

**The spirit is...rejoicing? but the flesh is weak:  
Exploring an unusual translation of Matthew 26.41  
in al-Biqā'ī's *tafsīr***

[¿El espíritu es...júbilo? pero la carne es débil: explorando una traducción inusual de Mateo 26,41 en el *tafsīr* de al-Biqā'ī]

**Roy MICHAEL MCCOY III**  
University of Oxford  
roy.mccoyiii@theology.ox.ac.uk

**Resumen:** El siguiente artículo se centra en la expresión árabe *mustabshira* contenida en Mateo (Mt) 26,41b, una lectura única entre la versión árabe de los Evangelios transmitida por al-Biqā'ī en su *tafsīr*. Con el fin de relacionar la versión árabe *mustabshira* ('regocijarse' o 'dar la buena nueva') con 'complaciente' (Gr. πρόθυμον) *ad* Mt 26,41, varios manuscritos de las versiones griega, árabe, copta, latina y siríaca del Evangelio de Mateo serán consultadas.

**Abstract:** The following paper will focus on the Arabic phrase *mustabshira* found in Matthew (Mt) 26.41b, a reading which is unique to the Arabic version of the Gospels transmitted by al-Biqā'ī in his *tafsīr*. In order to reconcile the Arabic rendering *mustabshira* ('to rejoice' or 'bring glad tidings') with 'willing' (Gr. πρόθυμον) *ad* Mt 26.41, several manuscripts for the Greek, Arabic, Coptic, Latin and Syriac versions of Matthew's Gospel will be consulted.

**Palabras clave:** Evangelio. al-Biqā'ī. *Tafsīr*. *Mustabshira*.

**Keywords:** Gospel. al-Biqā'ī. *Tafsīr*. *Mustabshira*.



### Introduction

The issue that will be addressed in the following paper concerns the Arabic translation of Mt 26.41: ‘Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing (*prothumos*), but the flesh is weak’; the Arabic term used for the Greek *prothumos* (‘willing’ or ‘ready’) appears as *mustabshira* (‘rejoicing’ or ‘bringing glad tidings’) in the Arabic version of the Gospels quoted in the fifteenth-century Muslim exegete Abū l-Ḥasan al-Biqā’ī’s (d. 885/1480) *tafsīr, Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa’l-suwar* (The String of Pearls: On the Interrelatedness of the verses and chapters).<sup>1</sup> The meaning of *mustabshira* bears no semantic resemblance whatsoever to the Greek *prothumos*, nor does it make immediate sense in the context of Mt 26.41. How this particular Arabic term became infused into the manuscript tradition of Mt 26.41 will be the focus of the following paper. There will be little to say, however, about al-Biqā’ī himself; it is the text he transmits through direct quotation in his Qur’ān commentary that concerns us here.

### Sources

There are four possible origins for this particular Arabic text: Greek, Latin, Coptic or Syriac could be impacting the translation. Fifteen Gospel MSS were examined in person: thirteen at Oxford, Bodleian Library and two at Cambridge, University Library; this includes two Diatessarons: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 13, a

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<sup>1</sup> Abū l-Ḥasan al-Biqā’ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa’l-suwar*, 22 vols (Hydarābād: Dār al-Ma’ārif al-’Uthmāniyah, 1969-1984).

bilingual, Latin-Old German text and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodl. Ar. e.163, otherwise known as the *O* recension; and two Coptic Gospel manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS Marsh. Or. 6 and Huntington 20; two Arabic Gospels held at the Université de Strasbourg were utilized: MSS 4.299 and 4.315; and two digitised versions were consulted: Vatican MS Ar. 13 from the *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana* and one bilingual, Greek-Latin manuscript from Cambridge, University Library, MS Nn.2.41 (*Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis*). Between all four languages and the Diatessaron tradition, ten published editions were consulted as well.

Of these twenty-nine versions of the Gospels, fourteen manuscripts contain continuous Arabic text;<sup>2</sup> all of the ones that include *mustabshira* range in date from the mid-thirteenth to the sixteenth century. These include Cambridge, University Library MSS Gg. 5.33 and 5.27; Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS. Seld., 3202 A.69 and Or. 265; two more witnesses for *mustabshira* include one Arabic Gospel lectionary, Strasbourg MS 4.299 and one Arabic *Catena* on the Gospel of Matthew, Strasbourg MS 4.315. As for the published editions, the list includes two Arabic versions, both of which contain the reading *mustabshira*: Paul de Lagarde's *Die Vier*

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<sup>2</sup> A *continuous* Arabic text is one of the six different forms that Arabic manuscripts of the Gospels appear in; see Hikmat Kachouh, "The Arabic Versions of the Gospels: A Case Study of John 1.1 and 1.18" in David Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 9-36. In addition to a *continuous* Arabic text, three more forms appear in the following study: (1) the Diatessaron, (2) lectionaries and (3) Gospel texts mixed with commentaries and 'sometimes separated by *قال مفسر* or the name of the Church Father from whom the explanation was taken' (Kachouh, 'Arabic Versions of the Gospels: A Case Study', pp. 9-10).

