thus present in the language of Q, but they function argumentatively not indicatively/demonstratively. In short, peasant interests are thus mediated for a larger project, Q’s social commentary.

2.2 Q 11:2b–4, 9–13

Along with the beatitudes which adopt the experiences the economically disadvantaged, Q’s discourse on prayer (Q 11:2b–4, 9–13) is another obvious unit to try to discern peasant concerns, for here we see a series of petitions to the Father for relief from hunger and indebtedness. This unit participates in one of Q’s most outstanding themes: the notion of

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17 Luke’s ὀχλοις is probably to be preferred over Matthew’s πολλὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων, which is far more polemical. Were Matthew’s version in Q, moreover, it would be the sole reference to Sadducees in the entire document.

18 We should also recognize how extensively the trope of poverty is used by elite authors for its rhetorical currency. As Vincent J. Rosivach demonstrates, among Athenian authors, the condition of poverty simultaneously had implications for moral worth and social value (“Some Athenian Presuppositions about ‘The Poor,’” Greece & Rome 38.2 [1991]: 189–98). In the cases that Rosivach examines, tropes of poverty rarely function only indicatively or demonstratively but are rather replete with elite assumptions about morality.

19 The Didache preserves an independent version of the prayer. There (Didache 8), the emphasis is on performance of the prayer and control of its practice.
God’s providence and care (cf. 6:35d, 36; 12:22–31; 15:4–7a, 8–10). This providence, moreover, is imagined as a response to rather specific set of circumstances: lacking the basic material necessities, a problem which is exacerbated by a situation of indebtedness (τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν). Many scholars interpret the language of economic marginality to work in the service of establishing the breadth of God’s providence, but similar to the unit discussed above, there seem to be more particular matters in mind: the situation of Q people themselves and their message.

Oakman has given the most thorough reading of this unit as an expression of peasant concerns. In one of his earliest analyses of the Jesus tradition, he saw this passage reflecting the problem of crippling debt in ancient Palestine: “The problem of debt, so oppressing the people of Palestine and controlling their lives, is so vast that only God’s power can effectively remove it.” He further notes the strong “material” connection between the petition for forgiveness and the petition for daily bread, suggesting that “[i]ndebtedness threatens the availability of daily bread.” In this early interpretation, he also understood Jesus appealing directly to those who were disconnected from the land. Although he now sees Q as a product put together by scribes, it is nevertheless one which still reflects peasant interests.

The Lord’s Prayer includes one rare Greek term (ἐπιούσιος) which has suggested to some that the original petition may have reflected the disadvantaged peasantry’s desire to

20 Oakman, Jesus and the Economic Questions of his Day, 155.
21 Oakman, Jesus and the Economic Questions of his Day, 155.
22 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 209. This is a crucial point to highlight in his work. Despite painting the milieu of the original Jesus movement broadly with a “peasant” brush, Oakman too realizes that the documents reflecting this movement must come from literate individuals.
meet its minimum food requirements for the day, especially in the face of elite extraction of surplus produce. Oakman uses a two-part interpretation of this term to reach this conclusion. One part relies on comparison with documentary papyri wherein the related terms οὐσία and περιούσιος are both used in connection with an abundance of material goods provided by the owners of landed estates to those who were dependent on them for their livelihoods. The second part of the interpretation seeks a Semitic parallel to the term, along the lines of Proverbs 30:8, which includes phrasing translated as “the food that I need.” Oakman concludes that the sense connoted by ἐπιούσιον must thus imply a portion of food provided by a royal figure that is sufficient for an immediate period of time. By focusing on the nuances of this word in this manner, he argues that the petition resists a strongly eschatological (future) reading and becomes concerned with immediate food needs, not with stockpiling food or even anticipating the needs beyond the current moment. In this way, Oakman suggests that the clause usually rendered “Give us today our daily bread” may be better translated thus: “Give us the bread of the kingdom today”; “Give us the royal bread ration today”; or even colloquially, “Give us today bread on the house.” This “concrete meaning,” with its subsistence overtones, appealed to peasants, which included “not only


24 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 219. The parallel is only a conceptual one, not a verbal one. The relevant phrasing from Proverbs 30:8 reads “σύνταξον δέ μοι τὰ δέοντα καὶ τὰ αὐτάρκη” (“provide me the food that I need”) and thus lacks any term related to ἐπιούσιος. (It is worth noting that the New International Version translation renders this phrase in Proverbs as “give me only my daily bread.”) The lack of verbal similarities is not necessarily a problem for Oakman, though, because he is interested in discerning a common Semitic idiom which might inform both Proverbs and Jesus’ phrasing in the prayer.

25 Fledderman (Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 471) reads even more into the metaphor of bread, interpreting it as referring to “all human physical needs.”

26 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 220. Cf. Vaage, Galilean Upstarts, 59: The term means “not ‘daily’ but ‘sufficient.’”
agriculturalists, but also their impoverished relatives eking out a living in lowly building trades or the fishing syndicates by the lake.  

In Q, the Lord’s Prayer is placed editorially in relation to 11:9–13. The passages are linked by not only catchwords ([ἐπὶ]δίδωμι and its cognates and ἀρτος), but also the common theme of God’s immediacy and providence. Q 11:9–13 serves to bolster the argument in the prayer that one should rely on God for these basic necessities. Q’s authors stitch together two (excessively confident) independent maxims related to pursuit and reward (11:9 and 11:10) with two vivid rhetorical questions (11:11–12) and a qal vehomer construction about the providence of the Father (11:13). The unit suggests that it is absurd to suppose that one’s request to one’s father will not be met. Not only will the requests be fulfilled, but they will produce precisely what is desired—e.g., one will not receive a stone or a snake when she petitions for bread and fish.

As with Q 6:20b–21, the Lord’s Prayer may preserve concrete socio-economic concerns, but it is highly stylized and has important ideological nuances that extend beyond Jewish and Christian discourse. As discussed in the last chapter, Bazzana observes that the

27 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 219.
28 Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, 205.
30 Cf. Thomas 94.
31 Note the connection between the imagery of the stone and bread in the first temptation. The connection that Q intends for the audience to make it not entirely clear, but for one interpretation, see Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 472.
32 On the composition of the prayer, see Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, 203–6. Fledderman thinks that this is an original composition by Q’s authors, but his reasoning is not especially compelling (“The passage uses common Q vocabulary and common Q literary techniques to urge a common Q theme” [Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 473]), especially given that some sayings in the unit are attested independently elsewhere.
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prayer appears to share common motifs and terminology, especially regarding the remittance of debts, with both legal documents and royal amnesty decrees found in documentary papyri from Egypt.33 These documents not only frequently offer forgiveness of debts but also ensure that those in the kingdom will be provided for materially. For instance, he observes these features in a royal decree issued by Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and his two queens, Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III34:

King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra the sister / and Queen Cleopatra the wife
proclaim an amnesty for / all the subjects to their basileia for errors, crimes, /
accusations, condemnations, and charges of all kinds up to the 9th of Pharmouthi of the 52nd year / except the persons guilty of willful murder or sacrilege. / They have also decreed that persons who have fled because they were guilty / of theft or subject to other charges shall return to their own homes / and resume their former occupations [...] / and their remaining property shall not be sold [...] / And they release everyone from debts for the period / up to the 50th year in respect to the farming of the grain tax and the money taxes, except of / hereditary lessees who have given a surety. (P.Tebt. I.5 [Arsinoites, April 28, 118 B.C.E.])35

πασῶν τὸν ὕπερ τοῦ Φαρμοῦθι τοῦ νβ / πλὴ τῶν φόνοις ἑκουσίως καὶ ἑρωσύλιασις συνεχομένων. / Προστετάχασι δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἀνακεφαρηκότας διὰ τὸ ἐνέχεισθαι / λείαις καὶ ἐπεραίς αἰτίας καταπορευομένους εἰς τὰς ἱδίας / γίνεσθαι πρὸς αἷς καὶ πρότερον ἦσαν ἐργασίας καὶ κομίζεσθαι / τὰ ἐτὶ ὑπάρχοντα ἀπράτῳ ἀπὸ τῶν διὰ ταῦτα ἁγιομετέχοντα / ἁφιᾶσι δὲ πάντας τῶν ὑφελομένων πρὸς τοὺς ἑως τοὺς / χρόνους πρὸς τῇ τὴν σιτικὴν φορολογίαν καὶ ἀργυρικὰς προσόδους πλῆ / τῶν μεμισθωμένων εἰς τὸ πατρικὸν ὑπὲρ ὄν διεγγύημα υπάρχει.” Despite the fragmentary nature of this particular papyri, its formulaic construction makes it possible
This formulaic decree characteristically grants the remission of debts and also absolves subjects of a number of other legal obligations. There is also a strong "ideological link between βασιλεία and economic affairs: a paramount responsibility for a Hellenistic sovereign consisted in caring for the welfare and prosperity of his or her subjects." Bazzana concludes that these motifs are so common in royal political documents that the association “might have been spotted by the majority of the people who read or recited the Lord’s Prayer throughout the eastern Mediterranean.” The ideology promoted by these kinds of texts, moreover, is a creative combination of native Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Israelite royal ideals, a crucial point to which we will return below. The main point for the present discussion is that the prayer reflects a common way to depict the beneficence of kingly figures: the extension of forgiveness and the iteration of royal largess.

Similarly Alan Kirk has pointed out the ways in which the prayer has formulaic similarities with official petitions in these papyri. In other words, the Lord’s Prayer in Q is not a simple transcript of the utterings of impoverished peasants, but rather, a highly stylized composition, composed to mirror acceptable forms for petitions. The observations of both Bazzana and Kirk underscore not only the constructed nature of the unit but also the strong connection that it has to middling, administrative figures as opposed to peasants. Moreover,
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this unit only superficially attends to peasant concerns. The enjoinment to rely on single-
mindedly on God does not address the root of any of the peasants’ real problems, that is, situations in which someone else controls their labour and economic production to the extent that their own basic needs are difficult to meet. On the contrary, the prayer takes this exploitative relationship for granted and does not attempt to challenge it or provide a realistic solution. What is offered instead is an idealization of kingly rule, complete with divine provisions, rather than a strategy for debt relief. There is a hint of “strategy” in the claim that the petitioners have forgiven those who have been indebted to them, but this is framed from the perspective of those in the position to grant loans. Even if this mutual ethic of forgiveness were enacted, its scope would have been limited; it would have no bearing on debt situation involving wealthy landlords and other elites. What this probably represents, then, is a highly idealized notion of the possible economic relations within an archetypal kingdom—the best possible expression of kingly rule, so to speak, imagined along the lines of beneficent rulers in royal decrees and petitions.

Furthermore, were real conditions of abject poverty in view, Q 11:9–13 would be a curious (and perhaps even insulting) addition. As Piper notes, the reassurances in this unit “are almost embarrassing in the scope of what is encouraged and promised.”39 Were it the case that “everyone who asks receives,” there would be no need for such pericopae as the beatitudes or the discourse on anxiety (see below). One wonders if an economically disadvantaged person might even regard this passage as kind of mockery. And oddly, there

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may be a kind of chastising going on in this passage as well, for the petitioner is reprimanded as “evil” (ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες) for daring to entertain the notion that their needs might not be met. Finally, the discourse on prayer is appended to a block of material dealing with encouraging the spread of Q’s message (10:2–24), a unit that comments on a situation in which only some people respond positively to the Q people.\footnote{Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, 190–203.} The passages on prayer, while likely an independent unit, now function in Q to encourage reliance on God’s care in spite of this situation. That is to say, it also functions in an argumentative way, not as indicative of socio-economic circumstances.

Thus, although peasant concerns are embedded in the original sense of the petition, the final form bears marks of scribal reworking and only offers superficial consolation to those in real economic distress. Surely there are subsistence concerns rooted in the Lord’s Prayer which would have made a great deal of sense to peasant ears, but the way to which this passage was used emphasizes something else entirely: the more abstract exhortation to retain confidence in God in spite of obstacles.

2.3 Q 12:22b–31

Q 12:22b–31 is another especially convenient passage to pursue peasant concerns, because in this unit, Q seems to be recognizing the pitfalls of people who are so disadvantaged that they lack sufficient food and clothing. For Horsley, this passage responds to “the Q people’s anxieties about the necessities of life.”\footnote{Horsley, “The Contours of Q,” 87.} It exhorts the audience to pursue the kingdom
“despite their poverty.” Elsewhere, he explicitly connects this unit to peasant concerns, as it is “the discourse devoted to gentle encouragement of subsistence peasants not to be overly anxious about necessities of food and clothing.” This passage, along with Q 11:2b–4, addresses people who are “desperately indebted, hungry, and worried about bare subsistence.” Or, as Vaage explains, “[t]he poor are those who suffer most the insecurities addressed in 12:22 regarding food and clothing.” Vaage sees the passage not as recommending a solution to this but as arguing that “a full and ultimately satisfying experience of life at the edge of subsistence” is possible.

Despite what some commentators have said, we may be certain that this does not condone voluntary poverty. For one, the only imperatives offered in this unit say nothing about adopting this lifestyle. Rather, they focus on abstract reflection and internal disposition: κατανοήσατε, καταμάθετε, μὴ μεριμνήσητε, and ζητεῖτε. Although there may be

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43 Horsley, “Israelite Traditions in Q,” 120.
44 Horsley, “The Covenant Renewal Discourse,” 219. Fledderman goes even further and allows “food” and “clothing” to “stand for all the basic physical needs of human beings” (Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 611).
45 Vaage, Galilean Upstarts, 61.
46 Vaage, Galilean Upstarts, 61.
a sense that an actual disadvantaged group’s concerns were the impetus for this saying, when we start to look closely at this passage, we find the sentiments that food and clothing are really *not* some of the most critical things according to Q (12:23). The pericope instead relativizes food and clothing to pursuit of the kingdom. “Seek his kingdom (ζητεῖτε τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ),” it enjoins, and those material items will simply appear. Once again, the sentiment is abstract: pursuit of the kingdom ought to trump the pursuit of material items.

As Arnal observes, this unit also does not address real conditions of socio-economic disadvantage with any real efficacy; what many might take as “advice” from the passage—do not be anxious, consider the ravens, observe the lilies—is “not especially credible or useful” counsel to people who are “naked or starving.” And if we accept Vaage’s interpretation, which sees this as encouraging one to make the best of their circumstances, we would be inclined to see the passage functioning in the way that Marx famously claimed religious discourse did: as an opiate of the oppressed and suffering masses. This is not the most useful sentiment if one is trying to make the case that Q is a champion of the lower classes, because there is something rather insulting with the implicit recommendation that one should just be content with their lot.

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49 Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, 174. Contra a reading which would see emulation promoted by this passage, Horsley argues that the point is not to offer advice or to encourage imitation of the birds and the lilies, but rather to provide consolation (“The Renewal Movement and the Prophet Performers of Q,” 296).

50 “Religious suffering is at the same time the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people” (Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy Of Right,” in *Karl Marx: Early Writings* [trans. and ed. T.B. Bottomore; London: C.A. Watts & Co.: 1963], 41–59, here 43–44, emphasis in original).
When it comes to this passage, we can thus be less sure that a peasant audience would have received this as positively as they may have taken the Lord’s Prayer or the beatitudes. The discourse on prayer and Q 12:22b–33, in particular, seem to encourage the abstract sentiment (confidence in God’s providence), but the cynical peasant in the audience may have rightly wondered about the immediate benefit in their very real situations of indebtedness in ancient Palestine. As with Q 6:20b–23 and 11:2b–4, 9–13, the final form of the construction promotes something intellectual and abstract.

