

# Losing the Lost Coin: Gender Doublets in the Synoptic Tradition

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## SHORT BIO

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## ABSTRACT

The Bible continues to be a contested book with texts that are both detrimental to women's full participation and inclusive and liberating with the latter often being hidden and sometimes deliberately obscured, however, they can be uncovered. The question of which of these traditions go back to the historical Jesus is contested. Historical Jesus traditions would have higher authority in the eyes of critical readers, and denying this status to traditions diminishes their importance. This article examines the tradition of "gender doublets" where double parables cite two examples for the same idea that illustrate male and female reality. The author argues that the frequency of these doublets, as well as the spread of evidence and the variability of construction, make it very probable that these doublets go back to the historical Jesus. In an environment hostile to women, it is more likely that parables like "the lost coin" or "the woman baking with leaven" got "lost" or were deliberately omitted from parallel traditions rather than the possibility of a later redactor compiling or composing such doublets.

## KEYWORDS

Gender doublets, Gender pairs, lost coin, parable of the leaven, Q parables, synoptic parables

## Introduction

In the journey towards women's full and equal participation in society, the Bible continues to be a contested book, used as a resource by both sides of the divide. While the oppressive texts are obvious and easily quoted, the inclusive and liberating traditions are often hidden in the Bible, sometimes deliberately obscured or lost in the process of redaction and canonization. Nevertheless, there are more such traditions in the Bible than meets the eye and they can be uncovered. In the consciousness of more critical Christians, a difference is made between the traditions going back to the historical Jesus, and those coming from an early church that opposed women's participation. However, what goes back to the historical Jesus is heavily contested in scholarship and scholars are often reluctant to make such a claim of a textual tradition. Denying that a tradition can be traced to the historical Jesus has the effect of diminishing its importance, especially in the eyes of critical readers. This article discusses the tradition of parable doublets that seem to be inclusive of women and men in the discourse of Jesus as told in the synoptic gospels. Were these examples originally told

by Jesus to include both his male and female listeners? Do they show that his message was inclusive of women? Or were they constructed by later authors and redactors? This article argues that while there cannot be absolute certainty, the most probable explanation is that they go back to the historical Jesus, but were subsequently not transmitted as doublets by all communities and redactors. Some Christian redactors “lost” the lost coin, or “lost” the woman baking with leaven. The article raises the question of what interests are served by scholars who deny that these doublets go back to the historical Jesus.

## Defining “Gender Doublets”

Throughout the synoptic gospels, there are parable doublets, that is examples where there are two illustrations for the same idea. Some of these are gender doublets, where one example focuses on male experience, the other on female experience. Some of these are obvious, others less so. There are disagreements between scholars as to what exactly constitutes a gender doublet, and which parables should be labelled a parable doublet. Arnal sometimes speaks of “doublets”, sometimes of “couplets” or “gender pairs”, or of “twinning”, and defines them as “repetitious examples, statements or arguments, paired by gender: one male, one female (usually in that order)”.<sup>1</sup> Kloppenborg and Batten speak of “Gender pairs”.<sup>2</sup> Seim speaks of “gender pairs” in her discussion on “Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts” but in addition to parables also includes other paired stories in Luke, such as the pairing of Zechariah and Mary in the infancy narrative, and pairs of healing miracles.<sup>3</sup> She emphasizes that the double parables are more structurally similar than the double narratives, as there is “parallelisation through the identical introduction, form and/or the concluding observation”.<sup>4</sup> Jacobsen speaks of “twinning” in both Q and Luke and also includes more than just parables.<sup>5</sup>

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1 William E Arnal, “Gendered Couplets in Q and Legal Formulations: From the Rhetoric to Social Source,” *JBL* 116, no. 1 (2019): 77.

2 John S Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 97; Alicia Batten, “More Queries For Q: Women and Christian Origins,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 (1994): 47.

3 Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message - Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 15.

4 Seim, *The Double Message*, 16.

5 Arland D. Jacobsen, *The First Gospel – An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1992), 227.

This article employs a wide definition, looking at parables only, from the three synoptic gospels and the gospel of Thomas. Paired parables will be examined where one part can be seen as coming from the male reality and the other the female. What constitutes these differences is, of course, a matter of debate. In some doublets, male or female actors are named, in others, one needs to determine what reality lies behind them. Were there fixed gender roles in first-century Palestine and can one accurately speak of “men’s work” versus “women’s work”? While these categories are never absolute, gender roles in first-century Palestine peasant society were likely clearly defined. However, whether an example can be seen as speaking to men and women is something that needs to be discussed case by case. When one speaks of “women’s experience” it needs to be noted, as Beavis formulates it, that

while the recovery and interpretation of material about women by women is an important part of feminist inquiry, it by no means exhausts the scope of feminist interpretation . . . nor can it be assumed that all women, regardless of differences such as race, class or ethnicity, share some essential nature – that all women are expressions of the category of “Woman” or “the Feminine”.<sup>6</sup>

Not all women share the same experience, not even all women of first-century Galilee. But did Jesus try to reach the different groups in his audience in his teaching? Did he formulate examples to appeal to women particularly? Can such examples be identified?

