

*The Critical Edition of Q*, edited by James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg and *Excavating Q*, by John S. Kloppenborg Verbin

Reviewed by [John Dart](#) in the [March 14, 2001](#) issue

Most New Testament scholars believe that besides following the Gospel of Mark's narrative of Jesus's ministry and passion, the authors of Matthew and Luke independently drew from a common collection of Jesus sayings in composing their Gospels. These books represent nearly two decades of study of the theoretical Q by two of its foremost scholars, James Robinson and John Kloppenborg Verbin (whose recent marriage accounts for his added surname). No manuscript evidence exists for Q (from *quelle*, "source" in German), but the preface to *The Critical Edition of Q* states bluntly: "The text of Q need no longer be just an imaginary black box lurking somewhere behind Matthean and Lukan verses as their source, but can emerge in its own right."

A highly technical tool for scholars, this volume places a reconstructed Q saying in Greek alongside the versions in Matthew and Luke, occasional parallel sayings in Mark and similar renditions in the Gospel of Thomas. The sayings are translated into English, French and German.

Robinson, professor emeritus at Claremont Graduate University, recaps the history of Q research from 1832 to the present, including the widely held thesis in North America that Q developed in three stages, with the bulk of it deriving from the mid-first century. Robinson, however, presents the reconstructed text in a neutral way, without labels.

Studying Q is important, scholars say, because it takes researchers one step closer to Jesus. Lacking a passion narrative, it is "an early expression of the Jesus tradition that did not feel the urgency of accounting for his death in soteriological terms," as Kloppenborg Verbin puts it in *Excavating Q*. It came from a Jesus movement that "privileged sayings rather than wondrous deeds."

Kloppenborg Verbin's sustained effort to achieve clarity should please researchers, for whom his book is meant. A New Testament professor at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, he contends that the original layer of Q can be

identified through its literary organization of six sections that legitimize "a somewhat adventuresome social practice--including debt forgiveness, the eschewing of vengeance, and the embracing of an exposed and marginal lifestyle." These sayings refer to "a God who is generous to enemies and friends alike, who is superabundantly provident . . ."

Though Kloppenborg Verbin does not contend that Jesus was a Cynic philosopher, he explores the implications of cyniclike teachings in Q. He defends himself against critics who have alleged he has assumed that "wisdom" sayings formed the original layer and "apocalyptic" sayings were introduced in the next edition. The prophetic sayings attributed to Jesus in Q tend to be inserted between the six sections or they interrupt passages, he argues, thus giving literary reasons for seeing the hand of an editor who wanted to cast Jesus in the tradition of Israel's often-rejected prophets.