2.4 Other Purported Peasant Concerns

A handful of other references in Q may be indicative of peasant concerns, although sometimes this interpretative lens must be imported from other verses, and so it is worth reviewing a selection of these as well. Q’s parables are a prudent place to start, given that Herzog, among others, has noted a coherent non-elite perspective in many of the parables attributed to Jesus. Oakman, for instance, argues that the parable of the mustard seed (representative of the wider category “parables of agricultural growth”) would have had special resonance with peasants. Details, such as the mustard plant often being considered an undesirable weed, would have been lost on those disconnected from agricultural

51 Although many have rightly emphasized the various forms of taxation and tribute for which inhabitants of first-century Palestine would have been responsible, the situation of indebtedness resulted from a combination of taxes and rents. As Keith Hopkins has argued, taxation and rents competed with one another, and even though both impacted the peasants, it was the extraction of rent payments especially that channeled a great deal of wealth toward the elite (“Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire,” 105).

52 Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, passim.

53 In fact, Oakman prefaches his interpretation of the parables of growth with a special section entitled “Assumptions About the Agricultural Imagery and Peasant Audience of These Parables” (Jesus and the Economic Questions of his Day, 100).
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production.\(^{54}\) Indeed, only Luke’s version of this parable assumes that the plant was intentionally cultivated.\(^{55}\) For Oakman, these valences imply a unique, non-elite audience for the earliest formulations of the parable:

For the Palestinian peasantry, good seed contaminated by very small mustard seeds will mean a mustard plant surprisingly and almost mysteriously appearing at harvest time … [this parable] deliberately likens the rule of God to a weed…. This “weed” stands over against all of the arrangement of civilization. It threatens the foundation of the edifice in its threat to the cultivated field.\(^{56}\)

In other words, Oakman views this parable as explicitly expressing the interests of the peasantry (i.e., their desire for God’s providence in the kingdom),\(^{57}\) and such an interpretation relies specifically on the assumption that a peasant audience is in view.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{57}\) In direct contrast to Oakman’s interpretation, Ryan S. Schellenberg has observed that the ways in which the Parable of the Mustard Seed was put to use by the Synoptics and *Thomas* betray no evidence that the authors understood the plant as a contaminant (“Kingdom as Contaminant? The Role of Repertoire in the Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven,” *CBQ* 71.3 [2009]: 527–43). Oakman’s interpretation is possible, but Q simply does not provide enough evidence to make it incontestable. Rather, the association between the mustard plant and the leaven make it more likely that Q is interested in the general idea of growth. This, while certainly a “natural” process, is not a metaphor that is restricted to a peasant context for its rhetorical efficacy.

\(^{58}\) Many of Oakman’s interpretations rely on importing a unique peasant experience of exploitation into the passage, even when it may not be explicit. For instance, he understands the measure for measure recommendation in Q 6:38 as a sentiment which recognizes that the “oppressed” will find happiness in sharing resources (*Jesus and the Economic Questions of his Day*, 169). *Contra* this position, see the more recent
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Rohrbaugh similarly interprets one of Q’s parables for peasant ears, although his interpretation admits alternatives as well. According to him, the Parable of the Entrusted Money in Q 19:12–13, 15–24, 26 would have been a “text of terror” for peasants in first-century Palestine. His analysis investigates with how elites and peasants would have understood this parable, finding vastly different interpretations for each audience. From the peasant’s perspective, the third slave (Q 19:20–21) was prudent in protecting his lot, knowing he had little power to better his circumstances. The passage becomes a scene of “terror” for peasants, because the slave, who fears the master, acts judiciously according to the logic of his social location—he “tries to protect the existing share of the master…[which] is exactly what in the peasant view an honorable person should do”—and is still castigated. However, for the elites, the third slave was indeed wicked, in that he did not do anything to increase the master’s wealth. So, although Rohrbaugh imagines a predominantly peasant audience for the parable in its initial reception, he is sensitive to this important ambiguity.

Interestingly, Rohrbaugh’s interpretation still works quite well even without a peasant constituency presumed as the audience. As Kloppenborg has shown, Q certainly paints the master quite negatively, using the term “hard” or “harsh” (Matthew’s σκληρός or Luke’s...
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αὐστηρός). No matter which term is used to reconstruct the parable, “[t]his combination of outrageous profits that the protagonist expects from his slaves and his own self-description as ‘hard’ characterize him as a harsh and unbending figure who traps the third slave in an unenviable situation.”62 Placed just after Q 17:23–24, 37, 26–30, 34–35 and immediately before 22:28–30, the function of the parable is to offer another “threatening” scenario of “a particularly brutal and destabilizing story of success and failure where the rules seem already to belong to a foreign realm.”63 The scene introduces “terror” because “the ends are simply beyond calculation.”64 As compelling as this reading is, it does not necessarily rely on a peasant audience. Indeed, the characteristics of the master appear to be tapping into a common literary character of a severe figure who is contrasted with a beneficent one—no doubt recognized by peasants but not restricted to their conceptual world.

The reference to labourers for the harvest in Q 10:2, which Q uses to illustrate the “work” associated with spreading their message, might also bring into a view another exploited class of non-elite agrarian workers. Horsley, for instance, attends to the explicit agrarian overtones of this reference, noting that “worker” originally referred to “those who worked the soil—farmers, peasants.”65 As Kloppenborg explains in a discussion unrelated to Q, seasonal workers and labourers (ἐργάται) were a special class of agricultural workers that

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came into being probably accompanying the consolidation of land into large estates during
the Hellenistic period.\(^{66}\) Displaced from the land owing to indebtedness, these labourers were
forced to seek employment on larger estates to make ends meet; even small landholders often
owned such poor plots of land that they too had to seek out this sort of supplemental
employment.\(^{67}\) Day labourers were especially disadvantaged, their employers were under no
obligation to provide them a steady source of work, their labour was easily replaceable, and
the nature of their work was likely very physically demanding. It may have even been more
economically viable for a landholder to give exhausting or dangerous tasks to day labourers
instead of slaves, because slaves were property in which the owners had made a significant
financial investment.\(^{68}\) With this background to the term ἐργάτης, it is interesting that *Q* uses
this term, so laden with economic disadvantage and exploitation, in *Q* 10:2 to describe
themselves as they travel to disseminate their message. Schortroff and Stegemann even
propose that day-labourers are the most logical audience for the *Q* 12:22b–31.\(^{69}\) That *Q*
actually anticipates this audience, however, seems unlikely. For one, I have shown that *Q*
12:22b–31 is only superficially concerned with immediate subsistence needs. For another,
although ἐργάτης occurs in the so-called mission discourse, the mission charge is not
recruiting day-labourers for this “harvest”; it is simply using this language to describe the
people already charged with disseminating *Q*’s message. The entire unit functions at the level
of metaphor: workers in the harvest refer reflexively to the *Q* people and their own


\(^{67}\) Kloppenborg, “The Growth and Impact of Agricultural Tenancy,” 40 and 55.

\(^{68}\) Kloppenborg, “The Growth and Impact of Agricultural Tenancy,” 57–60.

\(^{69}\) Schrottroff and Stegemann, *Jesus and the Hope for the Poor*, 39–42.
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perception of their role in God’s “harvest.” Thus, while this peculiar term has important socio-economic valences, again it does not seem to refer to anything beyond the Q people themselves.

Q 9:58 is another minor place where economically destitute people may be in view. In a response to a potential follower, Jesus announces, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the sky have nests; but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” Theissen once interpreted this as the voluntary adoption of homelessness and poverty which accompanied the requirements of discipleship. The “voluntary” dimension of this lifestyle has not stood up to criticism, but nevertheless, this statement may be a metaphor for being disconnected from more economically secure modes of life, especially if “son of man” in this passage is the generic usage of this phrase, as Crossan argues. If so, then the point of this statement may be for Jesus to “identify himself with those he was addressing, to emphasize that he shared with them a common destiny as we poor or destitute human beings.” On Crossan’s interpretation, then, this passage shows an awareness of the circumstances of economically disadvantaged people and realigns the contours of the social landscape so that all suffer the same existential condition of humanity.

70 This saying probably circulated on its own. See Thomas 86, which unfortunately gives little insight into the way this statement was received.

71 Theissen, Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity, 10–11.


73 Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 50–51.

74 Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, 51.
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These references are, for the most part, ambiguous, and they are easily interpreted as metaphorical, which is how critics such as Fledderman tend to interpret most of Q’s references to socio-economic conditions. The question is, to what extent are these references metaphorical and to what extent do they reflect actual socio-economic circumstances? This cannot be decided with any certainty, although I have followed others in suggesting that references to concrete socio-economic conditions are frequently redirected for more abstract commentary. Moreover, to what extent must we presuppose “real” peasants to be in view when imagining the composition and inclusion of these passages in a text like Q? That the passages reflect “rural” things is admittedly a weak argument for the reality of a peasant group in the audience of Q. 75 Most of the references to peasant modes of life, production, and values are in service of a broader ideological agenda: promoting and underscoring Q’s social critique.

It is critical to note that the passages in Q usually taken to be the most indicative of the socio-economic circumstances of the Q’s audience stem almost entirely from Q1, according to Kloppenborg’s compositional model. 76 This is further support for the idea that Q does not represent peasant interests in an unmediated fashion: the ethical ideas that might have once benefitted them (theoretically) are almost entirely muted by the polemical material introduced in Q2. And by the time Q3 material is appended, the authority of Jesus (and correspondingly of the Q people) is paramount. At the latest vantage point, as Arnal notes,

75 Reed, “The Social Map of Q,” 24–25; cf. Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 96: “[T]he entire economy of the Mediterranean was agriculturally based and hence, agricultural language and metaphors can be found practically everywhere.”

76 Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, passim, summarized succinctly on 322–28. See also, pp. 129–30 n. 32.
these sayings have already been “historicized” in Q, and these sentiments are viewed “retrospectively” as ethics proffered by Jesus in the past.77

That Q directly responds to a peasant experience of life is thus tenuous, but the authors certainly adopt a stance of marginality with resonates with the first characteristic of middling figures outlined in Chapter Two. We can thus reformulate the question of whether or not Q reflects peasant concerns to one which concerns how Q both reflects a structurally marginal position and retains, even urges, this sense of marginality throughout the text.

3 Q’s Authors and Structural Marginality

There are at least three overlapping uses of the term “marginality,” which deserve some remark. First, many scholars use “marginal” in a strict economic sense to refer to subordinate groups, as defined by their lack of access to wealth and power in a given social structure. This is probably the most common deployment of the term, although this analysis has generally avoided this strict economic definition in order to focus on an individual or group’s perception of access to resources. Second, marginality may also refer to structural marginality, which suggests an ambiguous or ambivalent social position but says nothing about the person’s real access to wealth and power. This use of marginality was explored in Chapter Two, because many middling figures are “cusp” or “hinge” figures between elite and non-elite populations and function as mediators for the social and economic relations between them. This understanding is more important for this project than the first, because it will help us understand Q as a series of mediating moments in a larger web of social

relations. Third, marginality is also used to describe a condition of alienation from different groups, because middling figures, who often have real access to social and economic resources, can still be considered marginal on the basis of their disaffection from both peasant groups and elites. The point of differentiating these understandings is that it becomes possible to focus on figures who occupy ambiguous social positions (i.e., structurally marginality), have experiences which leads to feelings of alienation or out-of-placeness (i.e., marginality as alienation), and eventually interpret them with tropes of real deprivation of resources (i.e., socio-economic marginality). Thus, marginality when applied to Q intersects with all these understandings in different ways.

In describing the kinds of marginality that might make sense of the author of the Gospel of Matthew, Duling describes a number of other variables which contribute to one’s social ranking such as political access, possession of property, occupation, ethnic identity, education, religious activity, gender, and family. Duling suggests correctly that marginality in any of these categories could affect one’s social status. In fact, Duling concludes that the scribe responsible for the Gospel of Matthew was culturally marginal, but importantly, “this cultural marginality may have been the result of his freely chosen ideological marginality, which identified him, although incompletely, with the structurally

78 Duling, A Marginal Scribe, 246–249. Duling expands upon Lenski’s social modeling of agrarian societies, which I discussed in Chapter One. Lenski’s model focuses almost exclusively on occupation and the social values assigned to it, and so Duling’s expansion is a helpful correction.

79 In his model, religious activity is stratified thus: the emperor is set over the high priests, who in turn rank higher than other priests and scholars. The laity comes next, and the lowest category of value in this model is “pagans.”

80 Duling, A Marginal Scribe, 248.
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Something similar is likely the case with the Q people. Although there is no evidence that the Q people’s ideology was “freely chosen ideological marginality,” there is good reason to think that some of the dimensions that Duling pointed to contributed to their sense of a structurally marginal identity. A crucial part of my argument is exploring the tension between Q’s rhetoric of marginality (often using explicit tropes of economic deprivation) and their technical capacity that set them apart from the peasantry.

The first way we can understand marginality with respect to Q is to recall from the previous chapter the most compelling social location for the Q people: low-level scribes or other administrative figures. This social location was marked with a sort of structural marginality, because the prestige and honour associated with routine scribalism especially was unpredictable. Whereas wielding education and literacy skills could be seen as a “prestige good” from some perspectives, this occupation was not regarded as so by all. Furthermore, the structurally marginal position of scribes fosters a kind of existential ambiguity. Documentary papyri, such as those in the archive associated with the komogrammateus Menches, discussed in Chapter Four, are helpful in assisting us in seeing the dual allegiance between upper and lower classes that scribes negotiated. We also saw that scribes appear to have a distinct professional identity, even though many of their


82 On this term, see Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (CSSCA; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3–63. Appadurai discusses the politics of valuing luxury goods, but the term is applicable to any object or skill that is restricted to a small group in a given context.

83 Note Josephus’ reports that competition among Herod the Great’s sons caused some to threaten others with demotion to village scribes (*Ant.* 16.203; *War* 1.479).
administrative activities ultimately benefitted the elite. Moreover, many of their activities involved assessing land for tax-purposes, preparing legal documents, and the like—in other words, all activities that involved a kind of political and economic surveillance of the native population. Thus, from the perspective of the villagers whom scribes oversaw, these figures’ allegiances were not entirely clear. They could at once be insiders to the community who could even offer a degree of protection in the way that they mediated the economic extraction of villages, but they could not do away with that exploitation altogether and hence were always, in some sense, agents of it.

While administrative figures as a distinct professional group may have experienced a sort of systemic liminality, Q’s authors may have experienced even more complicating factors. Focusing closely on the scribal identification of the Q people, Braun argues that the Q people experienced professional displacement due the increasing urbanization and bureaucratization of ancient Galilee. This experience would have induced a sense of relative deprivation, leading them to imagine themselves as “oppressed” and “marginal”—in other words, in the same boat as the peasants. Braun builds upon Kaster in order to compile a list of factors that “would contribute both to a real and a perceived sense of professional and personal devaluation and out-of-placeness.” These factors include (1) being in a “middling” social stratum; (2) attaining only a modest social status; (3) having ambiguous class commitments; (4) possessing modest resources; and (5) being mobile figures, both in terms

84 See pp. 192–93.
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of physical movement and ability to mobilize different technologies (literacy, philosophical discourse, and the like). 87 There are important factors which weigh against scribal figures automatically experiencing this resulting devaluation, 88 but given the shift in urban centres that appears to have been taking place in Galilee in the early part of the first century, the professional devaluation could have had very real results. 89 These reflect well the social location proposed for Q’s authors. The point, in other words, is that by appealing to examples of other structurally middling figures, there are very compelling reasons to see how Q’s authors may have perceived themselves through a lens of marginality and persecution even without experiencing these circumstances strictly speaking. Indeed, the examples described at the beginning of this chapter suggest that even when Q does not have actual circumstances of economic marginality in view, the language of economic disadvantage is still attractive to them—that is, it helps them accomplish an ideological project that justifies and defends their own social status.


88 In predominantly illiterate cultures, the ability to mobilize literate technologies is intrinsically valuable. For rural villages, written documents are some of the primary contacts with social and political elites, and if the mode of contact is restricted to a small group, this makes their capacity even more valuable. Caroline H. Bledsoe and Kenneth M. Robey, for instance, observe how literacy skills function among the Mende of Sierra Leone, where the postcolonial setting allows the interaction of both Arabic and English languages in addition to indigenous and creole languages. The Mende “view literacy less as a mnemonic device than a resource to bolster the legitimacy of claims and provide (or preclude) access to secret domains of knowledge whose meanings are dangerous to those without legitimate social and ritual qualifications…writing skills can be withheld or divulged strategically to gain power and dependents” (“Arabic Literacy and Secrecy among the Mende of Sierra Leone,” in Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy [Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 23; ed. Brian Street; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 110–34, here 112). In this context, multilingualism especially gives some groups the power to exclude others, shape political discourse, and even falsify information in some cases. Knowing Arabic, in particular, afforded one a special kind of “magical” knowledge as it was associated with mastering—and hence having true knowledge of—Islam.

