

# ‘REAPING WHERE YOU DID NOT SOW’: THE PARABLE OF THE ENTRUSTED MONEY (Q 19:12-13, 15-24, 26) AND THE REDACTION OF Q

LLEWELLYN HOWES

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

## ABSTRACT

In *The Formation of Q*, Kloppenborg identifies three redactional layers in the Sayings Gospel Q: the ‘formative stratum’ (or Q<sup>1</sup>), the ‘main redaction’ (or Q<sup>2</sup>), and the ‘final recension’ (or Q<sup>3</sup>). He ascribes the parable of the Entrusted Money in Q 19:12-13, 15-24, 26 to the main redaction. As an alternative, it will presently be argued that this parable appeared in the formative stratum before it was incorporated into the main redaction. In order to argue the latter, the article will actively engage in the interpretation of this parable.

**Keywords:** Jesus, parable, talents, minas, money, Sayings Gospel, Q, redaction, formative, stratum, layer, stratification, layering, stratigraphy, Kloppenborg

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In *The Formation of Q*, Kloppenborg identifies three redactional layers in the Sayings Gospel Q: the ‘formative stratum’ (or Q<sup>1</sup>), the ‘main redaction’ (or Q<sup>2</sup>), and the ‘final recension’ (or Q<sup>3</sup>). He ascribes the parable of the Entrusted Money in Q 19:12-13, 15-24, 26 to the main redaction. As an alternative, it will presently be argued that this parable appeared in the formative stratum before it was incorporated into the main redaction. As the foregoing sentences reveal, this article accepts the stratigraphy of Q proposed by Kloppenborg in 1987, thereby using it as a basis for further study. A number of other scholars have done the same.<sup>1</sup> The present author has defended his acceptance and approval of Kloppenborg’s stratigraphy of Q at length elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Although the reconstruction of Q 19:12-13, 15-24, 26 faces tremendous difficulties, most contemporary scholars agree that there is enough verbal, structural and conceptual overlap between Matthew 25:14-29 and Luke 19:12-26 to justify its place in the Sayings Gospel Q.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Denaux has argued comprehensively and convincingly that

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g. William E. Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes: Galilean Conflicts and the Setting of Q* (Augsburg: Fortress, 2001), 5.

<sup>2</sup> See Llewellyn Howes, *Judging Q and Saving Jesus: Q’s Contribution to the Wisdom-Apocalypticism Debate in Historical Jesus Studies* (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2015), 61-89, 151. This book is available online: <http://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/21>.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 105; Ronald A. Piper, *Wisdom in the Q-Tradition: The Aphoristic Teachings of Jesus* (SNTSMS 61; Cambridge: Cambridge

the parable of the Entrusted Money belongs in Q.<sup>4</sup> The International Q Project provides the following reconstruction and translation of Q 19:12-13, 15-24, 26 in their *Critical Edition of Q*:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>12</sup> .. ἄνθρωπός τις ἀποδημῶν <sup>13</sup>ἐκάλεσεν δέκα δούλους ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς δέκα μνᾶς [[καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς<ι>: πραγματεύσασθε ἐν ᾧ ἔρχομαι.]] <sup>15</sup> .. [[μετὰ]] .. [[πολὸν χρόνον]] ἔρχεται ὁ κύριος τῶν δούλων ἐκείνων καὶ συναίρει λόγον μετ' αὐτῶν. <sup>16</sup>καὶ [[<ἦ>λθ<εν>]] ὁ πρῶτος λέγων· κύριε, ἡ μνᾶ σου δέκα προσηργάσατο μνᾶς. <sup>17</sup>καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· εὖ, ἀγαθὲ δοῦλε, ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός, ἐπὶ πολλῶν σε καταστήσω. <sup>18</sup>καὶ ἦλθεν ὁ [[δεύτερος]] λέγων· κύριε, ἡ μνᾶ σου ἐποίησεν πέντε μνᾶς. <sup>19</sup>εἶπεν [[αὐτῷ]]· [[εὖ, ἀγαθὲ δοῦλε ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός,]] ἐπὶ πολλῶν σε καταστήσω. <sup>20</sup>καὶ ἦλθεν ὁ ἕτερος λέγων· κύριε, <sup>21</sup>[[ἔγνων]] σε ὅτι σκληρὸς εἶ ἄνθρωπος, θερίζων ὅπου οὐκ ἔσπειρας καὶ συνάγων ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόρπισας, καὶ φοβ[ηθεὶς ἀπελθῶν] ἔκρυψα [[τὴν μνᾶν] σου] ἐν [[τῇ γῆ]]· ἴδ[ε] ἔχεις τὸ σόν. <sup>22</sup>λέγει αὐτῷ· πονηρὲ δοῦλε, ἦδεις ὅτι θερίζω ὅπου οὐκ ἔσπειρα καὶ συνάγω ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόρπισα; <sup>23</sup>[[ἔδει σε οὖν βαλεῖν]] μου τ[[ὰ]] ἀργύρι[[α τοῖς]] τραπεζ[[ίταις]], καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐγὼ ἐκομισάμην ἂν τὸ ἐμὸν σὺν τόκῳ. <sup>24</sup>ἄρατε οὖν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὴν μνᾶν καὶ δότε τῷ ἔχοντι τὰς δέκα μνᾶς· <sup>26</sup>τῷ [[γὰρ]] ἔχοντι παντὶ δοθήσεται, τοῦ δὲ μὴ ἔχοντος καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.

<sup>12</sup> .. A certain person, on taking a trip, <sup>13</sup>called ten of his slaves and gave them ten minas [[and said to them: Do business until I come]]. <sup>15</sup> .. [[After a long time]] the master of those slaves comes and settles accounts with them. <sup>16</sup>And the first [[came]] saying: Master, your mina has produced ten more minas. <sup>17</sup>And he said to him: Well done, good slave, you have been faithful over a pittance, I will set you over much. <sup>18</sup>And the [[second]] came saying: Master, your mina has earned five minas. <sup>19</sup>He said to [[him: Well done, good slave, you have been faithful over little,]] I will set you over much. <sup>20</sup>And the other came saying: Master, <sup>21</sup>[[I knew]] you, that you are a hard person, reaping where you did not sow and gathering up from where you did not winnow; and, scared, I [[went «and»]] hid [[your <mina>]] in [[the ground]]. Here, you have what belongs to you. <sup>22</sup>He said to him: Wicked slave! You knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather up from where I have not winnowed? <sup>23</sup>[[Then you had to invest]] my money [[with the]] money [[changers]]! And at my coming I would have received what belongs to me plus interest. <sup>24</sup>So take from him the mina and give «it» to the one who has the ten

---

University Press, 1989), 144-145; Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, eds., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus; New Translation and Commentary by Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar* (New York and Don Mills, Ontario: Polebridge, 1993), 256, 374, 375; Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), 133; Christopher M. Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 147; Adelbert Denaux, 'The Parable of the Talents/Pounds (Q 19,12-27): A reconstruction of the Text,' in *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus* (ed. Andreas Lindemann; BETL 158; Leuven, Paris and Sterling, VA: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2001), 429-460; Harry T. Fleddermann, *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary* (Biblical Tools and Studies 1; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 837-838; Daniel A. Smith, *The Post-Mortem Vindication of Jesus in the Sayings Gospel Q* (LNTS 338; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 124; Ernest van Eck, 'Do Not Question My Honour: A Social-Scientific Reading of the Parable of the Minas (Lk 19:12b-24, 27),' in *HTS Theological Studies* 67/3 (2011): 1, 3; InHee Park, 'Children and Slaves: The Metaphors of Q,' in *Metaphor, Narrative, and Parables in Q: Dedicated to Dieter Zeller on the Occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (eds. Dieter T. Roth, Ruben Zimmermann and Michael Labahn; WUNT 315; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 84.

<sup>4</sup> Denaux, 'Talents/Pounds,' 429-460.

<sup>5</sup> See James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 524-557; James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Sayings Gospel Q in Greek and English with Parallels from the Gospels of Mark and Thomas* (CBET 30; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 148-151.

minas. <sup>26</sup>[[For]] to everyone who has will be given; but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

In his *Formation of Q*, Kloppenborg does not examine the parable of the Entrusted Money in any detail.<sup>6</sup> It was sufficient for his purposes to draw upon Lührmann's redactional observations about this text.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Kloppenborg maintains that both Q 19:12-27 and Q 22:28-30 fit well in their literary context in the Sayings Gospel after Q 17:23-35, since all three of these texts 'deal with the subject of [eschatological] judgment.'<sup>8</sup> Like Q 17:23-35, the parable of the Entrusted Money treats the negative side of eschatological judgment. Q 22:28-30 concludes the Sayings Gospel on a high note by treating the positive side of such judgment. Although Kloppenborg chooses not to spell it out for his readers in his 1987 publication, the obvious consequence is that the parable of the Entrusted Money belongs to the main redaction, since it deals with the same theme as the rest of this layer, namely eschatological judgment.<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning that Kloppenborg appeals only to his criterion of 'characteristic motifs' when he attributes this parable to the main redaction, thereby failing to draw upon his criteria of 'characteristic forms' and 'implied audience'.

Kloppenborg's case is very convincing, and there is no reason to doubt his analysis of the parable on the level of the main redaction. In fact, the current author has proposed similar avenues of interpretation in earlier publications when considering the parable synchronically as part of Q's final form.<sup>10</sup> Even so, there are indications suggesting that the parable featured in the formative stratum before it was incorporated into the main redaction.

## 2. THE MOST PRIMITIVE FORM OF THE PARABLE

There should be little doubt that Q 22:28, 30 was added after the parable by Q's main redactor.<sup>11</sup> It follows that the logion was not associated with the parable before the formation of the main redaction. In addition, parable scholars are agreed that the application in Q 19:26 was added to the parable secondarily.<sup>12</sup> The latter is confirmed by the fact that Q 19:26 was a free-floating maxim in the early Jesus tradition.<sup>13</sup> A number of scholars have commented that the maxim does not correspond perfectly to the parable's content.<sup>14</sup> Anyone wanting to determine the parable's meaning at an

---

<sup>6</sup> John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (SAC; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Dieter Lührmann, *Die Redaktion der Logienquelle* (WMANT 33; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 75.

<sup>8</sup> Kloppenborg, *Formation*, 164-165 (quotation from page 164).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. John S. Kloppenborg (Verbin), *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 118; John S. Kloppenborg, 'Jesus and the Parables of Jesus in Q,' in *The Gospel behind the Gospels: Current Studies on Q* (ed. Ronald A. Piper; NovTSup 75; Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1995), 290.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Llewellyn Howes, 'Condemning or Liberating the Twelve Tribes of Israel?: Judging the Meaning of κρίνοντες in Q 22:28, 30,' in *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35/1 (2014; available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.872>): 6; Howes, *Judging Q*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> Critical Edition of Q 22:28, 30 (Matt 19:28 // Luke 22:28, 30): 'You who have followed me will sit .. on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' (ὁμεῖς οἱ ἀκολουθήσαντές μοι .. καθήσεσθε ἐπὶ θρόν[[ου]ς] κρίνοντες τὰς δώδεκα φυλὰς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.)

