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Domestic Space, Family Relationships and the Social Location of the Q People

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Abstract

In the Q Document there are about twenty references that provide information about family life. Most of them mention different types of houses that are observed from different perspectives. By locating these references and the point of view they presuppose in the context of the different types of families that existed in first-century Galilee, this article will illustrate how they can help identify more precisely the social location of the Q people.

Purpose and Assumptions

Fifty years ago the redactional study of Q raised the question of the context in which this ancient document was born. In the last decades this question has been addressed from different perspectives and, as a result of these studies, we have gained a better understanding of the geographical, historical and social location of the people behind Q (Kloppenborg 1991, 1993, 2000: 166-213). This article, in contributing to this research, will show how the references to domestic space and to family relationships in Q can help identify more precisely the social location of the Q people. It is based on some assumptions that should be stated from the beginning.

My first assumption concerns the 'Q Document' itself. Although recent research has convincingly shown that it is the result of a long process of composition (Kloppenborg 1987), this study concentrates on its final redaction, whose archetypal text has been recently reconstructed in *The Critical Edition of Q* (Robinson *et al.* 2000).

My second assumption is implied in the use of the expression the 'Q

people'. It includes both the composers and the audience of the Q Document. The 'Q people' were probably a network of local groups of Jesus' disciples who lived in Galilee in the decades before the Jewish–Roman war (50–70 CE). Although the location of the Q Document in Galilee is still debated (Frechskowski 2001), it seems that there are good reasons to locate its composition in this region (Reed 1996; Moreland 2001; Han 2002).

My third assumption is related to the 'social location' of this group of Jesus' disciples. The studies that have tried to identify its *Sitz im Leben* are based very often on references to social relations (Kloppenborg 2000: 166–213). Only a few use references to material culture to establish the group's social location (Richardson 2000). I assume that references to material culture are a valuable tool in this undertaking and that the Q people lived in a stratified agrarian society, as described by Lenski and others (Lenski 1966). Social stratification is, therefore, an appropriate framework to understand the meaning of that material culture and to identify the social location of the individuals and the groups of that society.

Finally, I assume that the family was the most important social institution in the world of the Q people, and that the different types of families existing then reflected the social stratification of that society. The references in Q to houses and to family relationships are significant because they provide indirect information about the social location of Q's audience.

Houses and Families in First-Century Galilee

Families in the world of the Q people were quite different from families in our world. In order to understand Q's references to houses and family life we need some information about the family in first-century Galilee. This information, provided by Early Roman domestic archaeology and by the social stratification of agrarian societies, helps to reconstruct the social context in which these references can be adequately understood. This combination of domestic archaeology and social models shows that in first-century Galilee there were four different types of family: large, multiple, nucleated and scattered. This plurality of family types is reflected in the types of houses they inhabited, in the composition of the basic family group, and in the relationships they established among them (Guijarro 1997: 57–61).

Large families consisted of the father, the mother, the unmarried children, probably one or more married sons with their own wives and children, and

other family members, plus the servants and the slaves. To this type belonged the family of the king and of the ruling class who lived in palaces. Large traditional families probably lived in simple houses of large proportions, whereas the most Hellenized and wealthy would live in the Roman style 'domus'. The solidarity among these families and their capacity to support each other was very significant. They occupied the upper echelon of the social pyramid, to which no more than 2 per cent of the population belonged.

Multiple (or joint) families consisted of two or more conjugal families that were related to each other (usually two or more brothers). This type of family lived in courtyard houses. The relationship between the kinsmen living in the same house was strong in all respects, and their capacity for mutual support was also considerable. The families living in this type of house had moderate access to resources, such as families of retainers (tax collectors, soldiers, low clergy etc.) and those with access to wealth from fishing, commerce or intensive agriculture. The percentage of people that belonged to this type of family would not have exceeded 10 per cent of the total population.

The great majority of the inhabitants of Galilee were members of *nucleated families*. Nucleated families were nuclear collectivistic families that had been forced to loosen their ties with other relatives due to external factors, but who still retained some of those ties, especially with the closer relatives. The size of this type of family is a matter of discussion (Botha 1998: 48-49), but most comprised no more than six members. The houses in which they lived consisted, as a rule, of a small single room, both in urban and in rural areas. Mutual support to and from the relatives was limited, because nucleated families lived on the margin of subsistence. This type of family was the most frequent among the low classes, which in agrarian societies often reached 70 per cent of the total population.