89 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 183. Arnal also argues that this shift was accompanied by efforts by elites to monetize the local economy to facilitate efficient extraction of resources.
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3.1 Marginality Evident through Q’s Redaction

The second place we can observe Q’s sense of marginality is in its ideological shift from Q¹ to Q². Mack, in particular, has proposed a theory of social history of the Q group that explicitly relies on this compositional history.⁹⁰ He begins with the observation that the rhetorical posture in Q¹ strongly resonates with Cynic discourse, which takes a coherent stance toward conventional values, a stance which may be deemed “mildly subversive.”⁹¹ With its rhetoric of persuasion and recommendations for new modes of interaction, Mack also sees Q¹ as promoting “risky behavior.”⁹² From these observations, he wants to probe the relationship between the redactional material and this “counter-cultural” formative material. “[If] the shift from Q1 to Q2 can be clarified by changes in the social situations reflected in each layer,” he hypothesizes, then “a thesis might be possible that accounts for the literary history in terms of a social history of the Q tradents.”⁹³ Thus, his starting point is to begin with the earliest material in Q, which correlates to a particular worldview, and then to try to explain the accretions of later material. In Q², the rhetorical posture of the document changes to become accusatory and polemical; the concern becomes solely about “acceptance or rejection of Jesus and his words.”⁹⁴ This dramatic shift, he argues, is no accident; rather, it is directly related to the social experience of the authors, especially as they perceived their

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⁹⁰ Mack, “The Kingdom That Didn’t Come,” 608–35. This view was later developed in Mack’s The Lost Gospel.
message to receive devastating rejection. He thus describes the social experience of the Q tradents in the following way:

That the message of judgment [in Q²] required such an elaborate frame of epic-apocalyptic history in order to make good on its threat indicates a problem of some magnitude in the social history of the Q people…. The nature of that problem is given. A program thought to be constructive was experienced as ineffective. In response to those whose rejection hindered the progress of the program, the mode of “instruction” switched to the mode of defense, reproach, and threat of judgment.⁹⁵

In other words, Mack’s model proposes that the Jesus movement behind Q was initially full of energy and excitement as it spread the unconventional teachings that were attributed to Jesus, but as this message failed to be received favourably, the group became frustrated and defensive of their original message. The condition of marginality—of persecution, of rejection, of being consistently and insultingly misunderstood—appears in Q² precisely because the authors accumulated real-world experiences that discouraged their hopes for their movement.

Although it is not always wise to assume that literary history converts to social history, in this case, there seems to be something compelling in Mack’s insight. Indeed, although Kloppenborg based his stratigraphic model on literary observations, the layers of Q also divide thematically, and rather neatly at that. Most of the references to rejection frame the document or act as support, expansions, or glosses on prior material, indicating that they were added at a later point in time. If we conclude this particular literary development, it is

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helpful to also hypothesize a *reason* for this development as well, even if the conclusions must be tentative. Mack’s proposal is not perfect—indeed, he deliberately alters Kloppenborg’s compositional model to fit his model of social history\(^96\) —but it at least proposes a persuasive scenario. And the opposite model, that Q was *originally* reactionary and pessimistic and that ethical exhortations were inserted into said pessimistic material, seems less likely.\(^97\) So, with Mack’s interpretation, we see how Q’s authors’ experience of perceived marginality and rejection is refracted in the contours of the text, and it informs the very stance that is promoted, especially in Q\(^2\).

Moreover, other ideas in Q show important development that would also correspond to this social history. As I have argued recently, Q’s sense of justice also undergoes a transformation that roughly corresponds to Q\(^1\) and Q\(^2\) material. Q’s sense of justice in the formative material is quite confident, in that it expects that human intervention in the world will redirect the present injustices (see the confident instructions in Q 6:29–40, for example). However, the polemical, “apocalyptic” material in Q presumes something different, that divine intervention is necessary to alter the present circumstances and to vindicate Jesus’ and Q’s message (Q 11:49–51; 12:39–59, for example). This argument echoes (unintentionally) Crossan’s observation about different kinds of eschatologies between John the Baptist and


\(^{97}\) Horsley entertains a singular compositional moment for Q. As opposed to literary models that suppose redactional history, he argues that there is “an obvious alternative possibility: that the various clusters that supposedly constituted the formative layer were first brought together in the same redaction that joined them with the judgmental clusters, which were also brought together at that point” (“The Contours of Q,” 67). This is not impossible, but it seems difficult to force the ideas and attitudes in these literary strata into a singular moment of composition, especially noting the overt literary seams throughout Q between types of material.
As Crossan explains, the sapiential eschatology promoted by Jesus inspired his followers to try to enact the kingdom in the present world, whereas the apocalyptic eschatology preached by John the Baptist looked forward to intervention by God to enact kingdom. The former was oriented toward the world with optimism, while the latter with pessimism. The conclusions that I have made with respect to Q are thus conceptually quite in line with Crossan’s, but the chronology is reversed due to different foci of the analyses: Crossan is interested in the history of the historical Jesus while I am interested in the history of the Q group. Crossan imagines the historical Jesus emerging in the Baptist movement but quickly having his movement off from it, while my reading of Q sees Q\(^2\) (with its apocalyptic eschatology, if we employ Crossan’s terminology) as chronologically later addition in the Q tradition, only being utilized in the document when it became rhetorically useful.\(^99\) Crossan also recognizes that Q underwent literary development over time,\(^100\) but for him it is a separate issue from the mission of the historical Jesus since all of Q falls into his earliest cache of evidence for Jesus. In any case, it seems clear that Q’s views on the topic of justice do not all share the same presuppositions, and where they change roughly correlates to the introduction of Q’s polemical material. A similar development is seen in Q’s efforts to construct its own identity vis-à-vis the traditions of Israel, which becomes increasingly


\(^{99}\) Cf. Arnal, “Redactional Fabrication and Group Legitimation,” 174–75, in which Arnal argues that Q’s sayings by John the Baptist, save for Q 3:16, are independent creations of Q’s authors to try to define their movement with reference to the Baptist’s.

\(^{100}\) Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 429.
prominent in Q’s redactions. This, too, suggests that Q’s sense of identity went through important conceptual developments over time.

3.2 Other Evidence of Marginality in Q

We should also consider, regardless of literary history, instances where Q styles itself (and consequently, the group it represents) as socially or economically marginal, that is, alienated from wealth, power, and status. In other words, we can look in Q not only for its understanding of how the world breaks down into economic categories, but also into categories of power and dominance, powerlessness and subordination. For instance, Q opens with John the Baptist’s confrontation to those who claim an exclusive status: to be children of Abraham. John and the crowds both anticipate a future punishment (τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς), but some apparently expect to be spared from any consequences by their lineage from Abraham (πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ). John challenges this assumption that inherited status has any value and argues instead that repentance is necessary. Some want to read Q 3:8 as implying that this special Jewish status is meaningless given that God can create descendants for Abraham out of rocks. But this verse does not say the status is meaningless nor does it presume a lack of distinction between Gentile and Jew. Importantly, Q’s authors never style themselves as not having this status as children of Abraham; the claim is only that being a descendent of Abraham in itself will not spare one from future judgment; that identity will not be the marker that spares one from the coming judgment.

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102 Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 227.
Entailed in the challenge, moreover, is the implicit claim that Q’s authors constitute a small minority who knows better than to rely on this status claim. Therefore, even before Jesus speaks in Q, the text has already presented a bisected world in which there is a “mainstream” opinion about Abrahamic lineage, but Q purports to know better. The very first issue, then, that Q takes on is one of social/ethnic status.

There are even more explicit claims about status and honour which suggest that the Q people viewed themselves as socially marginal. From Q 11:43 we learn obliquely that Q’s authors do not count themselves among those having access to honourable seats at banquets and in synagogues, nor do they receive recognition in the markets (τὴν πρωτοκλισίαν ἐν τοῖς δείπνοις καὶ τὴν πρωτοκαθεδρίαν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ τοὺς ἀσπασμοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἁγοραῖς). In these public places in which honour is on display, the Q people consider themselves peripheral. Of course, for Q, these privileges should not be sought out, because in the case of the Pharisees, they represent a fundamental misunderstanding about value and merit in the world. This, parenthetically, is exactly what we would expect to hear from persons denied access to a special or prestigious status.

The Q people also briefly adopt the identity of children, as opposed to sages and other wise people, and claims that the former are worthy of receiving Jesus’ teaching (Q 10:21; cf. Q 7:31–35). They align themselves with neither kings nor prophets—in fact, Q 10:24 locates them above kings and prophets in knowledge—, and when speaking polemically, kings’ houses and their inhabitants receive criticism. The houses of kings, for instance, contain “those wearing finery” (οἱ τὰ μαλακὰ φοροῦντες), a characterization replete with insult in the
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ancient world. That prophets and kings are lumped together in this saying may be a subtle subversion of who one would typically expect to have clear perception and judgment in the world. The juxtaposition between “you” (ὑμῖν) and many prophets in Q 10:24 is somewhat odd, given that elsewhere Q clearly sees Jesus, his followers, and hence the Q people as prophetic figures (Q 6:23, 11:49–51; 13:34–35). Perhaps the way to understand this is to focus on Q’s qualifier many (πολλοί), which allows for some prophets to remain on a pedestal. Or, the sense could be chronological: many prophets misunderstood in the past, but select prophets now (i.e., “you”) comprehend the truth. In any case, Q’s sense of exclusivity is clear through these juxtapositions.

Perhaps the most explicit places that we can discern Q’s sense of social marginality come in passages reflecting real or perceived persecution. The authors style themselves, alongside Jesus and his followers, as recipients of mistreatment, insult, and other types of persecution. Q 6:22–23 imagines insult and persecution, which is completely in keeping with the way that prophets with special message have been treated in the past. Q 6:29–30 envisions situations of insult, perhaps entailing violence and disenfranchisement. Q raises the generic spectres of enemies (Q 6:27) and “bad” and “unjust” people (Q 6:35), without offering specific details. More particular situations of persecution are evident in Q 12:4, where damage to the body is in view. Forensic scenes of persecution emerge in Q 12:8–10, 11–12, where the Q people perceive themselves to be under duress in their commitment to the group. This need not correlate to any actual circumstances of persecution, and indeed, as

103 In its parallel to this passage, the Gospel of Thomas goes even further with its negative valuation of “those in soft clothing” (οὗτοι ἔχοντα τὰ ἰμάτια τὰ μαλακὰ): they will not be able to comprehend the truth. See also, Vaage, Galilean Upstarts, 98–100.
Carol Newsom has argued with respect to the Qumran community, the *rhetoric* of persecution (even in the absence of the actuality of it) creates a strong sense of social cohesion for a group.\textsuperscript{104}

Finally, there are hints that in several important social institutions, the Q people do not fare well. Despite knowing about the legal sphere,\textsuperscript{105} they consider themselves relatively powerless there. Q 12:58–59, the metaphor of being compelled to court banks on assumption that the courts will not provide meaningful justice, but will only end in prison.\textsuperscript{106} The Q people even fashion themselves as marginal with respect to one of the most ubiquitous social institutions: the family. Q 14:26, which claims that one must hate the father, mother, son, and daughter in order to become one’s disciple, is probably a metaphor for the strong commitment required for affiliation with the Jesus movement. Even so, the thrust of the statement is that relationships within the family are less significant than the ones proposed in the Q group. Q 9:59–60 also suggests that allegiance to Jesus is paramount over familial obligations: Jesus tells a potential disciple that he cannot even take the time to bury his father before following him. Q 12:53 is perhaps the strongest verse in its suggestion that typical family relations may be incompatible with Q’s new social order. This statement should be understood as a kind of myth-making by the Q people, in the sense that the new way of life

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\textsuperscript{104} Carol A. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran* (STDJ 52; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

\textsuperscript{105} As several recent studies have shown, Q contains fairly overt familiarity with formulations and compositional techniques in legal petitions, contracts, and other documentary papyri: Arnal, “Gendered Couplets”; Kloppenborg, “Verbal Continuity and Conceptual Discontinuity”; Bazzana, “Basileia and Debt Relief.”

\textsuperscript{106} This can be compared to Luke, who has far more confidence in the legal system. Rollens, “Why Do You Not Judge What is Right?” 466–67.
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they suggested for their Jesus movement probably caused tensions with families and so this statement was put on the lips of Jesus to “anticipate” this situation. Kinship is further devalued by John’s accusation in Q 3:7–9. The worth assigned to one’s traditional lineage is less valuable than one’s actions with respect to God. Fictive kinship language is used in several places in Q (Q 6:35c–d “sons of your father”; 6:41–42 “brother”, 20:6 “son of peace”, 12:13 “my brother”), which alongside the above denunciations of the family, suggests that the conventional familial relationships should be subordinated to those created within the text.

Thus, the text of Q bears marks of being produced by structurally marginal people, very much akin to those figures described in Chapter Two. This is evident by both external reasoning, that is, by examining the social location of administrative figures in antiquity, and also by reviewing internal features of the text. Recalling Chapter Two, Q’s authors are excellent examples of the “hinge” or “cusp” figures which have the potential to link the Galilean towns and countryside and transmit ideas between them. At the same time, Q’s authors also seem to also occupy the ambiguous space between these populations, a “very strange sort of shadow world,” in Feierman’s words, where their own social allegiances are not entirely clear and they adopt an outsider stance toward many conventional values and attitudes. Their rhetoric, which becomes increasingly hostile, suggests that they saw themselves more and more as a small group which needed to be defended from antagonistic outsiders. Even if Q’s authors were not really as disadvantaged as their rhetoric would have one believe, the perception of their experience is just as important for contributing to their worldview. This helps explain why they argue with tropes of poverty, homelessness, powerlessness, uprootedness, and the like. Their perception of their experience led them to
interpret their own experience in such a way that they imagined themselves aligned more with the disadvantaged peasantry than the wealthy and privileged elites.

4 Creativity and Innovation in Q

As we also saw in Chapter Two, structurally middling figures frequently have contact with multiple (sometimes competing) social groups, modes of production, and corresponding ideologies, and this contact often leads to opportunities and new resources for intellectual creativity. Accordingly, we should expect to find evidence that Q is also a creative and innovative project. This conclusion may not be self-evident, but I will argue that the features of Q which have caused problems for some commentators in the past (the audience of Q, the kingdom of God, Q’s “radical” inversionary rhetoric) will benefit from an analytical lens that sees these features as creative negotiations of multiple discourses. As a text which reaches back into the epic history of Israel to sustain many of its arguments (e.g., Q 3:8 [Abraham]; 6:23c [rejected prophets sent to Israel in the past]; 10:12 [Sodom]; 11:29–32 [Jonah, the Ninevites, Solomon], 51 [Abel and Zechariah]), Q is, in some ways, a

107 Brian Stock analyzes the process of creating a new community identity and finds that the intellectual work of relating a group to predecessors is a crucial moment in that process (Listening for the Text: On Uses of the Past [Parallax: Re-visions of Culture and Society; Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990], 25–26). He uses the Waldensians to illustrate this process, because they were able to historicize their group by linking it with figures in the Life of St. Alexis and the Life of St. Antony. By this deliberate connection, their founder, Peter Waldo, “gives a latent discourse a tangible form, breathes life into it, and creates, if only briefly, a new universe of discursive space in which relations between interpreter and audience recreate the old pattern of authority and tradition anew” (29). So also, we observe something similar in Q with the deliberate effort to connect the present experience of the group to literary predecessors such as Abel and Zechariah and to thus establish authority on the basis of those connections.