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary* (trans. James E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 249.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Matt 13:12; Mark 4:25; Luk 8:18; *Gos. Thom.* 41.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper Row, [1931] 1968), 176; Charles H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Revised ed.; Welwyn:

earlier stage needs to consider it without this application (Q 19:26) or the subsequent logion (Q 22:28, 30). This is not to say anything about the authenticity of these two sayings, both of which could have been taken from authentic Jesus material when added to the parable.<sup>15</sup>

Luke's version of the parable contains elements that narrate the so-called 'throne claimant' story.<sup>16</sup> Whether on the level of Q or the historical Jesus, scholars overwhelmingly agree that the parable initially featured without these elements.<sup>17</sup> Commentators typically point out that the throne claimant narrative recalls a historical event: In 4 BCE, Archelaus travelled to Rome in order to have his kingship over Judea confirmed, but was opposed in Rome by a Jewish embassy of 50 people.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, Luke could have been familiar with the historical incident described above, and could easily have changed the parable of Jesus to recall this historical event.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, featuring a recognised historical event as part of a parable was not typical of the historical Jesus, and even went against his rhetorical strategy in the telling of parables.<sup>20</sup> Even if Luke received the story of the throne claimant as part of the tradition that came down to him, he was in all likelihood responsible for conflating it with the parable of the Entrusted Money.<sup>21</sup>

In sum, this section has argued that the earliest recoverable form of the parable appears in Q 19:12-13, 15-24. In the remainder of this article, this form of the parable will be analysed and interpreted in order to ultimately argue that it featured in Q's formative stratum. It is accepted that the same form (and message) is the closest someone can get to the parable as it was told by the historical Jesus; although the latter claim is not important for the overall case of this article.

### 3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

---

James Nisbet and Company, [1935] 1958), 149; John D. Crossan 'The Servant Parables of Jesus,' in *Semeia* 1 (1974): 24; William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew; Volume III: Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII* (ICC; London and New York: T&T Clark, 1997), 410; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 249.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (3<sup>rd</sup> revised ed.; trans. S. H. Hooke; London, UK: SCM, 1972), 110; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 1529; Dodd, *Parables*, 149; Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 121; Funk and Hoover, *Five Gospels*, 257.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 19:12b, 14, 15b, 27 (ESV): '12bA nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. 14But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We do not want this man to reign over us." 15b...having received the kingdom... 27"But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'"

<sup>17</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 217; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 701; Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 530; Arland D. Jacobson, *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992), 241; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1528; Denaux, 'Talents/Pounds,' 431.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Bernard B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 223; see Stephen I. Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 55, 138-140. See Josephus, *J.W.* 2.80-100, 111; *Ant.* 17.208-249, 299-314.

<sup>19</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 402.

<sup>20</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays* (ed. Bernard B Scott; Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2006), 62, 172.

<sup>21</sup> See Anthony B. Taylor, *The Master-Servant Type Scene in the Parables of Jesus* (Doctoral Dissertation; New York: Fordham University, 1989), 155-157.

Recently, a number of scholars have investigated and interpreted the parable of the Entrusted Money on the level of the historical Jesus by seriously considering its social, economic, historical, cultural, political and religious contexts in first-century Palestine.<sup>22</sup> Out of these, the most convincing interpretation is arguably the one put forward by Van Eck,<sup>23</sup> who draws on Rohrbaugh and Herzog.<sup>24 25</sup>

In ancient Palestine, especially in the first century under Roman occupancy, significant percentages of agricultural goods were taken from the peasantry through various kinds of taxes, tithes, rents and loan repayments, and were then redistributed among the rich to use as they saw fit.<sup>26</sup> If Oakman's estimations are correct, taxes and rents could amount to between one half and two thirds of a peasant's overall harvest, leaving much less produce for daily survival.<sup>27</sup> The peasantry naturally viewed such appropriation of their produce as intrinsically unfair and immoral. Peasants understood the world as consisting of 'limited goods.'<sup>28</sup> According to the ancient social value of 'limited goods,' social and economic realities were closed systems, and resources were always in short supply. Available resources could be neither increased nor created *ex nihilo*, but could only be distributed and apportioned. One could only attain *additional* goods by depleting the resources of someone else, who probably needed those resources for survival.<sup>29</sup> This explains why the predominant type of economic exchange amongst peasants was 'balanced reciprocity,' which can be defined as barter and other (economic) exchanges that are characterised by expectations and/or obligations of equal return, in the spirit of fairness and justice.<sup>30</sup> Any economic endeavour aimed at gaining profit or accumulating wealth was therefore regarded as inherently devious and socially damaging.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, earning profit and accumulating wealth were exactly what motivated the rich. Most important for wealth creation was control over land and its produce.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the most important concern of peasants was control of their own smallholdings, but for a different reason altogether. Whereas the elite saw 'land' as an opportunity for wealth

---

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 'A Peasant Reading of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror,' in *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 23 (1993): 32-39; Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 53-55, 68-69; John D. Crossan, *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus became Fiction about Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 98-106; William R. Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster and John Knox, 1994), 155-168; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 1-11; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 84-88; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 217-235; Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 239-244.

<sup>23</sup> Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 1-11.

<sup>24</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 32-39; Herzog, *Parables*, 155-168.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 6-7, takes the minority position that the throne claimant narrative was part of the most primitive form of the parable. Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 8, argues that 'the parable cannot portray its core purpose without the throne claimant story to make its point.' Against this claim, it is argued in this article that the broad strokes of Van Eck's reading are not only possible, but also likely, if the parable is interpreted without the throne claimant story.

<sup>26</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 161; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5, 7; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 85, 86.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day* (Studies in Bible and Early Christianity 5; Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 72.

<sup>28</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 33; Herzog, *Parables*, 152; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5, 9.

<sup>29</sup> John D. Crossan, 'The Parables of Jesus,' in *Interpretation* 56/3 (2002): 252; Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 33, 35; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5.

<sup>30</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1995), 204; Oakman, *Economic Questions*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Crossan, 'Parables of Jesus,' 252; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5; see Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 33-34.

<sup>32</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 162; Arnal, *Village Scribes*, 102, 139.

creation, peasants saw it as an indispensable means for daily survival.<sup>33</sup> From a peasant perspective, the first and most important function of the land was the immediate need to assure family sustenance.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the political economy of the elite was aimed at earning a profit, the domestic economy of peasants was aimed at maintaining necessary levels of subsistence.<sup>35</sup> If a peasant was unable to meet existing obligations, that peasant was forced to borrow from wealthier individuals.<sup>36</sup> Such borrowing instigated a patron-client relationship between the two parties, which was skewed in favour of the patron, and often resulted in foreclosure of land due to an inability to pay off debts.<sup>37</sup> In other words, peasants were often forced into indebtedness, which initiated a downward spiral that included control by creditors, loss of land, starvation, and becoming day-labourers, slaves, beggars and bandits.<sup>38</sup>

Some of these peasants were allowed to remain on their smallholdings as tenant farmers, with ownership of the land and its produce reverting to the landlord. It was typical for such landlords and landowners to be non-resident, and largely absent from their farms.<sup>39</sup> Wealthy landowners and landlords mostly lived in the city, usually owning multiple estates.<sup>40</sup> Palestinian landowners therefore resided in cities like Tiberias, Sepphoris and Jerusalem, especially those who owned the most fertile land.<sup>41</sup> It is safe to say that the economic system of the day enabled rich and powerful individuals to exploit the peasantry by extracting produce from them and eventually appropriating their smallholdings through indebtedness and foreclosure. The households of these city-dwelling elite functioned like businesses, controlling rural smallholdings by collecting, storing, redistributing, selling and exporting significant percentages of their produce.<sup>42</sup> The elite often used skilled city slaves to take care of the daily operations of their ‘commercial households,’ which included making loans and collecting rents from the peasantry.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the elite made use of one oppressive system (slavery) to implement and maintain another oppressive system (economic exploitation of the peasantry). It is no wonder that peasants saw rich people as thieves who are insatiably greedy and inherently evil.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Arnal, *Village Scribes*, 139; see Oakman, *Economic Questions*, 49-52.

<sup>34</sup> Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 33-34; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 5.

<sup>35</sup> Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 85; see Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 56-57.

<sup>36</sup> Horsley, *Galilee*, 215, 219; Oakman, *Economic Questions*, 72; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 24; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 7.

<sup>37</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 161.

<sup>38</sup> Sean Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays* (WUNT 125; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2000), 205.

<sup>39</sup> Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel*, 99, 195; see John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine* (WUNT 195; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 279-280, 314-316.

<sup>40</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 156; Kloppenborg, *Tenants in the Vineyard*, 300.

<sup>41</sup> Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel*, 52, 99, 195; Oakman, *Economic Questions*, 78; Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 85.

<sup>42</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 156.

<sup>43</sup> See Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 75-76. A number of Jewish parables feature a king or master who assigns management over his belongings to his slaves before leaving on some or other extended trip; see J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), 29; Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 404; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 249-250; cf. *Yal. Shimoni* 267a; *b. Šabb.* 152b; *Tanna debe Eliyyahu* 53; *Cant. Rab.* 7.14.1; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 14.5; *Mek. Baḥodeš* 5; *Sem.* 3.3; *Mek. on Exod* 20:2; ‘*Abot R. Nat.* A 14.

<sup>44</sup> See Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 34-35.

## 4. INTERPRETING THE PARABLE

### 4.1 A response to economic exploitation

The parable of the Entrusted Money presupposes the situation described in the previous section. With the narrative setting being that of a wealthy urban household, the story plays out against the backdrop of a political economy, located in the city, and motivated by profit and self-improvement.<sup>45</sup> The reference in Q 19:23 to earning ‘interest’ (τόκος) with ‘money changers’ (τραπεζῖται) reflects an urban economic system built on the appropriation of rural produce and land.<sup>46</sup> In the narrative, city slaves further the economic interests of their master, who is portrayed as a powerful landowner. That the master should be seen as a landowner is particularly indicated when he is described with agricultural terminology as someone who ‘reaps where he did not sow, and gathers up from where he did not winnow’ (Q 19:21, 22).<sup>47</sup> That he is a wealthy man is indicated by the fact that he owns slaves and land, by the fact that he is ‘taking a trip’ (ἀποδημῶν), by the fact that he has a lot of money on hand to entrust to his slaves, and by the fact that he is willing to risk his money in such a way.<sup>48</sup> Even though Matthew’s talents constituted a much higher currency than the minas of Luke and Q, these minas still represented much more money than the average peasant would have been familiar with.<sup>49</sup>

The master is depicted *negatively* as a ‘hard’ (σκληρός) man.<sup>50</sup> Scott explains that σκληρός refers to a person who is ‘merciless in his dealings with others.’<sup>51</sup> Park adds that the term σκληρός functions in the tradition of Israel to portray ‘cruel foreign kings’ (Isa 19:4) and ‘stubborn Israelites standing against God’s will’ (Isa 48:4).<sup>52</sup> She also points out that the term ‘hard-hearted’ (σκληροκαρδία) features in the history of Israel to describe stubborn and disobedient individuals.<sup>53</sup> From a peasant perspective, the description of the master as someone who reaps where he did not sow, and gathers up from where he did not winnow, would have been categorically negative and immoral at its core. According to Marshall, the master is here being described as ‘a grasping person who wants money without the labour of earning it.’<sup>54</sup> According to Jeremias, the master is portrayed as ‘a rapacious man, heedlessly intent on his own profit.’<sup>55</sup> According to Scott, the master’s characterisation is ‘of an absentee landlord who bleeds the land dry.’<sup>56</sup> And from the perspective of Israel as a whole, elite and non-elite alike, the master’s comment about earning interest would have been disgraceful and

---

<sup>45</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 155; Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 85.

<sup>46</sup> Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 86.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 242; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 7.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 242; Herzog, *Parables*, 158; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 170.

<sup>49</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 224; Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 85.

<sup>50</sup> Dieter T. Roth, ‘“Master” as Character in the Q Parables,’ in *Metaphor, Narrative, and Parables in Q: Dedicated to Dieter Zeller on the Occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (eds. Dieter T. Roth, Ruben Zimmermann and Michael Labahn; WUNT 315; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 389, 390; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 228; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 54-55; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 5, 6; Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 86.

<sup>51</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 229 n. 57.

<sup>52</sup> Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 86.

<sup>53</sup> Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 87; cf. LXX Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Matt 19:8; Mark 10:5.

<sup>54</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 707.

<sup>55</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 60.

