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## Q, Memory and Matthew: A Response to Alan Kirk

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It is testimony to the resilience of the Q hypothesis, and to the determination of its defenders, that in spite of recent attacks, it is still generating thoughtful, rigorous and stimulating studies like *Q in Matthew*,<sup>1</sup> Alan Kirk's long awaited follow-up to his 1998 study, *The Composition of the Sayings Source*.<sup>2</sup> But where that study focused on Q as text, this one focuses on Q as source. Kirk explores how Matthew appropriated the Q source in his gospel, bringing insights from studies of ancient media to argue that Matthew's use of Q and Mark is coherent, understandable and plausible.

There are many things to admire about *Q in Matthew*, not least its authoritative, lengthy and educational exploration of ancient media dynamics, which takes up half of the book (Chapter 1, "Orality, Writing, and Media Interface in Antiquity"; Chapter 2, "Source Utilization Practices and Ancient Media: In Search of a Model"; Chapter 3: "Manuscript and Memory"). Even those who find the Synoptic Problem and Q among their least favourite topics might read this first half of the book with interest and profit. Kirk calmly explores issues that are often side-lined in Synoptic scholarship, and he encourages the reader to focus on the logistics of source utilization in antiquity. He places special emphasis on the role played by memory, not here oral memory as a means of examining pre-Synoptic tradition, but memory of manuscript as a means of examining inter-Synoptic relationships.

Kirk's thesis is that Synoptic scholars have underestimated the importance of memory in understanding how authors appropriated, reproduced and navigated their way around unwieldy scrolls. "In antiquity memory played an instrumental role in utilization of written works," he says, "making it possible to overcome the constraints of the scroll. A work's existence in memory enabled not just sequential but roving access guided by the configuration of

<sup>1</sup> Alan Kirk, *Q in Matthew: Ancient Media, Memory, and Early Scribal Transmission of the Jesus Tradition* (LSNT 564; London & New York: T & T Clark, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Alan Kirk, *The Composition of the Sayings Source: Genre, Synchrony, & Wisdom Redaction in Q* (NovTSup, 91; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998).

the work as a memory artifact.”<sup>3</sup> Kirk regards the insight as foundational for understanding how Matthew used both Q and Mark, working through Q as a sequence of moral *topoi* and Mark as a narrative. What emerges is a picture of an evangelist skilled in appropriating and re-working source material. “Matthew’s scribal competence,” Kirk suggests, “is particularly evident in his memory control of his sources. His source-utilization is an exemplary case of brain-artifact interface: the fusion of a written cultural artifact with memory such that it becomes operationalized as part of one’s cognitive apparatus.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, to understand Matthew is to understand how memory interacts with manuscript.

Kirk’s appeal to the importance of manuscript memory has precedents in scholarship on Christian origins. Michael Goulder, for example, appeals to the idea that Luke’s memory of Matthew can be seen in his redaction of Marcan passages,<sup>5</sup> and E.P. Sanders suggests that Paul’s dexterity in the Greek Bible points to memorization.<sup>6</sup> For Kirk, though, the stress is on how memory helps authors to navigate their source material. He is suggesting that Matthew’s use of sources is intelligible because they existed in his memory, and that Mark’s narrative sequence as well as Q’s *topoi* organization act as *aides memoire*. The memory factor thus helps Kirk to dispense with other theories of the evangelists’ procedures like the use of wax tablets, or the idea that Q was in codex or notebook form.

Kirk’s exploration of the role played by memory in the way that ancient authors used their materials is helpful, and the insistence on its application to Synoptic source-criticism is welcome. Kirk’s contribution can be read with profit alongside Robert Derrenbacher’s *Ancient Compositional Practices*, for which Kirk shows critical appreciation,<sup>7</sup> and both will be useful for consultation for

<sup>3</sup> *Q in Matthew*, 234.

<sup>4</sup> *Q in Matthew*, 298.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (JSNTSup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 428, 521, 581 and often elsewhere. See the helpful critique in Robert A. Derrenbacher Jr., “Greco-Roman Writing Practices and Luke’s Gospel: Revisiting ‘The Order of a Crank’” in Christopher A. Rollston (ed.), *The Gospels According to Michael Goulder: A North American Response* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 61–83 (67–76). In *The Case Against Q: Studies in Marcan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisville: Trinity Press International, 2002), 89, I speculate that Luke’s familiarity with Mark results from years of reading and preaching during which he steadily gets Mark by heart.

<sup>6</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity: Common Judaism, Paul, and the Inner and Outer in Ancient Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 268–75.

