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. προθυμον) ad Mt 26.41, varios manuscritos de las versiones griega, árabe, copta, latina y siria 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. προθυμον) ad Mt 26.41, several manuscripts for the Greek, Arabic, Coptic, Latin and Syriac versions of Matthew’s Gospel will be consulted.


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-Biqāʿī’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). 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-Biqāʿī himself; it is the text he transmits through direct quotation in his Qurʾān 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

---

An unusual translation of Matthew 26.41

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 and one bilingual, Greek–Latin manuscript from Cambridge, University Library, MS Nn.2.41 (Codex Bezae Cantabriensis). 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; 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

---

2 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 Arabisch⁵ and Walton’s Biblia Sacra Polyglotta⁴ (hereafter, London Polyglot).⁵ Pusey and Gwilliam’s Syriac version, as well as Kiraz’s comparative Syriac edition⁶ were used, as was one Coptic version of the Gospels⁷ and Ciasca’s Arabic-Latin edition of the Diatessaron.⁸ A list of the Arabic MSS examined herein will be

---

⁶ 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 Egyptian Vulgate, which was published in the Paris Polyglot and (3) the Antiochian, which was used in that patriarchate (174).
⁷ In the prolegomena to the London Polyglot, Erpenius’s Evangelia cum reliquis libris N. Test. Arabice edidit Tho, Erpenius Leidae, 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).
An unusual translation of Matthew 26.41

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. Given the similarity in research here, the structure, or pattern of the following paper also resembles Kachouh’s work. Saleh and Casey’s contribution to al-Biqāʿī’s use of the Gospels, which is a thirty page article published in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: historical, text-critical and literary aspects*, 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-Biqāʿī’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

---


10 Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, pp. 9-36.

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

Al-Biqā‘ī, 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. He begins by quoting what he believes to be the Markan text: ammāʾ-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-ammāʾ-l-jasad fā-da‘īf (‘but the flesh is weak’); no other comments are made about the text. Al-Biqā‘ī 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.

---

The AGM Tradition and Their Families: Mt 26.41 and Mk 14.38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family H$^{13}$</th>
<th>Ms. number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vatican Arab.13</td>
<td>c. 9th</td>
<td>انتبهوا وصلوا ليلًا تدخلوا في التجربة اما الروح منكم مستعد واما الجسد ضعيف</td>
<td>Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation; for the spirit from you is willing, but the flesh is weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f.53r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f.72r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family J$^{14}$</th>
<th>Ms. Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bodley Marsh 575</td>
<td>c. 1256</td>
<td>استيفضوا واتبئوا ليلًا تدخلوا في محنة اما الروح فشحيطة واما الجسد ضعيف</td>
<td>Watch and pray so that you do not enter into affliction; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f.61r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f.101r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{13}$ 'Family H' is of Syriac Vorlage (Kachouh, Diss., p. 146).

$^{14}$ 'Family J' is of Syriac Vorlage, but later checked against the Greek (Kachouh, Diss., pp. 212-213).
family k

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Huntington | c. 1173  | تدخلوا إلى التجرباً، أما الروح فشيط واما الجسد فضعيف

Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

| Huntington | c. 13th  | تدخلوا إلى التجرباً، أما الروح فشيط واما الجسد فضعيف

Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

| Huntington | c. 13th  | تدخلوا إلى التجرباً، أما الروح فشيط واما الجسد فضعيف

Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, 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.

Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

15 ‘Family K’ is of mixed Vorlagen, consisting of Syriac and Greek, but possibly checked against the Coptic (Kachouh, Diss., p. 214).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge Gg. 5.33</td>
<td>c. 1272</td>
<td>Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge Gg. 5.27</td>
<td>c. 1285</td>
<td>Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodley Seld., 3202 A. 69</td>
<td>c. 1326</td>
<td>Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bodley Or. 265\textsuperscript{16} c. 1348 f.47v
تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستشر والجسد ضعيف
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 f.67r
تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستعد والجسد ضعيف
Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

London Polyglot c. 1657 v.5.139
تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح فمستعد والجسد ضعيف
Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.

Lagarde’s Edition (Wien MS N.F. 97)\textsuperscript{17} c. 1864 (c. 4th) p.37
تدخلوا التجارب اما الروح
Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the

\textsuperscript{16} Mark ends \textit{ad 11.22} in MS Bodl. Or. 265.
An unusual translation of Matthew 26.41

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.

Family L.\textsuperscript{18}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Arabic Text (Mt/Mk)</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huntington 118</td>
<td>c. 1259/60</td>
<td>فاستيقظوا وصلوا ليلًا</td>
<td>Be attentive and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strasbourg MSS 4.299</td>
<td>c. 1050 (ed. 17th)</td>
<td>الفاسهروا وصلو ليلاً</td>
<td>Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is enter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{17} According to Kachouh, de Lagarde’s edition is a transcription of MS Wien A.F. 97 (Diss., p. 23).

