TERENCE C. MOURNET

Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 195

Mohr Siebeck

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Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q

Mohr Siebeck

TERENCE C. MOURNET, born 1969; 1999 M.T.S. in Biblical Studies at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, PA; 2003 Ph.D. Theology at University of Durham, UK; Adjunct Instructor of New Testament at North American Baptist Seminary, SD.

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Preface

This book is a revised version of my Ph.D. thesis, which was submitted to the University of Durham, UK in 2003. My interest in oral tradition began during the writing of my master's thesis in 1999. During that work, which focused on the "third quest" of historical Jesus research, I soon recognized the important place that oral tradition had in the discussion. This led me to inquire further about how oral communication functioned in antiquity, with particular reference to the development of the early Jesus tradition and Q. This work is an attempt to take seriously the *Sitz im Leben* in which the Jesus tradition was first proclaimed and within which it subsequently developed.

I recall with delight the many people who have played a significant role in both my academic and personal development over these last fifteen or so years. I thank the faculty of North American Baptist Seminary, and I am, to this day, grateful for the way in which they introduced me to the difficult questions which would provide the basis for subsequent academic inquiry. In particular, I thank Prof. Michael Hagan for his personal interest in my well-being during my time in South Dakota, and for modeling the holistic approach to Christian education that I hope to emulate someday. I also thank Profs. Glenn Koch and Manfred T. Brauch of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary for supervising my master's thesis and for their valuable contribution to my theological education.

My wife and I had the privilege of studying at the University of Durham, UK from 1999 to 2003. Upon relocating to Durham in September 1999, we immediately felt at home among the supportive faculty and staff of the Department of Theology. There is truly a collegial spirit within the department, and I am thankful for being able to experience, if even for a short time, the benefits from being in such an environment. The constant support of the faculty was a source of strength that I find difficult to put into words. I thank Prof. Loren Stuckenbruck for both his personal support and his academic expertise. On more than one occasion I benefited from our interaction about oral tradition, and Krista and I will always value the friendship we share with him and his family. This type of support made the arduous task of Ph.D. study manageable.

I especially thank my Ph.D. supervisor Prof. James D. G. Dunn and his wife Meta for the great impact that they have had on both my work and my life over the last several years. On a personal level, they welcomed Krista and me into their home as if we were family and provided us with invaluable advice and support. On a professional level, the symbiotic relationship that Prof. Dunn and I have is one which I will forever cherish. His perceptive critique of my work and his ability to get at the "heart of the matter" compelled me to reevaluate my line of argumentation on more than one occasion. I am thankful for the time he has been willing to spend interacting with my work. Our sessions together were challenging, educational, and perhaps most important of all, encouraging. Never before have I met someone who is able to formulate his thoughts with such clarity and to articulate them with such lucid language. I look forward to our continued interaction in the future.

I am particularly grateful to Prof. Jörg Frey and the other editors of WUNT for accepting this manuscript for publication. This work has, no doubt, benefited greatly from Prof. Frey's helpful comments and suggestions. In addition, I am also thankful for the personal warmth and kindness which both he and Dr. Henning Ziebritzki have extended to Krista and me over the past several years.

On a personal level, there are many people without whom this work would have never seen the light of day. In particular, I thank my mother who has provided me with abundant support during what has been a long and difficult journey. Her encouragement enabled me to pursue my vocation in a discipline that reaps far less financial reward than that for which I initially trained in university. May she be blessed in return for the countless blessings she has extended to so many others.

Last, but by no means least, I must thank my wife Krista for her patience and for her willingness to "put up with me" during the challenging time of writing a thesis and this subsequent monograph. The emotional strain was perhaps the most difficult aspect of postgraduate work, and at times that burden was more than I could manage alone. Without her love, support, and encouragement, I do not think I would have had the strength to "run the race" to its completion. This book is therefore dedicated to Krista —

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help (Eccl 4:9–10).

