*Ancient Rhetoric and the Synoptic Problem: Clarifying Markan Priority*, by Alex Damm. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 252. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2013. Pp. xxxviii + 396. Paperback. €85.00. ISBN 9789042926998.

Review by Daniel K. Christensen

In this published version of his dissertation under the supervision of John Kloppenborg, Alex Damm uses the conventions of ancient rhetoric to evaluate the plausibility of source critical theories regarding the Synoptic Problem. Damm's work opens up questions for discussion of why the Synoptic authors changed their source material the way they did (a question posed by scholars such as Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 169; Burridge, "The Gospels and Acts," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, ed. Porter, 512; Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem*, 30) and what are the more likely sources they used. In particular, Damm sets out to "demonstrate the rhetorically problematic nature of hypotheses of Markan conflation and the relative plausibility of hypotheses of Markan priority" (xv). This work will thus be useful for anyone studying the merits of source critical theories, but it will also benefit those who are interested in the process of rhetorical composition in early Christian texts more generally.

Damm goes about his task systematically. In Part I (3–170), "The Rhetorical Adaptation of Chreia," Damm evaluates the theoretical systems for rhetorical adaptation laid out in the rhetorical handbooks (Chap. 1, 3–80), heavily relying upon the handbooks of Theon (20–31) and Hermogenes (32–38). However, one should note that Damm's treatment of the rhetorical handbooks is somewhat derivative and he seems to engage more closely with Kennedy's translation of Aelius Theon than with the Greek text itself. Damm then corroborates the *progymnasmata* with examples of adaption from two ancient authors, Plutarch (Chap. 2, 81–110) and Josephus (Chap. 3, 111–166). Regarding Plutarch, Damm examines parallel χρεία between the ἀποφθέγματα (*apophthegms*) and the βίοι (*lives*) (e.g. *Reg. imp. apophth*. III: 181D (29); *Alex*. 47.5 [pp. 91–96]) using conventions of rhetorical arrangement (A.3 below). As for Josephus, Damm compares several of the speeches in the *Jewish Antiquities* with their corresponding sources from the LXX by looking at their rhetorical effectiveness and apologetic-theological interests (reason B below) (e.g. 1 Chr 22:7-16 [LXX]; *Ant*. 7.337–340 [pp. 145–155]).

From his survey of ancient rhetorical handbooks and direct engagement with Plutarch and Josephus, Damm formulates what he calls "a spectrum of rhetorical reasons for adapting chreia" (169). Reason A is "to draw chreia into closer conformity with rhetorical principles" (168); this includes four subheadings: (A.1) to intensifying proofs for biographical, apologetic, or theological reasons; (A.2) to reformulate the source in accordance with stasis theory; (A.3) to conform the source to a rhetorical arrangement theory, viz., introduction, statement of facts, proposition, proofs, conclusion (cf. Aristotle, *Rhet*. 3.13.1 – 5; [Cicero], *Rhet. Ad Her.* 3.9.16 – 17), (A.4) "to rearrange the proofs more effectively" (169). Reason B is "to address biographical, historical and theological interests" (169). Reason C is "to draw a chreia into closer accord with the fundamental rhetorical principle of clarity (σαφήνεια/*perspecuitas*)" (169). Reason D is "to draw a chreia into closer accord with the fundamental rhetorical principle of propriety (τὸ πρέπον/*aptum*)" (169); this includes two subheadings: (D.1) making changes appropriate to the part of speech, e.g., incorporating ἦθος into the introduction; (D.2) using material to support the *propositio*.

Damm goes on in Part II (173–280), "Applications of Rhetoric to the Synoptic Problem," to use these reasons for adaptation to evaluate three major source critical theories on the Synoptic Gospels' literary relationship, viz., the Neo-Griesbach Hypothesis (2GH), the Farrer Hypothesis (FH), and the Two-Document Hypothesis (2DH). Here Damm looks at two pericopae: The Question on Fasting (Mt 9:14–17; Mk 2:18–22; Lk 5:33–39 [Chap. 4, 173–220]) and the Beelzebul Controversy (Mt 12:22–37; Mk 3:20–35; Lk 11:14–36 [Chap. 5, 221–280]). In his analysis of the pericopae Damm is also systematic. He begins by describing the pericopae as they appear in each Synoptic Gospel, as well as in the document Q, and then draws conclusions on the purpose and meaning of the episode in its different Gospel contexts. Damm then evaluates the plausibility of each Synoptic source theory on the merits of his spectrum of adaptation.

Damm reaches two conclusions at the end of his monograph, one which corresponds to his thesis statement, and one which is auxiliary but was begged throughout his assessment (xv, cf. 281). Regarding the former, Damm states that the evidence examined between the two pericopae "renders hypotheses of Markan priority more rhetorically plausible than hypotheses of Matthean priority" (281). As for the latter, Damm concludes that the examination of these χρεία "has not indicated whether Luke more plausibly adapts Matthew (the 2GH and FH) or the sayings gospel Q (the 2DH)" (281).