To the preceding types of families we have to add another type: the family of those who, for different reasons, had descended the social scale down to the lowest level (the slaves, the sick, beggars, thieves, bandits, impoverished widows, orphans, the disinherited...). Most of them did not have a house or a family, and they could not count on support from any relatives. The political situation of Galilee in the first century (confiscations, debts, mortgage of land) suggests that this group of people was not less numerous than in other agrarian societies, where they made up from 15 to 20 per cent of the total population.

Houses and Families in the Q Document

In the Q Document there are about 20 references that provide information about family life. Most of them mention different types of houses or parts of houses (the door, the roof, the wall etc.), while others clearly reflect a type of family (a large banquet that implies a large dining-room; a landlord with many servants etc.).

A first classification of these references can be made by asking the following questions: Is there an explicit reference to a house or to a part of it? Is there an explicit reference to family relationships? Is it possible to identify the type of house/family mentioned? This enquiry permits their classification into three groups according to the type of house or family mentioned:

1. References to large families that live in palaces: Q 7.25; 11.17; or large houses: Q 7.1-10; 12.39, 42-46; 13.25; 14.16-23; 19.12-26.
2. References to joint families and to nucleated families that live in courtyard houses or simple houses: Q 6.47-49; 10.5-7; 11.33; 12.3; 15.8-9 (and also Q 12.53; 14.26; 16.18; 17.27).
3. References to the homeless way of life of Jesus and his first followers: Q 9.57-58, 59-60 (and also Q 10.7; 14.26; 12.53).

This classification can be refined by asking a second set of questions that focus on the perspective of the author and the audience: What is the relationship of the author and the addressees to the type of house or family mentioned? Are there signs of closeness or distance? For the purpose of this study, this second set of questions is more interesting, because it may reveal the point of view of the Q people towards a precise type of family.

When we ask these questions of the previous groups of references we find that there is a consistent relationship between the type of house or family mentioned and the perspective from which it is viewed. The Q people seem remote from the first and the third groups of references, while the second group of references shows signs of closeness to the type of house or family mentioned. This second group has most of the Q references with peculiar traits compared to their parallels in Mark and the *Gospel of Thomas*.

These observations suggest that the social location of the Q people is reflected in the group of sayings that refer to joint or nucleated families, but before reaching this conclusion, we must explore these references in

closer detail. This exploration will proceed in two steps. In the first I will consider groups 1 and 3, which reveal distance on the part of the composers and addressees of Q. And in the second I will concentrate on the references in group 2 that show familiarity with the houses or families mentioned.

Houses and Families that Are Observed from a Distant Point of View

There are two groups of references that show a distant point of view towards the houses or families mentioned. In the first one it is a matter of social distance, while in the second a temporal distance can be perceived.

The first set of references mentions the houses and families of the upper class. One of them mentions the palaces where the ruling class—the Herodians—lived (Q 7.25: ‘those wearing finery are in king’s houses’), and another may allude to competing ruling families (Q 11.17: ‘every household divided against itself will not stand’; Oakman 1988). The rest refer to the house of a centurion (Q 7.1-10) or to the houses of important landlords. These houses are supposed to be large enough to give shelter to the family of the householder and to many servants (Q 12.42-46: ‘the faithful and wise slave whom the master put over his household’; 19.12-26: ‘a certain person, on taking a trip, called ten of his slaves’). They may have a big room to prepare a large dinner (Q 14.16-23: ‘A certain person prepared a large dinner... and he sent his slave’), and keep valuable properties that attract thieves (Q 12.39: ‘If the householder had known in which watch the robber was coming, he would not have let his house be dug into’).

It is important to observe that none of these references reveals familiarity with the inner parts of this type of house. They are viewed from the outside. Kings’ palaces seem to be the most distant, because no details of them are mentioned (Q 7.25; 11.17). Big mansions seem to be better known, but only in their outer parts: the roof of the centurion’s house as a metaphor for the whole house (Q 7.1-10); the house wall that can be dug into by thieves (Q 12.39); or the door locked by the householder, so that no one else can enter the house (Q 13.25).