An example of a gender doublet that all scholars agree on is the longer story parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin in Luke 15:1-10 where male and female actors are specifically named. But there are also less obvious examples where there is disagreement, such as the example of the birds, who do not sow (was this an activity for men?) and the lilies, who do not spin or weave (were these women’s activities?) in Matt 6:26, 28b-30 and Luke 12:24, 27-28. Here, no male or female actor is named. Not all scholars agree that these should be counted as gender doublet.<sup>7</sup> There are also many short parables where two short illustrations, seldom longer than a verse or two,

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6 Mary Ann Beavis, *The Lost Coin – Parables of Women, Work and Wisdom* (London-New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 23.

7 Dieter T. Roth, *The Parables in Q* (London: T & T Clarke International, 2018), 201.

are juxtaposed. In this article a very broad definition is used, and all examples mentioned by various scholars will be looked at as part of the spread of evidence for that particular doublet, its construction, and whether it can be seen as a “gender doublet”. Subsequently, the question of whether these doublets were deliberately “constructed” by early Christian redactors or even composed, as is implied in some articles (see later discussion), will be discussed. The other possibility is that they go back to the historical Jesus but that they were increasingly obscured in later tradition. That is to say that later redactors were “losing the lost coin”.

Given that all four gospels portray Jesus as having women followers, tracing the gender doublets to the historical Jesus would seem the obvious choice. Schüssler Fiorenza states that canonical literature of the New Testament “does not transmit a single sexist story of Jesus, although he lived and preached in a patriarchal culture and society”.<sup>8</sup> While not everyone agrees, citing the difficult text of the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-31,<sup>9</sup> all make it clear that this story contradicts the portrait of Jesus in other texts in Mark and the synoptics, which is usually open and supportive of women.

However, there are many scholars who have argued that these doublets are a later construction by early Christian authors who had a special interest in women. They usually first cite Luke, though it is disputed whether Luke advances or impedes women’s full participation,<sup>10</sup> and second, the compiler(s) of the document of the double tradition shared by Matthew and Luke, commonly known as Q.<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to prove what goes back to the historical Jesus and even if these doublets were later compilations, they should be of interest to gender scholars. However their importance would be

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8 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons - Explorations in Feminist Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 32.

9 David D. M. King, “The Problem of Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman: A Reader-Response Analysis of Mark 7:24-31,” *Journal of Religion, Identity, and Politics* 3, no. 1 (2014): 17–18.

10 Seim, *The Double Message*, 1–3.

11 This article uses “Q” as shorthand for the tradition shared by Matthew and Luke. This does not necessarily refer to a particular reconstructed version of Q as for example proposed by the editors of the *Critical Edition of Q* (Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenborg 2000).

enhanced if demonstrated that it is highly likely this was the way the historical Jesus communicated with his audience.

This article will show how common gender doublets are in the synoptic tradition and that they are found in all three synoptic gospels, as well as the Gospel of Thomas. It argues that this makes the “compilation theory” less likely. It will also show that there are gender doublets that do not follow the expected order of the male example first, or differ from the norm in other ways, which also counts against deliberate construction. It argues that the most likely explanation for the texts we have is that they flowed naturally from a gifted preacher who was aware that both men and women were a part of his audience.

Possible gender doublets are listed below as well as the debates around whether or not they are real “gender pairs”. A redaction-critical approach will follow, comparing versions and determining what is likely to have been the original version and what is a possible redaction, though of course one is dealing with probabilities and not certainties here. In following a traditional “historical-critical” approach, I am aware of the feminist critique of this method that claims to allow for an objective interpretation while obscuring a biased agenda. Nevertheless, the “master’s tools”<sup>12</sup> can still be very useful to unmask tensions in the text. Making oneself dependent “on the same foundations that we criticize”<sup>13</sup> can nevertheless open up a route to dialogue and open space into mainstream and dominant discourse.

The gender pairs will not be individually discussed in depth as to what they reveal about the lives of women and their message. Nevertheless, each gender pair is worth studying in depth in further research.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), Title

13 Stichele and Penner, *Her Master's Tools?*, 12.

14 See the detailed analysis of the gender doublet on the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in J Gertrud Tönsing, “Growth or Contamination? The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven and the Hidden Transcript,” *Neotestamentica* 56, no. 1 (2022): 165–87.