<sup>56</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 230.

abominable, since it was absolutely forbidden in concurrent Judaism.<sup>57</sup> The master's reference to earning interest could in fact be an indication that the master is depicted as a *non-Jewish* landowner, which was not entirely uncommon in Palestine during the first century.<sup>58</sup>

Snodgrass points out that the noun δοῦλος can mean either 'slave' or 'servant.'<sup>59</sup> According to him, 'slave' is the more likely option, even if it is impossible to know with certainty which option is intended. Following Derrett,<sup>60</sup> Scott claims that the stewards in our parable were not slaves but servants.<sup>61</sup> Derrett's influential claim is simply wrong that 'the wide powers needed for commercial enterprise and to protect the capital belong to a fully competent agent, which a slave never can be.'<sup>62</sup> In antiquity, a slave could indeed function as 'a fully competent agent' on the authority of the slaveholder,<sup>63</sup> and, as argued below, using a slave as business agent was a *more* effective way to 'protect the capital' than using a free person. The restriction was that slaves could legally not do business or own money in *their own* capacity, but with their masters' money (including the *peculium*) they could perform all tasks a free person could, as long as it carried the approval of their masters.<sup>64</sup> Herzog argues that the δοῦλοι were household retainers, not slaves.<sup>65</sup> He defends his position by drawing on the hierarchy presupposed by the Matthean phrase 'to each according to his ability / power / status' (ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν). On the one hand, as Herzog admits, this phrase is widely seen as Matthean redaction, and is therefore not relevant to an interpretation of the parable at an earlier stage. On the other hand, even if the phrase were part of the parable at an earlier stage, it could just as easily refer to the abilities and/or hierarchy of *slaves* in the household.

There are a number of very good reasons to conclude that our parable intended the stewards to be understood as slaves. Firstly, the lexis δοῦλος is used almost exclusively of slaves, as is indicated by the fact that most Greek-English dictionaries do not even list 'servant' as a translation possibility.<sup>66</sup> Secondly, there were a number of Greek words available if the author wanted to indicate that the stewards were free servants, including θεράπων, ὑπηρέτης, διάκονος, οἰκέτης, οἰκετεία, θεραπεία and λειτουργός. Thirdly, the scenario sketched by the parable fits the ancient context best if the stewards were slaves. Even if free persons could also function as business agents,<sup>67</sup> it made much better legal sense to use slaves. Legally, neither the slave nor the master could be sued by third parties for the slave's actions.<sup>68</sup> Slaves could also not take legal action against

---

<sup>57</sup> Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 87; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 69; see Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 103-105.

<sup>58</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 253.

<sup>59</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 527.

<sup>60</sup> Derrett, *Law*, 18-24.

<sup>61</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 226.

<sup>62</sup> Derrett, *Law*, 19.

<sup>63</sup> See Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 275-284.

<sup>64</sup> See Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 275-284.

<sup>65</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 158.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains; Volume 2: Indices* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1993), 67 s.v. δοῦλος; Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 447 s.v. δοῦλος.

<sup>67</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 76; Herzog, *Parables*, 157; see Derrett, *Law*, 18-24.

<sup>68</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 275, 281.



their masters.<sup>69</sup> Using slaves for business therefore protected the master from all kinds of legal action. The same was not true of servants, though. Moreover, there was certainly security for the slaveholder in knowing that their slaves were under their complete control. Fourthly, the word δοῦλος is characteristically used by the Sayings Gospel Q to denote slaves.<sup>70</sup> Fifthly, the parables of Jesus are typically about slaves, not servants. Sixthly, both Matthew and Luke retained the lexis δοῦλος, which indicates that they probably also understood the stewards to be slaves. Finally, Luke (19:14) deliberately distinguishes the δοῦλοι in the parable of the Entrusted Money from the πολῖται in the story of the throne claimant.<sup>71</sup> Although the latter lexis should be translated as ‘citizens’ in the context of the throne claimant narrative, it also denoted ‘free persons.’<sup>72</sup> Given these considerations, it is extremely likely that the δοῦλοι in our parable are intended to be understood as slaves, and the onus rests on those wanting to argue that they were servants.

By ‘doing business’ (πραγματεύομαι) for the master, the productive slaves in the narrative are actively contributing to the exploitation of the peasantry.<sup>73</sup> That the productive slaves were in all likelihood exploiting the peasantry is indicated by their exceptionally high returns.<sup>74</sup> Such high returns could only have been gained through usurious loans, produce extraction, land speculation, commodities trading, maritime speculation or political extortion.<sup>75</sup> For the first audiences, the first three options would have come immediately to mind.<sup>76</sup> On a secondary level, these three activities would have made commodities trading possible.<sup>77</sup> To be sure, one would expect the slaves to speculate in the same economic ventures as their master, who is portrayed primarily as a landowner.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, the productive slaves were not merely investing at financial institutions to earn interest.<sup>79</sup> On the one hand, the returns on investment would in that case not nearly have been so high. On the other hand, earning interest at such institutions is mentioned in Q 19:23 as an alternative to whatever the slaves were doing with the money. Ultimately, the master and his productive slaves represent the immoral and unfair economic system of the elite, who exploit the peasantry in their never-ending search for profits.<sup>80</sup>

It is important to note that both the starting capital and the profits gained belong to the master, not the slaves.<sup>81</sup> The master did not loan capital to his slaves, but entrusted them

---

<sup>69</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Q 7:8; 12:42-46; 14:17, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor, *Master-Servant*, 158.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1434-1435 s.v. πολίτης.

<sup>73</sup> Crossan, ‘Parables of Jesus,’ 252; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 5, 7; Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 86; see Herzog, *Parables*, 160-161, 163.

<sup>74</sup> Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 243; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 5; see Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 35.

<sup>75</sup> Ronald A. Piper, ‘Wealth, Poverty, and Subsistence in Q,’ in *From Quest to Q; Festschrift James M. Robinson* (eds. Jon M. Asgeirsson, Kristin De Troyer and Marvin W. Meyer; BETL 146; Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2000), 240; Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 243; Herzog, *Parables*, 161; Kloppenborg, ‘Parables of Jesus,’ 296-297; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 251-252.

<sup>76</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 162.

<sup>77</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 161.

<sup>78</sup> See Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 75-76.

<sup>79</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 243; Herzog, *Parables*, 160-161, 163; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 250; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 7.

<sup>81</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 251; see Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 276-278, 284.

with his own money, to deal with on his behalf.<sup>82</sup> On the one hand, we know this because the money is entrusted to *slaves*, who could not do business with borrowed capital like free persons.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, we know this because the parable indicates as much in a number of ways: (1) all the slaves speak of ‘your [the master’s] mina’ (ἡ μινᾶ σου) in their replies (Q 19:16, 18, 21); (2) the master also speaks of ‘my money’ (μου τὸ ἀργύριον) (Q 19:23); (3) both the master and the unproductive slave declare that the money ‘belongs to’ (ἔχεις τὸ σόν & τὸ ἐμὸν) the master (Q 19:21, 23); and (4) the description of the master as someone who reaps where he did not sow implies that the master used his slaves to advance himself.<sup>84</sup> Thus, when the master instructs the unproductive slave to hand over his mina to the most productive slave, the mina still belongs to the master. The master only commands this exchange because he wants to earn as much profit as possible, and the first slave in the narrative seems to be his most lucrative minion.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of their levels of productivity, the slaves would not have been rewarded financially.<sup>86</sup> Instead, they would have been rewarded with additional responsibilities, additional privileges and opportunities to share in the lavish lifestyles of their masters. In our parable, the first option, namely that of additional responsibilities (with possibly an increase in status and honour), seems to have been the main and perhaps exclusive reward, as is indicated by the master’s response to the productive slaves: ‘...you have been faithful over little, I will set you over much’ (Q 19:17, 19).<sup>87</sup> Ultimately, all the rewards and punishments in the parable are driven primarily by the master’s greed, not his benevolence or annoyance.

If the socio-economic context of the parable is taken into consideration, it is impossible to understand any of the characters allegorically. The image of the master is decidedly negative, and could not have represented Jesus or God.<sup>88</sup> If the master were depicted as a Gentile, his association with Jesus or God would be even more unthinkable. Similarly, the productive slaves participated in the unfair dealings of their master, and could therefore not have represented the Q people, the disciples of Jesus or people in general.<sup>89</sup> We therefore have to strongly disagree with Marshall, who accurately expresses the sentiment of most other scholars when he claims that ‘the original form [of our parable] could not but have an allegorical significance for the hearers.’<sup>90</sup> If the ‘original form’ of the parable was not allegorical, then there is no reason to presume an eschatological reading either.<sup>91</sup>

Like other interpreters, Marshall approaches the parable ‘from above.’ Against this tendency, the current interpretation approaches the parable ‘from below,’ meaning from the vantage point of the peasantry and poor.<sup>92</sup> It is highly likely that an overwhelming

---

<sup>82</sup> Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 242; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 251; see Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 75-76, 85-86.

<sup>83</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 251; see Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 276-278, 284.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 7.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Derrett, *Law*, 30-31; Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 36; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 140.

<sup>86</sup> See Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 276-278, 284.

<sup>87</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 1014; Jeremias, *Parables*, 61; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

<sup>88</sup> Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 38; Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 86; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 75, 83, 86, 140-141. This is not to say that the master of this and other Q parables did not represent Jesus and/or God in the *final form* of Q.

<sup>89</sup> Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 86.

<sup>90</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 702.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 242.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 33, 35; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 5.

majority of Jesus' audiences were from the lower segments of society, including especially peasants.<sup>93</sup> The latter remains true even if these audiences were made up of diverse socio-economic segments of the population.<sup>94</sup> Both of the foregoing statements apply to the audiences of Q<sup>1</sup> as well.<sup>95</sup> Hence, both on the level of the historical Jesus and on the level of Q<sup>1</sup>, audiences would have identified with the unproductive slave.<sup>96</sup>

Against the sensibilities and intuition of those who read the parable 'from above,' which includes not only the evangelists, but just about every single interpreter thereafter, the hero of the story is the unproductive slave.<sup>97</sup> He is the only character in the narrative portrayed positively from a peasant perspective. Against the exploitative behaviour of the productive slaves, the unproductive slave acts according to the standards and norms of a domestic economy, associated with the countryside, and motivated by subsistence and self-preservation.<sup>98</sup> The unproductive slave's act of hiding the money in the ground would have been sensible and prudent according to ancient standards, so that the first audiences would have identified with this narrative character (see below).<sup>99</sup>

The parable of the Entrusted Money sketches a scenario of a slave who refuses to participate in the economic exploitation of lowly smallholders and tenant farmers.<sup>100</sup> His actions might have brought about the disfavour of his master, but the audience would have understood that it also brought about the favour of God. In the process, the slave exposes the master for who he really is: a money-hungry bully and tyrant.<sup>101</sup> The unproductive slave does so by accusing the master directly of economic exploitation in Q 19:21, and the master not only accepts this description of himself, probably viewing it as a compliment instead of the accusation that it is, but even repeats it verbatim in Q 19:22.<sup>102</sup> As a narrative character, the master embodies economic exploitation. He is a tragic character, who is unable to perceive his own faults and accountability.<sup>103</sup> The slave stood up against his master's evil ways, and because of clever rhetoric, is no worse off at the end of the narrative than he was at the beginning.<sup>104</sup> His 'punishment' is to give his mina to the slave with ten minas, but this is really a reward, since it releases him from having to participate in any economic endeavours in the foreseeable future.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Dodd, *Parables*, 21; Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 33, 38; Funk, *Parables*, 44.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 33, 38; Crossan, 'Parables of Jesus,' 251, 253; Funk, *Parables*, 37, 41.

<sup>95</sup> Oakman, *Economic Questions*, 100; Kloppenborg, *Formation*, 251; Tuckett, *Q*, 360, 365; Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel*, 206; Arnal, *Village Scribes*, 150, 173, 188; see Kloppenborg (Verbin), *Excavating Q*, 198-199.

<sup>96</sup> Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 107; Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36, 38; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 68.

<sup>97</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 33, 35, 38; Herzog, *Parables*, 153, 167; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 55; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 1, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Crossan, 'Parables of Jesus,' 252.

