

I can now return to my thread dealing with a question asked by a reader: if I could choose, which of the lost books from Christian antiquity would I want to be discovered? My first and immediate answer was: the lost letters of Paul. My second answer is what I will deal with here. I would love - we would all love - to have a discovery of Q.

Many readers of the blog will know all about Q. Many will know something about Q. Many will have never heard of Q. So here's the deal.

Scholars since the 19th century have worked out the relationship of the Synoptic Gospels with one another. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called "synoptic" because they tell many of the same stories, often in the same sequence, and sometimes in exactly the same words. Synoptic means "seen together." You can "see" these Gospels "together" by laying them side by side and noting their abundant similarities (and differences). But the only way they could have such extensive similarities (especially the verbatim agreements) is if they were copying one another or are copying a common source.

It has long been known that Mark was the earliest Gospel and that Matthew and Luke used it as a source for many of their stories. But Matthew and Luke have a number of traditions about Jesus in common that are not found in Mark - for example the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes. Almost all (not entirely all) of these traditions are sayings of Jesus.

And so scholars in 19th century Germany who worked out a solution to the "Synoptic Problem" (the problem of explaining why the Synoptics have such precise similarities among themselves and yet so many differences) suggested that since it appears that Matthew did not get these sayings from Luke or Luke from Matthew (see below), they hypothesized a one-time source, now lost, that they called the Sayings Source. The German word for "source" is Quelle. And so this hypothetical document is called Q for short.

Some scholars today doubt ...

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