*Evangelien Arabisch*<sup>3</sup> and Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*<sup>4</sup> (hereafter, London Polyglot).<sup>5</sup> Pusey and Gwilliam's Syriac version, as well as Kiraz's comparative Syriac edition<sup>6</sup> were used, as was one Coptic version of the Gospels<sup>7</sup> and Ciasca's Arabic-Latin edition of the Diatessaron.<sup>8</sup> A list of the Arabic MSS examined herein will be

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<sup>3</sup> Paul de Lagarde, *Die Vier Evangelien Arabisch aus der Wiener Handschrift Herausgegeben* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1864).

<sup>4</sup> Brian Walton (ed.), *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta, Bibliorum Sacrorum tomus quintus: Sive Novum d.n. Jesu Christi Testamentum*, 6 vols (London: Thomas Roycroft, 1657). The *London Polyglot* consists of an Arabic version of the New Testament which originally appeared in vol. 5 of the *Biblia Parisiensis* (hereafter, Paris Polyglot) published in two parts, 1630 and 1633 (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977], p. 266). In *The Considerator Considered: A Brief view of Certain Considerations Upon the Biblia Polyglotta, the Prolegomena and Appendix Thereof* (London: Thomas Roycroft, 1659), Walton notes that the Arabic versions available at the time of the London Polyglot's composition were three in number: (1) one at the hand of the Bishop of Seville in Spain ca. 700, (2) the *Alexandrian* or *Ægyptian Vulgate*, which was published in the *Paris Polyglot* and (3) the *Antiochian*, which was used in that patriarchate (174).

<sup>5</sup> In the prolegomena to the London Polyglot, Erpenius's *Evangelia cum reliquis libris N. Test. Arabice edidit Tho, Erpenius Leidæ, an. 1616 in quarto* is identified as the edition used therein (1:97); according to Kachouh, Erpenius's version appears to be dependent on MSS BnF Arabe 54 and 56 (*Diss.*, p. 281).

<sup>6</sup> Phillip E. Pusey and George H. Gwilliam (ed.), *Tetraevangelium Sanctum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901); George A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshitta and Harklean Versions*, vols. 1-2 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> The Coptic MSS (all Bohairic) are checked against G. Horner's *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect Otherwise called Memphitic and Bohairic: with introduction, critical apparatus, and literal English translation*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898).

<sup>8</sup> P. Augustinus Ciasca, *Tatiani Evangeliorum Harmoniæ Arabice* (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1888).

provided, including dates, with a transcription of the Arabic MS text, as well as a translation. A transcription of the Coptic and Latin MSS, and the published editions of the Greek, Latin, Coptic and Syriac will be given when each language is addressed.

### Previous Scholarship

Following a line of work on the Arabic Gospel manuscript tradition initiated by Hikmat Kachouh, the present study adopts the designations he supplies for the various manuscript families.<sup>9</sup> Given the similarity in research here, the structure, or pattern of the following paper also resembles Kachouh's work.<sup>10</sup> Saleh and Casey's contribution to al-Biqā'ī's use of the Gospels, which is a thirty page article published in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: historical, text-critical and literary aspects*,<sup>11</sup> should also be noted; the value of this article lies in its twenty-six page appendix. Saleh and Casey provide a table listing all of the locations for Gospel quotations in al-Biqā'ī's *tafsīr*. In this table, notations are made for a given text and attention is drawn to the use of *mustabshira* in what is observed as

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<sup>9</sup> Hikmat Kachouh, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels: the Manuscripts and Their Families* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012). Both the published version and Kachouh's dissertation (*The Arabic Versions of the Gospels and Their Families* [2 vols, Ph.D. Thesis; Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2008]) are used in this paper and will be cited accordingly (*Diss.* for his thesis).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, pp. 9-36.

<sup>11</sup> Walid Saleh and Kevin Casey, "An Islamic Diatessaron: Al-Biqā'ī's Harmony of the Four Gospels", in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: historical, text-critical and literary aspects*, Sarah Binay and Stefan Leder (eds), (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2012), pp. 85-115.

the Markan text; the authors simply state that they are not sure what to make of the term.