<sup>7</sup> Robert J. Derrenbacher, *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem* (BETL 186; Leuven: Peeters, 2005). Kirk’s primary disagreement with Derrenbacher is over the latter’s suggestion that Matthew accessed Q in codex format. Kirk regards this as unnecessary in the

years to come. But no response that only praises its subject is worth reading, so I would like to register several caveats about the general approach before explaining why Kirk's defence of the Two-Source Theory is less compelling than his advocacy of the importance of memory.

### Anachronistic Anxiety

Kirk's plea for understanding the role played by memory is in large part predicated on the assumption that scrolls were unwieldy and difficult to handle.<sup>8</sup> It is of course true that codices are easier to handle than scrolls, but it is a mistake for modern authors to be stressed about how ancient authors coped with their media realities, just as future authors might be amazed at how people managed to navigate their way through print books without being able to run electronic searches or to click on, mouse over or manipulate hypertext. William Johnson's warning about "exaggerated modern notions of the difficulty of using a bookroll"<sup>9</sup> deserves consideration:

When we conjure to mind the ancient bookroll, then, we see an object that to modern perception seems, with its lack of word spaces and bareness of punctuation, spectacularly, even bewilderingly, impractical and inefficient as a reading tool. But that the ancient reading and writing systems interacted without strain is indisputable: so stable was this idea of the literary book, that with only small variations it prevailed for over 700 years in the Greek tradition.

The expression of bafflement about the difficulties involved with handling scrolls comes from a kind of anachronistic anxiety about how ancient authors could have managed something apparently so unwieldy. Moreover, in the only

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light of the dexterity that is afforded by an understanding of memory. Derrenbacker himself appeals to memory, but he does not afford it the same importance as Kirk. Alongside Derrenbacker and Kirk, one might also place the important articles by John Poirier, "The Roll, the Codex, the Wax Tablet, and the Synoptic Problem," *JSNT* 35 (2012): 3–30 and James Barker, "Ancient Compositional Practices and the Gospels: A Reassessment," *JBL* 135 (2016): 109–21. Kirk shows less enthusiasm for Poirier (*Q in Matthew*, 48–9) and Barker (307, n. 29). With respect to the latter, Kirk's comment that Barker "ignores Kloppenborg's critique" is ironic in the light of the fact that Kirk himself ignores one of the two responses to Barker's paper.

8 See especially *Q in Matthew*, 51–2 and 54.

9 William A. Johnson, "The Ancient Book," in Roger S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 256–81 (267).

piece of New Testament evidence that touches directly on the handling of scrolls, Luke apparently imagines Jesus having little trouble in finding a choice passage towards the end of a huge Isaiah scroll (Luke 4.17, *καὶ ἀναπτύξας τὸ βιβλίον εἰδεν τὸν τόπον οὗ ἦν γεγραμμένον...*).<sup>10</sup>

### Dictation

There is a related issue with respect to how authors handled scrolls they were using as sources. Kirk does not discuss the role played by dictation in the way that ancient authors used source material. We know of many ancient authors who dictated to a scribe, including one very close to home, Tertius (Rom. 16.23), and there is a good case for imagining at least one of the synoptic evangelists handling a source text while dictating to their scribe.<sup>11</sup> Is it unreasonable to imagine Luke holding his scroll of Matthew in two hands while dictating to Quartus?<sup>12</sup>

### Memorization

A third issue relates to the extent of the memory factor envisaged. Kirk is surprisingly coy about suggesting that Matthew had memorized any passage from his sources, let alone the works as a whole. It seems clear that Kirk's Matthew always keeps the physical manuscripts handy:

<sup>10</sup> The point here is not, of course, to suggest that Luke's reporting of the Nazareth incident is historical but rather to note how Luke, one of the very authors under discussion, conceptualizes scroll usage. He does not, apparently, regard the scene depicted as implausible. It may be that Luke imagines Jesus having a good memory of the Nazareth synagogue's Isaiah scroll, but the point is Luke does not depict the process as a difficulty that needs to be overcome. It is the scholarly anxiety about unwieldy scrolls that is anachronistic.

<sup>11</sup> Although he briefly considers the possibility of dictation, F. Gerald Downing, "A Paradigm Perplex: Luke, Matthew and Mark," *NTS* 38 (1992): 15–36 (21) defaults to imagining the evangelists doing their own scribal work, and he expresses his concern about how this impacts on the use of source material, "If Luke is doing his own writing, rather than dictating, he is balancing a springy new scroll on a board on his knees, together with a pen, and somewhere to hand are his scroll of Mark, and a sharpener, a pricker or other line-marker, ruler, dividers, sponge, bowl of water, pumice and ink (perhaps some sand?)..."