<sup>99</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 227, 228, 230, 232; Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36, 38; Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 408; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 68-69; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5.

<sup>100</sup> Crossan, 'Parables of Jesus,' 252; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 10.

<sup>101</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 164, 165, 167; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 87.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Fleddermann, *Q*, 862; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 247, 253; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1018, 1019; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Edward F. Beutner, 'A Comedy with a Tragic Turn: The Dishonest Manager,' in *Listening to the Parables of Jesus* (ed. Edward F. Beutner; Jesus Seminar Guides 2; Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2007), 62.

<sup>104</sup> Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 87.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 535; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 87.

His master has one less minion to rely on in his abusive activities. Part of the parable's intent is to illustrate how one can stand up against prevailing exploitation, and in the process contribute to the establishment of God's kingdom.<sup>106</sup> The parable is a response to the economic exploitation of the peasantry in first-century Palestine.<sup>107</sup>

## 4.2 Cunning trickery in the face of fear

One could argue that the unproductive slave is not characterised as a humanitarian. The text clearly describes him as burying the money because he was 'scared' (φοβέω), not because he wanted to make an impact on society.<sup>108</sup> This explanation is also highly believable, since fear was by far the most important strategy used by ancient (and modern) slaveholders to control their slaves.<sup>109</sup> For the most part, such fear was instilled through severe physical punishment, used in combination with emotional torment. All forms of slavery presupposed fear, and all slaves lived under constant fear of being punished, or even killed.<sup>110</sup> Yet, there are a number of good reasons to conclude that fear was not the true factor that motivated his actions.<sup>111</sup> One should not assume that the slave's description to the master of his own internal motivation is entirely truthful. It is important to realise that, unlike the Matthean parable, the Q parable, following Luke, only narrates what the slave *told* his master, not what he actually did or how he actually felt.<sup>112</sup> It is likely that the slave did bury the mina, as he claims, but unlikely that he did so because he was scared, as he claims.<sup>113</sup> This does not mean that the slave was not afraid of his master, which he must have been, but merely that fear did not motivate his actions.<sup>114</sup> In my view, the slave's words represent shrewd rhetoric aimed at deceiving the master. A closer look at the content of the unproductive slave's response will reveal just how calculating and sneaky his utterances were.

The slave's response begins with the description of the master as 'a hard person, reaping where he did not sow and gathering up from where he did not winnow.' We have seen that the description of the master as a 'hard' (σκληρός) man is a decidedly negative one. It paints the master as a merciless, cruel, stubborn and perhaps even godless individual. From the master's perspective, however, the term could have come across as a positive reflection on him as an astute and solid business man. Similarly, the unproductive slave's description of the master as someone who reaps where he did not sow, and gathers up from where he did not winnow, is decidedly negative if viewed from the perspective of the socio-economic underclass, but fairly positive if viewed from the perspective of the socio-economic upper class.<sup>115</sup> To the peasantry, it depicts the master as a ruthless exploiter, but to master, it depicts him as a good business man. By combining the verbs 'gather up / in' (συνάγω) and 'winnow' (διασκορπίζω), the same

---

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 8.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 239-244; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 36, 54-55, 68-69, 252; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 84-88.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1538; Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 409.

<sup>109</sup> See esp. Keith R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Collection Latomus 185; Brussels: Latomus, 1984), 113-143.

<sup>110</sup> See Llewellyn Howes, 'Agricultural Slavery and the Parable of the Loyal and Wise Slave in Q 12:42-46,' in *Acta Classica* 58 (2015): 101-104; Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 123, 135-37, 142; Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 149.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 253.

<sup>112</sup> See Denaux, 'Talents/Pounds,' 439-440.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 253.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36, 37.

<sup>115</sup> Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5.

phrase was probably also intended as a criticism of the master's lavish and wasteful lifestyle.<sup>116</sup> The latter criticism would have come across as a compliment to the master, since wasteful living was one of the ways in which the ancient elite showcased their wealth and increased their honour.<sup>117</sup> Hence, the slave characterises the master negatively by accusing him of economic exploitation and profligate living, but does so in a way that not only conceals the negative characterisation, but also presents it as a positive characterisation from the master's perspective.

Within the context of the slave's rhetoric, the description is made to convince the master that he was afraid of him, and why.<sup>118</sup> By describing the master as a hard man, the slave ultimately convinces his master that he hid the mina out of fear.<sup>119</sup> This implies that the master is an effective slaveholder, knowing when and how to utilise the 'fear factor,' which would have come across as a type of compliment to the master. From the master's perspective, the slave's description of him can be paraphrased as: 'You are the kind of person who deserves to be feared...' From the slave's hidden perspective, however, the description means something entirely different, and may be paraphrased as: 'You are the kind of person who takes food from those less fortunate...' The master accepts the slave's description of him as someone who reaps where he did now sow, and even repeats it verbatim in Q 19:22.<sup>120</sup>

The second half of the slave's response is no less astute: 'Scared, I went and hid your mina in the ground. Here, you have what belongs to you.' The slave's reference to hiding the money in the ground recalls Jewish tradition, according to which someone could not be held liable for the loss of money if it had been buried in the ground by the responsible party.<sup>121</sup> According to Jewish tradition (and ancient practice in general), burying money was the most secure way for an average person to hide and protect it against theft.<sup>122</sup> The slave makes a case for his own innocence by appealing to Jewish tradition, despite having disobeyed his master deliberately.<sup>123</sup> By burying the money, the slave absolves himself from any additional responsibility or accountability.<sup>124</sup> The deliberate use of the verb 'hide' (κρύπτω) may also be relevant here.<sup>125</sup> On a connotative level, the verb probably symbolised the slave's sly interaction with his master. Hence, the slave's act of hiding the mina symbolises his larger activity of concealing not only his true valuation of the master, but also the true intent behind his actions. Through clever wordplay, the slave both hints at and conceals his own cleverness, slyness and intentionality by describing his own actions with the verb 'hide.'

---

<sup>116</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 164-165; cf. Luk 15:13.

<sup>117</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 164-165.

<sup>118</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1538; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36.

<sup>120</sup> Richard Valantasis, *The New Q: A Fresh Translation with Commentary* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 221; Fleddermann, *Q*, 862; Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 100; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 141, 171.

<sup>121</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 406; Jeremias, *Parables*, 61 n. 51; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 227; Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36; Herzog, *Parables*, 164; cf. *b. B. Meši'a* 42a; 42b; *m. B. Batra* 4.8.

<sup>122</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 61 n. 51; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 227; Blomberg, *Parables*, 215; Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36; Herzog, *Parables*, 164; Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 407; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252; cf. *2 En. [J]* 51:2; Josephus, *J.W.* 6.5.2; *m. B. Meši'a* 3.10-11; *b. Šabb.* 102b; *b. Ketub.* 67b.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 227, 230.

<sup>124</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 228, 230.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Funk, *Parables*, 100-101, 104.

Finally, attempting to give the master his money back is an important part of the slave's attempt to excuse his own behaviour and save his own skin.<sup>126</sup> It gives the impression that the slave was genuinely trying to protect the master's economic interests. In truth, however, the phrase 'you have what belongs to you' implies that the master does not deserve more than what he had to begin with.<sup>127</sup> In other words, the phrase is a veiled criticism of earning profit through economic dealings. It obliquely promotes the subsistence economy of the peasantry over the profit-seeking economy of the elite.

There is one feature of the text that strongly suggests trickery in the slave's claim that he hid the mina because he was scared, namely the suspicious use of the participial form for the verb 'scared' (φοβηθείς). If his aim was merely to convince his master, it would have been much more effective rhetorically for the slave to use the indicative mood, and state emphatically: 'I was scared' (ἐφοβήσαμην). In my view, the participle is employed to be deliberately ambiguous. The use of the participle makes it seem as if fear motivated the slave's decision to hide the money, especially if the participle is read together with the foregoing description of the master.<sup>128</sup> The translation 'because I was scared' expresses this meaning of the participle well. Grammatically, when used in this way, the adverbial participle is known as a causal participle. Yet, the adverbial participle in verse 21 can just as easily be read in a number of other ways. If it is read as a circumstantial participle, it means that the act of 'being scared' merely happened in addition to the act of hiding the mina in the ground. If it is taken as a concessive participle, it means that the slave hid the mina 'despite being scared.' If it is taken as a modal participle, it is merely an expression of the slave's emotional state of mind when burying the mina. If it is taken as a temporal participle (in the aorist tense), it simply means that the slave hid the mina 'after being scared.' In my view, the slave chose his words in such a way that the master took φοβηθείς to be a causal participle, even though the slave secretly intended it as one of the other options above. Any of the options listed would work in the sentence as the slave's hidden meaning, but the concessive participle seems most likely. This means that the slave hid the mina *despite* being scared of his master, with an attitude of bold defiance and considered rebelliousness.<sup>129</sup> In other words, the slave spoke in such a way that the master would understand his fear as a motivating factor for his act of hiding the mina, even if he secretly meant that the act of hiding the mina was part of his deliberate disobedience. As before, the slave employs clever wordplay (or 'grammar-play,' in this case) to bring about deliberate misunderstanding. In the process, the slave manages to conceal the true meaning behind his words and his deeds without technically speaking a lie. The slave was indeed afraid, but fear was not the factor that motivated his actions.<sup>130</sup>

An important indication that the unproductive slave was not being entirely truthful is that his argument is illogical.<sup>131</sup> Fear would have motivated the slave to obey his master, not to disobey him.<sup>132</sup> More realistically, fear would have motivated the slave to conjure up as many tactics as possible to make at least some profit. Even if the slave ended up being unsuccessful in his economic activities, the master would surely have preferred

---

<sup>126</sup> Bernard B. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1981), 44; Derrett, *Law*, 25; Herzog, *Parables*, 165; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5.

<sup>127</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 37.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36, 37.

<sup>131</sup> Scott, *Symbol-Maker*, 42; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 140.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 232; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1539.

an attempt at earning profit over a cowardly refusal to do so. The master tasks his slaves with ‘doing business’ (πραγματεύομαι) and not with ‘earning a profit.’ Even though the intent of ‘earning a profit’ is implied by the command to ‘do business,’<sup>133</sup> failing to do the latter is a direct and deliberate violation of the task, while failing to do the former could be blamed on incompetence or bad luck. As such, harsh punishment would more likely have followed intentional non-compliance than unintentional failure, especially since loyal obedience was the foremost attribute expected from slaves in antiquity.<sup>134</sup> Hence, the slave’s excuse that he was hiding the mina ‘because he was scared’ defies logic, since this very act would have induced the wrath of his master – something that his master points out to him.<sup>135</sup> The unstated assumption is that the slave was scared of losing the money because of the risks involved in economic undertakings.<sup>136</sup> Yet, the master acknowledges the irrationality of the slave’s reasoning when he tells the slave that he could have invested the money with money changers for virtually no risk.<sup>137</sup> By investing the money, the slave would have earned at least some return in the form of interest, without having to take the risks that go with more adventuresome financial dealings.<sup>138</sup> Understood from the master’s perspective, who understands fear as the motivating factor, the slave’s excuse is illogical. However, understood from the slave’s perspective, who secretly intends defiance as the motivating factor, the slave’s excuse is entirely rational, since the slave must have known that the master would punish disobedience, but decided to hide the mina anyway.<sup>139</sup> The description of the master, as a cruel person who takes food out of the mouths of those less fortunate, explains why the slave would intentionally disobey the master’s command, and hide the money despite being scared of him.<sup>140</sup> In other words, in addition to explaining on the surface level of the parable why the slave was scared, the foregoing description of the master also explains on the hidden level why the slave acted as he did, despite being afraid.<sup>141</sup> In truth, the slave’s actions were motivated by the master’s ruthless and heartless economic approach, not by his own fear.