Al-Biqāī, however, should be credited as the one who first observes the distinction in the Arabic text of Mt 26.41 and the parallel account in Mk 14.38.<sup>12</sup> He begins by quoting what he believes to be the Markan text: *ammā'l-rūḥ fa-mustabshira* ('for the spirit is rejoicing'), stops after *mustabshira*, interjects *qāla Marqus: musta'idda* ('Mark says: willing') — *musta'idda* appears to be the standard Arabic rendering for (Gr.) *prothumos*, as will be shown below — and then continues quoting the verse with *wa-ammā'l-jasad fa-ḍa'īf* ('but the flesh is weak'); no other comments are made about the text. Al-Biqāī makes these kind of linguistic observations at various moments when quoting the Gospels, sometimes adding parenthetical statements, most times not. It seems clear, however, that the difference between the Arabic terms *mustabshira* and *musta'idda* had not escaped his attention. Now the transcription from the Arabic Gospel MSS will be provided in order to show the distinction in the Arabic translation of both the Matthean and Markan texts.

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<sup>12</sup> Al-Biqāī, *Nazm al-durar*, vol. 5, p. 488.

**The AGM Tradition and Their Families: Mt 26.41 and Mk 14.38***Family H*<sup>13</sup>

<i>Ms. number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Vatican Arab.13	c. 9th	انتبهوا فصلوا ليلا تدخلوا في التجارب اما الروح منكم فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف f.53r	Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation; for the spirit from you is willing, but the flesh is weak.
		فانتبهوا فصلوا الا تدخلوا التجارب لان الروح مستعد متاهب ولكن لجسد ضعيف f.72r	Watch and pray you do not enter temptation because the spirit is willing and ready, but the flesh is weak.

*Family J*<sup>14</sup>

<i>Ms. Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Bodley Marsh 575	c. 1256	اسهروا وصلوا لئلا تدخلوا في محنة اما الروح فنشيطة واما الجسد فضعيف f.61r	Watch and pray so that you do not enter into affliction; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
		استفيضوا وابتهلوا ليلا f.101r	Hasten and pray ear-

<sup>13</sup> 'Family H' is of Syriac *Vorlage* (Kachouh, *Diss.*, p. 146).

<sup>14</sup> 'Family J' is of Syriac *Vorlage*, but later checked against the Greek (Kachouh, *Diss.*, pp. 212-213).

تدخلوا الي التجارب اما الروح  
فنشيط واما الجسد فضعيف

nestly (to God) so  
that you do not enter  
into temptation; for  
the spirit is willing  
but the flesh is weak.

*Family K*<sup>15</sup>

<i>Ms. Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Huntington 17	c. 1173	f.106v اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب الروح مستعد والجسد ضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
		f.185r-v اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فنشيطة والجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
Huntington 366	c. 13th	f.57v اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فنشيط والجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
		f.91v اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستعد والجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

<sup>15</sup> 'Family K' is of mixed *Vorlagen*, consisting of Syriac and Greek, but possibly checked against the Coptic (Kachouh, *Diss.*, p. 214).



Cambridge Gg. 5.33	c. 1272	f.45v اسهروا و صلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستبشر واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.
		f.78v-79r اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستع واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
Cambridge Gg. 5.27	c. 1285	f.24v اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجربة اما الروح فمستبشرة واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.
		f.42r اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجربة اما الروح فمستعدة واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
Bodley Seld., 3202 A. 69	c. 1326	f.61v اسهروا وصلوا التلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستبشرة والجسد ضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.
		f.103r اسهروا وصلوا التلا تدخلوا في التجارب اما الروح فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Bodley Or. 265 <sup>16</sup>	c. 1348	اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستبشر والجسد ضعيف f.47v	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.
Bodley Or. 447	c. 14th/15th	اسهروا و صلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح نشيط والجس ضعيف f.67r	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
		اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلو التجاربة اما الروح فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف f.117v	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.
London Polyglot	c. 1657	اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستبشر واما الجسد فضعيف v.5.139 اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف v.5.231	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak. Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
Lagarde's Edition (Wien MS N.F. 97) <sup>17</sup>	c. 1864 (c. 4th)	اسهروا وصلوا ليلا تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح p.37	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the

<sup>16</sup> Mark ends *ad* 11.22 in MS Bodl. Or. 265.

فمستبشر والجسد ضعيف spirit is rejoicing, but  
the flesh is weak.

اسهروا وصلوا ليلا p.62 Watch and pray so  
تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح that you do not enter  
فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف temptation; for the  
spirit is willing, but  
the flesh is weak.