The information about family structure in the references of this first group is also very limited. Relationships within the kinship group are not mentioned. By contrast, the servants and the master–servant relationship are prominent in most of these references (Q 12.42-46; 14.16-23; 19.12-26). This fact reveals a particular perspective because the relationship between masters and servants was of little concern and the slave areas of the house were almost invisible for high-status families. These details were

the most visible for low-status people because domestic slaves served very often as mediators in the interaction between them and the elite families (Osiek and Balch 1997: 29-30; 76-78).

We may conclude that the Q group looked at the families of the higher social strata from a distant perspective. They had no precise knowledge of their houses. They were not familiar with the relationships inside the core kinship group. In these references we perceive a social distance, which is also reflected in the literary genre used when referring to this type of family. Most of these references, in fact, are found in comparisons and parables, not in admonitions directed to the audience. It follows that the Q people did not live in those houses and that their families did not belong to the upper echelon of their society.

The second set of references reflects the homeless way of life of Jesus and his disciples; it comprises two 'chreiai' and three sayings. In the 'chreiai' Jesus invites those who want to follow him to lead a homeless and family-detached way of life (Q 9.57-58: 'the son of humanity does not have anywhere he can lay his head'; Q 9.59-60: 'leave the dead to bury their own dead'). The sayings reflect the conflict with the family provoked by Jesus' call (Q 12.53: 'I have come to divide son against father, and daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; 14.26: 'The one who does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple, and the one who does not hate son and daughter cannot be my disciple') and the homeless way of life of those sent by him (Q 10.5-7: 'at that house remain, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the worker is worthy of one's reward').

Although these traditions may come from the historical Jesus (Guijarro 2001), all of them were included in Q with some adaptations that reflect the new circumstances of the addressees of this document (Guijarro 1998: 346-57). In the life of the group behind Q the house and the family played an important role and provided the most important metaphors for the rhetoric of this document (Richardson 2000: 78). This means that the Q people looked to this homeless way of life as part of their past history. It was important for them to keep the memory of the beginnings of their movement, but they were living in a new situation.

Houses and Families that Are Observed from a Close Point of View

The sayings that mention joint or nucleated families show a higher degree of familiarity and understanding. It seems appropriate to study the

references to both types of families at the same time because of this common trait and also because in some cases it is not easy to say whether they refer to one type of house and family or to another.

Some sayings presuppose the single-room house characteristic of nucleated families. The comparison of the house built on bedrock and the house built on the sand (Q 6.47-49: 'the rain poured down and the flash-floods came, and the winds blew and battered that house, and promptly it collapsed') reflects knowledge of peasant houses that were often built with sun-dried bricks on poor foundations (Canaan 1933: 33-39).

Another reference to a single-room house can be found in the saying about the lamp that should be put on the lamp stand (Q 11.33). The Q version, which differs from that of Mark (4.21) and also from that of the *Gospel of Thomas* (33.2-3), presupposes that one little lamp can light everyone in the house, and this may imply that the house has only one room.

The parable of the lost coin (Q 15.8-9) is also located in a non-elite house. In order to find the coin the woman lights a lamp and sweeps the house. This implies that the floor of that house was made out of beaten earth. This flooring technique was the most common in Palestinian non-elite houses, while plastered floors or mosaic paved floors were characteristic of the more elaborate houses of the elite (Hirschfeld 1995: 270-72).

Some other references within this category seem to have in mind a courtyard house. This was the most traditional type of house in the ancient Near East (Hirschfeld 1995: 57-85) and also the best represented in the sayings of Q that reveal a close perspective. As a matter of fact, the saying on the lamp and the parable of the lost coin just mentioned may also make sense when located in a courtyard house. This type of house consisted of two or more rooms around a common courtyard, and could house a joint family, a group of conjugal families belonging to the same kinship group. A lamp could light a room of the courtyard house where one of these conjugal families lived. In the same way, the reaction of the woman calling friends and neighbours fits well with the kind of activities that took place in the courtyard of the house.