The slave’s strategy was a gamble, and the outcome uncertain. In most circumstances, his disobedience would have invited severe (physical) punishment. The slave must have been extremely anxious and fearful when he confronted the slaveholder, which makes his actions all the more courageous.<sup>142</sup> Fortunately, his cunning and considered response, which he must have rehearsed more than once, literally saved his skin. Because of the slaveholder’s privileged station and judgmental stance, he failed to recognise that the slave’s exhibited stupidity and cowardice were in actual fact his concealed astuteness and courage. If he did suspect some form of chicanery in the slave’s response,<sup>143</sup> he was left quite powerless by the slave’s masterful guile.<sup>144</sup> By pulling the wool over his master’s eyes, the slave managed not only to evade severe

---

<sup>133</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1533; Roth, ‘Master,’ 390.

<sup>134</sup> Hezser, *Jewish Slavery*, 155; see Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 33-40, 78.

<sup>135</sup> Dan O. Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1967), 118; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1539; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 140.

<sup>136</sup> Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 242-243; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1018.

<sup>137</sup> Via, *Parables*, 118; Scott, *Symbol-Maker*, 42.

<sup>138</sup> Derrett, *Law*, 26.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 37.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Valantasis, *New Q*, 221.

<sup>141</sup> Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 37.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 36, 37.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Herzog, *Parables*, 165.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 230.

(physical) punishment, but also to induce a form of punishment that was actually a reward from his own perspective.<sup>145</sup> Most importantly, the slave managed to frustrate and impede, to some extent at least, an evil and unfair process of economic exploitation.

Here is an overview of the unproductive slave's ambiguous and misleading response:

### Part 1: Honouring the master

The slave's actual words: 'Master, I knew you, that you are a hard (σκληρός) person, reaping where you did not sow and gathering up from where you did not winnow...'

What the master heard: 'Master, I knew you, that you are a solid (σκληρός) person [compliment], who earns money all over the place and induces fear in your subordinates [compliment]...'

What the slave meant: 'Master, I knew you, that you are a harsh and cruel (σκληρός) person [insult and accusation], seizing agricultural produce from the blood, sweat and tears of others [insult and accusation]...'

### Part 2: Explaining his actions

The slave's actual words: '...and, scared (φοβηθείς), I went and hid your mina in the ground.'

What the master heard: '...and, *because* I was scared (φοβηθείς), I went and hid your mina in the ground.'

What the slave meant: '...and, *despite* being scared (φοβηθείς), I went and hid your mina in the ground anyway.'

### Part 3: Returning the mina

The slave's actual words: 'Here, you have what belongs to you.'

What the master heard: 'I protected your interests, and I am now returning your property back to you exactly as I found it.'

What the slave meant: 'I am giving you exactly what you deserve, which is no more than what you had to begin with, since you have no right to exploit people for the sake of earning a profit.'

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, slaves were commonly viewed by their masters as being lazy, intransigent and unreliable.<sup>146</sup> We also saw that slaveholders were well aware that their slaves were afraid of them, and made 'good' use of such fear to control their slaves.<sup>147</sup> The unproductive slave in our parable knew how his master viewed him. To explain away his deliberate insubordination, and thereby avoid harsh (physical) punishment, the slave drew upon his master's perception of him, and presented himself as unintelligent, lazy, inefficient and, most importantly, fearful.<sup>148</sup> Instead of explaining

---

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 535; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 87.

<sup>146</sup> Howes, 'Agricultural Slavery,' 96.

<sup>147</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 136.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.



to his master the real reasons for hiding the mina, he told his master that he did it out of fear.<sup>149</sup> This was a very clever rhetorical ploy, explaining his actions in a way that would be plausible and believable from the master's perspective. His explanation was also not a straight-out lie, since the slave must indeed have been afraid of his master, as all slaves of antiquity were, but this was not his reason for hiding the mina.<sup>150</sup>

Van Eck also interprets the unproductive slave's response as deliberately deceiving. According to him, the master would have heard the following:

Master, I have so much respect for you (I am honouring you), that I did not want to take a chance with your money. I did what I thought was the honourable thing to do, that is, to protect what belongs to you.<sup>151</sup>

Yet, according to Van Eck, the peasant audience of Jesus would have heard the following: 'You are a thief, and I am not willing to be part of what you are doing!' With these paraphrases, Van Eck captures the heart of the cunning exchange as I have tried to explain it above. Other interpreters have also noticed some measure of ambiguity and pretence in the slave's response. Rohrbaugh considers how the unproductive slave's answer leaves a more favourable impression if heard with peasant ears.<sup>152</sup> Luz says intuitively: 'The [unproductive] slave's speech sounds unbalanced; it fluctuates among defiance, protest, and fear.'<sup>153</sup> Scott is moved by the narrative to ask: 'Whom do I trust? Where does the truth lie?'<sup>154</sup> Although offering a variant explanation of the truth behind the slave's words, Derrett also reckons that the slave was lying about being scared.<sup>155</sup> It is surely significant that the unproductive slave's feedback, together with the master's reply, carry a much higher degree of verbal overlap between Matthew and Luke than any other part of this narrative.<sup>156</sup> Such conformity strongly suggests that the two evangelists instinctively understood that the exact wording of the slave's response was important to the story. And indeed they were correct, seeing as the heart of the slave's deceit lies in those 'exact' words.

Although the slave is characterised as being sly, such characterisation would not have been judged negatively from the perspective of socio-economic underlings. Misleading one's master or landlord would have been acceptable, and even commendable, if it enabled one to evade severe (physical) punishment, or if it assured one's daily survival. Such deceit was part of the so-called 'weapons of the weak' employed by peasants to protect themselves against the exploitation of the elite.<sup>157</sup>

### 4.3 Humour and surprise

The first audiences would probably have found the misunderstanding between the master and his unproductive slave amusing. Derrett sees humour specifically in the slave's words: 'Here, you have what belongs to you' (ἴδε ἔχεις τὸ σόν).<sup>158</sup> The parables

---

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 253.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36, 37.

<sup>151</sup> Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 10.

<sup>152</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 37.

<sup>153</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

<sup>154</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 232.

<sup>155</sup> Derrett, *Law*, 25-26.

<sup>156</sup> Piper, *Wisdom*, 145; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 229; Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 102.

<sup>157</sup> See Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 10.

<sup>158</sup> Derrett, *Law*, 25.

of Jesus were certainly not immune to humour.<sup>159</sup> In two ways, then, the parable of the Entrusted Money functioned as a satire of sorts: (1) by exposing the status quo; and (2) by doing so in a humorous way.<sup>160</sup> Generally speaking, satires were (and are) ironically comical, exposing the status quo by poking fun at it. As a form of social commentary, satires functioned across cultures as ‘weapons of the weak.’<sup>161</sup>

It is important to point out, though, that the story was not in the first place told as a satire, but as a parable. In my view, Funk is on the money, so to speak, when he argues that the parables of Jesus were generally not intended to fulfil the mere satirical role of exposing the status quo.<sup>162</sup> Instead, their ultimate intent was to conjure up an alternative reality, and call people to action in the establishment of that reality.<sup>163</sup> His ultimate intent was not to reveal the existing kingdom of man, but to reveal the imagined kingdom of God. Likewise, none of the parables in the formative stratum – or the main redaction, for that matter – operate as satires. Even if some of these parables do illuminate ancient socio-economic conditions and disparities in various ways, they fulfil larger rhetorical roles within their respective literary contexts.<sup>164</sup>

The latter is not to say that the parable was uninterested in exposing the economic status quo operative in first-century Palestine.<sup>165</sup> Surely, exposing the economic exploitation of the peasantry was part of the parable’s intent, but it was not the parable’s *main* intent. The parable’s main intent was to illustrate how one can stand up against the reigning economic system of the elite without severely jeopardizing one’s livelihood, thereby contributing to the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth.<sup>166</sup> As a result of his actions, the unproductive slave is perhaps worse off than his fellow slaves, who might have enjoyed certain privileges as a result of their productivity, but those peasants who stood to lose from his exploits are better off. In this way, the unproductive slave’s actions do not merely expose the status quo, but also changes it.<sup>167</sup> The slave has made a real difference by refusing to participate in a corrupt and evil system.<sup>168</sup> By refusing to ‘do business’ (πραγματεύομαι), and by burying the coin, the slave was not ‘doing nothing,’ but was actively resisting a corrupt and abusive economic system.<sup>169</sup> As a narrative character, the unproductive slave personifies non-violent resistance.<sup>170</sup>

One could argue that the unproductive slave did not accomplish much in the end, since his coin was eventually handed over to the most proficient slave, who would ostensibly have been able to produce another tenfold return. Firstly, the latter should not be presumed, since it is at least possible that the most productive slave had by that time depleted his economic resources. Secondly, the unproductive slave was able to curb any business to be done with his mina for at least the period of his master’s absence, which

---

<sup>159</sup> See Edward F. Beutner, ‘A Mercy Unextended: Matthew 18:23-34,’ in *Listening to the Parables of Jesus* (ed. Edward F. Beutner; Jesus Seminar Guides 2; Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2007), 33-34; Beutner, ‘Comedy,’ 59-63.

<sup>160</sup> Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 84, 87-88.

<sup>161</sup> Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 87.

<sup>162</sup> Funk, *Parables*, 43-51, 173.

<sup>163</sup> Funk, *Parables*, 35, 38, 48-51, 62, 63, 86, 106-107, 158, 172, 175.

<sup>164</sup> Kloppenborg, ‘Parables of Jesus,’ 300.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Funk, *Parables*, 46, 172; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 40.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 8; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 40.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Beutner, ‘Mercy Unextended,’ 36.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 5.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 38.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 127-131.

could indeed have made a noticeable difference in the lives of individual smallholders, especially since the master was away for ‘a long time’ (πολὸν χρόνον).<sup>171</sup> Thirdly, his actions do succeed in exposing an alternative reality – one where it is possible to completely sidestep economic dealings for the sake of profit, and so hamper to some extent the economic exploitation of others.<sup>172</sup> Lastly, he did prevent the master from earning profits that, from a peasant viewpoint, did not belong to him.<sup>173</sup>

The surprising feature of the narrative is not the unproductive slave’s deceit, though, but the master’s reaction.<sup>174</sup> After the first two slaves in the narrative give their feedback, the audience expects the last slave’s response to be different, as was the convention in ancient storytelling and in the parables of Jesus.<sup>175</sup> The audiences of Q had even more reason to expect a different response from the last slave, since Q typically features a ‘broken third.’<sup>176</sup> A lower-class audience would intuitively have understood the deceit as it has been explained, and would probably have tipped their hats (metaphorically) at the slave’s guile, but would not have found it surprising.<sup>177</sup> Given both the characterisation of the master and the content of the third narrated response, however, the audience would have expected the unproductive slave to be punished harshly.<sup>178</sup> Instead, he is merely called a ‘bad’ (πονηρός) slave, and released from a duty he did not want to begin with.<sup>179</sup> The surprising feature of the parable is that the disobedient slave manages to evade punishment altogether.<sup>180</sup> The slave manages this because of his sly (but technically true) response, not because of his actions, which would otherwise have invited severe punishment. The unproductive slave manages not only to act exactly how he wants, being deliberately disobedient to his master, but also to procure the exact outcome that he wants, namely to avoid harsh punishment and be dismissed from any participation in the exploitation of others. Even the insult that he was a ‘bad’ slave would probably have been taken by the unproductive slave as a compliment, considering the source.<sup>181</sup> Conversely, the master ends up indicting himself in more than one way. Firstly, as we saw, he repeats the slave’s characterisation of him, thereby acknowledging his own insatiable greed and heartless exploitation. Secondly, he instructs the remaining mina to be handed over to the most productive slave – an act that would have characterised him as profoundly unjust to a peasant audience subscribing to balanced reciprocity.<sup>182</sup> The master’s concluding act functions as a symbol and microcosm of the inherently unjust process through which the wealthy wrestle land, produce and sustenance from the peasantry and poor.<sup>183</sup> At its heart, the story of the Entrusted Money is a ‘challenge parable’ – as this term has been defined by Crossan<sup>184</sup> – challenging the existing economic system that enabled the

---

<sup>171</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 167.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Herzog, *Parables*, 167.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 252.