<sup>12</sup> For the suggestion that the evangelists may have dictated their works, see also Barker, "Ancient Compositional Practices," 111, and literature cited there.

It would be wrong to conclude, however, that Matthew's source utilization proceeds in a scroll-free zone, in a virtual memory space as it were, as if the scroll artifact, after serving to provision memory, was dispensed with. One must think rather of an operational *fusion* of memory and manuscript. This is why we have been careful to describe Matthew's source utilization as 'memory-based' or 'memory-grounded'.<sup>13</sup>

The closest that Kirk's comes to suggesting that Matthew works without direct contact with his manuscripts is in his treatment of Matt. 4.23-5.2,<sup>14</sup> which features multiple parallels with Mark:

One might even be inclined to put 4.23-5.2 down in its entirety to Matthew composing in oral-traditional manner from a repertoire of stock words and phrases drawn from, or attested in, the Markan summaries. But the traces of a Markan order in 4.23-5.2 makes it a case of oral utilization practices applied to a written source.<sup>15</sup>

Kirk here appears to be close to imagining a scenario in which Matthew is working solely from his memory of Mark, but this is rare, and it is not clear where the reticence about memorization comes from. After all, if the evangelist was a "scribe disciplined in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13.52), he may well have had much of the Hebrew (or Greek) Bible by heart too. The longer he had worked with his sources, the more likely he is to have had them in memory *in toto*.

### Sauce for the Goose

The key question, however, for *Q in Matthew* is how it contributes to discussion of the Synoptic Problem, and there is no question that Kirk has clarified and helpfully described what may have been involved in Matthew's adaptation of Mark and Q. To the extent that this aids our understanding of the mechanics of the Two-Source Theory, this is an important contribution. What is less clear is how the argument functions as a critique of other models like the Farrer theory.<sup>16</sup> For Kirk, Matthew's use of Q is made more plausible by the appeal to

13 *Q in Matthew*, 221.

14 *Q in Matthew*, 237–41.

15 *Q in Matthew*, 241.

16 Kirk prefers the nomenclature "Farrer-Goulder Hypothesis". The difficulty with adding Michael Goulder to the name of the theory is that it ties it too closely to his particular take

memory, but he does not consider the same appeal to memory in the case of Luke's use of Matthew. He expresses surprise, for example, about the "breath-taking leaps across the source" that would be involved if Luke knew Matthew,<sup>17</sup> yet the very point of Kirk's thesis is that Matthew's leaps across Q are explicable in the light of a memory-grounded approach.<sup>18</sup> Sauce (or source!) for the goose is sauce for the gander. Kirk hints that the difficulty relates to the logic of Luke's redaction in that the pericopae are "randomly interspersed", but this is a simple return to Streeterian caricatures about Luke's order,<sup>19</sup> and does not move the discussion forward.

The point is that authors frequently make leaps across sources, whether breathtaking or otherwise, as in Josephus's use of the Pentateuch,<sup>20</sup> Thomas's use of the Synoptics,<sup>21</sup> or Luke's use of Mark.<sup>22</sup> Such movements around source material are rarely random, and it is usually straightforward to see literary reasons for the rearrangements. It is true, of course, that the interpretative task is greatly aided by consideration of the media realities involved, and is here that Kirk makes his key contribution in thinking through the issues in Matthew's rearrangement of Mark and Q, but this will always only be part of a larger discussion.

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on Luke's use of Matthew, including extreme source scepticism and the lectionary theory. See further my *Case Against Q*, 13–14.

17 *Q in Matthew*, 150.

18 Kirk's comments (*Q in Matthew*, 149–50) occur in critique of Francis Watson's suggestion that Luke rearranges Matthew in line with his oral interaction with its materials (*Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 118–19, 158). "As Watson applies it," Kirk says, "orality is a wand that allows him to wave away difficulties in Luke's utilization of Matthew" (*Q in Matthew*, 149), but this is a thesis that is not far removed from Kirk's own suggestion that Matthew engages in "oral utilization practices applied to a written source" (*Q in Matthew*, 241; quoted in full above).

19 See Goodacre, *The Case Against Q*, 59–61, 78–86, and literature cited there; Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 174–6.

20 This is particularly clear in *Antiquities* 3–4, e.g. in 3.258–75 Josephus juxtaposes units dealing with leprosy (Lev. 13–14; *Ant.* 3.258–68), the impurity of women in childbirth (Lev. 12.2–8; *Ant.* 3.269), the procedures for dealing with a suspected adulteress (Num. 5.11–31; *Ant.* 3.270–73) and forbidden marriages and sexual practices (Lev. 20.10–21; *Ant.* 3.274–75).