108 These, of course, are explicit references. We could further add to this list places where Q presupposes (written) Israelite traditions without listing them outright, such as 4:1–13 (Deut 6:13; 8:3; 10:20; Ps 91:11), 7:27 (Exod 23:30; Mal 3:1), 17:27 (Job 39:27–30). If Luke 9:61–62 is in Q, it is likely directly alludes to 1 Kgs 19:19–21. In favour of 9:61–62’s presence in Q, see Horsley, “Israelite Traditions in Q,” 96; Horsley, “Prophetic Envoys for the Renewal of Israel,” 241; Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q, 190–92; Kloppenborg,
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conservative project, in that it does not seek to displace the cultural stock that its authors have inherited. The traditions of Israel are perceived to be immensely powerful and indeed frame the whole presentation of the document. At the same time, the authors rework this cultural stock in new ways, making it possible identify a certain creativity and innovation in the text and to thus suggest that the text is a resourceful, intellectual project which combines many influences and interests into a cogent ideological project.

One obvious place to look for innovative ideas is in the text’s oft-lofted reevaluation of conventional status markers. For many, this defines the ultimate project of Q and renders it “radical” or “counter-cultural.” For instance, in the parable of the great banquet, the traditional expectations that the original guests are the most valuable is undermined as the invitation is extended to “undesirable” people found on the roads (εἰς τὰς ὁδούς). The parable of the rich fool in Q 12:16–21 likewise subverts the traditional assumption that wealth will prepare one for the future. These readings are underscored by the pervasive sense of inversion throughout Q, as in vv. 6:20b–21, 13:30, and 14:11. Vaage and others have shown that Q’s challenges to conventional values have counterparts in Cynic discourse, which means that they are not without precedent, but generally speaking, within traditional codes of

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Q Parallels, 64; Crossan, In Parables, 243 and 343. Against it (and representative of the IQP majority view), see Neirynck, “The Reconstruction of Q and IQP/CritEd Parallels,” 53–148, esp. 58.

109 Jacobson, “The Literary Unity Q.”

110 Especially vocal proponents of these qualifiers are Mack (The Lost Gospel) and Vaage (Galilean Upstarts).

honour and shame, many of these sentiments would have been quite out of place. This curious mixture of traditions led Crossan to wonder if Jesus’ sayings are what “Jewish cynicism” looked like.\textsuperscript{112} Granted, many of the “radical” or “inversionary” sayings in Q are reframed to promote abstract and intellectual conclusions, but the conclusions depend on entertaining the unconventional challenges, at least initially. Although the conservative dimension in Q is important—that is, the way Q frames its ideas as a continuation of typical prophetic activity, the reevaluation of these values is just as integral to its rhetorical efficacy.

More telling is Q’s reorientation of traditional familial relationships. In the provocative passage of Q 12:51, 53, the sayings suggest that the normal relationships within the family will be disrupted by the Jesus movement. This is exacerbated by Q 14:26, which proclaims that one must hate (μισεῖ) his or her family in order to become a disciple. In Q 9:59–60 we see the implicit suggestion again that one’s family obligations are subordinated to allegiance to the Jesus movement in Q. If Q 11:27–28 is in Q, this also challenges traditional assumptions of value.\textsuperscript{113} A woman attempts to honour Jesus by honouring his mother, but he subordinates this move to those who would properly respond to his message. Here also the seemingly radical sentiments are tamed to support a more mundane message.

\textsuperscript{112} Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, 122. To be more precise, Crossan raised to question that Jesus’ sayings might be what “peasant Jewish Cynicism” (my emphasis) looked like.

\textsuperscript{113} Although the IQP thinks something like Q 11:26–27 (attested only in Luke) was in Q, it was unable to reconstruct any specific wording. The inclusion of these verses in Q is considered likely on the grounds that within Luke, they are situated between two passages that derive from Q (11:24–26 and 11:29–32); they use literary forms that are common in Q (macarisms); and they do not seem to contribute independently to the overall context of Luke in any specific way—i.e., it is difficult to hypothesize why Luke would have created this passage ex nihilo in this context or why he would have placed this independent unit here even if he had learned it elsewhere. See Kloppenborg, Q Parallels, 96; Crossan, In Parables, 344. Kloppenborg supplies tentative wording in a later publication (Q, the Earliest Gospel, 133 and 163 n. 6): “Q 11:27–28? Hearing and Keeping God’s Word? 27? «While he was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!» 28? «But he said: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!»”
about the demands of discipleship, but they are nevertheless rather extraordinary in what they recommend, when compared to other ancient attitudes toward the family.\footnote{Note the Cynic counterpart to the sentiments in these passages as well (Vaage, \textit{Galilean Upstarts}, 181 n. 39). These similarities are quite intriguing, since these sayings adopt a rare posture that would have been “striking (i.e. revolting)” in the ancient world (94).} Q may have also had some innovative ideas about the relevance of the law, since it initially attempted to subordinate it to the message of John and Jesus (Q 16:16), but those ideas are quickly tamed by the tertiary redaction (Q 16:17).\footnote{Q 16:16 offers a subtle typology of the times: “The law and the prophets were until John. From then on, the kingdom of God is violated and the violent plunder it.” However, the implications of the law being only valid “until John” may have been too radical, and so the failsafe in Q 16:17 was appended to underscore the continuing importance of the law (Kloppenborg, “Nomos and Ethos,” esp. 45–48). The temptation story, moreover, depicts Jesus as debating over the finer points of the law, which also indicates its significance.}

Introducing challenges to conventional ideas is not necessarily all that innovative, especially since these are included alongside other material which clearly indicates that the Q people see themselves as standing in continuity with much of their past tradition. More compelling as an expression of innovation is the thoroughgoing attempt in Q to achieve (ideally—we can certainly question if this was achieved in reality) a synthesis of disparate groups within the Q “movement.” For instance, Q 10:22 reorients those who receive the message of the movement into group of “chosen” people, whom Jesus has selected (βούληται ἀποκαλύψαι) for revelation. Q 11:28 upholds the sentiment that there is a special status available to those who respond to the Jesus movement. This group, furthermore, is reassured in several places of its ultimate significance in the eyes of God (Q 12:6–7, 30–31).

In other words, the values promoted by society at large are devalued in the Q group and new status markers (“chosen,” “exalted,” and the like) are promoted. This synthesis comes together, in large measure, through language of the kingdom, which is discussed in

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more detail below. The kingdom, I will argue, is a rhetorical device that realigns different groups of people in the social landscape of the Q people. As is also suggested below, Q not only achieves an interesting synthesis of disparate groups through this kind of reevaluating language, but it also rigidly reinforces these boundaries, which does equally important ideological work.

There are even more nuanced ways to recognize creativity and innovation in Q that go beyond its deconstruction of conventional values and reformulation of alternatives. In many of its formulations, Q reflects a hybridization of ideas and forms, which directly results from the authors’ middling location. As was noted in the previous chapter, Bazzana, among others, has shown convincingly how many features in Q mirror the compositional techniques of village scribes, suggesting that the authors were drawn from the administrative sector. One of his strongest arguments is the way that the Lord’s Prayer in Q closely resembles royal petitions and amnesty decrees particularly from the Ptolemaic period.\(^{116}\) What becomes important here is his related argument that the ideological dimensions of these documents wed the ideal standards of royal figures from both Egyptian and Hellenistic milieu: “[The] occurrences of βασιλεία in documentary papyri support the hypothesis that the ideological construction of sovereignty is rooted in the expectation that a king or queen would care for the welfare of the subject…. This is a political-theological construction that is put together by combining creatively Greek and native Egyptian concepts.”\(^{117}\) By deploying this ideologically-laden concept of the kingdom, especially in forms that closely mirror those in

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\(^{116}\) Bazzana, “Basileia and Debt Relief.”

\(^{117}\) Bazzana, *Kingdom and Bureaucracy*, (forthcoming). He offers P.Muench 3.1.45 (221–205 B.C.E.) as an example of this creative hybridization in papyri, because it rather explicitly combines Egyptian and Hellenistic ideals of kingship.
said documents, Q’s rhetoric thus already begins from a point of hybridization of multiple forms of discourse. Moreover, Q takes this hybridization even further. Whereas most of the scribes that Bazzana discusses are drawn from Egypt, Q’s authors were no doubt Jewish.\footnote{118} Therefore, these ideals of kingship and benevolent rulers are combined further with critical imagery from the Israelite tradition in order to communicate what the reign of God will entail: sovereign care for the destitute and relief from suffering in a rather immediate form.\footnote{119} Q then contrasts this idealized notion of kingship with contemporary, deficient ones (Q 7:24; 10:24). This innovation with respect to ideals of kingship, then, is directly related to the “thought world” of the authors which is replete with legal and administrative language that has been infused with their contemporary political ideologies.

In addition, Q’s understanding of temporal horizons and deployment of apocalyptic language constitutes another expression of innovation. Q negotiates a number of expectations in its ideological project that both appeal to a “golden age” but also anticipate a new social order. Many commentators have rightly noted the way that Q works with cultural stock from the Israelite tradition (whether written or oral), as well as how many of the ethical injunctions are fairly commonplace and reflect sentiments found in Jewish wisdom texts.\footnote{120} At the same time, these ideas are situated in an entirely new cosmology that orbits around the initial

\footnote{118} This point needs very little substantiation. The several references to “Gentiles” in Q take for granted that the authors and probably the initial audience are Jewish. Moreover, Q employs imagery directly from the Israelite tradition for many of its arguments and, of course, frames Jesus’ mission in terms a succession of prophets sent to Israel, who were subsequently rejected.

\footnote{119} Bazzana, \textit{Kingdom and Bureaucracy} (forthcoming).

\footnote{120} Kloppenborg, \textit{The Formation of Q}, 276–89. The genre is more broadly conceived as “Near Eastern Instructions,” but within that category fall \textit{Ben Sira} and several selections of Proverbs; so also, Kirk, \textit{The Composition of the Sayings Source}, passim, esp. 130–49, 275–89.
appearance, the subsequent absence, and the eventual return of the son of man. Many commentators have understandably overlooked this implicit temporal “arc” that lurks behind Q’s sayings, but according to Labahn, Q deliberately situates its narrative world in the period between the time when Jesus preached and his anticipated return as the Son of Man. In doing so, “[s]o wird ein Bogen aufgemacht, der die Gegenwart zwischen erzählter Errinnerung und erwarteter Zukunft als zu gestaltender Handlungsraum zu verstehen gibt” (“An arc is opened, which understands the present as formative space for action between narrated memories and awaited future.”)\textsuperscript{121} That is, \textit{contra} Horsley, Q is not trying to simply restore former “Israelite” village ethics, but rather it imagines that they are projected forward into a new order, whose chronology is structured by Jesus’ presence and absence.

Whereas Q also uses apocalyptic language to underscore its preaching, this is, in some ways, a creative deployment as well. Commentators have made much of trying to assess how Q should be read as either an “apocalyptic” or “wisdom” text.\textsuperscript{122} This debate, however, not only presupposes rigid genre boundaries but is also insensitive to authorial creativity, which, as I have argued, is precisely the feature which is outstanding in many social movements which middling figures facilitate or mediate. Many have argued that Q contains sayings and tropes that might be considered “apocalyptic,” but Kloppenborg demonstrates how apocalyptic language in Q functions atypically in comparison to other apocalyptic writings. While the text does indeed employ apocalyptic metaphors, it does so:

\textsuperscript{121} Labahn, \textit{Der Gekommene als Wiederkommender}, 232.

\textsuperscript{122} Illustrative of this muddled debate is Horsley’s harangue in \textit{Whoever Hears You Hears Me} (“The Contours of Q,” 62–70; see also idem, “Logoi Prophētōn?” 196–200); a more nuanced treatment of this topic is Kloppenborg, “Symbolic Eschatology and Apocalypticism in Q,” \textit{HTR} 80.3 (Jul., 1987): 287–306.
The Ideological Project in Q

not because it speaks from an ‘apocalyptic situation’ of anomy but because the symbolic character of apocalyptic language could be turned to serve Q's particular aims. Such language is used creatively to dramatize the transfiguration of the present: apocalyptic symbols lend their force both negatively, by the subverting of confidence in the everydayness of existence, and positively, by buttressing a vision of rich and empowered existence based on the instruction of Jesus.\footnote{Kloppenborg, “Symbolic Eschatology and Apocalypticism in Q,” 304.}

So the hackneyed question of whether or not Q is an apocalyptic or a wisdom text is a moot issue. Q has elements of both and combines them rather cleverly, resisting our modern notions of fixed genre boundaries. It is important to realize that the polemical, apocalyptic imagery is in service of highlighting the importance of the ethical material.

Q’s authors also adopt an intellectual approach to socio-economic problems that it perceives and wrestles with in its social context. We have noted that these problems entail such tangible matters as social inequality, economic exploitation, and challenges to the group mentality—topics that would theoretically make good sense to peasant ears. But Q is already looking beyond the particular conditions of inequality and exploitation to the existential conditions that bring those situations into being, and the discourse, in Q\footnote{Kloppenborg, “Symbolic Eschatology and Apocalypticism in Q,” 304.} at least, is experimenting with a new kind of interaction (divine mimesis, especially as it is promoted by 6:20–49) to extinguish those particular problems. Q’s authors are thus, according to Arnal, “addressing an entirely different question than poverty at large” and have “appropriated an already-extant discourse and applied it to a new problem, a problem already-given, and not give by or as a result of the discourse in question, but by the social forces and conditions
exterior to that discourse.” In other words, the register from which the Q people speak has put an entirely new slant on this project.

Finally, somewhat less dramatic than the previous points, I argue that we also see originality in the very form of the document. Q is not simply a sayings collection à la the Gospel of Thomas or the Sentences of Sextus, nor is its narrative fully developed. This hybrid genre caused Koester and Robinson to hypothesize that there was a general development from sayings collections to narratives in the Christian tradition. This notion of a trajectory is less secure now, but the observations about Q nevertheless hold. Q weaves sayings and narrative bits side by side. Even when the narrative is absent, the horizon of expectation still looms in the background, structuring the time and space of the person who receives it. The narrative is used at key points to communicate crucial information about the figure of Jesus, but the sayings are the vehicle for the social critique, bound up with, in fact, directly related to, a commentary on the social experience of the Q people.

So we may surmise that Q is a creative and innovative intellectual product that reflects precisely the same sort of social location that was described in Chapter Two. This social location engenders a social critique and often explores alternative social configurations to the ones challenged by the critique. The closest analogues out of the examples that were

126 As E. P. Sanders observes, the whole notion of “trajectory,” whether intentionally or not, imports the notion of a single line of development into the “Christian” tradition (Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977], 20–24). So also, Kloppenborg notes that the position from which Koester, in particular, started when hypothesizing Q’s place in the development of Christianity was methodologically problematic (The Formation of Q, 38–39).
127 Labahn, Der Gekommene als Wiederkommender, passim.
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presented are the “peasant intellectuals” in Tanzania who intervened on behalf of the peasant villagers when the British attempted to hijack the chiefdom structure. Like those intellectuals, Q’s authors created a kind of counter-discourse to contest their situation, and it was made possible directly through their middling position: their access to rather restricted education, their familiarity with scribal ideologies, and their contact with multiple ways of life and modes of production. In this discourse, they promoted the new system of values associated with their Jesus movement and their new ways of thinking about the world. Moreover, Q’s authors had access to a variety of cultural resources for this project, similar to the sort that Wolf recognized among structurally marginal literati: they had “a communication field vastly larger than that of the past, and full of new learning which suggests powerful visions not dreamed of in the inherited ideology.”

These cultural resources explain well such creative and innovative features as Q’s hybridized political ideology in the kingdom of God and its atypical use of apocalyptic language to promote something notably non-apocalyptic. Finally, the examples of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers discussed in Chapter Two are suggestive for seeing how a new intellectual product can stem directly from culturally or socially marginal figures. It is, in fact, the condition of structural marginality that often leads to discourse and rhetoric that valorizes that condition. We can thus conclude that the social location of Q’s authors likewise acted as a kind of generating milieu for the nexus of ideas and their creative combination in the text.

