

THE INTRICACIES OF MEDIAEVAL ARABIC GOSPEL QUOTATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THE *KITĀB AL-MAĞDAL*

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Abstract:

This article examines the Mediaeval Christian Arabic compendium *Kitāb al-Mağdal* from a new perspective. While its theology and language have previously been studied, its hundreds of biblical quotations have not yet been analysed. Scholars working on Mediaeval Christian Arabic texts are aware that these often quote the Bible freely, however, no study has yet undertaken a thorough linguistic examination of Arabic biblical quotations or compared them systematically with the various versions of the Bible (though a few comparable studies will be referenced in the Conclusions). One difficulty in pursuing such an endeavour lies in the fact that numerous Arabic Bible translations circulated in the Mediaeval Middle East, and not all have yet been mapped. This article seeks to identify the possible source(s) of the quotations found in one chapter of the *Mağdal*, while also shedding further light on the complexity of Mediaeval Arabic Bible translations.

Keywords:

Mağdal, *Maṣābīḥ*, Arabic Bible, Syriac Bible, Arabic Gospels, Bible translations

1 Introduction

The *Kitāb al-Mağdal* (*The Book of the Tower*)¹ is a monumental East Syrian work, originally composed in the early eleventh century,² which addresses a range of topics

¹ According to the most comprehensive dictionaries, the Arabic مجدل should be read *miğdal* in this sense, however, for the sake of simplicity, I employ the form prevalent in scholarly literature.

² It was previously dated to the twelfth century, but Holmberg has convincingly argued for an early eleventh-century dating (Holmberg 1993).

central to Christians: theology, apologetics, and church history.³ Its complete and oldest surviving version, the thirteenth-century BNF Arabe 190, extends to over a thousand pages. In total, twenty-four manuscript witnesses are known today, although many transmit only parts of the work (Holmberg 1993:269). The present analysis is based on the seventeenth-century manuscript BL Or. 4240.

The *Mağdal* attracted the attention of scholars already in the eighteenth century, but for a long time, only its fifth, historical chapter was in their focus. Most notably, Gismondi published a portion of this historical chapter with a Latin translation in 1899 (Holmberg 1993:259). In 1975, Gewarges Putrus prepared a critical edition of the second chapter as his PhD thesis in French, although it remains unpublished. Gianmaria Gianazza has published most chapters of the *Mağdal* with an Italian translation (Gianazza 2022, 2023–2024);⁴ however, this edition exhibits several weaknesses. Although presented as a “critical edition”, it contains only a restored Arabic text,⁵ a very literal Italian translation and an index of names and biblical citations. Ayşe İçöz wrote her PhD thesis on the fourth chapter of the *Mağdal* (İçöz 2016), and she also published an article focusing on the stylistic features and number symbolism in this work (İçöz 2024). However, none of these scholars conducted any, or any serious inquiry into the immense number of biblical quotations found in this work.

The present article examines the biblical quotations of the fourth chapter of the *Mağdal*, titled *al-Maşābīḥ* (*The Lamps*). This chapter is essentially a guideline on Christian virtues, accompanied by hundreds of quotations from the Bible. The practice of frequent biblical citation (sometimes referred to as ‘prooftexting’) is common in Mediaeval Christian Arabic works, yet the *Mağdal* is exceptional in that it constitutes an extensive collection of biblical quotations and recollections of biblical events. The *Maşābīḥ* chapter alone contains approximately 200 biblical citations, which together make up nearly half of the text. This feature represents one of the chapter’s most distinctive characteristics and therefore warrants close examination. This article focuses solely on the Gospel quotations of the *Maşābīḥ* chapter: These represent the majority, as their number is about one hundred.⁶

³ Its authorship, as Holmberg also observed, is rather problematic and will not be discussed here (Holmberg 1993:257). Suffice it to note that, following Holmberg, the work is now generally attributed to ‘Amr ibn Mattā, who is otherwise unknown.

⁴ Departing from the prevalent use of ‘*mağdal*’, he uses ‘*miğdal*’.

⁵ Although he provides variant readings from the manuscripts he consulted, those from Or. 4240 are frequently omitted, and the criteria for selecting particular readings remain unclear.

⁶ Other books of the New Testament – Acts of the Apostles and some Epistles – are also quoted, but only about two dozen times. These are usually short and/or loose citations and are not valuable for such an examination. The Old Testament quotations would require separate research.

The central question is whether it is possible to identify which version of the Bible the author used? First, I compared the citations found in the *Maṣābīḥ* chapter with the known and extant Arabic Bible traditions and then examined their correspondences in the Syriac versions of the Bible.