## Debates Around “Historical Jesus” Material

Suggesting that some material in the New Testament goes back to the historical Jesus inevitably results in fraught and difficult discussions as to what criteria can be used to determine this. Indeed, we can only reach the historical Jesus when mediated by the faith memory of the church and not by any objective outside proofs. As Dunn points out, “We cannot find a Jesus who did not make an impression or arouse faith in listeners”.<sup>15</sup> There is no absolute criteria that could “prove beyond reasonable doubt” that something goes back to the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, there are ways to determine which of these claims has greater plausibility. Theissen and Winter argue that a decisive criterion for “authenticity” is “contextual plausibility in tandem with the plausibility of later effects”.<sup>16</sup> A convincing argument must be made that it is likely this material dates back to Jesus rather than to the background of first-century Palestine or the early church.

The “criterion of dissimilarity”, which was widely used in the debates around the historical Jesus, argues that it is most likely to date to the historical Jesus if it is different to what would have been said in a Jewish context or by followers of the risen Christ. This criterion has been critiqued as it attempts to separate Jesus from his context and also his followers.<sup>17</sup> Jesus was a Jew who took up the traditions of his context in his preaching. But he did bring something new and different. This can be determined without a denigration of his Jewish roots (see the critique of Schottroff et al. of Feminist Anti-Judaism).<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, one should not denigrate Jesus’ followers, particularly those who understood themselves in continuity with the teachings of the historical Jesus and were closer to the source than we today can ever be. However, it is equally true that the early church had to adapt to the world and understood the teaching of the historical Jesus in light of the resurrection. There was an

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15 James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective of Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 29.

16 Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus* (Louisville, London: John Knox Press, 2002), xv.

17 Christopher F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London, Philadelphia: SCM Press, Trinity International, 1993), 38.

18 Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Feminist Interpretation - The Bible in Women’s Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 55 – 61.

inevitable shift in the message and theology, which is discernible in gospel material.<sup>19</sup> Is the material easier to understand in light of the post-Easter message or is it understandable within the context of Jesus' preaching among the simple people of Galilee or Judea? We need to acknowledge how little we know of these backgrounds when we make such findings.<sup>20</sup>

Another common criterion for increasing the plausibility of originality is "multiple independent attestation".<sup>21</sup> This is based on assumptions on authorship, dating, and relationships between the documents. Is the Gospel of Thomas independent of the gospels and is Mark independent of the "Q" double tradition? These questions are disputed. If they are independent, then attestation in different tradition streams would be strong evidence for authenticity rather than later redaction.<sup>22</sup> Despite potential dependencies between the sources, a spread of evidence, nevertheless, makes it more likely that a tradition is closer to the earliest Christian tradition.<sup>23</sup> Multiple attestation cannot prove authenticity, but it does heighten the probability that the tradition originated earlier rather than later and, therefore, could conceivably go back to the historical Jesus.<sup>24</sup> This criterion is crucial to this article.

Demonstrating the plausibility of later effects is a process of trying to determine how the different versions of a text came about, and what effect the passage had later. The most likely original version is the one that can explain how the others originated. The other layers are not inauthentic: "Jesus left behind him thinkers not memorizers, disciples not reciters, people

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19 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons*, 251–53.

20 Stanley E. Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research* (New York: T & T Clarke International, 2000), 74.

21 Andries Van Aarde, "Methods and Models in the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Historical Criticism and/or Social Scientific Criticism," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (2002): 429. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v58i2.562>.

22 Kloppenborg argues that Q is independent of Mark but is also made up of various redactional layers of different ages. To discuss the implications of this goes beyond the scope of this article. John S Kloppenborg, *Conflict and Invention – Literary, Rhetorical and Social Studies on the Sayings Gospel Q* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 7–10.

23 Theissen and Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, 14–15.

24 John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus - The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke International, 1991), xxxi.

not parrots”.<sup>25</sup> If it can show how the later effects might have come about, it heightens the plausibility that a passage was original.

## Arguments for Compilation by Luke

The evangelist Luke has a particularly high proportion of narratives including women, seemingly demonstrating a special interest in women, even though there is a debate whether his writing advances or pushes back the women’s cause.<sup>26</sup> Luke tells the double parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin just before the third parable of the lost son (Luke 15:1-10). Matthew brings a parallel to the story of the lost sheep, but not the lost coin. (Matt 18:12-14) The Gospel of Thomas notes the lost sheep only (G Thom107). Did Luke compose the story of the woman looking for the coin himself as Schmithals implies?<sup>27</sup> Or did he adapt something from his special Luke sources to construct a doublet as Grundmann and Balch argue?<sup>28</sup>

If one looks at this parable in isolation in the context of Luke it would be easy to argue that Luke follows his special interest, especially if one sees Luke as woman-friendly. However if one examines it in the context of all the gender doublets that are included in both Luke and Matthew, (see discussion below), it is more likely that there were many gender doublets in circulation, and that Luke found the doublet either in Q as argued by Klein<sup>29</sup> or in his Special Luke material. Evans argues that, in this case, Matthew does not share a tradition with Luke but does not make a finding on the originality of Luke.<sup>30</sup>

Matthew brings only the story of the lost sheep. Did he not know the second part that was only found in the Special Luke material? Or did Matthew deliberately “lose” the lost coin parable, perhaps to side-line the offensive

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25 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxi.