### Family L<sup>18</sup>

<i>Ms. Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Huntington 118	c. 1259/60	فاستيقظوا وصلوا لكيلا f.84r تدخلوا التجارب فاما الروح فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف	Be attentive and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
		فاسهرو f.142v-143r وصلوليا تدخلوا التجربة اما الروح فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

### Strasbourg MSS

<i>Ms. Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</i>	<i>Translation</i>
4.299	c. 1050 (ed. 17th)	اسهروا وصلوا ليلا f.182v تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستبشر واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not temptation; for the spirit is enter

<sup>17</sup> According to Kachouh, de Lagarde's edition is a transcription of MS Wien A.F. 97 (*Diss.*, p. 23).

<sup>18</sup> 'Family L', otherwise known as Ibn al-'Assāl's version, is of Coptic *Vorlage* with notations from Greek and Syriac *Vorlagen* (Kachouh, *Diss.*, p. 306).

			rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.
		اسهروا وصلوا ليلا f.150r تدخلوا في التجارب اما الروح فمستعد واما الجسد فضعيف	Watch and pray to that you do not enter into temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
4.315	c. 16th	اسهروا وصلوا ليلا f.336v تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستبشر (Mt only) والجسد ضعيف	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.
<i>Diatessaron</i>			
<i>Ms. Number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Arabic Text</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Bodley Arab., e. 163	c. 1806	اسهروا وصلوا حتى لا تدخلوا التجارب والروح مؤثرة ومستعد لكن الجسد مريض	Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; the spirit is pathetic and willing, but the flesh is sick.

### The possible influences on the Arabic text of Mt 26.41

As previously mentioned, there are four possible origins for the Arabic term *mustabshira* in Matthew 26.41: the Greek, Latin, Coptic or Syriac language; the Greek original will be assessed first. Then the Diatessaron tradition will be examined, followed by the Latin, Coptic and Syriac texts.

## (1) A Greek Source

Matthew 26.41 (Nestlé-Aland)<sup>19</sup>

γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς  
πειρασμόν τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής.<sup>20</sup>

Mark 14.38 (Nestlé-Aland)

γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ ἔλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν  
τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής.<sup>21</sup>

Here both the Matthean and Markan texts are in agreement with the exception of the verb *eiselthēte* ‘to enter’, which appears as *elthēte* ‘to come/go’ in Mark, the root of both verbs being *erchomai* – *eis erchomai* in the case of Matthew’s text. The word in question, *prothumon* (‘willing’), remains unchanged and consistent throughout all of the Greek witnesses. The sense of *prothumon*, moreover, does not correspond to the meaning of the Arabic term

<sup>19</sup> B. and K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger (eds), *Novum Testamentum Græce* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelsesellschaft, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> No variants occur in the Matthean text for *prothumon* in the Greek ms. witnesses; see Reuben J. Swanson (ed.), *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus, Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 266.

<sup>21</sup> No variants occur in the Markan text for *prothumon* in the Greek ms. witnesses; see Reuben J. Swanson (ed.), *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus, Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 235.

*mustabshira* ('rejoicing' or 'bringing glad tidings') in any context.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the Greek original cannot be considered the origin of the Arabic term in Mt 26.41.

The Markan text, moreover, typically renders *prothumon* as *musta'idda* ('ready' or 'prepared' [to do something], i.e., 'willing'), a translation that appears to be more consistent with the sense of the Greek;<sup>23</sup> *nashīt* ('pleased', 'cheerful', 'happy', or 'willing' [to do something]) is also found in both Mt 26.41 and Mk 14.38 for *prothumon* in the selection of manuscripts cited for this study, and bears a similar linguistic relationship to the meaning of the Greek text as that of *musta'idda*.<sup>24</sup> One could consider *nashīt* to be a 'middle term' between the Arabic *musta'idda* and *mustabshira*, having a foot in both semantic fields. Here MS Huntington 118 is helpful to consult. The scribe notes in the margins around the main text of the ms. different translations for *prothumos*, including both the Coptic (*rōout*) and Arabic (*nashīt*). Unfortunately, *mustabshira* does not appear in the *marginalia* of MS Hunt. 118. Now it will be helpful to address the Diatessaron tradition on the text of Mt 26.41 / Mk 14.38 in order to orient the reader to the issues that have surrounded the translation of this parallel narrative from an early point in its transmission history.

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick W. Danker and F. Wilbur Gingrich (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 706.

<sup>23</sup> Out of the thirteen Arabic Gospel manuscripts examined, ten contain *musta'idda* in the Markan text.