Research on Arabic Christianity and the Arabic versions of the Bible has gained increasing attention in the twenty-first century. However, beyond specialist in the field, the wider community of Arabists remains, in my experience, largely unaware of the remarkable plurality of these translations. Thus, before turning to the Gospel quotations of the *Maṣābīḥ* chapter, it is necessary to outline the most important features of the Arabic versions of the Bible. When presenting the Arabic quotations, they are always preceded by the corresponding English text from the King James Bible, unless otherwise stated.

2 The Bible in Arabic

As noted above, numerous Arabic Bible translations existed in the Middle Ages. Their most prominent features are as follows:

- *Translations from various Vorlagen*⁷: Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, Coptic, and Latin. More importantly, many Arabic translations are eclectic: They do not follow a single *Vorlage* but incorporate readings from multiple sources. Newly emerging translations often drew on existing Arabic translations in addition to their non-Arabic *Vorlage(n)*, further complicating textual criticism (Kashouh 2012:262). Within the same manuscript, the different Gospels sometimes follow different traditions (Kashouh 2012:198, 298).
- *Linguistic diversity*: This refers to the fact that virtually any verse from the Bible can be rendered differently across various traditions. The meaning is generally consistent, but it may be expressed using synonyms and different grammatical constructions, even within manuscripts belonging to the same translation tradition. Such diversity leads to inconsistencies in translation choices: Even technical terms, such as the “Pharisees”, are often rendered differently within the same manuscript. For example, in B.O. Or. 432 the term معترلة (“Pharisees”) and الفريسيين (“the Pharisees”) appear on the same page (f. 22v, lines 5 and 17; corresponding to Matthew, 15:1 and 15:12).
- *Textual deviations*: Some do not appear to be supported by any known *Vorlage* (see, for example, 5.1.2 and 5.2).
- *Omissions*: Many translations omit words or phrases from their *Vorlage(n)*, often to avoid the pleonasm that are particularly characteristic of the Old Testament (Vollandt 2015:211–212).
- *Expansions*: Translators often employ chains of synonyms, typically when a single Arabic word does not fully capture the meaning of the *Vorlage*. Other

⁷ *Vorlage*: the source text from which a translation is made.

additions serve to clarify ambiguous passages, while some are exegetical in nature (Vollandt 2015:53–54, 207–211; Kashouh 2012:154).

- *Harmonisation*: Although not a prominent feature, occasional tendencies to harmonise parallel passages in the Gospels can be observed (Kashouh 2012: 144, fn. 45; 158).⁸ This phenomenon holds some significance from our perspective (see Conclusions).

The presence of omissions and expansions indicate that many of these Arabic translations were reader oriented. At the same time, numerous translations are extremely literal, following the syntax of their *Vorlage* awkwardly (Vollandt 2015: 77, 88) and, according to Blau (2002:19), “they are hardly worthy of being called A[rabic] at all.”

As Vollandt (2015:IX) sums it up: “Arabic versions far outnumber all other known translation traditions.” Consequently, it is necessary to examine all known traditions and compare them with as many biblical citations from the *Maṣābīḥ* as possible, even though the different Arabic versions of the Bible are still not fully mapped.

This article does not discuss the history of scholarly research on these translations. Suffice it to say that by the nineteenth century, European scholars had recognised the remarkable plurality of Arabic translations, but they considered these versions unimportant and largely disregarded them (Vollandt 2015:3–4). Between 1944 and 1953, Graf published the monumental, five-volume *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, which aimed to encompass the entire literature of Christian Arabs, naturally including Bible translations, and provided some insight into the *Vorlagen* they used (Graf 1944: I, 142–170). Other scholars have attempted to identify the *Vorlagen* used by specific Arabic translations or have focused on particular books or versions of the Bible.⁹ However, comprehensive research in this complex field was limited, as manuscripts could only be consulted *in situ*. With the digitisation of manuscripts, research on Arabic Bible translations has accelerated in the twenty-first century.

In 2012, Hikmat Kashouh published his monumental work *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels. The Manuscripts and Their Families*, which remains the most extensive study in this field. He examined over 200 Arabic Gospel manuscripts, grouping them to twenty-four families, with some further divided into subfamilies. His work provides the principal foundation for my research in identifying the

⁸ Additional cases may likewise be observed. For example, in Luke, 12:4–5, BNF, Ar. 57 reads (161r, last-162v, 1) : لا تخافوا ممن يقتل الجسد خافوا ممن يقتل النفس والجسد ويلقيهم في نار الجحيم : 1) which is harmonised with Matthew, 10:28. The same parallel accounts are also combined in the *Maṣābīḥ*; see below.

⁹ Cf. Kashouh 2012:25–27. An early example is J.F. Rhode’s PhD thesis (1921). More recently, Sidney Griffith has made substantial contributions to the field (Griffith 2013).

possible source(s) of the biblical quotations found in the *Maṣābīḥ* chapter of the *Maḡdal* (see 4.1).