26 Seim, *The Double Message*, 1–2.

27 While Schmithals does not deny that the second parable could come from special Luke material, he emphasizes the particularly Lukan elements of the construction. Walter Schmithals, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980), 164.

28 Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1978), 306; David.L Balch, “Luke,” in *Eerdman’s Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1137.

29 Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 521.

30 Evans, *Saint Luke*, 585.



comparison between a searching woman and God searching for the lost? Another possible reason for Matthew leaving the second part of the doublet argued by some scholars is that Matthew emphasizes the sheep “going astray” rather than the shepherd “losing” it. This would be a reason for leaving out the coin, which is passive and has no agency.<sup>31</sup> Kloppenburg goes even further:

Matthew put the parable of the lost sheep at the service of a pastoral exhortation which invites one to follow the example of the shepherd’s conduct; it would have been tactless to add the example of a woman searching for a drachma.<sup>32</sup>

The choice of words is notable, and seems to indicate that, even today, some people have no problem equating God with the shepherd but shirk from equating God with a searching woman. In many congregations, leaders are called “shepherds” (pastors) and are motivated to follow the example of Christ but are seldom motivated by the example of a searching woman. Brawley points out that while people are encouraged to identify with the shepherd, the word “or” leaves it open to listeners whether or not they want to identify with the woman. In popular consciousness, the coin parable, though still present in the scriptures, is normally still “lost”.

The Gospel of Thomas 107 only includes the example of the shepherd. It also speaks of the lamb going astray and ends with the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep: “I love you more than the ninety-nine”. Again, this would be a good reason to “lose” the inanimate coin, which cannot be in a loving relationship with the finder.

The balance of probability is against the doublet being authored or compiled by Luke. There are enough plausible reasons for Matthew to omit it to make it possible that it was part of the “Q” tradition.

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31 Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 521.

32 Kloppenburg, *Excavating Q*, 98.

## **Arguments for the Compilation by the Redactor of Q**

### *Frequency of Gender doublets in Q*

There are various gender doublets shared by both Matthew and Luke, leading some scholars to argue that this was a special interest of the compiler(s) of the Q document.<sup>33</sup>

Kloppenborg identifies four gender pairs in the double tradition:<sup>34</sup>

- 1) *Jonah / Queen of Sheba*: Q (Luke) 11:31-32 // Matt 12:41-42
- 2) *Sowing and spinning*: Q (Luke) 12:24,27-28 // Matt 6:26,28b-30
- 3) *Mustard seed and the leaven*: Q (Luke) 13:18-21 // Matt 13:31-33
- 4) *Grinding corn, working in the field/in bed*: Q (Luke)17:34-35 //Matt 24:40-41

1)The men of Nineveh listened to Jonah, the Queen of Sheba came to listen to Solomon. They will stand in judgement on “this generation”. Here, there are clear male and female actors.

2) The birds do not sow (possible work of men) and the flowers do not spin (possible work of women), yet they live and thrive under God’s care. Hearon and Wire include spinning in a list of “essential tasks carried out by women” in their discussion of parables, and as such this can be seen as a “gender doublet” even though no actors are named in this example.<sup>35</sup>

3) A man sows (or throws) a mustard seed in his garden, a woman mixes leaven into dough. Both grow from small beginnings with a great effect. Here again, male and female actors are named. This parable is also found in Mark, but due to the ways that Matthew and Luke agree against the Markan version, many scholars would argue it was also in Q.<sup>36</sup>

4) People are close together, sharing a space or activities and then one is taken and the other is left on the “day the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:30). Matthew has two men in a field and two women grinding grain, Luke

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33 Roth, *The Parables in Q*, 201.

34 Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 97.

35 Beavis, *The Lost Coin*, 139.

36 Roth, *The Parables in Q*, 299; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 552.

has two people on a bed and two women grinding grain. This is a clear gender doublet in Matthew and an ambiguous one in Luke. This could refer to a married couple.

Other doublets can be added to this list of four:

*5) Lost sheep / lost coin: Q (Luke) 15:1-10// Matt 18:12-14.*

Here, male and female actors are again named. It is possible that this was in Q, and that Matthew deliberately “lost” the female part of the doublet (as argued above). The common denominator is the value the seeker places on what is lost.