21 See, for example, Thomas 79, which combines elements from Luke 11.27–28 and 23.27–31—Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 97–108, itself probably a case of the author's memory of Luke (*Thomas and the Gospels*, 150–1).

22 See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke 1–IX* (Anchor Bible, 28; New York: Doubleday, 1986), 71–2, for Luke's "seven well-known transpositions of Markan episodes in Luke".

### Mechanical Matthew

At times, Kirk's focus on media realities leads to an overly mechanical conceptualizing of the way that ancient authors worked. He talks, for example, about "identifying at what point in Mark Matthew has inserted the Sermon on the Mount",<sup>23</sup> and settles on Mark 1.21b over Mark 1.39 or Mark 3.13. While this question is a good one for scholars who are constructing a Gospel Synopsis, it is less useful in conceptualizing how Matthew works with Mark. Matthew does not "insert" the Sermon anywhere in the Marcan outline; rather, he has a new structure into which Marcan and other materials are integrated. The point is further illustrated by the surprising lack of reference to Matthew's most famous structural feature, the five major discourses, all marked off by a similar literary formula (Matt. 7.28-9, 11.1, 13.53, 19.1, 26.1).<sup>24</sup> Kirk has no account of how Matthew's "utilization model" led to this striking arrangement. Are the five discourses an accident of Matthew's strategy in working through the *Q topoi* and the Marcan narrative, or is a larger literary agenda here in evidence? If Matthew is a "redactional opportunist",<sup>25</sup> how intentional can his crafting of the five major discourses have been? Of course it is important to think about the logistics of an evangelist's source utilization, but it is at least as important to think about literary imagination and authorial agenda.

### Hypothetical Q

Although it is now de rigueur in discussion of the Synoptic Problem to underline Q's hypothetical nature,<sup>26</sup> Kirk spends relatively little time reflecting on how the uncertainties of working with a hypothetical entity might impact on

23 *Q in Matthew*, 231; cf. "Inserting Mk 2.1-22 at the joint between Mk 5.20 and 5.21 is therefore the only practical course open to Matthew. The effect is to graft Mk 2.1-22—somewhat forcibly pulled out of a Marcan elaboration ... into the pre-commission narrative" (291).

24 The only references I can find to the five discourses are in a quotation of Streeter (*Q in Matthew*, 162) and a quotation of Kloppenborg, who is summarizing Vincent Taylor (*Q in Matthew*, 164), and Kirk does not go on to discuss the five discourses here.

25 "Matthew is a redactional opportunist, seizing on ways of combining his sources in ways that serve his theological and ethical program", *Q in Matthew*, 224.

26 See, for example, Austin Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q" in D.E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 55–88 (66), John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 3, 11–12 and 50–4, Francis Watson, "Q as Hypothesis: A Study in Methodology," *NTS* 55 (2009): 397–415, and Mark Goodacre, "Criticizing the Criterion of Multiple Attestation: The Historical Jesus and the Question of Sources" in Chris Keith and

his thesis. He always assumes that the Lucan order of the double tradition best represents the Q order,<sup>27</sup> and he seldom reflects on the methodological uncertainties of analysing an evangelist's use of material from a non-extant source. He does not engage with contrasting reconstructions of Q: neither Fledderman<sup>28</sup> nor the *Documenta Q* volumes appear in his bibliography, and his discussions of the *Critical Edition of Q* are sparing. The issue is an important one because key elements that may have been present in Q are ignored, elements that could have an impact on Kirk's discussion.

Kirk does not, for example, discuss Q 4.16, which mentions "Nazara",<sup>29</sup> a verse that could (*ex hypothesi*) shed light on how Q narrated Jesus' early mission, and so have relevance to how Matthew might have integrated materials from Q and Mark.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Kirk discusses how Matthew structures Jesus' movements in and out of Capernaum without even mentioning this important Q text.<sup>31</sup> It is not simply that Kirk is reluctant to reflect on how differing reconstructions of Q might place question marks over his thesis; it is also that Kirk plays down anything that might draw attention to Q's narrative sequence.<sup>32</sup> Q is characterized as a "non-narrative source"<sup>33</sup> in contrast to Mark, but the frequent indications of time, place and narrative cause-and-effect in Q might have provided grounds for reflection on Matthew's task, which was not so much a matter of integrating a "non-narrative source" with "the Markan narrative sequence"<sup>34</sup> as it was a matter of integrating Q's narrative sequence with Mark's.