<sup>24</sup> In MS Huntington 118 *ad* Mt 26.41, the scribe writes in the margins around the Arabic rendering *musta'idda* other terms used for the translation of that text: (Arab.) *nashīt*, (Copt.) *rōout* and (Gr.) *prothumos*; *mustabshira* is, unfortunately, found wanting in this case.

## (2) The Diatessaron Tradition

With respect to the parallel narrative of Mt 26.41 / Mk 14.38, the *Diatessaron* tradition provides some interesting anomalies to this text that demonstrate the general inconsistency when translating the material. The first thing to note in MS Bodl. Arab. e.163, one of the *Diatessaron* MSS, is the ascription of (Arab.) *yā Sham'ūn* (Gr. Σίμων) to Matthew under the *sigla* 'mīm', when it is only attested in the Markan text in the Greek ms. tradition. Ciasca's edition, however, places the text under Mark. This observation does not help to answer the question of *mustabshira*, but it does stand as an example of a discrepancy with the transmission of this narrative.

The second anomaly to note is the inclusion of a second attribute for (Gr.) *pneuma*, or 'spirit' in the Markan text. The Greek MS tradition only attests to *prothumon*,<sup>25</sup> but here in Arab. e.163 and Ciasca's edition, the spirit is both *mu'thira* ('moving' or 'ready') and *musta'idda* ('willing'); Ciasca's Latin edition mirrors the Arabic here with two attributes. This similarity can be observed between the *Peshittā*, Vatican Arab. 13 and the *Diatessaron* tradition *ad* Mk 14.38, while the Matthean text lacks any secondary attribution for the condition of the spirit. Once the Gospel text becomes admitted into the *Diatessaron* tradition, this kind of alteration in form and content is not uncommon between parallel accounts.<sup>26</sup> The reason for the

<sup>25</sup> Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Matthew*, 266; Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Mark*, p. 235.

<sup>26</sup> A clear example of this can be observed in 'Peter's denial' *ad* Mt 26.33-4 / Mk 14.29-30 / Lk 22.23, a parallel account in close proximity to the present text; see Charles Horton (ed.), *The Earliest Gospels: the Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Gospels - the Contribution of the Chester Beatty Gospel Codex P<sup>45</sup>* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 57-58; here Peter's statements are conflated between the

appearance of this second term for the spirit in Mark is not central to answering the question concerning the translation *mustabshira ad* Mt 26.41, but it does, however, show that there was some fluidity to the shape of the narrative in its *Diatessaronic* form. The Latin text of MS Junius 13, another *Diatessaron* witness, resembles the Greek text, only containing one attribute *promptus est* ('ready' or 'willing').<sup>27</sup> As we turn to the Latin sources, the *Diatessaron* reading of MS Junius 13 is in line with the general transmission of Mt 26.41/Mk 14.38 in the Latin Gospel tradition.

(3) A Latin Source<sup>28</sup>

Matthew 26.41 (Codex *a*)

vigilate et orate ut non intretis in temptationem spiritus quidem promptus est caro autem infirma.

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Synoptic accounts, creating a recension of the narrative that never existed in the Greek ms. witnesses.

<sup>27</sup> While MS Junius 13 is a late edition (c. 16th), the text is thought to belong to a much older text type, possibly contemporaneous with the ninth-century ms. *Codex Sangallensis*; for this argument, see William L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 93-95.

<sup>28</sup> Three Latin sources were used for this section: one bilingual, Greek-Latin ms., *Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (d)* (MS Nn.2.41 [digitised version]); and two published editions, *Codex Vercellensis (a)* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1914) and the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, 4th edn. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelsesellschaft, 1994). The published version of the *Codex Vercellensis* only contains the Gospels of Matthew and John.



Matthew 26.41 (Codex *d*)

vigilate et orate ut non intretis in temptatione spiritus quidem  
 pronptus caro autem infirmis (f.93r).

Mark 14.38 (Codex *d*)

vigilate et orate ne intretis in temptationem spiritus quidem  
 promptus caro autem infirma (f.320r).

Matthew 26.41 (*Vulgate*)

vigilate et orate ut non intretis in temptationem spiritus quidem  
 promptus est caro autem infirma.

Mark 14.38 (*Vulgate*)

vigilate et orate ut non intretis in temptationem spiritus quidem  
 promptus caro vero infirma.

Other than the altered spellings in Codex (*d*) (*pronptus* / *promptus*) all three versions translate *prothumos* with the participle *promptus(est)* ('ready'/'at hand'/'prepared'), from *promo* / *promere* / *prompsi* / *promptum*, in both the Matthean and Markan texts. The sense of the Latin lacks any semantic relationship to that of *mustabshira* and appears to follow the Greek literally. Therefore, it cannot be the origin for the Arabic rendering *ad* Mt 26.41.

