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### **Review of *The Lost Gospel of Q***

*The Lost Gospel of Q* was written by Burton Mack. Mack is an accomplished scholar of the New Testament. He was a professor of the New Testament at Claremont School of Theology. His works include *Who Wrote the New Testament*, *Christian Myth, Rhetoric and the New Testament*, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, *Who Wrote the New Testament*, and others. He was one of the more prominent members of the Jesus Seminar and is a secularist by nature. Mack is a naturalist; that is, he believes that the history of mankind can be explained in terms of natural occurrences and human creation. To him there is no room for supernatural happenings or beings. It is from that point of view that he seeks to explain the New Testament.

Mack begins his book with a brief history of the discovery and development of the *Book of Q*. He goes through and notes what scholar contributed what to the theory. Most simply put, the rationale behind its existence has its roots in a comparison of the *Gospel of Matthew* and the *Gospel of Luke*. When one looks at these two works excluding the material found in the *Gospel of Mark*, certain patterns appear. There are passages, mostly saying of Jesus, found in both books that have almost the exact same wording. In addition to that, there are occurrences of what scholars call doublets. Doublets are similar passages with different contexts. For example, Jesus giving the same speech on two different occasions is a doublet. The existence of doublets in to works is usually considered evidence for the works having the same source. These are the two most convincing arguments for the existence of the *Book of Q*. The name "Q" comes from the German word *Quelle*, meaning source. The book has never been found, and there are no direct references to the book. The theory was boosted with the discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas*, a highly disputed Gnostic work that is a sayings gospel, like *Q* is reputed to be.

Mack then gives his interpretation of the social situation around Galilee at the time of Jesus. He notes that they were an independent, academic people, with heavy influences from the Jewish culture to the south and Greek and Roman culture from the west. He argues that Jesus was a cynic sage and derived his message as a response to the times. Mack believes that

the original followers of Jesus, dubbed the “Jesus people,” were responsible for the book of Q. Mack then creates his version of Q and presents it in the middle section of the book.

With the first section setting up the *Book of Q*, Mack then seeks to analyze the work. He begins by noting that there seems to be seven clusters of teachings in the work. These seven clusters can be read independently from the rest of the work, suggesting they composed the earliest form of Q. This original work of Q is called Q<sup>1</sup>. There another set of passages that seem to fit around the first set. These are mainly prophetic announcements and they seem to “beef up” the persona of Jesus. These are quite naturally named Q2. The rest of Q does not fit any pattern in particular; the only distinguish trait besides exclusion from Q1 and Q2 is that they bolster the claims of Christ even further. These remnants are dubbed Q3.

After slicing up Q into sections arranged by topic, Mack then hypothesizes that these three sections that not only do these represent the development of the *Book of Q*, but they also represent the theological development of the community of Q. Mack says that if one can track the theological development of the community of Q, then one can have a clearer picture of the origins of current Christian thought. What was the original Jesus movement like? Take a look at the seven clusters of teaching that Mach identifies in Q1:

- 1) Jesus' Teaching
- 2) Instructions for the Jesus Movement
- 3) Confidence in the Father's Care
- 4) On Anxiety and Speaking Out
- 5) On Personal Goods
- 6) Parables of the Kingdom
- 7) The True Followers of Jesus

According to Mack the original community of Q was centered around Jesus' teachings and expounded on them and created rules for their new community. One can see what the community was concerned with: proper teaching, mantra, insecurity, how to define themselves, and materialism. The lack of any miraculous occurrences indicates that they thought of Jesus just as a teacher, not a savior or messiah.

As the years progressed, the Jesus movement started to mythologize their sage. Mack says that all religions naturally do this. He notes the introduction of the phrase Son of Man and John the Baptist into Q2. He theorizes that the myth of Jesus was born primarily out of the “Wisdom of God” and “Son of Man” figures in Hebrew mythology. “Wisdom of God” was an incarnation of wisdom, sometimes referred to as the child of wisdom. This person functioned not only as an avatar of the ideal of Sophia, but a man sent by God to reveal more of his wisdom to his creation. The Son of Man was the herald of the end times in ancient Hebrew mythology. His coming would be one of the signs of the apocalypse, which was a prevailing mood of the time. Thus the Jesus people began their journey away from the original Jesus-philosopher and into the world of the religious. Once it started it would prove impossible to stop.

With the destruction of the temple ten years after the formulation of Q2, the Jesus people had begun to transform into the Christ Cult. In Q3, we find mention of the Son of God to refer to Jesus and added more of Jesus’ miracles and prophecies, most notably those that concerned themselves with the temple. If their wise god-man prophet-king was as they crafted him, he would have surely been able to predict the temple’s destruction and even add meaning to it. Mack spend the rest of his time in the book expounding on the how Christians after the Q Community added to the myth and evolved into what we have as Christianity today.

The trouble with Mack’s hypothesis is it reliance on contingencies: if there was a book of Q, if there was a community behind the book, if the community had gone through the development, ect... If any of these is false, then the whole theory falls apart. The impact that this theory would have on Christianity if it were true is enormous. That is why it is imperative to evaluate the basis on which Mack funds his theory.