A courtyard house may also be implied in the saying about proclaiming on the housetops (Q 12.3). The scenario presupposed in this saying is that of a series of houses connected across their roofs. It is important to notice that it does not say 'from the housetops' but 'on (*epi*) the housetops'. The most common type of roof in first-century Galilee was a flat ceiling composed of wooden beams set into the tops of walls. This wooden structure was covered with reed mats and plastered to avoid dampness (Hirschfeld

1995: 237-48). In terrace housing, the roof of a lower house could be used as part of the living space of the upper one (Richardson 2000: 69). The housetop was a part of the living space of the house and was considered an extension of the courtyard (y. 'Erub. 9.25c; m. 'Erub. 10.3) where different activities could be performed (Acts 10.9).

Two references to family relationships are better understood in the context of a courtyard house where different generations of the same kin group lived together. In Q 12.53 we hear about a family of five adult members with a married son and an unmarried daughter living in close relationship to their parents, most probably in the same house. In Q 14.26 we know about a family in which three generations lived together. As we shall see later, the Q version of these sayings talks about an extended kin group that is absent in their parallels.

A last reference to a courtyard house can be discerned in the missionary instructions concerning the house (Q 10.5-7). In them, the missionaries are invited to remain in the house that receives their message of peace 'eating and drinking whatever they provide' and to stay in the same house instead of moving from house to house (Robinson 1999: 192-94). This instruction implies that the houses to which the missionaries were sent had the capacity of providing shelter and food during some days for at least two more people. This picture fits well with the type of family that used to live in courtyard houses, for they have a moderate access to resources and can rely on the support of the kinship group.

This quick survey of the references to non-elite houses and families in Q leads to the conclusion that, although some of them may talk about a single-room house, the courtyard house with a joint family is the most plausible scenario for the majority of them.

A second trait shared by these references is their familiarity with the type of houses and families mentioned. This familiarity can be noticed in the precise knowledge of the house or family relationship, in the point of view shared by the author and addressees, and also in their literary form.

First, these sayings reveal a precise knowledge of concrete features of this type of house. They talk about different kinds of foundations (Q 6.47-49: 'a man who built his house on bedrock... a man who built his house on the sand'). They know the importance of housetops and the kind of activities that were carried out on them (Q 12.3: 'what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the housetops'). We also find a precise knowledge of the house furniture, such as the lamp stand (Q 11.33), and of the kind of floor that made it necessary to sweep the house in order to find a lost coin (Q 15.8-

9). These sayings also reveal a precise knowledge of the family relationships, such as the conflicts between different generations (father–son), between brothers and sisters, and between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (Q 12.53), to which their knowledge about marriage and divorce regulations may be added (Q 17.27: ‘marrying and giving in marriage’; 16.18: ‘Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another...’).

These references not only show a detailed knowledge of the houses and family relationships, they view them from the perspective of an insider. This perspective is revealed in their knowledge of the inner parts of the house: the earth floor, the lamp stand and the housetop, already mentioned. The sayings about family relationships also reveal knowledge of the internal conflicts that were common in the ancient Mediterranean family (Guijarro 1998: 149–51). Even the relationships with neighbours and friends (Q 12.3; 15.8–9) are viewed from the inside of the family.

Finally, it is interesting to note the literary form of these sayings. We find a comparison (Q 11.33) and a parable (Q 15.8–9), but also admonitions addressed to itinerants (Q 10.5–7) and to the audience (Q 12.3, 53; 14.26). We might remember that the sayings about the families of the elite that lived in big mansions or palaces appear mostly in parables or comparisons, and that we took this as a sign of distance on the part of the author and his audience. In contrast, the use of direct speech and the imperative tense reveals their close familiarity with non-elite houses and families. These precise details about domestic architecture and social relations, together with the rhetoric characteristic of these sayings, reveal that the Q people were very familiar with this type of housing and family.

This conclusion can be reinforced by a further observation about the peculiarities of some of these sayings that have parallels with sayings in the Gospel of Mark and/or in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Q’s version of the instructions to the missionaries (Q 10.5–7) has more precise and detailed references to the house than Mark’s (Mk 6.10). Only in Q do we find the greeting to the house: ‘Peace to this house’. Only in Q is the householder called ‘Son of peace’ and the ‘workers’ instructed to ‘eat and drink whatever they provide’. Q reinforces the instruction to stay in the same house by stating: ‘do not move from house to house’ (Guijarro 2003: 76–80). All of these peculiar traits reveal the importance of the house, and of this precise type of house in the life of the Q people.