(4) A Coptic Source<sup>29</sup>*Huntington 17*

## Matthew 26.41

ⲠⲔⲒϢ ⲠⲚ ⲟϤⲟⲗ ⲧⲔⲔⲃⲗ ⲗⲒⲚⲁ Ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉⲙⲓ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲚ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁϢⲙⲟϢ ⲡⲓⲡⲚⲁ ⲙⲉⲛ  
ⲉⲡⲣⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧ ⲛⲥⲁⲣⲗ ⲟϥⲗϥⲥⲟⲉⲛⲛⲥ ⲧⲉ (f.106v).

## Mark 14.38

ⲠⲔⲒϢ ⲠⲚ ⲟϤⲟⲗ ⲁⲣⲓⲡⲣⲟϥⲉϥⲗⲉϥⲥⲟⲉ ⲗⲒⲚⲁ Ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉⲙⲓ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲚ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁϢⲙⲟϢ  
ⲡⲓⲡⲚⲁ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲣⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧ ⲛⲥⲁⲣⲗ ⲁⲉⲟϥⲗϥⲥⲟⲉⲛⲛⲥ ⲧⲉ (f.185r-v).

*Bodl. Or. 6*

## Matthew 26.41

ⲠⲔⲒϢ ⲟϥⲚ ⲟϤⲟⲗ ⲧⲔⲔⲃⲗ ⲗⲒⲚⲁ Ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉⲙⲓ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲚ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁϢⲙⲟϢ ⲡⲓⲡⲚⲁ  
ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲣⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧ ⲛⲥⲁⲣⲗ ⲁⲉⲟϥⲗϥⲥⲟⲉⲛⲛⲥ ⲧⲉ (f.72v).

## Mark 14.38

ⲠⲔⲒϢ ⲟϥⲚ ⲟϤⲟⲗ ⲁⲣⲓⲡⲣⲟϥⲉϥⲗⲉϥⲥⲟⲉ ⲗⲒⲚⲁ Ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉⲙⲓ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲚ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁϢⲙⲟϢ  
ⲡⲓⲡⲚⲁ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲣⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧ ⲛⲥⲁⲣⲗ ⲁⲉⲟϥⲗϥⲥⲟⲉⲛⲛⲥ ⲧⲉ (f.123v).

*Huntington 20*

## Matthew 26.41

ⲠⲔⲒϢ ⲟϥⲚ ⲟϤⲟⲗ ⲧⲔⲔⲃⲗ ⲗⲒⲚⲁ Ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉⲙⲓ ⲉⲃⲟϥⲚ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁϢⲙⲟϢ ⲡⲓⲡⲚⲁ  
ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲣⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧ ⲛⲥⲁⲣⲗ ⲁⲉⲟϥⲗϥⲥⲟⲉⲛⲛⲥ ⲧⲉ (f.87v).

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<sup>29</sup> There are three Coptic (Bohairic) sources (MS Bodl. Or. 6 and MS Huntington 20), including the bilingual, Coptic-Arabic MS Huntington 17.

## Mark 14.38

ⲠⲠⲟⲓϥ ⲟⲩⲛ ⲟⲩⲟⲗ ⲁⲣⲓⲡⲣⲟϥⲉⲕⲁϥⲉⲟⲉ ϣⲓⲛⲁ ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉⲙⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲁϥⲙⲟϥ  
ⲛⲓⲡⲓⲛⲁ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲩⲣⲱⲟⲩⲧ ⲓⲥⲁⲣⲗ ⲁⲉⲟⲩⲃⲁϥⲉⲛⲛⲥ ⲧⲉ (f.148r).

The focus here with the Coptic text is on the word for (Gr.) *prothumos*, translated as (Copt.) *rōout* ('be glad, eager, ready', or 'glad, fresh, flourishing').<sup>30</sup> The use of the Coptic term *rōout* remains consistent between the Matthean and Markan texts in all three manuscripts. The bilingual, Coptic-Arabic manuscript, MS Huntington 17, uses the Arabic term *musta'idda* in Matthew and *nashīt* in Mark for the Coptic *rōout*. This points toward the synonymous use of both Arabic terms, though each one has a slightly nuanced meaning, the sense of *nashīt* ('pleased', 'cheerful', 'happy') being closer to that of *rōout*. As with *prothumos*, *musta'idda* lacks any sense of 'being glad'.