128 Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, 288.
5 Articulating Class Concerns and Facilitating a Social Movement: A Constituency for Q?

As an extension of its creativity, Q engages in a related ideological product: the creation and promotion of an identity centered on Jesus and accordingly, a kind of constituency for the movement associated with that identity (albeit nascent). Framing the parameters of their social world through the kingdom of God is one of the central parts of this project. This framing entails two primary rhetorical strategies: (1) the proffering of the kingdom of God and (2) the maintenance of structural marginality to define its constituency. Through these strategies, Q’s authors participate in the third characteristic of middling figures that was discussed in Chapter Two: articulating class interests. For Q, this enterprise is something more complex, however, because the authors are not simply capitalizing on a coherent class that is fully formed and waiting to be represented. They are instead creating their own

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130 Here I am interested in marginality as positionality in a wider social structure, not marginality as simply the lack of material resources. This reflects Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of the term as she uses it to correct for the deficiencies in the category “the poor”: I do not think the social category of ‘the poor’ is sufficient to describe the inclusive character of the Jesus movement. Added to this category must be that of ‘the marginal,’ because the healing stories, as well as the descriptions of other persons in the Jesus traditions, indicate that Jesus and his movement were open to all, especially to the ‘outcast’ of his society and religion. Although the majority of the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners might have been poor, some of them were probably not (In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 141).

There are numerous problematic categories in this statement, such as “his society” and “religion,” not to mention that her interest lies with the historical Jesus not the Q group, but the point about marginality is critical. On one hand, Q is quite sensitive to social and economic marginality and hopes to alter many of these circumstances. On the other, the text consistently defines itself as positionally or structurally marginal, aligning a certain loyal group within the kingdom of God and keeping those who do not exhibit proper allegiance at a distance.

131 The notion of class itself in this context is problematic. The use of class in Chapter Two largely presumed a Marxist definition, wherein a group was defined by common socio-economic interests. That definition will be less useful here, because of the acknowledged difficulty of knowing how Q’s socio-economic references
“class,” or constituency, through this Jesus movement, stitched together from a variety of figures on their social landscape. It is difficult to determine whether or not this social reconfiguration ever came to fruition in reality, but nevertheless, at the discursive level, Q’s authors masquerade as spokespeople for the group associated with Jesus and as those authorized to be caretakers of this Jesus tradition. Before exploring the tricky concept of the kingdom of God, it is necessary to say a few words regarding Q’s audience.

5.1 Q’s Audience

It is indubitably clear at this point that a homogenous peasant group is not the intended audience of Q, nor is Q the spontaneous oral expression their interests. But who is the audience? On one hand, the text is self-referential in that many passages comment on the probable social experience of the authors, but on the other, this commentary is accomplished by absorbing and redeploying the social experience and interests of other groups. Thus, other social groups are in view even when the Q people are talking about themselves. This in itself does not make them an audience; however, Q itself imagines that its message is being spread to potential affiliates, so we should try to define the contours of that envisioned audience, to the extent possible. The authors seem, at the least, to have many targets on their social scape, and they are ultimately trying to orient them all towards affiliation with Jesus and the kingdom of God.

What has sidetracked many proponents of the peasant milieu of Q has been a preoccupation of the imagery of rural modes of existence and economic marginality in Q.

connect with the real world. Thus, “class” in the present discussion indicates only a group with a relatively coherent identity, even if it is only defined as such against “outsiders.”
But they have paid less attention to how this imagery is *deployed*. As described, Q’s authors are well aware of the mode of life of disadvantaged peasants, and they use those experiences to construct their own identity. So Q is, in one sense, hypersensitive to tropes of extreme disadvantage, but only insofar as they contribute to its own self-definition. At the same time, Q’s economic comments are not cut from whole cloth. There is also a noticeable selection of passages that concern people who are more well-to-do than those discussed so far. Q 6:30, for instance, presumes someone with the capacity to grant loans, and Q 6:38 is also directed at persons with the capacity to lend.\(^{132}\) Q 12:33–34 supposes that some are enticed by the temptation to hoard material items for their own security. Granted, these examples give no indication of the extent of surplus resources that the audience is imagined to have, but nevertheless, they do not cohere with the experiences of those who worry about food and clothing, such as those alluded to in Q 12:22b–33. If Luke 12:13–14 is in Q,\(^ {133}\) Q’s authors appear to be targeting people who receive family inheritance (κληρονομία). So also, if Q 12:16–20 stands in Q as well,\(^ {134}\) we have even more “advice” from Q’s authors to people who have disposable resources. In addition, the language of “storing” that is evident in many passages (Q 12:16–20, 33–34), would not have resonated strongly with peasants. It not only would have been entirely appropriate language for scribes to use, as Bazzana has shown, but when deployed for rhetorical purposes, it makes more sense when it is aimed at those who

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\(^{133}\) Luke 12:13–14 has no parallel in Matthew, but there is a closely worded version in Thomas 72. On its inclusion in Q, see Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels*, 128. This is the minority position among participants in the IQP.

\(^{134}\) Like Luke 12:13–14, Luke 12:16–20 has no parallel in Matthew but a close one in Thomas 63. These passages both are likely to be in Q given the strong sense of valuation of treasure that they share with Q 12:33–34 and even Q 12:39–40, which are all linked with the previous material on the concern “physical needs or wealth” (Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q*, 216–23). Cf. Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels*, 128.
have the capacity to store surplus resources or at least the awareness of the benefits of doing so.

Thus, Q has in mind multiple audiences and it is trying to mediate a message to them, perhaps not succeeding entirely because what comforts those whose headspace is in the world of granting loans to others and storing up foodstuffs will do very little for someone who has difficulty meeting basic subsistence needs. The interests of all these people, nevertheless, are positioned together and oriented toward the single-minded focus on the kingdom, which they all should have in common. In this way, as I suggest below, its discourse has the capacity to link different groups and is a deliberate attempt to target and bond a variety of people within this concept. Just as the middling figures in Chapter Two were often found to link or bridge peasants and elites or urban and rural dwellers, so also Q tries to touch base with diverse groups in its text.

The examples from which Q draws appeal to a variety of social experiences. Q does not consistently target any one “class” of people, but imagines that many can potentially join its movement; hence it uses imagery which involves multiple spheres of life. It is possible to see all these references as simply metaphorical, but it seems unwise to strip them from their currency and value in the real world, to which Q appears to be quite sensitive and which Q imagines will be reconfigured in the kingdom.

We should, of course, distinguish between real and imagined audiences. Just because Q imagines all of these people potentially responding to their message does not mean that they were literally in the audience of any particular performance of the text. Given that many sayings are directed inwardly to the group, it is difficult to discern the extent to which the text ever had any audience beyond the authors themselves. Nevertheless, Q’s tradents still
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seem to imagine that they are resourceful and persuasive enough to reach a range of people, which is an important way in which they try to assert their power and authority within the text.

5.2 The Kingdom of God in Q: The Crux of Q?

Perhaps the clearest example of Q’s authors’ creative and innovative capacity is found in their generating, shaping, and deploying of the concept “the kingdom of God” (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ). Through this semantic matrix, there develops a new social configuration which aligns people in the same relationship to each other vis-à-vis God, downplaying (although not necessarily leveling or extinguishing) their socio-economic differences. In this way, the kingdom of God has the potential to create a new “class” identity in the Q movement which defines its constituency based on its assent to the ideology of Jesus and the Q people.  

Some remarks on the term ideology are prudent, because it has varying meanings in different contexts. In this project, ideology is treated similar to a “world-view” in that it implies the framework for thinking about the world which characterizes a particular group, and importantly, this ideology comes into being because of similar socio-economic experiences shared by the members of the group. Thus, the ideology of a particular group is not a given set of ideas but one that is formed in response to discrete experiences. This understanding of ideology is similar to one discussed by Raymond Guess (The Idea of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School [Modern European Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981]), whom I quote at length to illustrate this view in detail:

The intuition that motivates the introduction of a concept of ‘ideology as world-view’ is that individuals and groups don’t just ‘have’ randomly collected bundles of beliefs, attitudes, life-goals, forms of artistic activity, etc. These bundles generally have some coherency—although it is very hard to say in general in what this coherency consists—the elements fit together in the bundle are complexly related to each other, they all somehow ‘fit,’ and the whole bundle has a characteristic structure which is often discernible even to an outside observer (10). Furthermore, Guess describes certain “properties” of these “bundles” of beliefs: they must be shared among members of the group; they must have a “wide and deep influence” on members’ behaviour; they must be firmly entrenched among the members; and they must “deal with the central issues of human life (i.e. they give interpretations of such things as death, the need to work, sexuality, etc) or central metaphysical issues” (10). In other words, ideology as world-view entails an explanation for the way the world appears to work (from the perspective of a particular group, based on their experience), and the explanation seems to possess a logic. This also corresponds to Terry Eagleton’s second (of six) definitions of ideology: “ideas and beliefs (whether true or false) which symbolize the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class” (Ideology: An Introduction [London: Verso, 1991], 29). These definitions, furthermore, are quite similar to Rohrbaugh’s understanding of the “social location of thought” (“Social Location of Thought”).
Language of the kingdom is used throughout Q as if it were self-evident, and so we are initially in a difficult position for trying to understand it. It has recently become clear that this concept has important counterparts in documentary papyri, which help us understand it, not as a notion that finds it referent in “religious” discourse, but rather in the discourse of antique political ideologies. This discourse, unfortunately, has not been the first place commentators have turned to make sense of this concept.

While a discussion of “the kingdom of God” could fill several monographs, it is important here to at least outline the major ways this concept has been understood by scholars who focus closely on Q, for this term is often taken as the “cardinal concept” in the document. Many have simply opted to take this as a stock phrase which refers to the notion that God will be in command at a future time/place—that is, the kingdom is usually taken as self-evident, which is precisely how Q treats it. Jacobson, for example, does not go into great detail on this concept, save to note how Q constructs the kingdom as something desirable and which is opposed to the kingdom of Satan. He uses the parable of the leaven and the mustard seed to conclude that the kingdom is also something “to which diaspora Jews (or perhaps gentiles) will come streaming, [and] is present even now but in almost unrecognizable significance.” Here at least, he recognizes a tension in Q’s language of the kingdom between a present reality and a future expectation.

136 Bazzana, Kingdom and Bureaucracy (forthcoming). So also, Horsley sees it as the “principal, unifying theme of the whole document” (“The Contours of Q,” 87).

137 Jacobson, Q: The First Gospel, 182.

138 Jacobson, Q: The First Gospel, 204.
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As discussed in Chapter One, Horsley conceives of the kingdom as a symbol for a thorough-going renewal program that was intended to rejuvenate village communities and encourage their intra-dependence, constituting a form of resistance against external, exploitative economic pressures from elites.\(^{139}\) To reiterate his position, the kingdom entails “food for subsistence and the cancellation of debts, which threatened the viability of the peasant household”\(^{140}\) and an ethic based on “the renewal of Israel in its basic social form, the village community.”\(^{141}\) In a similar interpretation which emphasizes the socio-economic dimension of the kingdom, Oakman views the reference to the kingdom in the Lord’s Prayer (which he presumes to go back to Jesus, in some form) to mean “something like the ‘lordship of God’ over historical affairs … [anticipating] something like an Exodus from “Egypt,” representing what must have been felt to be oppressive circumstances.”\(^{142}\) While agreeing with the general political conflict out of which the earliest Jesus movement stemmed, Crossan has a special understanding of the kingdom which is hybridized to represent both sapiential eschatology and interests of the lower classes. Thus, the kingdom is “a here and now Kingdom of nobodies and the destitute”\(^{143}\) with explicitly political overtones.\(^{144}\)

\(^{139}\) See pp. 30–31.

\(^{140}\) Horsley, “The Kingdom of God as the Renewal of Israel,” 267.

\(^{141}\) Horsley, “The Kingdom of God as the Renewal of Israel,” 270.

\(^{142}\) Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 215.

\(^{143}\) Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 292.

\(^{144}\) Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 266: “[W]hat we are actually talking about is power and rule, a state much more than a place, or, if you will, a place only because of a state. And, lest one ambiguity replace another, state means way of life or mode of being, not nation or empire….The kingdom of God is divine rule, and that, as ideal, transcends and judges all human rule. The focus of discussion is not on kinds but on rulers, not on kingdom but on power, not on place but on state.”
Crossan famously sees the Jesus movement as concerned with those even more economically disadvantaged than peasants: the kingdom was “not of the Peasant or Artisan classes [in Lenski’s typology] but of the Unclean, Degraded, and Expendable classes.”

Fledderman takes a different approach and finds the kingdom of God to be solely about discipleship. This reading relies on cross-referencing many of the references to the kingdom with other parts of Q. Thus, Fledderman links “the poor” in Q 6:20b to the first temptation in Q 4:1–4, so that “[t]he kingdom of God appears here and now in the present when the disciples turn away from bread to worship God.” The kingdom is therefore “the present state of the disciples as a way of being with God in the world.” Despite this emphasis on kind of existential state of being, he is also able to understand the kingdom also as a place, and even as an event that “unfolds in time.” This interpretation becomes even more nebulous, because Fledderman ultimately settles on the kingdom being a strong association with God: “The kingdom centers on God; it is the place where God is God.”

Even so, similar to Horsley and Crossan, Fledderman also holds that the kingdom is something actually expressed through the community which used or produced Q. By aligning

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145 Crossan, The Historical Jesus, 273.
146 Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 83 and esp. 143–51.
147 Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 144–45.
148 Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 145.
149 Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 150.
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themselves with Jesus, “the disciple enters here and now into the kingdom of God actualized in the Christian community.”

I have argued elsewhere that the kingdom of God should primary be understood for its discursive function, not its symbolic function. It does not stand for a future event or a place, but unites a nexus of ideas that endorse the ethos promulgated in Q seriously. This is a political understanding; in the same way that communism is a political expression of communist ethics, so also the kingdom of God is an expression of kingdom ethos, however that is understood. The fact that Q appears to have been relatively unsuccessful in spreading its initial message indicates that it may never have had any explicit expression in a particular community. In any case, at this point in Q studies, the simplistic notion that the kingdom represents only the expectation of a physical place or the expression of a discrete community can be dismissed. The safest bet is to focus on the kingdom of God at the rhetorical level. No matter how many scholars have wanted to it be a haven for the poor and oppressed, it is a rhetorical device which reacts and interacts on a discursive level.

The multiple interpretations of the kingdom seen thus far ought to be cause for alarm. Or should they? On the contrary, by admitting that the kingdom need not have one sole referent, or put differently, by recognizing the fluid nature of the concept, we see how this

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150 Fledderman, *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary*. 151. Contra Fledderman, I have thus far avoided treating Q in terms of a “Christian” document, because I do not see any evidence that the authors were self-consciously Christian or even that they thought they had a unique or new form of Judaism.

151 Rollens, “Does ‘Q’ Have Any Representative Potential?” 64–78. I argued that attempts to make the kingdom symbolize a single idea tend to reflect contemporary presuppositions about the nature of religious discourse.