Soli Deo gloria –

Terence C. Mournet
New York, January 2005

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this work are from Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999). For sources and periodicals not listed there, I have relied upon H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). Additional abbreviations are listed below:

JAF	Journal of American Folklore
OrT	Oral Tradition

Chapter 1

Introduction

Texts — it is hard to imagine what Western civilization would be like without them. Books occupy a place in society unlike that of any other item. They have become fully integrated into our daily lives and we interact with them in varied contexts on a frequent basis. We keep them in our "personal libraries" and display them prominently in our living rooms for ornamental or decorative purposes. We use them when preparing food in the kitchen or to relax in bed after a difficult or stressful day. They accompany us whilst on holiday, entertain us when we are bored, and we are quite willing to divest a significant percentage of our personal resources both to obtain them and protect them from harm.

We have even created an entire industry dedicated to producing products used in conjunction with books. One glance around my work area reveals many items that have been invented for the sole purpose of supporting our modern print culture. There is the reading lamp, a large desk cluttered with many books, a bookshelf within arm's reach, and several other items that would defy description if it were not for the existence of books. In particular, my attention is directed towards the intriguing foldable steel device which, when erected on my desk, serves no purpose other than to keep a book upright, at the proper reading angle, and open to the correct page.

While it is clear that these items are inventions designed to facilitate personal interaction with a text, how often have we considered that *writing itself is an invention*? Such a question might seem odd, but the reality is that writing has not always been a tool at our disposal — at either a societal or an individual level. At some point in our pre-history, an individual came up with a new and revolutionary idea for expressing the various phonemes of human speech in a form never before utilized. He or she picked up a sharp pointed instrument and began the process of developing a coherent, repeatable system of representing — or re-presenting human speech via inscribed symbols that could be revocalized at another time in the future. Of course, this technology developed like any technology with which we are familiar today. It required refinement, adjustment, and some attempts simply failed and were left by the wayside. Even the more successful attempts did not come to fruition overnight. The

alphabet itself proved to be an incredibly complicated invention that took many centuries to develop, only achieving its full potential with the development of the Greek alphabetic script in the eighth century B.C.E.[1] Eric Havelock's work on this "technology" of literacy has had fundamental implications for how we understand our current place within what Marshall McLuhan has called the "Gutenberg Galaxy."[2] Havelock suggests that "alphabetic technology is of a kind which ceases to be recognizable as a technology. It interweaves itself into the literate consciousness of those who use it so that it does not seem to them that they could ever have done without it."[3]

Among our concerns in this study is the extent to which we are products of a thorough-going literacy culture. Literacy is so interwoven into our current collective consciousness that we find it difficult to detach ourselves to the extent necessary to analyze objectively both the texts and traditions of antiquity. As products of the "hyper-literate" twenty-first century, we need to reflect on the ways in which our immersion in the technology of writing has affected how we study ancient texts and in particular, how we understand the composition of the Synoptic Gospels.

The "problem" of oral tradition is by no means a new one in New Testament research and hardly needs a detailed introduction here. The need to incorporate a working model of oral tradition into any cogent model of early Christianity is readily evidenced by the prominence given the discussion in *introductory* texts on the subject.[4] In short, the

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[1] Havelock argues that the Greek script was the first successful attempt to develop an alphabet, and he dates its invention to approximately 700 B.C.E. (Eric Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982], 15). For Havelock, scripts such as the many Semitic variants (e.g, Hebrew, Aramaic, etc.) were not considered to be alphabets for they lacked several features, in particular, the lack of vocalization meant that there was potential ambiguity between different words. The Greek script was the first to eliminate ambiguity and have the ability to represent any possible phoneme. For more on this see, below, chs. 2, 4.

[2] See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962). McLuhan's book focused on the dramatic effect that the printing press had on the Western mind by bringing about a new era in human history that subsequently affected modes of thinking and human consciousness. For a brief summary of McLuhan's work see Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 26–28 .

[3] Havelock, *Literate Revolution*, 29.