<sup>174</sup> Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 8.

<sup>175</sup> Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 100, 108-109.

<sup>176</sup> See Fleddermann, *Q*, 86-87, 861.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Crossan, ‘Parables of Jesus,’ 253.

<sup>178</sup> Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 172.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 222; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 3, 8, 10.

<sup>180</sup> Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 8.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 38; Beutner, ‘Comedy,’ 62; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 142, 171.

<sup>182</sup> Scott, *Symbol-Maker*, 44; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 232-233; Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 38; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 69.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg, ‘Parables of Jesus,’ 298.

<sup>184</sup> Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 45-112.

perpetual and aggressive exploitation of the peasantry and poor, and challenging the latter to stand up against the former.

As a challenge parable, it cannot be taken as a mere example story.<sup>185</sup> The situation of the unproductive slave is not directly transferrable to the situation of the parable's first (and later) audiences. These first hearers were (for the most part, as far as we can tell) not slaves, so they could not act exactly (or even approximately) how the unproductive slave did. Instead, the parable confronts the audience with the question: 'How can I, in my own situation, boycott the existing economic system that exploits the weak, without facing the consequences of such purposeful behaviour?' In some sense, the parable poses a *Qal wahomer* argument for contemplation: 'If a slave can accomplish so much, how much more should a free person, even a peasant, not be able to accomplish in the struggle against economic oppression?' On a secondary level, the parable of the Entrusted Money also operates like the parable of the Samaritan, portraying a stereotypically negative character in a positive light. Peasants dealt with privileged city slaves and retainers on a regular basis, and must have despised these parasitic exploiters.<sup>186</sup> Against the backdrop of this stereotype, the unproductive slave is a troubling figure.<sup>187</sup>

#### 4.4 Counter-arguments

Some scholars have reacted against the line of interpretation followed here. Kloppenborg holds that 'the parable cannot be meant as black irony, condemning the rapacity of the rich.'<sup>188</sup> He supports this claim by arguing that the description of the unproductive slave as 'bad' (πονηρός) and the productive slaves as 'good' (ἀγαθός) and 'faithful' (πιστός) dictate how the parable should be interpreted, even if sympathy is otherwise evoked for the unproductive slave. Although Kloppenborg interprets the parable on the level of Q's main redaction, his observation would apply equally to the formative stratum, since the master's valuation of his slaves appears as part of the narrative on that level as well. Yet, the current analysis has shown, hopefully with some degree of success, that the parable presumes two levels of interaction: (1) on a surface level, as understood 'from above' by the master and more fortunate interpreters, the unproductive slave is scared, fails to gain a profit, and gets punished, but (2) on a hidden level, as secretly intended by the unproductive slave and understood by less fortunate interpreters, the slave is courageous, deliberately refusing to gain a profit, and actually gets rewarded.<sup>189</sup> On the surface level, the master's valuation of the unproductive slave is negative, but on the hidden level, the exact same valuation is positive. As Herzog rightly says, the master's reply 'is not to be taken at face value.'<sup>190</sup> Being called 'bad' by a bad person is ultimately a compliment (see above). The first audiences would not have placed much stock in the master or his viewpoint anyway, since his character stood for the economic exploitation of peasants.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> See Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 29-44.

<sup>186</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 160, 161, 167, 168.

<sup>187</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 162.

<sup>188</sup> Kloppenborg, 'Parables of Jesus,' 298.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 10.

<sup>190</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 165.

<sup>191</sup> Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 142, 171.

Luz comments that the master did not necessarily agree with the slave's characterisation of him in Q 19:21.<sup>192</sup> It seems unlikely to me that the master would repeat the slave's description word for word if he did not agree with its content. If the master disagreed with the statement, he could easily have begun the exact same counter-argument with words like 'If you thought that of me...' or 'Let us say for argument's sake that I am like that...' Instead, he chose to repeat the same characterisation exactly. The repetition drips of pompous boasting and self-aggrandisement. Scott argues more definitively than Luz that the master in fact did not accept the slave's characterisation of him, since he not only acted kindly towards the productive slaves, but also refused to take the unproductive slave's coin for himself, giving it to the most productive slave instead.<sup>193</sup> These arguments betray Scott's erroneous conviction that the stewards were not slaves but servants (see above). Snodgrass applies the same observation of the master's 'kind' treatment of the productive slaves to argue that the master is not characterised as 'harsh' in the narrative at all, and that the unproductive slave's description of him is unwarranted.<sup>194</sup> Both Scott and Snodgrass fail to notice that it is wrong to read much about the master's character into his specific punishments and rewards, since the money belonged to the master regardless. Ultimately, both the productive slaves' 'reward' and the unproductive slave's 'punishment' are motivated by the master's greed, not his kindness.<sup>195</sup>

Snodgrass is perhaps the most vehement opponent of the line of interpretation advocated here, claiming that 'it is more of a usurpation of the parable than an interpretation.'<sup>196</sup> He states: 'If this [parable of the Entrusted Money] is a warning about mistreating the poor, it is cryptic in the extreme.'<sup>197</sup> First of all, this statement betrays his proclivity to read the parable 'from above,' since a 'warning about mistreating the poor' would still be directed at the rich, not the poor. To be fair, Snodgrass is here reacting to Rohrbaugh, who did indeed argue that the parable should be understood as 'a warning ... to those who mistreat the poor.'<sup>198</sup> Be that as it may, the present article has argued instead that the parable is a challenge aimed primarily at the peasantry and poor, who made up the majority of Jesus' first audiences. Second of all, to the extent that the parable was also aimed at the rich, it challenged these members of Jesus' first audiences to rethink the economic system of which they were part, which constitutes a much more subversive challenge than merely warning against mistreating the poor.<sup>199</sup> Third of all, Snodgrass is absolutely correct that the parable is 'cryptic in the extreme,' but only if read both 'from above' and from a western standpoint. Rohrbaugh rightly says: 'The fact that we western capitalists find the peasant reading so difficult to imagine may be little more than a function of our socialization in a world where amassing wealth is the accepted norm.'<sup>200</sup> By contrast, it is very likely that the first audiences would have immediately and intuitively understood the unproductive slave's reply as a skilful and deliberate attempt to deceive the master by being cryptic. In any case, all the parables of Jesus were cryptic in essence.<sup>201</sup> By contrast, Snodgrass's

---

<sup>192</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 253.

<sup>193</sup> Scott, *Symbol-Maker*, 43-47; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 233-234.

<sup>194</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36.

<sup>196</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>197</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>198</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 32.

<sup>199</sup> See Crossan, 'Parables of Jesus,' 252-253; Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 105-106.

<sup>200</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 38.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Beutner, 'Mercy Unextended,' 34; Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 47.

interpretation of the current parable is straightforward to the extreme. Worse yet, his interpretation is inherently allegorical, even if he delimits the number of allegorical applications to only a few features in the text.

Snodgrass argues further that the unproductive slave's words 'are merely the basis on which he is judged,' thereby attempting to negate finding any relevance in these words to the parable's interpretation.<sup>202</sup> Yet, the fact that Matthew and Luke feature these words with such a high degree of verbal overlap indicates that the unproductive slave's response must have been important to the story.<sup>203</sup> The same is indicated by the sheer length of the unproductive slave's response.<sup>204</sup> The careful exposition offered above indicates that every word in the slave's response was measured and deliberate. The slave's words were indeed 'the basis on which he was judged,' but his words were also the weapons he used to indict the master, as well as the reason why he did not receive a harsher punishment. Snodgrass continues to argue that 'the rule of end stress places the emphasis on the master's verdict, not on the actions of the third servant.'<sup>205</sup> This is a false dichotomy, and the rule of end stress applies to the entire interaction between the master and the unproductive slave, as the current exposition has indicated, and as commentators typically confirm.<sup>206</sup>

Snodgrass argues further that audiences 'would hardly identify with the third servant and his fear, which leads him to hide the money.'<sup>207</sup> This is the typical impression when approaching the parable 'from above,' failing to recognise or consider the true plight of a slave in antiquity (see above).<sup>208</sup> Fear was a necessary part of being a slave, and such fear should not make it more difficult to identify with the slave, but easier, since fear is a condition we all share, especially those on the bottom of society.<sup>209</sup> Snodgrass also claims that the unproductive slave's actions 'are hardly defiance of an oppressive system.'<sup>210</sup> Indeed, the slave could have acted more aggressively, blaming the master in unambiguous language for oppressing those less fortunate, and explaining in clear terms that he refused to be party to such conduct. If he did, he would probably have found himself whipped or dead. And who would that have served? The 'weapons of the weak' were in use precisely because the poor and defenceless needed ways of standing up against the rich and powerful without having to face the usual consequences of such insolence.

Snodgrass continues to claim that the unproductive slave's act of burying the money 'is not a commendable action.'<sup>211</sup> Once again, the question is: from whose perspective? As argued above, the slave's behaviour represents a crafty way of drawing on Jewish tradition to sidestep both accountability and blame. Ancient peasant audiences would have seen the unproductive slave's actions as commendable, and the master's

---

<sup>202</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>203</sup> Piper, *Wisdom*, 145; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 229; Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 102.

<sup>204</sup> Herzog, *Parables*, 164.

<sup>205</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>206</sup> E.g. Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 106; Piper, *Wisdom*, 145; Herzog, *Parables*, 164; Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 401-402; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 247; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1020; Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 102.

<sup>207</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 35, 38.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 142.

<sup>210</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>211</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

punishment as arbitrary.<sup>212</sup> The preceding claim is confirmed by Luke's editorial activity. Firstly, Luke struggled to find guilt in the unproductive slave's act of burying the money, and therefore changed it to an act that was more deserving of punishment according to Jewish tradition, namely that of hiding the money in a cloth.<sup>213</sup> Secondly, Luke (19:25) added a statement of disbelief on the part of Jesus' first audience at the injustice of the punishment.<sup>214</sup> To Lukan redaction can be added the amendment of this parable in the *Gospel of the Nazoreans* (18), according to which the slave who buried his money is either joyfully accepted or mildly rebuked, depending on how one reads the parable, but with the former option being much more likely.<sup>215</sup> In that version, punishment is reserved for a slave who squandered his money with prostitutes and flute girls. Snodgrass supports his claim that the slave's act was not commendable by pointing out that the money was left with the slave not for safekeeping, but for investment.<sup>216</sup> This is true, but only highlights the fact that the slave found a cunning way of boycotting the master's direct instruction while maintaining his own innocence. Snodgrass is certainly correct that '[t]he presumption of the parable is that failure to invest the money was a dereliction of duty.'<sup>217</sup> The question, however, is whether such 'dereliction of duty' should be viewed as positive or negative. Viewed from above, it is surely negative, but viewed from below, it is decidedly positive, since it not only benefits others, but also represents opposition against oppression.<sup>218</sup> This section confirms Van Eck's observation that the parable of the Entrusted Money is itself a 'hidden transcript,' validating the status quo if read from above, but surreptitiously challenging the same status quo if read from below.<sup>219</sup> Rather than the present interpretation being a usurpation of the parable, the parable is a protest against all forms of usurpation.

## 5. KLOPPENBORG'S CRITERIA

It remains now to measure the parable on its own against Kloppenborg's criteria of 'characteristic forms,' 'characteristic motifs' and 'implied audience' to see if the proposal offered above really does match the rest of the formative stratum.

### 5.1 Characteristic forms

Q 19:12-13, 15-24 is clearly a parable. In fact, it is one of the few proper narrative parables in Q, with most of the other options qualifying instead as similitudes.<sup>220</sup> In its capacity as a parable, Q 19:12-13, 15-24 qualifies formally as a piece of wisdom.<sup>221</sup> Even if the content of any particular parable happens to feature eschatological, apocalyptic or prophetic themes and/or small forms, it still operates as part of the

<sup>212</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 38.