*6) Fish and egg/bread: Q (Luke) 11:9-13 // Matt 7:9-11*

This is not an obvious gender doublet, as in both cases the son asks the father for food. In reality, it is likely that it would be the father providing the fish and the mother providing the bread (Matthew)<sup>37</sup> or egg (Luke). In this case, the fatherly caring role is being emphasized, despite common knowledge that women normally provide food to children. Brawley calls the family model presupposed here one that “undermines the hierarchical patriarchal model”.<sup>38</sup>

The following doublets are included by some scholars but are not parables, so go beyond what is discussed in this article. However, they do follow the pattern, so shall just be mentioned here:

*a) Division in the family: Q (Luke) 12:51-53 // Matt 10:34-36*

The divisions are son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Matthew’s final general statement uses the generic *anthropos* (human), though it is often translated as “man”: “a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (10:36).

*b) Van Eck<sup>39</sup> points out a brief doublet within a longer (non-gendered) doublet: In the days of Noah and the days of Lot:*

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<sup>37</sup> Hearon & Wire in Beavis, *The Lost Coin*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Robert L. Brawley, *Luke* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 123.

<sup>39</sup> Ernest van Eck, “A Realistic Reading of the Parable of the Lost Coin in q: Gaining or Losing Even More?,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75, no. 3 (2019): 6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5656>.

Marrying and being given in marriage: Q (Luke) 17:27 // Matt 24:38  
However here, while Luke uses the passive “being given in marriage” (that is the bride), Matthew’s version states “giving in marriage” (the action of the father), making it a male doublet. Again this might be a case of Matthew “losing” the gendered doublet.

Even if one does not include all the examples above as gender doublets, it demonstrates that the tradition shared by Luke and Matthew (Q) has a high concentration of illustrations from the lives of women. This raises the question of whether compiling such doublets was a particular interest for the redactor of Q, which would consequently mean that the interest in twinning examples in terms of gender would predate Luke.

### *Parables are separate or single in other sources*

One of the main reasons for arguing that they were compiled by the redactor of Q comes from the fact that some of the doublets are separate or single in other sources. One example is the parable doublet of the Mustard seed and the leaven Q (Luke) 13:18-21 // Matt 13:31-33. Both Matthew and Luke compare the kingdom of God to a mustard seed being sown by a man and to the leaven women used to bake bread. The gospel of Mark includes only the mustard seed parable in his gospel and not the leaven (4:30-32). The Gospel of Thomas brings the two parables separately in different places (G Thom 20 and 96). This, many scholars argue, shows that these parables circulated independently and that it was the redactor of Q who brought them together.

The Gospel of Thomas 36 parallels the second example above (Sowing and spinning) but has differences in its Coptic and Greek versions. The Coptic version only has the words: Jesus said, "Do not be concerned from morning until evening and from evening until morning about what you will wear". The Greek fragment P Oxy 655 brings the example of the lilies that “do not card or spin”,<sup>40</sup> articulating, in this case, only the “female” example. The Coptic version could have “lost” the feminine illustration. In this case, the Gospel of Thomas would be evidence of the female example circulating separately and could be another example to be cited in support of a compilation by Q.

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<sup>40</sup> Robinson, Hoffmann, & Kloppenborg, eds *The Critical Edition of Q*, 344.

Similarly, the Gospel of Thomas has a parallel to the fourth example above but only includes one part: “two will rest on a bed. The one will die, the other will live” (G Thom 61). In example (a) above, speaking about divisions in the family, the Gospel of Thomas only uses the example of the “father against son and son against father” (G Thom 16.3b). Did this redactor “lose” the other part of the example, or was only one part known and the second part originates with redactor of Q?

Several scholars argue that the Gender Doublets go back to the compiler of Q,<sup>41</sup> such as Bovon<sup>42</sup> who states that the early Christians liked to bring together traditions that were similar. Kloppenborg even writes that “It might even be argued that Luke got the idea to use paired illustrations from Q”.<sup>43</sup>

Was the parable doublet “compiled” or even “composed” or were parts of the doublets “lost”? Except for the case of the Greek fragment with the lilies parable (P Oxy 655), the missing part of the doublet is almost always the feminine example. Is it more likely that early Christian redactors added in a feminine part of a doublet, or that in an environment hostile to women, the feminine part was deliberately omitted because it was seen as inappropriate or even embarrassing?

## Problems With the “Q as compiler” Theory

### *Plausible reasons for leaving out parts or splitting gender doublets*

Mark only includes the mustard seed parable and does not include the second half of the doublet, the parable of the leaven (4:30-32). However, Mark includes this parable in a whole chapter of parables on seed and sowing. As such, just as there is in the “lost coin” example above, there is a very plausible explanation why Mark would not have included the leaven parable if he had known it as a doublet.