[4] E. P. Sanders devotes an entire chapter to "Creativity and Oral Tradition," see *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Trinity University Press, 1989), 138–145. Also, Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 45, and Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: an Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 81–86. Although

recognition that oral tradition was a vital factor in the development and transmission of early Christian material is now almost universally accepted, and has become an *a priori* assumption in the field of Synoptic Gospel research.[5] This is not surprising once one examines the development of the historical-critical method and its leading proponents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as we will do in chapter three.

The study of oral tradition and its role in the development of the pre-literary traditions about Jesus, along with the ongoing effect of orality on the tradition's literary descendants has been examined extensively for more than two centuries. The academic interest in the oral Jesus tradition dates back to the late eighteenth century writings of the interdisciplinary scholar J. G. Herder (1744–1803).[6] Herder was no small figure of his time and played an influential role in the shift away from the Enlightenment era to the Romantic era that was to follow. As an interdisciplinary scholar, Herder brought to bear upon the New Testament his many insights derived from various fields of research — philosophy, linguistic theory, and the newly emerging field of folklore studies. His concern was different from that of his predecessors who were engaging the New Testament from particularly rationalistic perspectives. While his contemporaries were postulating Matthean priority by way of literary dependency, Herder's radical approach was far more "romantic" than J. J. Griesbach's highly

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these texts are intended to be *introductory* texts on the New Testament and the Synoptic Gospels, they are important indicators of the current state of New Testament research.

[5] Both Walter Ong and Robert Culley also associate the widespread acceptance of the oral origins of the Biblical text to the work of Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932); see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 173, and Robert C. Culley, "An Approach to the Problem of Oral Tradition," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 113. Schmithals is among the few who suggest that the tradition was literary from the first ("Vom Ursprung der synoptischen Tradition," *ZTK* 94 [1997]: 288–316).

[6] See Johann Gottfried Herder. "Vom Erlöser der Menschen. Nach unsern ersten drei Evangelien (1796)." Pages 137–252 in Herders Sämmtliche Werke XIX (Ed. B. Suphan. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880). Also, Herder's work on John which contains an appendix on the problem of the interrelationship among the Gospels (Johann Gottfried Herder. "Von Gottes Sohn, der Welt Heiland. Nach Johannes Evangelium. Nebst einer Regel der Zusammenstimmung unserer Evangelien aus ihrer Entstehung und Ordnung [1797]." Pages 253–424 in Herders Sämmtliche Werke XIX [Ed. B. Suphan. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880]). Kümmel, despite his somewhat misleading summary of Herder, provides the easiest access to some of Herder's writings; see his *Introduction to the New Testament* (The New Testament Library London: SCM Press, 1966), 38, and *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 79. Jörg Frey was kind enough allow me to read his forthcoming article to be included in a volume dedicated to the works of J. G. Herder (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005). His work provides a helpful summary of the significance of Herder's work on the Gospels.

"clinical" solution to the problem of Synoptic interrelationships. Herder suggested that behind the canonical Synoptic Gospels was an alleged "oral gospel" that contained the preaching of Jesus and his disciples.

As history will testify, Herder's then radical approach did not have any significant lasting impact on the study of the Synoptic Gospels. Rather, his writings have been generally neglected or relegated to footnotes or introductions to works such as this.[7] However, this is not to suggest that oral tradition itself was forgotten about or played no part in subsequent work on the formation of the Biblical tradition. Rather, Herder's emphasis on the role of *das Volk* led to the eventual coining of the term "folklore," and it is through that field that he would have a lasting impact on subsequent Biblical scholars such as Hermann Gunkel, Rudolf Bultmann, and Martin Dibelius.