<sup>213</sup> Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 222, 228; Herzog, *Parables*, 151; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 248, 252.

<sup>214</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 62; Piper, *Wisdom*, 147; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 228; Taylor, *Master-Servant*, 165; Fleddermann, *Q*, 853; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 253.

<sup>215</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 58, 63; Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 107; Piper, *Wisdom*, 147; Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 232-233; Herzog, *Parables*, 152; Kloppenborg, 'Parables of Jesus,' 297; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 248-249; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 55; see Crossan, 'Parables of Jesus,' 252; Crossan, *Power of Parable*, 102-103; Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 36-37.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Blomberg, *Parables*, 215.

<sup>217</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 534.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, 'Peasant Reading,' 38.

<sup>219</sup> Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 10.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Funk, *Parables*, 31.

<sup>221</sup> See Alan Kirk, *The Composition of the Sayings Source: Genre, Synchrony, and Wisdom Redaction in Q* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 298, 234, 246-248.

teaching experience to incite reflection and contemplation. As a sapiential form, Q 19:12-13, 15-24 belongs to the formative stratum.

## 5.2 Characteristic motifs

In the formative stratum, the following texts deal with a socio-economic matter, and does so from the perspective of the underprivileged: Q 6:20-23a, 27-28, 29, 30;<sup>222</sup> [Matt 5:41]; 11:2-4, 9-13; 12:6-7, 11-12, 22-31, 42-44,<sup>223</sup> 58-59; 14:16-18, 21, 23,<sup>224</sup> 34-35; 16:13;<sup>225</sup> 15:4-5, 7, [8-10]. The same can obviously be said of the parable in Q 19:12-13, 15-24.<sup>226</sup> The following Q<sup>1</sup> texts further promote general reciprocity at all societal levels over both balanced reciprocity and exploitative economic dealings:<sup>227</sup> Q 6:27-28, 35, 29-30, 31, 32, 34; 11:33;<sup>228</sup> 12:42-44,<sup>229</sup> 14:16-21, 23.<sup>230</sup> I would define ‘general reciprocity’ as barter and other (economic) exchanges that are characterised by the unilateral giving or receiving of something without any expectations and/or obligations of repayment, in the spirit of grace and benefaction.<sup>231</sup> This form of reciprocity was usually in antiquity reserved for exchanges between family members, but Q’s formative stratum promotes it for society at large. The parable of the Entrusted Money contributes to this social vision by exposing and criticising economic endeavours that threaten both balanced and general reciprocity at village level.<sup>232</sup>

The formative stratum’s radical vision included economic practices like loan acquittal (Q 6:30) and debt release (Q 11:4). With such expectations, the formative stratum confronts economic practices that promote perpetual indebtedness head on.<sup>233</sup> As we saw, it was through systemic and systematic indebtedness that members of the upper class were able to appropriate the smallholdings of individual peasants, and in the process force these peasants into becoming tenant farmers, day-labourers, slaves, beggars and bandits. In the spirit of texts like Q 6:30 and Q 11:4, the parable of the Entrusted Money takes a stand against the abusive practice of loaning money to peasants at outrageous interest rates in order to compound their debts and steal their livelihoods.<sup>234</sup> This parable features people who participate in those economic dealings that ultimately result in the indebtedness of ordinary peasants, but continues to tell about

---

<sup>222</sup> This text deals with a socio-economic matter, but not exclusively from the perspective of the underprivileged.

<sup>223</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Q 12:42-44 belongs to the formative stratum, to which Q 12:45-46 was added by Q’s main redactor; see Llewellyn Howes, ‘“Cut in Two,” Part 2: Reconsidering the Redaction of Q 12:42-46,’ in *HTS Theological Studies* 71/1 (2015); P.G.R. de Villiers Dedication; available online: <http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/2938>): 1-7.

<sup>224</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Q 14:16-21, 23 belonged to the formative stratum before it was incorporated into the main redaction; see Llewellyn Howes, ‘“Whomever You Find, Invite”: The Parable of the Great Supper (Q 14:16-21, 23) and the Redaction of Q,’ in *Neotestamentica* 49/2 (2016): 321-350.

<sup>225</sup> This text deals with a socio-economic matter, but not exclusively from the perspective of the underprivileged.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. Fleddermann, *Q*, 862-863; Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 10.

<sup>227</sup> See Howes, ‘Cut in Two,’ 2-5.

<sup>228</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Q 11:33 belongs to the formative stratum and promotes general reciprocity; see Llewellyn Howes, ‘“Placed in a Hidden Place”: Illuminating the Displacement of Q 11:33, 34-35,’ in *Neotestamentica* 47/2 (2013): 303-332.303-332.

<sup>229</sup> See Howes, ‘Cut in Two,’ 1-7.

<sup>230</sup> See Howes, ‘Whomever You Find,’ 321-350.

<sup>231</sup> Oakman, *Economic Questions*, 151–152; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 95, 105, 138; cf. Luk 11:11.

<sup>232</sup> Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 10.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Van Eck, ‘Do Not Question,’ 10; Park, ‘Children and Slaves,’ 87.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Rohrbaugh, ‘Peasant Reading,’ 38; Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 36.



one character who refused to be party to such dealings.<sup>235</sup> This stubborn character might have incited the wrath of his master, but he also prompted the favour of God. The same strategies of passive resistance and employing the weapons of the weak might be reflected in Q 6:29 (incl. Matt 5:41), where the audience is implored to shame the abuser by offering the other cheek when assaulted, handing over additional clothing when sued, and walking twice as many miles when conscripted. Like the conduct of the unproductive slave, the actions promoted by the latter text are both brave and comical.<sup>236</sup> Also, like the landowner in our parable, the abusers implied by the latter text may be seen as Gentiles.<sup>237</sup>

In thematic content, the parable of the Entrusted Money overlaps further with the logion in Q 16:13.<sup>238</sup> By refusing to participate in the economic exploitation of others, the unproductive slave has illustrated through his actions how one can practically choose to serve God instead of mammon. In the conduct of the unproductive slave, there is no middle ground. In choosing not to 'do business,' the slave deliberately chooses for God, and against mammon. His so-called 'punishment' was to be released completely from any financial responsibilities,<sup>239</sup> so that he could from that moment on focus all his attention on serving God. Although the parable of the Entrusted Money should not be seen as an example story, the unproductive slave does feature as an exemplary character.<sup>240</sup> He provides a practical example of someone who chose for God, and against wealth, in his daily life. Conversely, the master and his other slaves provide examples of people who chose for wealth, and against God, in their daily financial dealings.

The same thematic overlap extends to Q 12:22-31 and Q 12:33-34.<sup>241</sup> In the former text, Q's Jesus instructs his disciples to seek God's kingdom instead of earthly needs. If God's kingdom is understood as a place where everyone receives food<sup>242</sup> as part of God's family,<sup>243</sup> then Q 12:31 instructs its hearers to contribute to the establishment of such a place before selfishly scrambling to address one's own needs. This is exactly what the unproductive slave in the parable of the Entrusted Money does. Unlike the other slaves in this parable, the unproductive slave puts the economic needs of others ahead of his own wellbeing. In the process, he establishes the kingdom of God in the most unlikely of places.<sup>244</sup> In Q 13:33-34, people are told to accumulate heavenly treasures instead of earthly treasures. Once again, the unproductive slave does exactly this: he wins the favour of God by devaluing earthly treasures like money and profit.

Piper argues that the parable of the Entrusted Money (in the final form of Q) commends the behaviour of the *productive* slaves, and promotes taking economic risks instead of

---

<sup>235</sup> Crossan, 'Parables of Jesus,' 252; Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 5.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Funk, *Parables*, 174.

<sup>237</sup> See Valantasis, *New Q*, 59-60, 68.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg, 'Parables of Jesus,' 299; Piper, 'Wealth,' 260; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 87.

<sup>239</sup> Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 141, 171.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Van Eck, 'Do Not Question,' 8.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Fleddermann, *Q*, 858 n. 540.

<sup>242</sup> Q scholars agree that the Sayings Gospel associated God's kingdom with the feeding of the poor; e.g. Piper, 'Wealth,' 241, 251, 259; Howes, *Judging Q*, 123-124.

<sup>243</sup> Q scholars agree that the Sayings Gospel understood God's kingdom as a new symbolic family; e.g. Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel*, 206; Piper, 'Wealth,' 264; Arnal, *Village Scribes*, 174; Park, 'Children and Slaves,' 73, 78, 88-91; Howes, *Judging Q*, 144-150.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Beutner, 'Mercy Unextended,' 34.

trying to preserve material possessions (including presumably money).<sup>245</sup> He sees the latter as the point of thematic overlap between the parable of the Entrusted Money and the texts in Q 12:22-31 and Q 12:33-34. Firstly, I strongly doubt that the parable, as it appears in the main redaction or final form of Q, addresses economic matters at all. Instead, it seems that an allegorical interpretation reinforcing eschatological judgment completely overshadows any economic message that the parable might have had at an earlier stage. Secondly, the main thrust of the passages in Q 12 is to redirect focus away from material concerns, and towards heavenly and ‘kingdom’ concerns. The economic behaviour being discouraged as resulting from material concerns seem to include not only an obsessive focus on the preservation of money and possessions,<sup>246</sup> but also an obsessive focus economic undertakings as such, whether these be risky or not.<sup>247</sup> By contrast, the parable of the Entrusted Money, according to Piper’s reading, promotes economic activity for the sake of profit. It follows that Piper’s reading of the parable introduces a contradiction between Q 12 and Q 19, not an overlap.

Like our parable, the parable of the Loyal and Wise Slave in Q 12:42-46 is about the activities of slaves during their master’s absence, ultimately leading to a moment of reckoning at the master’s return.<sup>248</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Q 12:42-44 originally appeared in the formative stratum, to which Q 12:45-46 was added by Q’s main redactor.<sup>249</sup> In this earlier version, the parable features a slave who uses his position of privilege to feed his fellow slaves. According to my interpretation of Q 12:42-44, Q’s Jesus views those who take care of the physical and nutritional needs of others as the true leaders of Israel. God expects those in privileged positions to address the needs of their underlings. Whereas the parable of the Loyal and Wise Slave in Q 12:42-44 features a slave who contributes to the economic survival of others, the parable of the Entrusted Money in Q 19:12-13, 15-24 features a slave who refuses to participate in the economic starvation of others. Both are exemplary characters, working towards a world that is unperturbed by debt and starvation – a world otherwise referred to by Q’s Jesus as the ‘kingdom of God.’

### 5.3 Implied audience

If my proposed interpretation of the parable is correct, it would be difficult to read it as aimed either directly or indirectly at outsiders. In portraying the kingdom of God as a place where contemporary economic endeavours have no place, the parable intends to direct the behaviour of insiders.<sup>250</sup> In the context of the Q movement, the parable envisages the in-group operating outside the economic affairs of existing society as God’s family. This does not mean that the Q movement functioned from the start as a breakaway Jewish movement, aiming to create a sectarian community outside of Judaism. Rather, it means that the early Q movement wished to convince all their fellow Jews of the kingdom message, thereby establishing a new Israel operating on kingdom

---

<sup>245</sup> Piper, ‘Wealth,’ 240, 259-260.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. the phrases ‘gather into barns’ (συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας) in Q 12:24 and ‘treasure treasures’ (θησαυρίζετε θησαυρούς) in Q 12:33.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. the phrases ‘neither sow nor reap’ (οὐ σπείρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν) in Q 12:24 and ‘neither work nor spin’ (οὐ κοπιᾷ οὐδὲ νήθει) in Q 12:27.

<sup>248</sup> Kirk, *Composition*, 298; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1012-1013; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 526, 531; see Smith, *Post-Mortem Vindication*, 124-126.

<sup>249</sup> See Howes, ‘Cut in Two.’