\textsuperscript{18} ‘Family L’, otherwise known as Ibn al-ʿAssāl’s version, is of Coptic Vorlage with notations from Greek and Syriac Vorlagen (Kachouh, Diss., p. 306).
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.

Watch and pray to that you do not enter into temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Watch and pray so that you do not enter temptation; for the spirit is rejoicing, but the flesh is weak.

**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 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)\textsuperscript{19}

γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμὸν τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σάρξ ἀσθενής.\textsuperscript{20}

Mark 14.38 (Nestlé-Aland)

γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ ἔλθητε εἰς πειρασμὸν τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σάρξ ἀσθενής.\textsuperscript{21}

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

\textsuperscript{19} B. and K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger (eds), \textit{Novum Testamentum Graece} (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelsesellschaft, 2012).

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

mustabshira (‘rejoicing’ or ‘bringing glad tidings’) in any context.  

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 mustaʿidda (‘ready’ or ‘prepared’ [to do something], i.e., ‘willing’), a translation that appears to be more consistent with the sense of the Greek;\(^{23}\) nashīṭ (‘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 mustaʿidda.\(^{24}\) One could consider nashīṭ to be a ‘middle term’ between the Arabic mustaʿidda 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 (nashīṭ). 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.

---


\(^{23}\) Out of the thirteen Arabic Gospel manuscripts examined, ten contain mustaʿidda in the Markan text.

\(^{24}\) In MS Huntington 118 ad Mt 26.41, the scribe writes in the margins around the Arabic rendering mustaʿidda other terms used for the translation of that text: (Arab.) nashīṭ, (Copt.) rōout and (Gr.) prothumos; mustabshira is, unfortunately, found wanting in this case.
An unusual translation of Matthew 26.41

(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 Shamʿūn (Gr. Σήμων) 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, but here in Arab. e.163 and Ciasca’s edition, the spirit is both muʾthira (‘moving’ or ‘ready’) and mustaʿidda (‘willing’); Ciasca’s Latin edition mirrors the Arabic here with two attributes. This similarity can be observed between the Peshitta, 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. The reason for the


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 P45 (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’). 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

Matthew 26.41 (Codex a)

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

---

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

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.

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
prontus caro autem infirmis (f.93r).

Mark 14.38 (Codex d)

vigilate et orate ne intretis in temptationem spiritus quidem
prontus 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) (prontus / promtus) 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.
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

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’). 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 *mustaʿidda* in Matthew and *nashīṭ* 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 *nashīṭ* (‘pleased’, ‘cheerful’, ‘happy’) being closer to that of *rōout*. As with *prothumos*, *mustaʿidda* 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’. Given that both the Matthean and Markan texts contain *rōout* and Mark never has the reading *mustabshira*, it seems unlikely that Coptic...

---

31 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 *Peshiṭṭā* (P), Old Syriac (*Sinaïticus*) (S), Old Syriac (*Curetonian*) (C) and Ḥarklean (Ḥ) were consulted.

(5) A Syriac Source

Matthew 26.41

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{P} & : \text{ܡܪܘܚܐ ܡܛܝܒܐ ܦܓܪܐ ܕܝܢ ܟܪܝܗ} \\
\text{S} & : \text{ܡܪܘܚܐ ܨܒܝܐ ܐܠܐ ܦܓܪܐ ܟܪܝܗ} \\
\text{C} & : \text{ܡܪܘܚܐ ܡܢܢ ܚܘܝܚܐ}
\end{align*}
\]

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  —
Ḥ  The spirit, on the one hand, is joyful / cheerful / glad / ready;
    the flesh, on the other hand, is weak / infirm.

---

An unusual translation of Matthew 26.41

Mark 14.38

\[ \text{Translation:} \]

\begin{align*}
P & \text{ The spirit is willing and prepared/ready, however, the body is infirm/sick.} \\
S & \text{ The spirit is willing, but the body is infirm/sick.} \\
C & \text{ —} \\
H & \text{ The spirit, on the one hand, is joyful/cheerful/glad/ready; the flesh, on the other hand, is weak/infirm.} \\
\end{align*}

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 Peshīṭā and Old Syriac (Sinaïticus) for Mt 26.41 are mṭaybā and ṣabyā, respectively; the Ḥarklean is ḥwiḥā. The Markan text contains the same terms with the exception of the Peshīṭā, which includes both mṭaybā and ṣabyā, a similarity already noted between the Peshīṭā, MS Vat. Arab. 13 and MS Bodl. Arab. e.163 (Diatessaron). The focus here, however, is the Ḥarklean text.

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

---

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’. Given the regularity of both ṭaybā 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).

---

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’ (ʿubūdīya al-Shayṭān). 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.

35 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 rōūt 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.