When calqueing the Greek *prothumos*, moreover, the term *rōout* appears most frequently in biblical contexts as 'ready' or 'willing', but there are two contexts in the New Testament epistles where the root of *rōout* (*ourot*) is used with the sense of 'cheerfulness'.<sup>31</sup> Given that both the Matthean and Markan texts contain *rōout* and Mark never has the reading *mustabshira*, it seems unlikely that Coptic

<sup>30</sup> W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 490; the form *rōout* comes from the root *ourot*.

<sup>31</sup> Both the Hebrew Bible (*Septuagint*, hereafter LXX) and the New Testament in Coptic employ *rōout* (*ourot*) regularly for (Gr.) *prothumos/n* (cf. 1 Chron. 28.21; 2 Chron. 29.31; Hab. 1.8; 1 Pet. 5.2); (Gr.) *prothumia* (cf. Acts 17.11; 2 Cor. 8.11, 19, 9.2); for the LXX, see Alfred Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006); for the Coptic New Testament, see instances of *rōout* as 'cheerfulness' in Romans 12.8 and James 5.13; the Greek, however, differs from *prothumos/n* (*hilarotēs* and *euthumei*, respectively).

alone is responsible for the Arabic rendering. The final language to examine will be the Syriac version of the Gospels; the *Peshittā* (P), Old Syriac (*Sinaiticus*) (S), Old Syriac (*Curetonian*) (C) and Harklean (H) were consulted.

(5) A Syriac Source<sup>32</sup>

Matthew 26.41

. ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	P
. ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	S
—	C
. ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ . ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ	H

*Translation:*

- P The spirit is prepared / ready, however, the body is infirm / sick.  
 S The spirit is willing, but the body is infirm /sick.  
 C —  
 H The spirit, on the one hand, is joyful / cheerful / glad / ready;  
 the flesh, on the other hand, is weak / infirm.

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<sup>32</sup> For the *Peshittā* version of Matthew and Mark, see Pusey and Gwilliam's *Tetraevangelium Sanctum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 172 and p. 294, respectively; for the Old Syriac version (*Sinaiticus*), see Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 410; Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Mark* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 218; for the Harklean version, see Joseph White, *Sarorum Evangeliorum: versio Syriaca Philoxeniana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1778), p. 139 and p. 244, respectively.

## Mark 14.38

. ܡܝܫܝܬܝܘܢܝܐ ܕܢܪܘܢܝܐ ܕܡܝܫܝܬܝܘܢܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ P  
 . ܡܝܫܝܬܝܘܢܝܐ ܕܢܪܘܢܝܐ ܕܡܝܫܝܬܝܘܢܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ S  
 — C  
 . ܡܝܫܝܬܝܘܢܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ . ܚܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ H

*Translation:*

- P The spirit is willing and prepared / ready, however, the body is infirm / sick.  
 S The spirit is willing, but the body is infirm / sick.  
 C —  
 H The spirit, on the one hand, is joyful / cheerful / glad / ready; the flesh, on the other hand, is weak / infirm.

The first thing to note is that there is no witness in the Old Syriac (*Curetonian*) for either the Matthean or Markan text; the folios containing both readings are missing from MS British Library Add. 14.451. The relevant terms in the *Peshittā* and Old Syriac (*Sinaiticus*) for Mt 26.41 are *mṭaybā* and *ṣabyā*, respectively; the *Ḥarklean* is *ḥwīḥā*. The Markan text contains the same terms with the exception of the *Peshittā*, which includes both *mṭaybā* and *ṣabyā*, a similarity already noted between the *Peshittā*, MS Vat. Arab. 13 and MS Bodl. Arab. e.163 (*Diatessaron*). The focus here, however, is the *Ḥarklean* text.<sup>33</sup>

The list of possible meanings for *ḥwīḥā* as ‘joyful’, ‘cheerful’, ‘glad’ and ‘ready’ resembles that of (Copt.) *rōout* and (Arab.) *nashīṭ*.

<sup>33</sup> For a recent, critical edition of the *Harklean* version of Mark, see Samar Soreshow Yohanna, *The Gospel of Mark in the Syriac Harklean Version: An Edition Based on the Earliest Witnesses* (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2015).

This is interesting because, according to Brock, the Ḥarklean version, or revision, is believed to be ‘a remarkable mirror translation, reflecting every detail of the Greek original’.<sup>34</sup> Given the regularity of both *mṭaybā* and *ṣabyā* in the other Syriac witnesses for Matthew and Mark, and their semantic resemblance to (Gr.) *prothumos*, the choice of *ḥwīḥā* appears odd in light of Brock’s statement. In the case of all three languages — the Coptic *rōout*, Arabic *nashīṭ* and Ḥarklean Syriac *ḥwīḥā*— the term that accounts for the least amount of meanings in the semantic range, that is, ‘ready’, has gained primary usage in the Matthean and Markan texts. This indicates that, although the choice of using *mustabshira* in Mt 26.41 has some significant linguistic support, the lack of witnesses for its attestation in Mk 14.38 as well points toward another interpretive influence.