### A Questionable Premise

Perhaps the most pressing problem, though, is the premise of *Q in Matthew*. Kirk's book is largely an attempt to explain a perceived anomaly for the Two-Source Theory, the difficulty of Matthew's re-ordering of Q. He speaks of

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Anthony Le Donne (eds.), *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (London & New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 152–69 (157).

27 If there are exceptions to this rule in Kirk's book, I have not found them.

28 H.T. Fledderman, *Q. A Reconstruction and Commentary* (Biblical Tools and Studies, 1; Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

29 See Shawn Carruth and James M. Robinson; volume editor: Christoph Heil, *Q 4.1-13, 16. The Temptations of Jesus – Nazara* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 392–462.

30 Cf. Mark Goodacre, Review of Alan Kirk, *The Composition of the Sayings Source, Novum Testamentum* 42 (2000): 185–7 (187).

31 *Q in Matthew*, 282–3.

32 On Q's narrative sequence, see Goodacre, *Case Against Q*, 170–85.

33 *Q in Matthew*, 162 and 223; cf. 170, 302.

34 *Q in Matthew*, 162.



“[t]he difficulties Matthew’s use of Q presents for the 2DH” as “the theme of the present work”<sup>35</sup> and he repeatedly states that Matthew’s ordering of the double tradition has been a point raised by critics of the Two-Source Theory. As well as claiming that “The divergent order of the Matthean double tradition vis-à-vis Luke is a favorite target of 2DH critics”,<sup>36</sup> he suggests that “attempts to explain Matthew’s utilization of his Q tradition” are among difficulties that “critics of the 2DH never fail to point out.”<sup>37</sup> He adds:

The different dispositions of the double tradition in Matthew and Luke must be faced by any utilization hypothesis; this is not just a problem for the 2DH. But accounting for Matthew’s significant rearrangement of the Q materials constitutes a particularly daunting challenge for the 2DH.<sup>38</sup>

These repeated claims are curious. I am unaware of any critic of the Two-Source Theory who use Matthew’s ordering of the double tradition as an argument against the existence of Q, nor does Kirk cite any author who makes this claim. It may be that Kirk is making an inference from the work of Q sceptics who have praised Luke’s order of the double tradition material,<sup>39</sup> but the celebration of Luke’s literary art does not imply a criticism of Matthew’s alleged rearrangement of Q.<sup>40</sup> The context for such accounts of Luke’s order is the argument that Matthew’s ordering of Q material is admirable, coherent and aesthetically pleasing, the very opposite of what Kirk presumes as the basis for his study.<sup>41</sup>

Kirk ends his book by praising the resilience of the Two-Source Theory. “A viable hypothesis,” he suggests, “is one that is able to respond to criticism

35 *Q in Matthew*, 48.

36 *Q in Matthew*, 306.

37 *Q in Matthew*, 151.

38 *Q in Matthew*, 162.

39 See, for example, Goodacre, *Case Against Q*, 81–132 and literature cited there.

40 It is possible that Kirk has in mind my quotations of Fitzmyer and Stanton about the “loosely related” sayings in second half of the Sermon on the Mount, a “ragbag of sayings” that Luke reworks (*Q in Matthew*, 187, quoting Goodacre, *Case Against Q*, 99–100), but my point here is not, of course, to criticize Matthew’s alleged re-ordering of Q but to explain Luke’s rearrangement of materials from the Sermon in the wake of the classic charge that the order is inexplicable or random.

41 The classic statement is B.H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 183, contrasting Matthew’s “exceedingly appropriate” contexts for double tradition with Luke’s that have “no special appropriateness”, but his rhetoric is frequently echoed; for examples see Goodacre, *Case Against Q*, 81–5.

and emerge stronger and increase its explanatory range as a result." Theories that do not respond to rational critique, he goes on, "fade away or survive on cult followings."<sup>42</sup> The difficulty with Kirk's claim is that it responds to a criticism that adherents of the Farrer theory are not making. Those who defend Luke's use of Matthew, who often have a more generous view of the scope of an evangelist's reworking of source material, have no problem with the idea of an author making substantive changes in the order of source materials. The difficulties with the Two-Source Theory are not difficulties about relative order. The case against Q does not focus on Matthew's order of the double tradition material. The case, in fact, remains straightforward: the Two-Source Theory appeals to a hypothetical document to explain data that is better explained by Luke's familiarity with Matthew. This may be the stuff of what Kirk calls "cult followings", but it is worth remembering that hypothetical literary sources sometimes prove less durable than the texts from which they are conjured.

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42 *Q in Matthew*, 309.