The Gospel of Thomas generally consists of only short sayings, and is understandable that they sometimes only bring one half of the doublet. The

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<sup>41</sup> Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 483; Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 97.

<sup>42</sup> F Bovon, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, EKK 2. Auf (Neukirchen-Vly: Neukirchener/Patmos Verlag, 2008), 418.

<sup>43</sup> Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 97.

leaven parable has also undergone some transformation, so can no longer be considered a genuine “twin” of the G Thom mustard seed parable.<sup>44</sup>

### *Lack of “Gender Friendly” Material in Q*

If one takes the reconstruction of “Q” contained in the *Critical edition of Q* by Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenburg as a departure point, there is little material beyond the gender doublets themselves indicating that the inclusion of women was of particular interest to the compilers of such a document.

Outside of the parable doublets, women are mentioned in the following places in the reconstruction of Q in Robinson et al.:

1) Q (Luke) 7:28: “*There has not arisen among women’s offspring anyone who surpasses John*”.<sup>45</sup>

The interest here is in John and not in the inclusion of women.

2) Q (Luke) 13:34: “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her nestlings under her wings, but you were not willing*”.<sup>46</sup>

While this is a feminine image, it would be difficult to argue that it originated with the redactors of Q, which is usually seen as a rural, Galilean document.<sup>47</sup> Rather, this likely originated with the historical Jesus, or in Judean communities.

3) Q (Luke) 14:26: “*The one who does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple; and the one who does not hate son and daughter cannot be my disciple*”.<sup>48</sup>

This verse is similar in structure to the parable doublets and shows the same pattern of inclusion. It can be understood as a sayings doublet, which is not a parable. It adds to the list of doublets, but is not independent evidence of the interests of the Q redactor.

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44 See more thorough discussion of versions of this doublet in Tönsing, “Growth or Contamination?,” 182 – 183.

45 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenburg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*, 136.

46 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenburg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*, 420.

47 Kloppenburg, *Excavating Q*, 214.

48 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenburg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*, 452.

4) Q (Luke) 16:18: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and the one who marries a divorcee commits adultery”.<sup>49</sup> This cannot be cited as evidence of a special interest in including women.

In the gospel of Luke, a special interest to include women is evident in many places. However, this is not the case in the Luke/Matthew doublet tradition, as least as reconstructed in the *Critical Edition of Q*. It is difficult to imagine that an editor would go to some trouble to collect and put together parable doublets in order to be inclusive of women, but not leave traces of this interest in any other material, narrative or otherwise. It is more probable that this material goes back to the historical Jesus.

### *Disagreements About Categories*

There is disagreement about what qualifies as “gender doublets”. For example, Roth does not consider doublet (2) above, about the birds and the flowers, as a genuine gender doublet. While he does not provide specific reasonings, he notes that the reference to male and female work is negative, that is, it speaks of what the birds and lilies do not do.<sup>50</sup>

The doublet in Luke 17:34-45 (doublet (4) above) is also interesting to consider, as both Matthew and Luke mention two women grinding corn together. However, Matthew notes two men in the field while Luke has “two people in one bed”, probably intended as a reference to a married couple, meaning that it cannot be considered a genuine gender doublet in the Lukan version. As both pronouns are male, many commentators assume two men.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, some Bible translations read “two men on a couch” (ISV and YLT),<sup>52</sup> however, it is more likely that the example does not want to specify whether it is the husband or the wife is that is left behind.<sup>53</sup> Most contemporary Bible Translations render it as “two people on a bed”.<sup>54</sup> A married couple corresponds better to the close proximity of two women operating the handmill. If Q had compiled a clear gender doublet, as in Matthew, it raises the question of why Luke would make it ambiguous.

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49 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenborg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*, 470

50 Roth, *The Parables in Q*, 201.

51 See the discussion in Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 575.

52 *The Message* freely paraphrases: “two men will be in the same boat fishing”

53 L. Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale Ne (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 286.

54 Luke 17:34 *Good News Bible*, NIV, ESV, NLT

Instead it seems that Matthew “loses” the married couple and changes it into two men.

The example of the fish and the egg/bread (doublet (6) above) could have easily been changed into a genuine gender doublet if this had been the interest of the compiler, but it remains an ambiguous doublet.

The last example (non-parable doublet b), contained within a non-gendered doublet, again differs in Luke and Matthew. Here, one could argue Luke changed the “giving in marriage” to the gendered “being given in marriage”. However, this then raises the question why he did not change the whole passage into a gendered doublet. Once again, the more plausible scenario is that Matthew “lost” the feminine element.