Gunkel (1862–1932) is widely recognized as the father of modern form criticism. Although the roots of the form-critical method with which Gunkel is associated date back to the Enlightenment scholar Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677)[8], it is in Gunkel's work that we have the twentieth-century model of form criticism that we have come to recognize. Gunkel was born just following the death of the great folklorist Wilhelm Grimm and one year prior to the death of his brother, Jacob Grimm. By this time the seventh edition of the Grimm's *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* was available (1857), and it had a strong impact on nineteenth and twentieth-century European academia. The Grimm Brothers had compiled their folklore collection from predominantly German sources that they had edited and "smoothed out" during the process of transcribing them into their printed forms.[9] They had a diffusionist approach to folklore, in that they believed that traditions common among different people-groups were attributable to the *diffusion* of a tradition from one culture to the other. This diffusionist approach to folklore was not surprisingly coupled with the concept of a "pure" form of a tradition. According to the Grimm Brothers, traditions originated in pure forms, and their subsequent transmission to other cultures by way of diffusion resulted in the

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[7] There were a few scholars who interacted with Herder. J. C. L. Gieseler (1818) developed Herder's insights and proposed that the original oral gospel was transmitted in Aramaic and then gave rise to two different Greek forms upon which the Synoptic Gospels were based. See Walter Schmithals, *Einleitung in die synoptischen Evangelien* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985) and c.p. Kümmel, *Introduction*, 38 for his summary of the "tradition hypothesis."

[8] See David Laird Dungan, *The History of the Synoptic Problem* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 199–260, *passim*, for more on Spinoza and the political agenda behind his pioneering method of historical criticism.

[9] The Grimm Brothers made editorial changes to their recorded versions. They "polished" the stories and in doing so made them less useful for future folklorists.

degradation of the original pure form. All of this was facilitated by the then commonly accepted "superiority" of Western civilization, and in particular, that of Europe.[10]

The influence of the "Brothers Grimm" on Gunkel was profound. By the time Gunkel wrote his *Genesis*,[11] there were a multitude of different folkloristic models on offer, each of which provided the biblical scholar with a unique and attractive glimpse into the pre-textual traditions behind the now inscribed canonical texts. In particular, the work of folklorists such as Axel Olrik[12] and Vladimir Propp[13] who themselves were building upon the work of the Brothers Grimm, served as inspiration to Gunkel and others who were interested in tracing the development of early pre-textual oral traditions into their full canonical representations.[14] Gunkel adopted the Grimm Brothers' view of the oral/folk traditions, including the principle that traditions developed as individual disconnected units that were subsequently developed and expanded upon from what was an originally "pure" form. Gunkel envisioned the process of oral transmission as follows:

> In the leisure of a winter evening the family sits about the hearth; the grown people, but more especially the children, listen intently to the beautiful old stories of the dawn of the world, which they have heard so often yet never tire of hearing repeated.[15]

This view of oral tradition which was based upon the work of the Grimm Brothers would be clearly reflected in the developing method of *Formgeschichte*, a method that would remain at the center of New Testament research for the first half of the twentieth century and which we will examine in more detail in chapters two and three.

What is surprising about the above summary of the development of the form-critical view of oral tradition is that while many of the

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[10] Isidore Okpewho in his work on African oral tradition summarizes the Grimm Brothers diffusionist view as such: "if any similarities were found between tales told in Africa and those told in Europe, the former should be seen as offshoots of the parent Indo-European culture. The Grimm Brothers made such a statement because they were working under the prejudice that culture can only spread from a superior to an inferior people, not the other way round — and Africa was of course considered racially inferior to Europe" (Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature* [Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992], 7).

[11] Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer, 1997).

[12] Axel Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," in *The Study of Folklore* (ed. Alan Dundes; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

[13] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

[14] See Hermann Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1987) and *The Legends of Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

[15] Gunkel, *Genesis*, 41.

aforementioned premises supporting the theses of Gunkel, Bultmann and Dibelius have been shown to be deficient, the overall *Sitz im Leben* that is proposed by the early form critics has remained relatively unchanged. For the most part, New Testament scholarship has accepted their proposed setting for the development and transmission of the early Jesus tradition. Oral tradition remains at the center of most scholarly constructs and despite one's possible reservations about the overall agenda of form criticism, it is difficult to envisage a setting that is *radically* different than that suggested by Bultmann, Dibelius, *et al.*[16] It is highly likely that the earliest stages of the tradition *were* entirely oral — with the exception of Jesus writing in the sand in (John 8:6, 8:8)[17], there is simply no evidence that he had written any books or texts, or that he would have had the ability to do so had he desired.[18]