The saying about the lamp on the lamp stand (Q 11.33) has parallels in Mk 4.21 and *Gos. Thom.* 33.2–3. The precise observation of Q ‘and it gives light for everyone in the house’ is lacking in Mark, whereas *Gos. Thom.*

33.3 has 'so that everyone who comes in and goes out will see its light'. It seems that Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* have adapted the saying to their context and that Q presupposes a particular type of house, as we have already seen. Also, the two sayings on family relationships have parallels in the *Gospel of Thomas* (Q 12.53 // *Gos. Thom.* 16.3 and Q 14.26 // *Gos. Thom.* 55; 101). In both cases Q seems to have enlarged the composition of the family group. In the first case the *Gospel of Thomas* mentions only the father-son relationship, whereas in the second the relationship with son and daughter is not mentioned (Guijarro 2001: 214-16 and 219-20).

There is a consistency in some of these peculiar traits of Q that points to a growing importance of the joint family, the kind of family that might plausibly offer a social basis for the continuity of the Q people.

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis of the sayings of Q in which houses (or parts of houses) and family relationships are mentioned reveals some traits of the social location of the people behind this ancient document. Three conclusions could be relevant to previous research on Q and the early Jesus movement.

First, by the time of the redaction of Q, the house and the family had become the basic social structure of the groups of Jesus' disciples behind this document. On the one hand, the homeless way of life of Jesus and his first followers belongs to the group's past history. On the other, the use of domestic and familial metaphors is so pervasive in Q that it is difficult to imagine a different setting for the everyday life of its tradents. The peculiar traits of some sayings about houses (Q 10.5-7; 11.33) and family relationships (Q 12.53; 14.26) confirm this observation. This conclusion reinforces the criticisms of many scholars to the proposal of G. Theissen about the key role of the itinerant prophets in the early Jesus movement (Kloppenborg 1993: 12-18). The Q people were not a combination of itinerant radicals and sedentary communities, but a network of local groups formed as a result of the missionary activity of Jesus and his first Galilean disciples. As D. Zeller has shown, the redactional activity of Q reveals that the tradition of the itinerant prophets was adapted to the new situation of settled groups (Zeller 1982).

Secondly, the different points of view when mentioning different types of houses and family relationships show that the Q people did not belong to the upper echelon of that society. The houses and families of the elite

were viewed from the outside, and knowledge about them was scarce. In contrast, the knowledge of the houses and relationships of non-elite families is precise and accurate. It follows that the people behind Q should be located at this social level. This conclusion confirms some previous proposals about the social location of the Q people. Thus, for example, the location proposed by J. Kloppenborg among the scribal retainers (Kloppenborg 2000: 196-213) and the observations of R. Piper about the distrust of the Q people towards local courts (Piper 1996) fit well with the results of this analysis. It is helpful to observe that most of the houses mentioned in Q seem to be urban buildings and that there are no clear references in it to the farmhouse, the most characteristic rural type of house.

Finally, the Q people seem to live in traditional Palestinian houses. The so-called simple house of one or four rooms and the courtyard house are in fact the most traditional domestic buildings in the ancient Near East (Stager 1985: 17-18), whereas the big mansions, palaces and shops were introduced during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. This suggests that the Q people were not as Hellenized as some have thought. Their domestic setting makes it difficult, for example, to imagine them as a group of Hellenistic cynic philosophers. This setting and their familiarity with the Jewish practices of marriage and divorce (Q 16.18; 17.27) suggest that they should be imagined as a group of traditional Galilean Jews.

In recent research on the ritual practice reflected in the Q sayings concerning death and burial, Byron McCane has come independently to similar conclusions. According to him, the burial practices reflected in the Q sayings indicate 'that the Q groups were organized around ties of kinship', and therefore we should expect 'that housing arrangements in the Q communities were set up in units inhabited by groups of extended kin'. At the same time, their death ritual confirms that 'the dominant influence on the culture in which the Q people lived was the common Judaism of Early Roman Palestine', and therefore that they can be described as 'conservative Jews' (McCane 2003: 81-83).

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