The ambiguity of the examples queries whether there could have been a deliberate attempt to construct “gender doublets”. If the compiler of Q had deliberately done this in an environment that was generally hostile to women’s participation, and this had not been included in the sources, would it not seem more obvious and deliberate? The ambiguity of the parables are more easily understood as simply illustrations that would make sense to different people in an audience, rather than as a deliberate attempt to construct a gender balanced double parable.

## **Arguments for Originality of Gender Doublets**

This section shall argue that the spread and variety of doublets in the synoptic tradition and beyond is such that it is most easily explained as a common narrative practice of the historical Jesus. The criterion of “multiple independent attestation” is relevant here, though scholars debate whether the Gospel of Thomas is really an independent source or somehow dependent on the gospels (see discussion on dating in Valantasis).<sup>55</sup> However, a spread across the Q texts, Mark, as well as the Gospel of Thomas does increase the plausibility of originality if these three are taken as independent sources. Even if there is literary dependence, multiple attestation shows common knowledge of important traditions that are more likely to have originated earlier rather than later. There is also material found

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55 R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London - New York: Routledge, 1997), 12–20.



only in Matthew or Luke (Special Matthew or Special Luke) that would likely be independent of Q.

*The Spread of Non-Gendered Doublets: Drawing in Different Audiences*

There are many non-gendered doublets in the synoptic tradition, some of them seem aimed at drawing in different segments of an audience. Sometimes there are also three different examples. The list below is not exhaustive, providing only unambiguous doublets. In many cases there are some sources that mention only one part of the doublet. This is what one would expect from the oral tradition where one part of the illustration could have been recalled more clearly than the other.

*The Double Tradition (Q)*

Sparrows and Hair: Q (Luke) 12:6-7 // Matt 10:29-31

Figs from thornbushes, grapes from briars: Q (Luke) 6: 43-44 // Matt 7:16-18 // G Thom 45

*Parables only in Luke (Special Luke)*

Galileans killed by Pilate, people killed by collapsed tower: Luke 13:1-5

Counting cost of building a tower, going to war: Luke 14:28-33

Days of Noah, days of Lot: Luke 17:26-29 (Matthew has Noah only 24:37-39)

*Parables only in Matthew (Special Matthew)*

Treasure in the field, precious Pearl: Matt 13:44-46 // G Thom 76

Salt and Light: Mt 5:13-16 (Luke has Salt only 14:34-35)

Giving what is holy to the dogs, pearls to swine: Matt 7:6 // G Thom 93

*Gospel of Thomas*

Mounting two horses, stretching two bows: G Thom 47

The general prevalence of doublets in the synoptic and Thomasine tradition (multiple attestation) counts against deliberate compilation by an early Christian writer. It is understandable that a doublet would sometimes remain together in oral traditions, whereas other times only one part would circulate in one community and the entire doublet in another community.

### *The Spread of Gender Doublets*

The presence of gender doublets goes beyond just Matthew and Luke. They are also present in Mark and the Gospel of Thomas. This makes it less likely that they came about as a result of the deliberate composition of the redactor of Q, unless one argues that neither Mark nor Thomas are independent of Q.

The gender doublet about mending clothes and making wine can be seen as a genuine gender doublet as mending clothes would generally have been the work of women whereas making wine was the work of men. Perkins discusses whether mending was woman's work or whether this speaks about "male village tailors" as Kee argues. However, the more relevant question is whether people who can afford tailors would really mend old clothes. This is more likely to reflect the situation of the poor and not the rich, in which case mending would be woman's work.<sup>56</sup>

This is contained as a doublet in four documents, Mark, Matthew and Luke and also the Gospel of Thomas:

Mending clothes and making wine: Mark 2:21-22 // Luke 5:33 - 39 // Matt 9:14-17 // G Thom 47

There is one more gender doublet in Special Luke, which is also independent of Q:

Widow in Zarephath, Naaman: Luke 4:24-27.

It goes beyond the scope of this article to fully argue this, but a case could be made that the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13) was originally a short parable that was part of a gender doublet together with the parable of the wise and wicked servants (Matt 24:45-51). Several scholars have argued that Matthew wrote an expanded allegory of Christ's second coming in this parable.<sup>57</sup> This would mean that the Special Matthew material also contained a gender doublet, independent of Q:

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<sup>56</sup> Beavis, *The Lost Coin*, 129–30.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Nach Matthäus*, 515–516.

The wise and wicked servants, wise and foolish virgins Matt 24:45-51, 25:1-13.

(Luke only has wise and wicked servants Luke 12:42-46).

There is, thus, an impressive spread of evidence of gender doublets in Christian texts that likely do not depend on the Q document. "Multiple attestation" counts as one of the factors in favour of attributing a saying or a tradition to the historical Jesus. The spread of evidence counts against the theory that these doublets were compiled by the redactor of just one of the early Christian documents.