Despite the shared recognition that the early Jesus tradition was *oral* in its origins, the early form-critics continued to approach the tradition from a *strictly literary* perspective. In essence, they had acknowledged that oral tradition played a significant role in the formation of the Synoptic Tradition, but they had not come to grips with the *implications* of that fundamental premise. They worked from an unrealistic view of tradition transmission and gospel formation, assuming that both oral and literary tradition developed in an essentially uniform, *linear* fashion. This linearity has traditionally been expressed in two different forms. Either, like

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[16] After more than a century of work on the Synoptic Gospels from a form-critical perspective, scholars *still* assume that oral tradition was integral to the formation and transmission of the Jesus tradition, and unfortunately, many scholars *still* misunderstand how oral tradition functions (see ch. 3, below). Of course, as is the case with any thesis, there have been those who have questioned this elementary assumption. Recently, Alan R. Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 197, has written about the possibility that the earliest witnesses of the Jesus tradition (i.e., those who listened to Jesus' speech) might have taken notes during the course of the performance itself. While not disputing that the Jesus tradition was essentially oral in its origins, Millard does attempt to push the date of the inscription of the Jesus tradition back far earlier than most scholars. Also, see Barry Henaut's study on oral tradition and Mark 4, in which he has a chapter entitled "Oral Tradition Taken For Granted" (*Oral Tradition and the Gospels: the Problem of Mark 4* [JSNTSup 82; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 28–74). There, Henaut questions an approach that assumes the presence of an oral "substratum" behind the text prior to searching for evidence of literary redaction within the text. See below, ch. 3 for more on Henaut's reliance upon the literary paradigm.

[17] John 8:6 — ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κάτω κύψας τῷ δακτύλῳ κατέγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν; John 8:8 — καὶ πάλιν κατακύψας ἔγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν.

[18] Even if one adopts Millard's thesis regarding the early inscription of the Jesus tradition, that does not mean that oral tradition can be dismissed from the discussion. See below (chs. 4, 5).

Bultmann and Dibelius envisioned, the *Tendenz* of the tradition was towards growth and expansion,[19] or, as Vincent Taylor would later argue, contraction and the "rounding-off" of a tradition was what happened over time as a natural result of the transmission process. In either case, the tradition was marked by a linearity and predictability that allowed them to chart the course of the past development of the Jesus tradition in both its pre-inscribed and inscribed forms.

All of these factors have led to the current situation, in which oral tradition is often given "lip service" but is not dealt with as a serious phenomenon in the development of the early Jesus tradition. Oral tradition has at times been expressed in "either/or" terms. That is, arguments against the role of oral tradition in the formation of the Synoptic Tradition have often been formulated against what is best described as a caricature of the "oral argument." This has led to a position where oral "advocates" such as Herder have been presented as somehow representative of all those who approach the question of Synoptic interrelationships from a non-literary perspective. By arguing against a caricature of the "oral argument" and framing the question in an either "oral or literary" matter, it seems reasonable that one would choose the literary hypothesis over its oral alternative.[20] W. C. Allen, despite his affirmation of the role of orality in Synoptic formation, wrote in 1899 that the oral theory "hopelessly breaks down" when argued from an exclusive perspective.[21] He was correct to note that the association of oral tradition with these extreme positions has made it more difficult for subsequent scholars to incorporate a more nuanced view of oral tradition in their models of Synoptic relationships.

This misunderstanding has understandably contributed to the current state of New Testament scholarship where the role of oral tradition in the

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[19] Such a view can be seen clearly in the work of the Jesus Seminar; see Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: the Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus. New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1993). For a critique of such a view see Terence C. Mournet, "A Critique of the Presuppositions, Sources, and Methodology of Contemporary Historical Jesus Research" (M.T.S. Thesis, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999).