152 The language of the kingdom is often not overtly apocalyptic, unless one imports that sense into the passages from elsewhere. Q does not anticipate any specific “apocalyptic timetable” (Jacobson, *Q: The First Gospel*, 233) and is rather “laconic” with specific references to the end time (Kloppenborg, “Symbolic Eschatology and Apocalypticism in Q,” 303).
The Ideological Project in Q trope is a creative, rhetorical device which Q’s authors used to accomplish a number of tasks. This fluidity has been apparent to others as well. Even in his literary analysis of the composition of Q, Kloppenborg had noted how the kingdom entails variation of meanings: the kingdom not only provides the “motivation” for the Q group, it is also simultaneously the “content (10:9) and the raison d’être of missionary preaching (12:2 and probably 13:18–21) and the focal point of all activity and expectation (9:62; 11:2; 12:29–31).”153 So also, in Mack’s early work on the Q community, he posited that the idea of what the kingdom was underwent a noticeable development in Q. Initially, he argued, the Q people were engaged in a social experiment aimed at creating an egalitarian community, known as the kingdom of God. The authors first used the concept to refer “not only to the challenge of risky living without expectation that the social world will change but also to the exemplification of a way of life that like-minded persons might want to share.”154 In later redactional units in Q, he found that the kingdom changed to symbolize something more apocalyptic, to be revealed at a different point in time.155 Although sharing with Mack a similar analogy between the Q people and Cynic philosophers, Vaage concedes that the kingdom of God is used inconsistently in Q. In comparing Q’s rhetoric to strategies in Cynic writings, Vaage concludes that the references to the kingdom in Q actually serve a number of purposes, such as explaining what poverty means one case (Q 6:20b–21) or describing “a particular social

154 Mack, The Lost Gospel Q, 123.
155 Interestingly, Mack’s own understanding of the kingdom shifts over time as well: it becomes a less specific, more rhetorically dependent, concept the more Mack sees affinities between the Q people and Cynics. See especially, Mack, “Q and a cynic–like Jesus,” 25–36.
The Ideological Project in Q

posture” that enables social critique in another (Q 13:18–19, 20–21).\(^{156}\) Vaage’s analysis highlights how the kingdom sayings are not always meant to communicate a single idea but rather a whole set of programmatic issues have been synthesized by the “organizational ‘stamp’” of the “kingdom of God.”\(^ {157}\)

Following Vaage, Arnal focuses on the concept of the kingdom as expressed in Q\(^1\), finding that it entails “a general set of suppositions about God and the relationships of God to the circumstances that Q addresses.”\(^{158}\) The specific activity and ethos that Q endorses, he argues, follow directly from the suppositions entailed in this ideology. These suppositions, in turn, are structurally homologous to the circumstances of the authors: “[I]ts theological emphasis on the immediacy and nearness of God, God’s accessibility through nature and direct contact, for instance, is a structural homologue to and symbolic articulation of the social consequences of the Q program, a program that eliminates all extra–village or extra–local political structures.”\(^{159}\) Again, the complexities of trying to define a fixed idea of the kingdom are somewhat overcome by treating the kingdom as a kind of political ideology which is both presupposed and expressed by Q’s argumentation.\(^{160}\)


\(^{158}\) Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 198.

\(^{159}\) Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 199.

\(^{160}\) Arnal’s task is made easier by the fact that he only explores the kingdom, in Q\(^1\). Were he to explore its use in Q\(^2\), this understanding would require expansion.
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The polyvalence of this concept does more than organize information; it functions to disorient and reorient the audience’s expectations, which is precisely in line with Q’s general ethos. Thus, it is entirely understandable that the kingdom is not a symbol with one consistent referent—it is the concept itself that is the authoritative and rhetorically unifying device for a range of socio-political commentary. It is able to encompass ideas about the providence of God, notions about the future and the judgment entailed therein, socio-ethical commentary, among other things—all because of the uses to which the symbol is put. That is, it has no content outside of that with which the authors imbue it. It functions as an abstract discursive unit, which is clearly a creative, intellectual effort to define and solve problems, reflecting the way, as Pels so eloquently puts it, philosophy, of which Q can be considered a sort, “steps into the world as a disappointed politics.”

Perhaps the most persuasive treatment of the kingdom of God in Q is Bazzana’s recent analysis of this language in light of documentary papyri to discover the “political ideology” of the kingdom. While not discounting the resonances that the prayer has with Israelite traditions, he argues that the papyrological counterparts of the prayer have been


162 An analogous example of what I have in mind here is the concept of “democracy” in the Western world. In its most basic form, democracy implies equal political participation. But, depending on who is deploying the term, it can be made to encompass all manner of things, such as ideas about racial or gender equality, notions of free enterprise and individual civic responsibility, and even presumptions about the evolution of political processes in contemporary society (i.e., democracy represents the most sophisticated form of political representation among modern societies). Moreover, as recent political events have shown, many consider democracy to be something that can be “spread” throughout the world and it can “reach” people, fundamentally changing their orientation toward the world after its introduction (i.e., a nation-state with democracy is regarded as fundamentally different that one lacking it). Furthermore, “spreading democracy” (however that may be interpreted) is assumed to be valuable in and of itself. The polyvalence of “democracy” and the self-evident way in which it is frequently deployed are thus eerily similar to the way the Q uses the language of the kingdom to bring together a number of ideas.

163 Pels, The Intellectual as Stranger, 194.
overlooked. As noted earlier, the kingdom references in the Lord’s Prayer participate in an expression of ideals about royal figures in the eastern Mediterranean, including that kings and queens are forgiving of legal transgressions and that they provide economically in times of want. His interpretation helps us account for the diversity of ways that Q seems to deploy the concept of the kingdom. The βασιλεία in documentary papyri is not a single thing, but an “organizational stamp,” to use Vaage’s earlier wording, to encompass a number of ideas about what it means to run a kingdom properly, and this interpretation makes sense of some of the more opaque references to the kingdom in Q. For instance, the odd reference in Q 11:20, which clearly precludes an apocalyptic reading, makes sense in terms of papyri which depict the far-reaching influence of royal sovereigns. In such texts as BGU 2.522 we see an important analogue of royal beneficence “reaching” (φθανούσης; cf. Q’s ἔφθασεν) the petitioner.164 So also, Q 10:9 ties the presence of the kingdom to relief from suffering, which is a trait that is often associated with Hellenistic royal figures.165

With Bazanna’s compelling interpretation, furthermore, we are confronted with an important function of the kingdom in Q, beyond communicating a set of ideals about God and his kingship. The references also create “subjects” out of all recipients of the βασιλεία ideology and locate them together in the same structural position vis-à-vis God: Q demands a strong association “between the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ and subjects—human beings.”166 In other

164 Bazanna, Kingdom and Bureaucracy (forthcoming). This is not an isolated case. As Bazanna also notes, petitions tend to be highly stylized and so this kind of petition reflects an entire genre of requests for beneficence or amnesty. He offers further examples with P.Mich.3.174 and P.Mich 6.426, which both employ φθανούσης.
165 Bazanna, Kingdom and Bureaucracy (forthcoming).
166 Bazanna, Kingdom and Bureaucracy (forthcoming).
words, disparate interests are aligned *through or by means of*—not *in*—the language of the kingdom.

The polyvalent nature of the kingdom in Q is thus entirely appropriate, for it allows it to be an ideologically valuable rhetorical tool for addressing all sorts of people with diverse interests. It could absorb and endorse numerous interests—economic, social, political or otherwise. Much like a political concept such as democracy can be wielded to reflect particular things for whoever is deploying it, so also can the kingdom of God be flexible enough to stand for whatever Q’s authors want it to. The kingdom is thus one of the best examples of the creativity on the part of Q’s authors. It represents a synthesis of a broad collection of ideas of social interaction and political ideology. It is the idea in Q around which all the ethical exhortations and maxims orbit, but it is also the spectre which is underscored and reauthorized the polemical, judgmental language.

Moreover, the polyvalent nature of the concept seems to be intentional. Although, as noted, Q uses the concept as if it were self-evident, it seems absurd to propose that the authors were unaware of the different ways they were using the term. The reference to the kingdom in Q 7:28 is clearly used to say something about John the Baptist; its presence in Q 10:9 has to do with something entirely different, namely, the activities of people who spread Q’s message; and in Q 16:16 it seems to be a comment on the current experience of the Q people, which has been correlated to the timetable of the kingdom. It would be special pleading to try to force these references participate in one unified concept. Thus, we must imagine that Q’s authors knew of the rhetorical efficacy of this term and used it where and how it was useful, regardless of the “ultimate” referent (if any).
5.3 The Maintenance of Marginality and the Kingdom in Q

Whereas Q invests heavily in creating and deploying the concept of the kingdom for rhetorical ends, it also supports this project with consistent, custodial maintenance by maintaining firm, dualistic categories in its rhetoric so as to indicate who is with and who is against the Q group. Since the kingdom is such a nebulous concept, Q needs to define its project and constituency rigidly, even if not clearly, and the text, therefore, goes to great lengths to underscore the allegiances in the kingdom. Q depicts this loyalty as existing in only a small, persecuted\(^{167}\) group; this point is hardly disputed and so will easily be demonstrated by a few key passages.

Many Q sayings define mutually exclusive allegiances for insiders and outsiders. For instance, Q 11:23 rigidly reaffirms the position of the Q group and uses Jesus to claim that the one who is not with him is against him, and those outsiders will “scatter” (σκορπίζει)\(^{168}\). While certainly having eschatological overtones, this open-ended formulation could be taken to mean a number of things, but within the wider unit within which it functions in Q (11:14–51), the meaning is in service of the harsh polemic intended to promote adherence to Jesus’ message and hence the message of the Q people\(^{169}\). The saying on the return of the unclean

\(^{167}\) Whether or not there are real circumstances of persecution in Q’s social setting is debatable. I suspect that this is not the case, and rather, that experiences of rejection have been wedded with Deuteronomistic theology so as to create this picture. Moreover, critics have probably been far too influenced by Christianity’s rhetoric of persecution and martyrdom, which was not as widespread or extensive as Church fathers would have us believe. See Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013).

\(^{168}\) Mark’s version of this saying (Mark 9:40) does not contain the eschatological threat of being scattered. Rather, the sense is not of punishment or destruction for disloyalty, as in Q, but only of a reward for allegiance (9:41).

spirit (Q 11:24–26) warns against any superficial adherence to the message, and the following material on the request for a sign (Q 11:29–32) chastises those who do not properly respond and even dare to ask for more proof. For Q, there are thus only two categories of people: those who are unambiguously loyal and those who are not. The absoluteness of this juxtaposition is echoed in Q 10:22, where Jesus claims that one only knows the father through the son and “to whomever the son chooses to reveal him” (ἐὰν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκάλυψαι). Q 10:23 praises a small few (you [pl.], as evidenced in ὑμῖν, βλέπετε, and ἀκοὐετε) who have been able to discern something that most others have missed. In other words, there is no grey area: one is either affiliated with the small group that accepts Jesus’ message or one is not. Moreover, one is only granted this affiliation if one “measures up,” so to speak, and Jesus chooses to offer revelation. Q 12:8–9 echoes this sentiment, with Jesus acting as a broker in a series of allegiances.

The collection of sayings in Q 13:24–27, 29, 28 reinforces this even more. Verses 13:24–27 imagine a scenario in which people try to enter the master’s house, only to be rejected with the accusation of “doing lawlessness” (οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομία). The appending of Q 13:29, 28 orients this scene toward the future, promising a reward (a banquet with past patriarchs) for those aligned with the kingdom of God and vivid suffering for those left out (ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων). Q 13:30 reinforces the binary nature of the Q people’s marginal position: The last will be first, and the first, last. The underlying sentiment of all this is absolutely clear: not adhering to the message in Q amounts to dissociation with the group.

The dualism is continued in Q 17:34–35, where the speaker (presumably Jesus) describes two eschatological situations in which two people are suddenly rent apart. That this
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is an eschatological situation follows from this passages association with Q 17:26–27, 30, which describes what will take place on the day of the son of man. Q is oddly ambiguous on which is the more desirable position, to be taken or to be left, but again, the sense is clear: there are only two options. The similar statement in Thomas 61 offers little clarity, for not only is it unclear whether or not Thomas’ version is older, but Thomas also clearly has in view life and death (ποινην ποιαν παραλαμβάνει) instead of an eschatological reckoning, as Q does. In any case, given the broader interests of Q, the best interpretation lies in seeing how Q uses this passage to reveal mutually exclusive fates for those for and against their group.

Lest one think that these allegiances are fluid, Q 16:13a disabuses one of that misconception. Critics have made much of the connection between 16:13b to the original part of the saying and have suggested that this is solely about Jesus’ critique of money and the rich. On one hand, there is something to this: Q is clearly concerned with the problems that wealth and riches entail. However, the general sentiment behind Q 16:13a is capable of functioning on its own (cf. Thomas 47), and in that way, it largely conveys a concern for

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170 The general consensus of the Jesus Seminar is that Thomas’ version is older (Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus [San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996], 507). On the other hand, Thomas’ version may be an attempt to make sense of the perplexing situation in the original saying, preserved by Q 17:34–35. That is, Q’s version is ambiguous about not only which fate is preferred, but also what the details of the eschatological situation are. The author of Thomas may be thus trying to narrow the range of possibilities for interpretation by making this sentiment strictly about life and death, which would imply a later version. This is even more compelling if we observe that Q’s version is closely connected to 17:26-30, which recalls the Lot story (“City and Wasteland,” 152). If the author of Thomas somehow missed this connection to the Lot story (or it was never present in the version to which he had access to begin with), his need to make sense of this situation would be all the more necessary.


172 Thomas’ version does not concern God and mammon but preserves the same sense of two mutually exclusive options: “Jesus said, ‘A person cannot mount two horses or bend two bows. And a slave cannot serve two masters, otherwise that slave will honour the one and offend the other’” (Thomas 47).
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loyalty. Moreover, mammon may be metaphorical and may refer to a wider category of “worldly things” that distract for sole loyalty to the Q group. Luke certainly understands this passage for its sense of loyalty, because he appends it to sayings on being faithful (Luke 16:10–12).173

Like the deliberately fluid use of the βασιλεία language, the repetition of this rigid duality is intentional. Repetition of key themes, as Fledderman notes, is one of the literary features central to Q’s aesthetic.174 Repetition extends beyond words and figures to metaphors and themes, so that throughout the document, one is constantly reminded that Q wants to construe the small, marginal group who aligns itself with Jesus over against those in “mainstream” society who either reject them or who have not fully committed. There are only two sides, and the audience must choose.

Furthermore, Q is not simply reflecting two categories of people; it is creating them.175 We have seen that the social world of Q’s authors probably comprised a diversity of social groups. This, together with its overt hostility to those who evidently oppose them, probably indicates that there was far more ambiguity in affiliating with the Q group than the authors would have liked. Deploying this rhetoric of duality and marginality and insisting on

173 Matthew’s understanding of this passage is less clear. It appears that unlike Luke, Matthew understood the crux of the God and mammon saying to center on the lure of material goods in the pursuit of God and Jesus, and so he linked it with other Q material which treated that concern as well (Q 12:22b–33 // Matt 6:25–33). Before this passage in Matthew, there is a concern for elevating heavenly treasures over earthly treasures (Matt 6:19–21), followed by the saying on the eye being the light of the body (Matt 6:22–23). Matt 6:19–21 thus expresses a distinction that Matthew thinks is important, while Matt 6:22–23 emphasizes clear perception in navigating this issue. Matt 6:24 underscores the impossibility of having it both ways, and Matt 6:25–33 consoles those who would still remain tied to worldly things. Even if Matthew took this passage over for its sentiments about material desires, there is still a way in which loyalty (to God and Jesus) is a related issue for him.

174 Fledderman, Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary, 81–82.

175 Cf. Kloppenborg’s observation that the imperatives in Q 6:27–35 recommend an ethos that produces “liminality” (“Blessing and Marginality,” 51).
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it so rigidly within the text is a way to “solve” the problem of waffling allegiance, at least within the text: inflexible dualism organizes at the rhetorical level what was otherwise a very messy scene of allegiances and affiliations ‘on the ground.’ The sayings put on the lips of Jesus actually create and reinforce a position of marginality as much as they reflect that which existed in their social context. In this way, this minority status is consistently maintained, even demanded, throughout the gospel.

In addition to maintenance of its constituency, the polyvalent nature of the βασιλεία required something else. Because the βασιλεία was not self-evident to this constituency that Q wanted to create by its binary language, the authors themselves probably had to act as authorities on this concept. Thus, whereas their scribal skills may have dwindled in to obsolescence in reality, within the group they were trying assemble, they retained some relevance as custodians of this tradition and interpreters who made such a polyvalent symbol meaningful to a range of audiences.