### *The Format of Gender Doublets*

Another argument raises doubt as to the theory that doublets were later compilations is their structure. If doublets were deliberately constructed, one would expect a certain regular structure, in this case, usually the male example first and then the female examples.

Most of the examples that have been listed above follow the expected order of the male example appearing first. However, there are some notable exceptions:

#### *1. Jonah / Queen of Sheba: Q (Luke) 11:31-32 // Matt 12:41-42*

Matthew has Jonah first then the Queen of Sheba, the expected male-female order whereas Luke has the order in reverse, which is illogical in the context. He begins speaking about the "sign of Jonah" (11:29-30), then speaks of the "Queen of the South", (31) and then goes back to speaking of the men of Nineveh and Jonah (32). It is more likely that Matthew smooths out the sequence than that Luke deliberately jumbled it, which would mean that the sequence with the female example first is probably original.

#### *2. One taken, the other left: Q (Luke) 17:34-35 // Matt 24:40 – 41*

This doublet on the end times where two people are side by side and only one is taken up, is a clear gender doublet in Matthew with the male example coming first: There are two men in a field and two women together at a hand mill. As argued above, the example in Luke is not a clearly structured gender doublet as the first example probably refers to a married couple.

### 3. *Widow in Zarephath, Naaman: Luke 4:24-27.*

Here the female example comes first, likely because they are in chronological order, the first linked to Elijah, the second to Elisha.

### 4. *Mending clothes, making wine: Mark 2:21-22 // Luke 5:33 - 39 // Matt 9:14-17 // G Thom 47*

In three of the four witnesses to this doublet, the example linked to women's reality, patching clothes comes first. However, in the Gospel of Thomas, the two are reversed and the example of making wine appears first.

There is, thus, irregularity in the structure of the doublets. While this does not completely rule out deliberate construction, it is more likely that what was deliberately constructed to make a point would also make the point in some kind of regular way.

### *Lack of Reasons for Deliberate Construction*

While many "gendered" doublets can be found, most of them are not obvious. Compilation would imply sifting among the many short parables Jesus told to find two with the same message and similar structure, one from the male and the other from the female reality. This theory implies that Jesus did tell both these parables, but not together. This theory, though not impossible, is more complicated than assuming he told them together. The alternative would be to consider that the redactors or evangelists composed the other half of the gender parable.<sup>58</sup> While one might expect this from Luke, it can be argued that Luke is not so unambiguously woman-friendly that he would be a more likely author than Jesus himself.<sup>59</sup> If there was a woman-friendly redactor of Q, it is likely the compiler rather than a composer as it is likely that a composer would have written less ambiguous examples if they were trying to make a point.

## **Conclusions**

While gender doublets are not easy to define and there are differences of opinion about which examples to include, there is a great spread of such parables where one example could be seen to be taken from the male and

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<sup>58</sup> David L. Tiede, *Luke - Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 273.

<sup>59</sup> Seim, *The Double Message*, 1-2.

the other from the female experience. These examples are found in different sources, such as Q, Mark, Special Luke and possibly Special Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas. The construction of the parables varies, sometimes the male example comes first, sometimes the female, and some of them are ambiguous in at least one of the versions. In some cases, only one part of the doublet is found in some versions. Most often it is the feminine part that is “lost”.

As shown above, scholars have argued that the parable doublets were an innovation of the redactor of Q and other sources, including Mark and the Gospel of Thomas, were derived and inspired from this. However, there is little evidence that the Q document had a particular interest in women and not all scholars agree on this theory of dependence. A simpler explanation is that doublets in general, and gender doublets in particular, were a way that the historical Jesus spoke to his audience and that some communities remembered the whole doublet and others just a portion. Some redactors could also have deliberately omitted a part of the tradition available to them for reasons enumerated above. In the early church there was a growing tendency to marginalize women. In such situations, female examples were likely deliberately left out rather than being compiled from disparate traditions or even deliberately composed.

It is impossible to prove beyond doubt that a tradition goes back to the historical Jesus, and whether or not it does, does not change the canonicity of a tradition. However, it does make a difference as to its authority, at least among critical readers. The best explanation for the texts we have with all their ambiguities and variations is that the historical Jesus was aware of having both men and women in his audience and found examples that would appeal to different groups without consciously and deliberately constructing the doublets. These examples flowed naturally from a gifted speaker. It is easy to imagine the situation in which they arose, reconstruct a possible original version and explain how the other variations of the doublets arose. This would mean that the parable doublets in the synoptic gospels would meet the criterion of Theissen and Winter for historical Jesus traditions of “contextual plausibility in tandem with the plausibility of later effects”.

The rich, even if partly obscured tradition of gender doublets sheds light on the situation Jesus may have been speaking into and raises a wealth of

questions and insights into their complex tradition history that warrant more research and analysis so that what was “lost” may be found.

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