[20] This was recognized as far back as 1899 by W. C. Allen who noted that the "extravagances" of the "oral tradition" theory have caused negative reaction against any solution to the Synoptic problem that incorporates oral tradition into its model; see his "Did St. Matthew and St. Luke use the Logia?," *Expository Times* 11 (1899): 425.

[21] Allen, "Logia," 425. F. G. Downing notes that this type of reasoning continues today. In addressing the work of John Kloppenborg, Downing correctly emphasizes that Kloppenborg has worked with a model of dichotomy between the oral and written media: "The dichotomy between 'oral' and 'textual' remains central — and remains unsubstantiated," F. G. Downing, "Word-Processing in the Ancient World: The Social Production and Performance of Q [evidence for Oral Composition of Gospel Tradition]," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996): 41.

formation of the Synoptic Gospels often has been relegated to a subordinate position in preference for what is, at times, an unrealistic setting for the composition of the Gospels. Here we have an example of the extent to which a valuable and insightful thesis (i.e., inter-gospel literary dependency) can be pushed too hard and too far. The *textual critic* David Parker summarizes this highly "literary" approach to the Synoptic Gospels in a chapter devoted to examining the Synoptic Problem:

> We examined Koester's suggestion that Matthew and Luke can be used as primary manuscript evidence for the recovery of the text of Mark, and were not convinced. We studied Streeter's solution to the problem of the Minor Agreements and, while defending his right to emend, found his solution to be unsatisfactory. We could also have studied writers who conduct their source criticism from printed editions with no reference whatever to the manuscript evidence. The basic problem in all these hypotheses is the use of a model which separates the process of creating Gospels and the process of copying them. In the study of the Synoptic Problem, the production of each Synoptic Gospel is often treated as though it were identical with the publishing of a printed book today: the author prepares the text, the printer prints it, the publisher publishes it, the booksellers sell it, and we have in our hands Matthew, Mark or Luke. All that we have to do is to buy all three, take them home, lay them out on our desk and compare them. Then we can come up with our solutions.[22]

Given our familiarity with texts and the ease with which we interact with them, it is quite understandable to assume that the ancients worked with texts as we do.[23] Parker is correct in suggesting that this approach to the Synoptic Tradition is problematic, and his assessment of the situation is perceptive. To rephrase his statement in terms applicable to the current inquiry, we suggest that many hypotheses based upon an underlying early form-critical model have, at times, worked with the Synoptic Tradition from a thoroughly post-Gutenberg perspective. Approaches that adopt

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[22] David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117–118. Also, Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 69: "the assumption that a scribe would have at hand several copies of different texts and be able to compare similar passages, or even collate manuscripts, is an assumption based in part on evidence from a later period and in part on exceptional cases such as Tatian."

[23] In critiquing Michael Goulder's view of Luke's compositional technique, Robert A. Derrenbacker, "Greco-Roman Writing Practices and Luke's Gospel," in *The Gospels According to Michael Goulder: a North American Response* (ed. Christopher A. Rollston; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 64, writes, "Modern writers are very familiar with desks as writing and working surfaces, usually standing thirty inches or so off the ground. The picture of this working environment is one where a writer spreads his/her work out on desks or writing tables and works in an environment of controlled chaos as letters, essays, and articles are composed on paper or computer, surrounded by stacks of books, notes, and journals. However, ancient writers and scribes, of course, did not work in this fashion."

concepts of a "fixed" text, or assume that a solution to the Synoptic Problem is a matter of fitting together the various pieces of the Synoptic "puzzle" have approached the question of Synoptic interrelationships from an *exclusively literary* perspective. This leads us to question whether such a view of Synoptic interrelationship is a historically viable option given what we now know about ancient compositional techniques and the relationship between oral communication and written texts.