### **An Arabic *Catena* on Matthew**

While the commentary tradition deserves its own study here, one particular MS reading may shed light on the choice of *mustabshira* as the translation *ad* Mt 26.41. The Strasbourg manuscript MS 4.315 contains a compilation of commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew, what is known as a *catena*. This particular text contains interpretations by Severus, Bishop of Antioch (d. 538), Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) and John Chrysostom (d. 407). The portion of this *catena* that concerns us here, which appears approximately four folios before the quotation in Mt 26.41, is the interpretation of Judas’s betrayal (*ad* ‘you have said it’ [*anta qulta*] Mt 26.25).

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<sup>34</sup> Sebastian Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), p. 19.

This quotation from Mt 26.25 is the last direct quotation before reaching the Gethsemane account, which begins at Mt 26.36, the immediate context of our verse. The discussion between these two texts, that is, Judas's betrayal and Gethsemane, centres on Judas and how to understand *anta qulta*; here the conversation shifts to *al-Shayṭān*, as well, and the role Satan plays in this account. The general context also includes, and here this is key, a discussion of 'one's sorrows being washed away' and 'rejoicing' (*yastabshirū*, lit. 'they may rejoice') at 'salvation or deliverance (*al-khalāṣ*) from the darkness (*ẓulamāt*)' and 'the bondage of Satan' (*'ubūdīya al-Shayṭān*).<sup>35</sup> This is the closest contextual link discovered between the use of *mustabshira* and its interpretation *ad* Mt 26.41 and thus provides one plausible explanation as to why the Matthean text, and not the Markan reading, retains *mustabshira* consistently in the MS tradition.

It is quite possible, however, that the MS tradition influenced the commentary rendering rather than the other way around. Here it is important to place the dating of MSS that witness *mustabshira* alongside the dating of the Arabic *catena* on Matthew's Gospel. The earliest manuscript witnesses to *mustabshira* addressed in this study are MS Camb. Gg. 5.33 (c. 1272) and MS Camb. Gg. 5.27 (c. 1285), and the dating of the *catena* appears to be the sixteenth century. The only possibility for influence from the commentary on the MS tradition is if Strasbourg MS 4.315 is a much later copy of an Arabic text that was circulated and disseminated prior to the thirteenth century.

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<sup>35</sup> Strasbourg MS 4.315, f.332v.

### General Conclusions

The results of this case study can be summed up in four comments:

(1) The scribe only knew the ‘secondary’ Coptic meaning for *rōout*, and translated accordingly.

(2) The scribe only knew the Ḥarklean reading (*ḥwīḥā*) *ad* Mt 26.41, and translated accordingly.

(3) The scribe knew both the secondary meaning of the Coptic and Ḥarklean rendering, and translated *mustabshira* based on that evidence, (a) not knowing the context or (b) knew the context and thought that the Coptic and Ḥarklean together made a stronger argument for using the Arabic for ‘happy’ ‘glad’ ‘joyful’; if one was not convinced, or did not have knowledge that ‘willingness’ or ‘ready’ was the correct reading from the Greek, translating Mt 26.41 as ‘the spirit is glad/rejoicing, but the flesh is weak’ is not incoherent in this context. If you factor in the use of the Arabic *nashīṭ* as well, the case becomes even stronger for a deliberate alteration of the text with the translation of *mustabshira*.

(4) The commentary tradition, namely the Arabic *Catena* (Strasbourg MS 4.315) provides grounds for understanding *mustabshira* in context, since one’s ‘spirit’ (anthropologically understood as is the case in the tradition) ‘rejoices’ at Satan’s defeat on the cross; *yastabshirū* (‘they may rejoice’) is used in this way when discussing deliverance from the bondage of *al-Shayṭān*. Rather than being a separate answer to the riddle, the appearance of *yastabshirū* in such close context to Mt 26.41 sheds light on the mutual influence between the manuscript and commentary traditions.

While this kind of question appears impossible to answer definitively, several plausible explanations for *mustabshira* in Mt



26.41 have been presented here. The most promising scenario is a translation based on the meanings of the Coptic *rōout* and Ḥarklean Syriac *ḥwīḥā*, a rendering that remained unchecked against the Greek. Bearing in mind both the linguistic background and the commentary tradition helps to bring us one step closer to understanding how the text of the Bible was transmitted across variegated religious and cultural contexts.