The creation and maintenance of a constituency are similar phenomena to those discussed in Chapter Two, where we also saw how middling figures were often tasked with the ideological work of articulating class interests for disadvantaged groups who could not do so themselves. Gramsci imagined that organic intellectuals would be able to do this kind of work and synthesize the interests of urban workers and rural peasants into a coherent working class ideology. Redfield also observed this activity happening in European peasant communities, when a small group of ‘hinge” figures engaged in political discourse and patriotic activities to help form a recognizable social identity for themselves and the peasants.

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176 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 183–84; Braun, “The Schooling of a Galilean Jesus Association,” 56 (building on Arnal’s argument).
Perhaps the strongest analogue from the examples discussed earlier is the ideological work accomplished by Medha Paktar when she represented an indigenous protest movement opposed to dam-building in India’s Narmada valley: she wove discrete experiences of injustice into a wider political framework (in this case, an environmental one). It is important to acknowledge that Q’s authors are not self-conscious “activists” in the same way that many figures were in Chapter Two. At the same time, their ideas about the way the world works and their vision for the future appear to have much in common with those promoted by middling figures in similar contexts.

5.4 Excursus: The Failure of the Kingdom?

If the kingdom is understood as a polyvalent field of meaning which expresses an ideological matrix and is not the expression of a discrete community or place, it affects how we understand the “success” of this vision. As noted already, Q is rife with indications that its ideas were not well received. Opponents appear in numerous forms such as “this generation,” Israel, and the Pharisees, suggesting that all manner of people did not welcome this message with open arms. Moreover, the compositional history of Q tells the same story: Q’s initial project, which wields the kingdom of God as a rhetoric device to counter to current order of things, is only apparent in its earliest redaction Q\textsuperscript{1}. By the time of the secondary redaction, marked by noteworthy Deuteronomistic theology, there is no kingdom in view. Instead, the project of establishing the kingdom appears to have suffered substantial failure and Q now reflects on that failure with language of polemic and judgment.

Similarly, in Arnal’s reading of Q, all evidence indicates that the social project envisioned by Q’s authors had failed. Taking the latest perceptible vantage point on Q and assessing the development of the social critique in Q\textsuperscript{1} to the polemical material in Q\textsuperscript{2}, Arnal
concludes that the rhetoric displays nothing other than a failure. The failure is not a result of unconvincing ideas or flawed argumentation, he notes, but the realization that Q’s authors “had already lost sufficient power by the time they formulated these speeches that they were unable to exercise sufficient influence to halt further loss…. Persuasion comes, as it were, from the barrel of a gun, and the Q people had no guns.”

That is (as I understand it), we already see in Q² a pushback by Q’s authors against external rejection, in form of appeal to an Israelite tradition likely held in common with their opponents. Thus, proactive social-formation becomes reactive myth-making.

However, I think “failure” may be too strong a word to describe the final form of Q, despite its thoroughgoing pessimism and hostility. That there is a disconnect between what Q set out to do in its rhetoric and what is accomplished in reality should not necessarily be interpreted as a failure. We can consider it a failure no more than Paul’s communities are failures of his visions, even though they are often clearly expressing “Christianity” in a way that is at odds with Paul’s ideals. Only in a narrowly focused sense does this project “fail,” if that implies the failure to accomplish its goals and affect the overall hegemony in its social context.

In Chapter Two, we reviewed remarks by Samual Popkin on the condition under which a social movement will be successful with peasantry. He claimed that a successful movement must (1) use terms and symbols that resonate with peasants; (2) capitalize on hinge figures so that the movement has credibility with peasant population; (3) have a strong ethical code; (4) frame reform in terms of tangible consequences; and (5) accrue other

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middling figures (or those even of higher means) to the group to mobilize more resources. Q, it turns out, seems to evince many of these features. I have shown that much of the imagery in Q would resonate—on some level—with peasants, even though it has been directed toward more abstract ends. With local scribal figures responsible for the text, Q’s authors are (potentially) credible hinge figures who would have currency within village networks. Moreover, Q certainly has a strong ethical code, which would be attractive to a variety of people who were generally unsatisfied with their current lives. Given the preceding analysis in this chapter, it is somewhat difficult to claim that Q is framed in terms of “tangible” consequences, since such abstract reflection is at the fore of the document, but the political ideology of the kingdom could perhaps appear tangible to some. Finally, although nothing in Q shows evidence of attracting members with especially high political or social currency, we may note that eventually, some rather well-to-do people (the authors of Matthew and Luke) adopted it.

Furthermore, there is evidence that Q’s authors attempt to compromise and to manage and mediate different interests, as I have suggested earlier in this chapter. These attempts suggest that Q was engaged in a kind of ideological arbitration, which recognized that compromises needed to be made for the success of the Q group. This is evident not only in the way that it appropriates and “writes up” peasant concerns, but also in the way it works out issues related to the Torah\(^\text{178}\) and even the authority of John the Baptist\(^\text{179}\).

\(^{178}\) For instance, 11:42c and 16:17 acts as correctives to statements which may be taken as too lax with respect to the law. On these developments in Q, see Kloppenborg, “Nomos and Ethos.”

\(^{179}\) Arnal, “Redactional Fabrication and Group Legitimation.”
This kind of working out of a number of issues, trying to synthesize a diversity of issues, and put a coherent frame on the text is precisely what we would expect from a group trying to define itself within Judaism in this period. It reflects a very nascent social movement, but the early stages of one nonetheless. This resonates with the early stages of other social movements:

[S]ocial movements are the product of the interaction of different social and political groups. Internally, movements are often heterogeneous and constantly run the risk of losing their constituency or falling apart. Externally, they are often forced to make alliances and compromises if they want to be successful. In the process, they run the risk of losing their ideological coherence, or of being incorporated into hegemonic politics and mainstream society…. This precarious process requires constant ideological work, in multiple arenas, to articulate demands, forge unity, and legitimize claims.”

As I have suggested, Q shows evidence of this “heterogeneous” constituency which they are trying to reconfigure in the context of their group. Moreover, the text’s continuous responses and challenges to its opponents, even if in reality they are inwardly directed, exemplifies precisely the kind of ideological work described in the above quotation.

Again, it needs to be emphasized that when we think about the actual production of a text like Q, and the literary faculties and economic resources required for it, we are not talking about the most destitute of folks on the first-century Palestinian social scape. Q is an intellectual project, something that draws upon a number of intellectually elite resources in

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order to fashion its ideological program. In this sense, the project is a success, because Q was not simply reabsorbed or “incorporated into hegemonic politics and mainstream society.”\(^{181}\) Q managed to survive, and its ideas were still considered relevant and valuable for later authors—indeed, its existence for several decades indicates that someone or some group wanted to preserve it.

6 Ambiguity in Q

Chapter Two cautioned that representation in social movements should not be idealized, because there are compelling examples of misrepresentation by spokespeople, whether intentional or not. For instance, in his discussion of native political participation in Ecuador, Becker had observed that the indigenous peasants relied on local scribes to pen their grievances in Spanish, but the scribes inadvertently massaged the peasants’ language and ideas in a way that reflected their own values and perceptions of the peasantry. The petitions, he notes, commonly referred to the indigenous people as “*infelices ecuatorianos* (miserable Ecuadorians).” Becker rightly wonders, “Surrounded with family and rooted in a proud cultural tradition, would they see themselves as miserable, or as Ecuadorians for that matter?” No, he concludes, this characterization results from scribal reworking, which was done with the best of interests but amounted to the petitions “lack[ing] a penetrating critique of indigenous exclusion and exploitation.”\(^{182}\) We should expect to find something similar in

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Q, since Q’s authors are not peasants strictly speaking but still employ their experiences for rhetorical purposes.

Whereas it may be possible to see how the language of the kingdom in Q has the potential to synthesize different groups of people, there may be, nevertheless, a kind of unintentional distortion in representing all sorts of people in the text as well. As noted, the above discussion demonstrated that what once may have been concrete socio-economic concerns in Q have consistently been redirected for more rhetorical purposes having to do less with advocating for a group and more with championing a set of abstract ideas about how the world should work and the role of the Q people within that world (Q 6:20b–21; 11:2b–4, 9–13; 12:22b–31, in particular). Thus, although some rural metaphors no doubt reflect peasant modes of production and their experiences in situations of socio-economic dependency (e.g., 3:9 [an unproductive tree chopped down and cast into the fire]; 6:43–45 [the quality of a tree known by its yield]; 12:16–21 [a rich man who has exploited others to amass a large storehouse of crops]; 13:18–19 [a parable related to agricultural growth]), many are directed at a higher register of reflection than that in which most peasants would have participated. While many metaphors undoubtedly concern “rural” or “agrarian” activities, they are drawn from an oddly limited sphere of activity—one which is more closely related to administrative matters than peasant activities. Q’s penchant for metaphors of “storing,” (Q 12:16–21, 24, 33–34; 19:12–13, 15–24, 26), as Bazzana identifies, is a topic

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183 This is in no way to make the claim that peasants could not have participated in this kind of intellectual discourse, but generally speaking, they have not historically produced the kinds of written evidence that suggests that they did. In other words, their intellectual capacities are theoretically no different than those of people who occupy other social locations, but they often lack the technological training and other skill sets which foster these capacities.
that is frequently discussed in documentary papyri produced by administrative figures. Storage and movement of larger quantities of goods thus reflects language that would be entirely appropriate for administrative figures such as village scribes to employ. On the other hand, the frequent appeal to the metaphor of storing would seem to be an odd thing for peasant discourse to focus on—indeed, most transactions at the village level probably involved immediate exchange either through barter or only the minimal amount of coinage. As Q is wont to do with other traditional assumptions of value, the benefits and drawbacks of storing are reevaluated within the text, but nevertheless, the position from which Q begins its argumentation begins with those matters which fall into the purview of administrative dealings, rather than the many that do not. Q’s reflection of “scribal values” also influences the work that this imagery does, by directing it toward more abstract ends, such as promoting the ideals of good judgment, clear perception, and the value of learning. In short, a direct representation of peasant social experiences is mediated and distorted by the middling, administrative figures responsible for Q.

Furthermore, Q distorts what elites it bothers to represent as well. The “kings” in Q are largely incompetent. In Q 7:25, Jesus is depicted as contrasting John the Baptist with “those in finery in kings’ houses” (οἱ τὰ μαλακὰ φοροῦντες ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις τῶν βασιλέων). As Vaage has observed, this polemic against “fine” or “soft” clothing has a counterpart in Cynic

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184 Bazzana, Kingdom and Bureaucracy (forthcoming).
185 Oakman, Jesus and the Peasants, 84–97; Hanson and Oakman, Palestine in the Time of Jesus, 120–25.
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writings, which often extends to the poor character of the wealthy or privileged.\(^{187}\)

Elsewhere, “kings” represent those who have clearly failed to perceive the significance of
Jesus (10:24).\(^{188}\) Moreover, the Pharisees, as Kloppenborg has suggested, are little more than
a caricature of themselves in Q, for the woes directed at them do not even address a realistic
legal debate.\(^{189}\) The role of the Pharisees in the text is to act as ridiculous opponents, over
whom the Q people can champion themselves. Finally, of course, the rich people, wealthy
landowners, and those who generally value material goods in Q consistently fail to recognize

Thus, while it might be appealing to think of Q’s authors addressing disparate
interests in its project, the matter is far more complex. The people whose interests and values
stand behind the rural imagery in Q (i.e., peasants) are not really represented in the texts, but
distorted. Q’s authors want to appropriate the subordinate experience of the peasantry for
their own interests, which are clearly invested in styling the Q people as a marginal position
aligned with the kingdom. In carrying out this program of allegiance, the actual concerns of
the peasant are muted. So also, with other groups of people. The rhetoric of Q would have us
believe that these categories of people are all united in the kingdom of God, but an
unmediated representation of them is doubtless lacking.

\(^{187}\) Vaage, Galilean Upstarts, 96–101.

\(^{188}\) Q 10:23–24 taken on its own does not clearly indicate that perception is related to the person of Jesus, but
the relation between 10:22 and 10:23–24 suggests that this connection is in view. The whole unit may reflect a
situation in which the Q people and their message may have been rejected (Kloppenborg, The Formation of Q,
201).

\(^{189}\) Kloppenborg, “Nomos and Ethos,” 42.
The Ideological Project in Q

Again, this is understandable, in many ways. These kinds of distortions are precisely the sort that Becker identified in his observations about Ecuadorian scribes recalled at the beginning of this section. In Q as well, the authors’ contact with the peasants’ mode of life may have influenced this rhetoric and world of ideas, but the final product reflected their own values and conceptual universe. This confirms what Bourdieu suspected about advocates as well: they are always simultaneously speaking for themselves even when they speak for others. Thus, we may even be tempted to construe Q’s distortion as a kind of exploitation of peasant interests, but this might be too cynical a reading, which would rely on the assumption that the authors did not actually believe the ideals of impartiality that they promoted throughout Q (6:36; 12:6–7).

In short, any project which seeks to discern pellucid social locations for the people in Q’s social world is precarious. Q is not first and foremost interested in those people, but in using the ideas of them for rhetorical purposes. Just as we ought not to see Q’s references to Gentiles as conveying information about “typical” Gentiles in Galilee, so also the references to “the poor” “the rich,” those who worry about food and clothing, those in kings’ houses, and the like are references which work above all to define, not their supposed referents, but the Q people and their interests. In this way, the ambiguity in the way that Q treats social actors tells us more about the authors themselves than the people in their world.

190 See p. 102 n. 125.
7 Summary and Conclusions

We must underscore the very real disconnect between Q’s authors’ self-presentation as non-
elite and powerless and their apparent moderate education and ability to produce such an
astute text. Crucially, the perception of social and economic marginality matters just as much
as the reality of their deprivation, which was probably not as dismal as some of Q’s sayings
taken on their own would have us believe. Q’s project was one that diminished this
disconnect in service of reconfiguring diverse social groups into a kind of egalitarian set of
social relations within the Q group.

This chapter has also problematized the notion that “peasants” underlie Q’s concerns.
On the contrary, Q bears many of the markers of an ideology that would be better situated
within a middling group, which was negotiating different allegiances to different social
groups and thus had an ambiguous social status. The “typical” markers of the peasantry—
rural imagery, agricultural metaphors, and tropes of social and economic marginality—are
certainly present in Q, but they no more point to a peasant group behind Q than they do in the
elite literary products of the Israelite tradition, such as Deuteronomy, which arguably also
preserve “peasant concerns.”191 Yet there is a way in which the authors of Q need to
appropriate the social and economic experience of the peasantry—of being poor, hungry,
day-labourers, figures of low status—to construct their own identity in Q and thus to justify
the social and economic critique placed on the lips of Jesus. This is not a neutral project that

191 That is, Deuteronomy preserves law codes that would benefit non-elite rural dwellers engaged primarily in
agricultural production. For instance, Deut 15:1–11 (on cancelling debts during the sabbatical year and caring
for the poor), 24:6, 11–15 (on not requiring one’s means of livelihood or one’s most personal possessions as
surety); 25:13–16 (the requirement to use honest weights and measurements for seed and foodstuffs).
came to expression because a handful of intellectuals happened to notice the dire circumstances of the local peasants, but rather one generated because the authors experienced something which they considered similar to the peasants’ plight. Even so, Q does make some symbolic space for a peasant constituency by its use of this imagery and the symbolism of the kingdom. It is possible that if the Q people were making any real effort to “sell” this project beyond their own scribal networks, this was made easier by the presence of this imagery and symbolism, which together provided opportunities for the peasantry to imagine themselves in this group.