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew XIX-XXVIII*, 403-404; Kirk, *Composition*, 298, 300; Piper, ‘Wealth,’ 255-256.

principles as part of God's new family.<sup>251</sup> They wished to revive Israel, but only succeeded in creating yet another Jewish reform movement, which ultimately operated outside the boundaries of contemporary Judaism.<sup>252</sup>

It was during the latter stage that those responsible for the main redaction changed the meaning of the parable to focus on the eschatological judgment of outsiders at the return of Jesus as the Son of Man.<sup>253</sup> This was achieved through clever redactional work, and seemingly without changing the parable itself. First, the main redactor added a whole complex of eschatological material directly before the parable. Second, the main redactor added Q 19:26 after the parable as its application in order to generalise its meaning.<sup>254</sup> Unfortunately, this addition caused a direct contradiction with the themes of socio-economic and eschatological reversal that appear throughout the rest of Q.<sup>255</sup> Third, the main redactor added Q 22:28, 30 after the generalising application to not only refocus and control its meaning, but also explain away the contradiction caused by its addition. Elsewhere, I have explained the development in logic from Q 19:26 to Q 22:28, 30 as follows:

While the Q people, who already has [*sic*] the kingdom, will be afforded the additional privilege of judging the rest of Israel at the final judgment, Israel, who currently lacks the kingdom, will also be robbed of their privileged status as 'sons of Abraham' at the final judgment.<sup>256</sup>

Interestingly, such a change in the parable's meaning strongly suggests that those behind the main redaction were socio-economically better off than those behind the formative stratum. Thanks to the efforts of Q's main redactor, a path was cleared for the evangelists to further refine and emphasise the parable's eschatological allegory through their own redactional efforts.<sup>257</sup>

## 6. FINDINGS

This article has argued that the parable of the Entrusted Money in Q 19:12-13, 15-24 featured in Q's formative stratum before it was incorporated into the document's main redaction. If the parable's context in first-century Palestine is taken into account, as it should be, its message and intent fit the formative stratum much better than the main redaction. Moreover, if all three criteria used by Kloppenborg to separate Q<sup>1</sup> and Q<sup>2</sup> from each other are applied to Q 19:12-13, 15-24, the original position of this text in the formative stratum is revealed. Finally, it is possible to retrace the steps through which the parable was redacted by Q's main redactor. Some time ago, Jeremias noticed that the process of turning the parables into allegories had already started with pre-Synoptic traditions, including the tradition common to Matthew and Luke (referring to

---

<sup>251</sup> See Howes, *Judging Q*, 253-255.

<sup>252</sup> Howes, *Judging Q*, 144.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Smith, *Post-Mortem Vindication*, 170.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Dodd, *Parables*, 147-148; Jeremias, *Parables*, 36-37, 62, 110; Piper, *Wisdom*, 144; Taylor, *Master-Servant*, 165; Funk and Hoover, *Five Gospels*, 375; Herzog, *Parables*, 150-151; Davies and Allison, *Matthew XLX-XXVIII*, 410.

<sup>255</sup> Jacobson, *First Gospel*, 244; Howes, *Judging Q*, 213; see Piper, *Wisdom*, 149-153; cf. Q 6:20-22; 10:21; 11:9-10, 19, 31-32; 12:22-31, 45-46; 13:28-29; [30], 34-35; [14:11], 16-19, 21, 23.

<sup>256</sup> Howes, 'Condemning or Liberating,' 6.

<sup>257</sup> See Dodd, *Parables*, 152-153; Jeremias, *Parables*, 59-60, 62-63; Herzog, *Parables*, 151; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 255-258.

Q).<sup>258</sup> It is now possible to say with greater specificity that, pertaining to the parable of the Entrusted Money at least, this process was started by Q's main redactor. By changing the meaning of an earlier parable into an allegory about the final judgment, the main redactor was also 'reaping where he did not sow.'

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnal, William E. *Jesus and the Village Scribes: Galilean Conflicts and the Setting of Q*. Augsburg, MN: Fortress, 2001.
- Beutner, Edward F. 'A Comedy with a Tragic Turn: The Dishonest Manager.' Pages 59-63 in *Listening to the Parables of Jesus*. Edited by Edward F. Beutner. Jesus Seminar Guides 2. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2007.
- Beutner, Edward F. 'A Mercy Unextended: Matthew 18:23-34.' Pages 33-39 in *Listening to the Parables of Jesus*. Edited by Edward F. Beutner. Jesus Seminar Guides 2. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2007.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Interpreting the Parables*. Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1990.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996.
- Bradley, Keith R. *Slavery and Society at Rome*. Key Themes in Ancient History. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Bradley, Keith R. *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control*. Collection Latomus 185. Brussels, BE: Latomus, 1984.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Translated by John Marsh. New York: Harper and Row, [1931] 1968.
- Catchpole, David R. *The Quest for Q*. Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1993.
- Crossan, John D. 'The Parables of Jesus.' *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 56/3 (2002): 247-259.
- Crossan, John D. 'The Servant Parables of Jesus.' *Semeia* 1 (1974): 17-62.
- Crossan, John D. *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus became Fiction about Jesus*. New York: HarperOne, 2012.
- Davies, William D. and Dale C. Allison. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew; Volume III: Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII*. ICC. London and New York: T&T Clark, 1997.
- Denaux, Adelbert. 'The Parable of the Talents/Pounds (Q 19,12-27): A Reconstruction of the Text.' Pages 429-460 in *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus*. Edited by Andreas Lindemann. BETL 158. Leuven, Paris and Sterling, VA: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2001.

---

<sup>258</sup> Jeremias, *Parables*, 67, 89.

- Derrett, J. Duncan M. *Law in the New Testament*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970.
- Dodd, Charles H. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. Revised ed. Welwyn: James Nisbet and Company, [1935] 1958.
- Donahue, John R. *The Gospel in Parable*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988.
- Fleddermann, Harry T. *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary*. Biblical Tools and Studies 1. Leuven: Peeters, 2005.
- Freyne, Sean. *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays*. WUNT 125. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.
- Funk, Robert W. 'Jesus of Nazareth: A Glimpse,' Pages 89-93 in *Listening to the Parables of Jesus*. Edited by Edward F. Beutner. Jesus Seminar Guides 2. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2007.
- Funk, Robert W. *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays*. Edited by Bernard B. Scott. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2006.
- Funk, Robert W. *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996.
- Funk, Robert W. and Roy W. Hoover, eds. *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus; New Translation and Commentary by Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar*. New York: HarperOne, 1993.
- Hedrick, Charles W. *The Wisdom of Jesus: Between the Sages of Israel and the Apostles of the Church*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014.
- Herzog, William R. *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*. Louisville, KY: Westminster and John Knox, 1994.
- Hezser, Catherine. *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Horsley, Richard A. *Galilee: History, Politics, People*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1995.
- Howes, Llewellyn. "'Cut in Two,'" Part 2: Reconsidering the Redaction of Q 12:42-46,' in *HTS Theological Studies* 71/1 (2015; P.G.R. de Villiers Dedication): 7 pages; <http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/2938>.
- Howes, Llewellyn. "'Placed in a Hidden Place": Illuminating the Displacement of Q 11:33, 34-35.' *Neotestamentica* 47/2 (2013): 303-332.
- Howes, Llewellyn. "'Whomever You Find, Invite": The Parable of the Great Supper (Q 14:16-21, 23) and the Redaction of Q.' *Neotestamentica* 49/2 (2016): 321-350.
- Howes, Llewellyn. 'Agricultural Slavery and the Parable of the Loyal and Wise Slave in Q 12:42-46.' *Acta Classica* 58 (2015): 70-110.
- Howes, Llewellyn. 'Condemning or Liberating the Twelve Tribes of Israel?: Judging the Meaning of κρινοντες in Q 22:28, 30,' in *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35/1 (2014): 11 pages; <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.872>.

- Howes, Llewellyn. *Judging Q and Saving Jesus: Q's Contribution to the Wisdom-Apocalypticism Debate in Historical Jesus Studies*. Cape Town: AOSIS, 2015; <http://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/21>.
- Jacobson, Arland D. *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q*. Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *The Parables of Jesus*. 3<sup>rd</sup> revised ed. Translated by S. H. Hooke. London: SCM, 1972.
- Kirk, Alan. *The Composition of the Sayings Source: Genre, Synchrony, and Wisdom Redaction in Q*. NovTSup 91. Leiden: Brill, 1998.
- Kloppenborg (Verbin), John S. *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000.
- Kloppenborg, John S. 'Jesus and the Parables of Jesus in Q.' Pages 275-319 in *The Gospel behind the Gospels: Current Studies on Q*. Edited by Ronald A. Piper. NovTSup 75. Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1995.
- Kloppenborg, John S. *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*. SAC. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987.
- Kloppenborg, John S. *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*. WUNT 195. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.
- Liddell, Henry G. and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
- Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains; Volume 2: Indices*. Cape Town, ZA: Bible Society of South Africa, 1993.
- Lührmann, Dieter. *Die Redaktion der Logienquelle*. WMANT 33. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969.
- Luz, Ulrich. *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*. Translated by James E. Crouch. Edited by Helmut Koester. Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC. Exeter: Paternoster, 1978.
- Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2005.
- Oakman, Douglas E. *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*. Studies in Bible and Early Christianity Series 5. Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen, 1986.
- Oakman, Douglas E. *Jesus and the Peasants*. Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context 4. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Park, InHee. 'Children and Slaves: The Metaphors of Q.' Pages 73-91 in *Metaphor, Narrative, and Parables in Q; Dedicated to Dieter Zeller on the Occasion of his*

- 75<sup>th</sup> *Birthday*. Edited by Dieter T. Roth, Ruben Zimmermann and Michael Labahn. WUNT 315. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.
- Piper, Ronald A. 'Wealth, Poverty, and Subsistence in Q.' Pages 219-264 in *From Quest to Q; Festschrift James M. Robinson*. Edited by Jon M. Asgeirsson, Kristin De Troyer and Marvin W Meyer. BETL 146. Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2000.
- Piper, Ronald A. *Wisdom in the Q-Tradition: The Aphoristic Teachings of Jesus*. SNTSMS 61. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Robinson, James M., Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000.
- Robinson, James M., Paul Hoffmann and John S. Kloppenborg, eds. *The Sayings Gospel Q in Greek and English with Parallels from the Gospels of Mark and Thomas*. CBET 30. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002.
- Rohrbaugh, Richard L. 'A Peasant Reading of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror.' *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 23 (1993): 32–39.
- Roth, Dieter T. "'Master" as Character in the Q Parables.' Pages 371-396 in *Metaphor, Narrative, and Parables in Q; Dedicated to Dieter Zeller on the Occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. Edited by Dieter T. Roth, Ruben Zimmermann and Michael Labahn. WUNT 315. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.
- Saller, Richard. 'Women, Slaves, and the Economy of the Roman Household.' Pages 185-204 in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*. Edited by David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek. Religion, Marriage, and Family. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003.
- Scott, Bernard B. *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989.
- Scott, Bernard B. *Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1981.
- Smith, Daniel A. *The Post-Mortem Vindication of Jesus in the Sayings Gospel Q*. The Library of New Testament Studies 338. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006.
- Snodgrass, Klyne R. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2008.
- Taylor, Anthony B. *The Master-Servant Type Scene in the Parables of Jesus*. New York: Doctoral Dissertation, Fordham University, 1989.
- Tuckett, Christopher M. *Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.
- Valantasis, Richard. *The New Q: A Fresh Translation with Commentary*. New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005.

Van Eck, Ernest. 'Do Not Question My Honour: A Social-Scientific Reading of the Parable of the Minas (Lk 19:12b–24, 27).' *HTS Theological Studies* 67/3 (2011): 11 pages; <http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/977>.

Via, Dan O. *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1967.

Wright, Stephen I. *Jesus the Storyteller*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015.