It is only relatively recently that scholars have begun to inquire as to the relationship between oral communication and written texts. At one time the consensus was that ancient Israel was a highly literate society: Torah training was mandatory, young men were given a "proper" education and were taught to read and write, people had access to texts, and scholars assumed that the Hebrew Bible reflected the widespread literacy of Israel in general. Much was the same as far as most Greco-Roman scholars were concerned. Prior to 1960, classical scholars worked under the premise that the works of Homer were "high" works of literature produced by a proficient, highly educated author. All of these views have now been questioned, and it is now commonplace to read detailed treatments of the question of oral tradition in studies on ancient *literacy*.[24]

It is therefore important to re-examine a highly literary approach to questions concerning the formation of the Synoptic Tradition. Many factors must be considered when asking how a gospel author might have interacted with a source text and/or an ongoing oral tradition. It will not suffice to *assume*, as illustrated above, that the gospel authors would have necessarily preferred texts *over* oral tradition. An exploration of the complex relationship between oral communication and written texts is necessary and will provide a means by which one can further evaluate previous approaches to the Synoptic Tradition.[25]

This leads us in turn to reflect in more detail upon the implications of a highly "literary" approach to the question of Synoptic interrelationships. The most direct entry point into the discussion is by way of "Q". It is unnecessary at this stage to address in detail all of the arguments both for and against the existence of the hypothetical source. It is fair to suggest that most gospel scholars now accept Q as a working hypothesis, despite the vocal protest of a minority. While we will refrain from engaging in the rigorous debate over the various aspects of Q such as its genre, theology, etc., there are other areas of investigation that are worthy of further attention.

Much of the recent work undertaken on Q has been directed toward the reconstruction of its original form. The *International Q Project (IQP)* has

[24] See below, ch. 4.

[25] See below, ch. 4.

been instrumental in this area and has provided the critical tools necessary to interact with the two-source hypothesis in a way not previously possible. A fundamental premise behind the work of the *IQP* is that Q was a *text* — not simply a collection of oral tradition with which the gospel authors interacted while composing their respective Gospels. Such an assumption is in many respects a reasonable one. Of the many arguments put forth in support of such a thesis, the argument from order and the high level of verbatim agreement between Matthew and Luke traditionally have been the two strongest indicators that there was a textual *Vorlage* behind the Matthean and Lukan double tradition. Indeed, the high level of verbatim agreement between Matthew and Luke in passages where they "overlap" in content was the primary reason for positing a Q source to begin with. Subsequently, this high level of verbatim agreement has been a necessary focal point of any discussion on the existence of Q. Once again these fundamental premises have been supported by a great weight of scholarship, and it is not our desire to question either of these tenets, although a few fundamental questions remain.

First, there is widespread disagreement over the scope of Q. There are those who maintain that that the siglum "Q" should be reserved only for the non-Markan, Matthean and Lukan double tradition passages which have a high enough level of verbatim agreement to definitively indicate that they are from the same source document. Others use the term as a more loosely defined category to describe all of the non-Markan shared passages in Matthew and Luke. This list could be expanded to include several other theses regarding Q, but space does not permit us to do so here. What is significant to note is that there is a fundamental disagreement over the definition of Q and the scope, or boundaries of the source itself. It is a profound disagreement, and the issue goes far beyond a dispute over nomenclature.

The fundamental crux of the issue of verbatim agreement and the scope of Q is in regard to the observed differences in verbatim agreement in those passages assigned to the hypothetical source. Scholars have addressed this question and have asked whether it is a methodologically sound practice to attribute passages of such varying levels of verbatim agreement to the same source *text* of Q. In this case, it has been mentioned that the levels of verbatim agreement in passages attributed to Q range from approximately 8% to 100%.[26] Following such an observation, some suggest that a "Q" comprised of pericopes with such low levels of agreement no longer resembles the source which was originally posited to account for the *high levels of agreement* between the Matthean and Lukan double tradition. Within the context of our discussion of *oral tradition*, we

[26] See below, ch. 6.

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