Given the ambiguous social position of scribes, it seems necessary to distinguish the Q group from these peasant figures, but not too rigidly, especially if we imagine a situation in which administrative figures were drawn from the local population which they served. And if this is case, it becomes even more vital to ask what the actual relationship of the Q people was to the peasantry. Is it possible that in their deracination—i.e., their being out of a job or their perceived sense of obsoleteness—that they felt the need to ingratiate themselves to the peasantry in absence of other social options that might be available in more urban areas of the Empire? It seems reasonable to imagine the Q people fashioning themselves as purveyors of a prestige good—the message of Jesus—which, conveniently incorporated peasant concerns. This role would help them reassert their village/community function in

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192 Note Lenski’s comments on the retainer class: “Because they were intermediaries, the retainers deflected much of the hostility and resentment which otherwise would have been directed at the political elite. Peasants and other members of the lower orders could never be certain whether the difficulties they experienced were due to the tax collectors, petty officials, and other members of the retainer class with whom they interacted, or to those higher up. Because of their lack of contact with the governing class, the peasants were likely to give them at least some of the benefit of the doubt” (Power and Privilege, 246). This seems to be an oversimplification, however, because it is not sensitive to the social origins of these intermediary figures. They could be regarded as either insiders or outsiders in the village context, and if the former, may not have automatically received hostility and resentment.
context where they were growing more and more obsolete. Although they may have thought they were spokespeople, in a sense, for the peasantry and authorities for the Jesus tradition, the answers to the problems outlined in Q do not serve the concrete subsistence interests of the peasants. They serve an intellectual purpose, authorizing and legitimating the ax that Q has to grind. This, I have argued, was also a product of their middling social location.

At this point, we may summarize the comparison undertaken in this chapter between the low-level scribal figures behind Q and the other middling figures described in Chapter Two. For the following reasons, Q’s ideological project is better explained by the authors having a social location analogous to the middling figures described in Chapter Two. The evidence outlined in Chapter Three found that Q was likely written by people who were structurally marginal in ancient Palestine—that is, low- or mid-level administrative figures. Their worldviews and competencies are consistently reflected in Q. Moreover, the text styles itself as socially marginal—that is, not neatly at home among either the elites or the rural villagers. As argued above, the text of Q is in many ways a creative, intellectual project, which is exactly what we would expect as the product of its authors’ social location. And although less explicitly that many of the examples explored in Chapter Two, Q is a project that synthesizes a number of different ideological interests through its rhetoric and it reconfigures them in the kingdom of God language. There is no definitive evidence for a “mature” social movement, but the early efforts at identity formation are widespread in the text. Finally, whereas there is a way in which situations and values that reflect peasant interests are preserved in Q’s discourse, these interests are redirected toward more abstract ends. In this way, the text embodies peasant interests, but it does so with a kind of unintentional distortion.
The comparative enterprise here is not perfect. Precisely where the comparison breaks down—where we fail to perceive a clearly articulated social movement instituted by Q’s authors or a constituency which they consciously purport to represent—we learn something about Q. Namely, Q does not appear to represent a full-fledged socio-religious movement with clearly articulated goals, reminding us once again that Q speaks from such an early moment in the formation of early Christianity that it does not see itself apart from Judaism.\textsuperscript{193} Thus, its lack of fully articulated identity is just what we would expect. This constitutes a major point of difference with the movements discussed in Chapter Two, which were typically self-conscious social movements, peasant movements, resistance movements, or other reform movements.

This, in turn, has implications for the understanding the “success” of the Jesus movement behind Q. On one hand, it is difficult to imagine Q being a success when we consider redactional additions, which indicate very likely rejection of the Q tradents. On the other, we must grapple with the reality that Q survived long enough to circulate and end up in Matthew and Luke’s hands, which means that it had been preserved to some degree within a wider group of people who considered it to be a meaningful collection of ideas.

In short, comparing the authors of Q to middling figures makes better sense than other arguments for who Q’s authors were. The notion that Q is a crystallization of oral tradition passed down by rural peasants cannot account for form and content or Q, nor can it make sense of Q’s seeming disconnect with the peasant way of life and the fact that it solves

so-called peasant problems with intellectual resources. The suggestion that Q’s authors were
gentile Christians\textsuperscript{194} proffering a universal message about Jesus and discipleship cannot
explain in a compelling way the features discussed above. I have shown that Q appears to be
engaging in an ideological project similar to those in which other middling figures are found
to take part; that is, important features of the text and the authors are explained, in part, by
exploring this comparison, which provides other data to support these conclusions. Our data
for Q is admittedly sparse, but using an alternative model to think about the Q people with
generates new questions and insights about these people. Although this analysis has been
very narrowly focused on Q thus far, I will conclude this project by thinking more broadly
about the implications for the rural Galilean Jesus movement if this proposal is taken
seriously.

\textsuperscript{194} Fledderman, \textit{Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary}, 167.
Conclusion: Implications for the Galilean Jesus Movement

The idea that peasants would naturally gravitate toward the teachings attributed to Jesus is an assumption that is unfounded. It is not an unreasonable assumption, but it has been based on rather idealized notions of not only peasant motivations and interests but also theological ideas about what Jesus and the earliest Christians were doing—that is, selflessly spreading an egalitarian message with overt political, economic, and social implications. Herzog has recognized the need to posit a more robust explanation. “What motivated peasants to form a movement with enough staying power to survive the crucifixion of its leader?” he wonders, “What attracted the peasants of Judea and Galilee to join and spread the Jesus movement?”

To my mind, these are crucial questions, but ones that need significant modification. In their original formulations, his queries perpetuate the presumptions that Jesus and his teachings were so special and unique that they easily attracted disadvantaged or dispossessed followers; that these peasants spontaneously gathered together in response to this message; and that the influential ideas of one person alone were all that were necessary for this social formation. I have shown that this question should be asked from another perspective: What motivated the authors of Q to use language and imagery that derived from the social experience of illiterate peasants? Why adopt this range of experiences for Q’s argumentation rather than others?

Instead of thinking in terms of peasants who were “naturally” attracted to the ideas in Q, we ought to focus on the ideological work on the part of Q’s authors who shaped and deployed

\[1\] Herzog, “Why Peasants Responded to Jesus,” 47.
an ideology which was potentially meaningful to a variety of social groups. This is the task I have undertaken in this dissertation.

As noted in the Introduction, this project reaches conclusions that are both narrow and broad. On the narrow end, some conclusions about Q’s authors are apparent. First, they likely had an ambiguous social status in Roman Galilee that led them to deliberately adopt a standpoint of marginality within their text, drawing fodder for this perspective partially, but not exclusively, from experiences of disadvantaged peasants in their social context but refracting said experiences through a text which deployed them for a largely self-referential project. Second, through the comparison with other middling figures, we have seen how it is to be expected that Q would engage in such a project, which seems to benefit lower classes, generally speaking, but actually significantly reworks these interests instead of simply acting as a mouthpiece for them. In the context of the Jesus movement in Q, peasant marginality is “written up” in such a way that it now also speaks to the perceived marginality of Q’s authors, situated in a slightly higher social location than typical peasants.

Focusing on middling figures behind Q, as opposed to the frequent appeal to the “peasant milieu” of this text, is a more realistic and analytically useful way to conceptualize what occurred in this particular Jesus movement. We saw in Chapter Two that peasants rarely seek out leaders or people designated to speak for them. Rather, individuals emerge from common conditions to act as directors or leaders, representing their interests—with varying degrees of sincerity—through explicit ideological work. The Q people can be thought of in terms of those variously described as “hinge,” “cusp,” “marginal,” or “middling” figures—I have opted mostly for “middling” because of its implications for authorial agency. Critically, this kind of social location is not confined to antiquity, and this
realization has opened up a wealth of cross-cultural data which have been used comparatively to introduce new insights about Q. Despite important differences among these figures, they often have in common structural marginality, the production of creative and new intellectual products, and the tendency to participate in social movements. We have seen that they also share a distinctive vantage point on society, which leads to explicit social criticism as well as to the pursuit of allegiances with social groups who are less well off than they. These individuals, moreover, are engaged in a constant cycles of interaction with their social conditions, and accordingly, although the questions that this dissertation asks about Q are initially confined to the textual level, they presume that Q is both a product and an interpretation of its immediate historical context.

This comparative analysis also makes better sense of why we find in Q hints of different social locations. Q appears to have in view a variety of socio-economic experiences, ranging from the temptation to stockpile material treasures to the concern about the source of one’s next meal. The text offers “advice” to people who experience these things and tries to orient them all toward the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, as I have argued, is an immensely powerful rhetorical device for unifying a great number of issues. It is this tool, with its ostensible inclusivity for those loyal to the movement, that has the potential to unite a broad constituency in Q. Contrary to other scholars, I have maintained that the kingdom is best viewed as a political ideology with important social and economic dimensions; it is not a place or a symbol of the community but a discursive unit that absorbs and reflects a variety of interests.

There are broad implications for this project as well. This analysis has implicitly called into question how we should understand the “retainer class” in antiquity. Perhaps not
as popular as Lenksi’s “peasant” stratum in his social hierarchy of agrarian societies, the social identification of “retainer” has nevertheless entered the vocabularies of scholars of early Christianity with fairly rigid determinism; retainers, it is too frequently assumed, actively and consistently “retain” the positions of the elite at the expense of the rest of the social hierarchy. The lower classes, it is then supposed, only regarded them with resentment and hostility. Yet even if the Q people are best viewed as village scribes or other administrative figures, which would both fall into Lenski’s “retainer” category, this project suggests that there are different ways that retainers interacted with groups above and below them. The retainer class was not any more homogenous than the peasantry, a point which others are starting to realize as well. In Herzog’s interpretation of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18:23–35, for instance, he observes how the parable introduces a conflict within the retainer class in addition to the primary conflict between the ruler and the servant.² Thus, the “retainer class” itself was a heterogeneous group that should not viewed as a socially stable entity. In fact, retainers and other middling figures probably lacked a common set of social and economic interests that would even render them a coherent “class.” If internal conflict and competing obligations within the retainer stratum were common, it is unlikely that social solidarity and identity formation would have been successful if confined to such a precarious social position alone. If the Q scribes felt this instability and liminality, as I and others have argued, one solution may have been to present themselves in alliance with another, more stable group. Identification up the social hierarchy with elites is not especially likely, due the limited access to that social stratum for most

² Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, 136.
people in the ancient world. On the other hand, identifying with the peasants and, in some sense, merging the instability of a middling social location with the instability associated with peasant livelihoods would be much more attractive.

Thus, the former scholarly opinion that holds that the retainer class was something utterly distinct from the lower classes, that it only acted in service of the elites, and that there was inherent hostility between retainers and those beneath them cannot be sustained. While realizing that retainers and other middling figures often stood in a position of alienation from the peasantry, I have suggested that the Q people’s position was in flux in a way that facilitated frequent contact with the Galilean peasantry to the extent that their subordinate position became an attractive rhetorical trope for Q’s authors. But the peasant experiences and interests are not preserved in Q in an unmediated, consistent, or “natural” fashion; in fact, they are used in ways that are decidedly not of immediate benefit to the peasantry.

The conceptual pay-off for thinking of Q’s authors in terms of middling figures of ambiguous social standing is that it makes sense of Q’s adoption of rhetorical tropes normally associated with socially and economically marginal persons, and this inclusion, in turn, might actually explain the latter’s probable motivation for participation in Q’s Jesus movement. Identifying Q’s authors with these sorts of middling figures also gives us a powerful motivating factor for why literate middling figures would be found writing something like Q. A social project such as Q contains the ideological seeds of a vision that would reorder society and call into question many features of the conventional social order—a social order which was the source for the Q’s people problematic and peripheral social identity.
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It remains, therefore, valuable to think of Q’s authors along the lines of middling figures, instead of occupants of the retainer class rigidly conceived. Terminology of the “retainer class” has done a disservice to the diversity of allegiances and interests, as well as the possible and probable mobility, of many figures in the ancient world. We ought not to try to fix them in time and space with our categories. “Middling,” while imperfect in some respects, allows for a kind of visible agency, which we would do well to try to recognize more often, because as I have suggested, these people might be some of the most crucial for the success of early Christian groups.

This analysis has taken place mostly at the discursive level, that is, the level of ideas within Q, with few conclusions on what the Q people were actually doing. In closing, I propose some reasonable suggestions. First, not only have Q’s authors collected and assembled their text, but there also appears to be sustained custodial activity with this material, leading some to posit a “school” mentality and members who attended to a text over time and made it continually meaningful.  

Second, we must also think about the activity involved in spreading the message in Q. If we take seriously the material in Q that indicates its message was categorically rejected, we should also consider what Q’s authors must have been doing to disseminate it to incur this rejection. Arnal imagines the Q people making short trips around Galilee to capitalize on their village networks that already existed in order to persuade others to join their program. Perhaps initially this was the case, for we know from documentary papyri that scribal networks existed, and a coherent professional identity may

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3 Braun, “The Schooling of a Galilean Jesus Association.”
4 Arnal, Jesus and the Village Scribes, 182.
have even developed around this occupation in some locales. Eventually, however, I have hinted that their travel may have become a form of surveillance, even if these trips were initially only intended to spread the teachings of Jesus. Village scribes were accustomed to traveling on their administrative rounds, and it was frequently for purposes of tax and land assessment. Traveling thus always entailed a kind of “checking up” on those in their territory and accordingly the exercise of authority. If their authority were contested or their visits resented, we can easily see how the perception of rejection would quickly result. Especially if the Q people were trying to capitalize on village connections already in place, as Arnal suggests, they might have had limited points of access in a given village. If these limited connections rejected them, the entire town, for all intents and purposes, had rejected them as well—hence, the harsh rhetoric against entire towns in Q 10. Therefore, in addition to observing the activity of the Q people writing a text, we can also recognize the sort of activity that must have been involved in spreading such a message. What Q might also represent, then, is a series of moments of competition and territorial infringement within a scribal network in Lower Galilee over the authority to interpret this particular Jesus tradition.

Conclusions about the Q people’s activity are, however, all quite tenuous in comparison to the sociological and anthropological studies on peasant movements in which I have identified prominent directive middling figures in Chapter Two. In the absence of unambiguous data, we have no way of knowing what the Q group looked like in reality or of gauging its success. We may be reasonably certain that the ideas appealed to enough people that it was thought worth copying and preserving long enough until it fell into the hands of the authors of Matthew and Luke. Its appeal, I have argued, was no accident; it resulted from determined ideological work. Q’s ostensibly bold project, which addresses a diverse
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constituency with creative and polyvalent symbols, is actually rather ordinary and precisely the kind of endeavour that we ought to expect from structurally marginal figures when manage to mobilize such skills as literacy and cultural capital.

Finally, this sort of comparative project suggests that the notion of “community” in this very early period of Christian origins is in dire need of redescription. Not only is a coherent community not evident in Q, but the activity that produced its “group mentality” needs rethinking. The identity in Q was sustained by frequent attention to the text, probably some intentional interaction with other villages in ways that capitalized on social networks that were already in place, and a significant amount of maintenance and surveillance for the whole enterprise. Thus, the sense of “community” behind Q is nothing like that which Eusebius and the author of Acts imagined, wherein the ideas of Jesus and the accompanying mission generated a spontaneous “Christian” community of believers. It was a common identity that only came into being when someone set their pen to a papyrus (or whichever medium), when it came to expression in a text, and when it was set in relation to other expressions of identity. Thus, community is not “natural”; it results from creative and innovative ideological work that has to synthesize a broad range of interests into a new configuration, even if this synthesis takes place only at the rhetorical level.

In Eric Hobsbawm’s analysis of social movements involving banditry, he quotes Michele Caruso, a shepherd, bandit, and leader of one of these movements in late nineteenth-century Italy, who bemoaned upon his capture: “Ah, gentlemen, if I had been able to read

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and write I’d have destroyed the human race.” This sentiment is a fitting end to this project, which underscores how literate technologies and other skills are integral for shaping an ideology with far-reaching effects. It is not ideas alone that matter but the capacity to formulate them coherently and make them meaningful to a variety of people so as to garner support for a movement. This capacity, as I have argued, was only found in a very limited segment of the population in the first century, which explains why some individuals from this segment happen to put Q together. One could hardly make the claim that the ideas in Q “destroyed the human race,” but insofar as it contains the ideological seed which imbued so many later forms of Christianity—and indeed occupies today a central ethical role for many Christians—there is a way in which these ideas fundamentally influenced the trajectory of the Western thought. The origin of that ideological seed is not an explanation for all that came after it, but it is, nevertheless, an important development in and of itself.

6 Hobsbawm, Bandits, 58.
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