Did Q ever exist? For starters, it has never been found. No mention of it has been made. No sites have been found nor mention of any communities fitting Mack’s description. The purported similarities between Luke and Mathew can be explained a multitude of ways. The Q theory is one such explanation. Another equally plausible explanation is that the speeches, catchphrases, and slogans were probably repeated on more than one occasion and in multiple locations. It would be quite easy for those traveling with Jesus to memorize his message and

transmit it with relative accuracy to others. This would also explain away the occurrences of doublets. If Q never existed, the whole theory collapses.

The theory of the development of Q hinges heavily on the dating of the writing of the Gospels. Oral tradition and theological development takes time to develop. Figure 1 shows Mack's version of the synoptic gospels' formation. Notice that it takes at the least 50 years to develop the theological additions from a

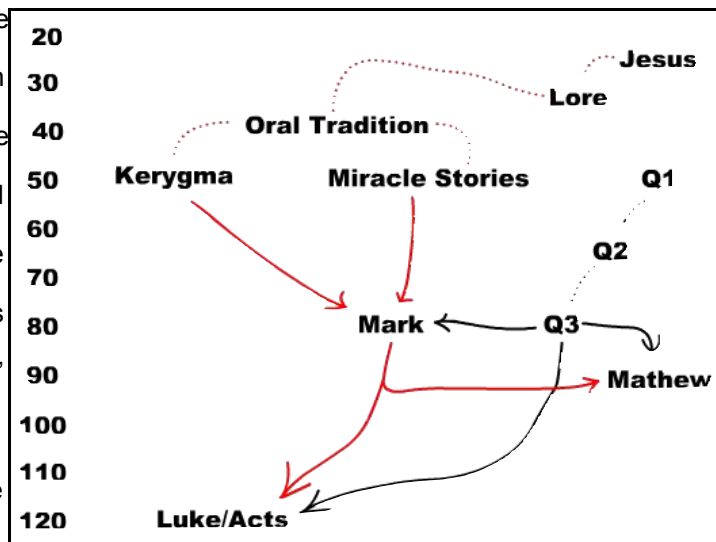


Figure 1

teacher to a god/man/prophet/king. Now, there is evidence for earlier dates for Mathew and Luke Mathew.

The Magdalen Fragments are pieces of papyrus that contain verses from Mathew 26 on them. They were found in Egypt and were first assumed to be of second century origin, but recent study has argued for a mid-first century date. The first argument is that they were composed in Unical style handwriting that was thought to have died out by the middle of the first century. A weaker argument is that they were part of a codex, a primitive kind of book in which writing was found on both side of the papyrus. Some think that codexes were used by early Christians instead of scrolls for portability. However is also currently thought that codexes did not become popular until sometime in the second century. In three places on the Magdalen Papyrus, the name of Jesus is written as KS, an abbreviation of the Greek word Kyrios, meaning Lord. If the dating holds up this means that by 50 C.E. followers of Jesus were already attaching the name Lord to Jesus, implying that they thought of him as much more than a teacher. There is evidence that the Gospel of Luke was written before 68 C.E. Luke ends his work, the Gospel of Luke being the first volume and Acts of the Apostles being the second, with Paul still alive. Since Paul died around 68 CE, it would be natural to assume that Acts was finished while Paul was still alive. If we take these dates and use them to compress the formation of the Gospel's

accordingly, see figure 2 we arrive at a much different picture than Mack suggests. The development time is cut short drastically. There is not time for the theology of Q3 to develop as Mack suggests.

Taking this into consideration one has to conclude that while Mack's theory is beautiful and full of possibility, it falls short on plausibility when evaluated on a realistic basis. This is not to say that he is wrong in his evaluation, facts very well may

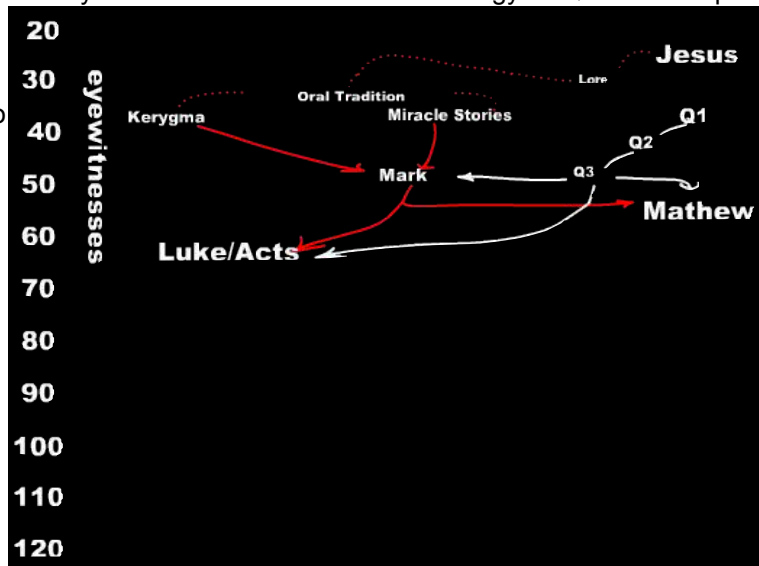


Figure 2

bear him out. However, in the absence of the facts, we must withhold judgment and search for them.