Damm's methodology, that one can use rhetorical criticism to make source critical evaluations of the Synoptics texts by tracing the development of stylistic virtues (ἀρεταί), especially through clarity (σαφήνεια/*perspecuitas*), propriety (τὸ πρέπον/*aptum*), and overall improvement through ἐξεργασία (55–58; Theon, *Progymnasmata* (ed. Spengel 2.62–64; Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 6–8), is dependent on his definition of rhetoric. In defining rhetoric, Damm heavily relies on Quintilian's definition, "the science of speaking well (*bene dicendi Scientia*)" (xvi, 5; Quintilian, *Inst*. 2.15.38 [Damm incorrectly cites 1.Pr.9 on page xvi, and 2.15.38 is not listed in the index]). Damm provides very little resistance to this definition. In fact, he only cites Aristotle's definition of rhetoric once, in a footnote (5; Aristotle, *Rhet*. 1.2.2). By doing so, Damm does not sufficiently engage with how various definitions provide different emphases for rhetorical composition; as Kennedy points out, Aristotle's definition emphasizes proof, while Quintilian's emphasis is "on a variety of rhetorical features which does not neglect proof, but gives increase attention to style" (Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 13). It is by using Quintilian's definition that Damm is able to justify the use of rhetoric as a means for source critical judgements. Aristotle's definition, on the other hand, makes Damm's methodology more tenuous. If one sees rhetoric as "the power to discover the possible means of persuasion about each subject" (ἔστω δὴ ἡ ῥητορικὴ δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρῆσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν [Aristotle, *Rhet*. 1.2.1]), then a comparison between texts like the Synoptic Gospels cannot postulate "improvements" among the texts *per se*, but is more suited to describe how each Gospel makes a meaningful argument/story based on the concerns each audience had on hand. Comparative rhetoric thus does not have to imply source criticism. This is an avenue that I hope Damm's study might open for further exploration, viz., how rhetoric might also aid the scholarly understanding of each Gospel's *Sitz im Leben*.

The use of ancient rhetoric to determine the plausibility of source critical theories and the originality of forms, such as χρεία, has been met with criticism before. In this regard, Damm is engaged with providing a response to E. P. Sanders' and Margaret Davies' assessment of form critics (e.g. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* [1961]) who sought to determine the original version of a sayings tradition, they write "the synoptics conform to no model which will tell us *how much* the material changed, nor *what directions* the changes took" (*Studying the Synoptic*

*Gospels*, 131). Damm's response, to me at least, seems to side-step the issue (59–60). While Damm makes the assertion that "several rhetorical principles are basic enough to composition that we can expect their application to be valid much of the time," (60) the statement as Damm formulates it makes his previous description of rhetorical conventions as "standards against which to measure more plausible kinds of literary dependence" to be more like shifting guidelines rather than a stable set of principles (xxxv). In a similar way, he also avoids a substantive definition of what constitutes a principle for change when pointing out that rhetorical techniques were meant for original compositions and not necessarily for rules governing adaptation and change (38).

Damm should be applauded for his systematic attention to detail when examining Synoptic pericopae. For example, his description of the chiasmus in Mark 3:20–35 (pp. 222–225) was particularly helpful for my reading of the text and subsequent study into Matthew's and Luke's changes. I found the discussion of Matthew 12:24–32 drawing Mark 3: 22b–30 into closer conformity with *stasis* theory especially enlightening as it neatly highlights and justifies Matthew's arrangement of *ethos, pathos,* and *logos* in the pericope (248–252). Additionally, although Damm favors the 2DH, which is subtly revealed at one point in a quip on page 265, "There is, to be sure, something odd in the fact that Luke must retain Matthew's parts and sequence of speech while systematically changing their contents; but it is possible," his commitment to his methodology brings him to a relatively balanced defense of his thesis without dismissing the FH (281–282).

Still, one cannot help but feel that this study is geared toward a more robust confrontation between the 2DH and FH in the future, one which favors the 2DH. Damm moves toward the supposition that there is a best practice for rhetorical composition through use of "plausibility" language (xxxv, 8, 60, 281), language that is championed by his supervisor in defense of the 2DH (Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 43). Such a claim would greatly benefit the 2DH and scholars who make the supposition that, for example, the Matthean Sermon on the Mount is the more plausible form of a particular set of Jesus' sayings in comparison with Luke (e.g. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study*, 87; cf. Goodacre, *Case Against Q*, 81–104). Additionally, Damm makes little effort to establish the existence of the Q document before subjecting it to his rhetorical analysis of change on the part of Matthew and Luke. (There is some discussion in note 51 on page 230.) There is thus an underlying assumption throughout the book that Q is a stable document and can be compared against Matthew and Luke. However, Q is not stable, it is constructed (Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 87; Goodacre, *Case Against Q*, 15). Damm even says so himself when concluding that Luke does not "weaken Q's treatment of stasis or arrangement or proofs" in the Beelzebul Controversy (279); he writes, "This conclusion might sound disingenuous given that Q exists in Luke by definition, but it remains to Luke's credit from the perspective of the 2DH that he incorporates all of Q" (279). Granted, Damm's procedure is to evaluate source critical theories and not prove the existence of Q, but without substantial discussion on the nature of Q as a hypothetical document Damm's assessment here must remain disingenuous. How can one compare the "improvement" of Q when that document itself was constructed from the texts that supposedly used it? Such a comparison does not demonstrate Luke's or Matthew's use of an ancient sayings source, rather it is a self-congratulatory statement that modern scholars have "reconstructed" Q properly to fit the texts.

In all, Damm presents a study that is meticulously organized and insightful for source critics and New Testament scholars at large. He carefully triangulates the application of rhetorical theory on the Synoptic Problem by engaging with rhetorical handbooks, non-Christian

sources, and the Christian sources under examination. The rhetorical principles he discusses may not be able to offer a maximal solution to the Synoptic Problem (281) but they are nonetheless useful for further study as they open up questions about the evangelist's motivations for writing and the means by which they instructed their audiences.