3 The characteristics of the Bible quotations in the *Maṣābīḥ* chapter

The *Maṣābīḥ* chapter is further divided into subchapters, each opening with the author's reflections on Christian values, followed by biblical quotations. Without detailed examination or collation, we can assume the following possibilities for how the Arabic authors quoted the Bible: they may have memorised an Arabic translation; consulted an Arabic Bible and quoted directly from it; memorised a Syriac, Greek, or other version and translated it into Arabic themselves; consulted a Syriac, Greek, or other version and translated it into Arabic; or employed a combination of these methods.

Turning to the focus of this article, we may now summarise the characteristics of the citations in the *Maṣābīḥ*:

- *Combination of verses*: Different verses are often combined into one saying.¹⁰
- *Gospel harmonisation*: Parallel accounts (the same narrative in multiple Gospels with varying details) are sometimes amalgamated.
- *Loose quotations*: Many citations are rendered very freely.
- *Textual deviations*: Some deviations do not appear to be supported by any known *Vorlage*.
- *Repetition*: The author occasionally quotes the same verse(s) multiple times throughout the text, but with varying wording.
- *Omissions and additions*: The author often omits certain words from a verse, or, when quoting several verses, omits entire passages; these omissions are sometimes clearly deliberate, serving to make the quotation fit the narrative better (for example, omitting the words of the disciples who ask Jesus to clarify a parable). Conversely, words are occasionally added, sometimes as clarifications when the quotation is taken out of context.
- *Combination of categories*: In many cases, multiple types of variation occur simultaneously. For example, when quoting Matthew, 10:28, "... fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." In the *Maṣābīḥ* (103v, 5): خافوا الله الذي يقدر يهلك النفس والجسد جميعاً ويليقا في نار جهنم. The verb "cast", present in the *Maṣābīḥ*, occurs only in the parallel account of Luke, 12:5, which is otherwise worded quite differently: "Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell..." The *Maṣābīḥ* also adds الله, which is absent from both original verses, likely serving as a clarification.

Another example is Matthew, 19:21: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and

¹⁰ This has also been observed by Putrus (1975:623) and Holmberg (2003:175) in the second chapter of the *Maḡdal*.

come and follow me.” In the *Maṣābīḥ* (128v, 17–18): ان كنت تشا ان تكون كاملاً لتستحق الدخول الي ملكوت السما امضي بع ساير ما تملك وتصدق به علي المساكين واتبعني. Since the quotation is taken out of context, the addition of ملكوت السما appears deliberate: in the preceding verses, Jesus is asked by a young man what he must do to attain eternal life, so this insertion substitutes those verses. Conversely, the quotation omits “and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” This omission may reflect reliance on memory, but it could also be deliberate, as it might seem redundant given the addition of ملكوت السما.

Other cases, however, can only be explained by the author’s reliance on memory. For instance, a free mixture of the parallel accounts of Matthew, 10:37 and Luke, 14:26 (137v, 10–11): ان من لم يترك اخاه و اخته واباه وامه لا يستحقني ومن يحب اخاه و اخته واباه وامه اكثر مني لا يستحقني

- *Misattributions and unidentifiable quotations*: The quotations are usually introduced by the formula *qāla*, such as *qāla Mūsā* or *qāla sayyidunā l-Masīḥ*, but in a few cases the attribution is incorrect. For example, on one occasion, the author states that a quotation is from the Prophet Daniel, although it appears in the Epistle to the Romans (102v, 7–9). These instances suggest that, at least occasionally, the author was quoting Scripture from memory. A few unidentifiable quotations also point in this direction, although it is possible that he drew on apocryphal sources—he extensively references *The Cave of Treasures* and may have used other apocryphal sources as well. Nevertheless, misattributed and unidentifiable quotations constitute the minority.

Regarding the different editions of the *Maḡdal* mentioned in the Introduction, only Putrus (1975) attempted to provide explanations for these complex citations, a discussion to which I will return to at the end of this article.

4 The research method

As noted above, the *Maṣābīḥ* chapter contains approximately one hundred Gospel quotations. For this study, I selected twenty test passages for collation with the sources outlined below. Three types of sources were employed in this collation of the selected quotations:

4.1 Arabic Gospels

Despite the *Maḡdal*’s East Syrian background, I sought to collate the quotations with all Arabic translation traditions described by Kashouh, regardless of their *Vorlage*. This approach is motivated by the fact that Arabic Bible translations were not only numerous but also highly mobile. As Vollandt observes regarding the Pentateuch: “... Saadiah’s originally Judaeo-Arabic Tafsīr [i.e. translation] was adopted by Samaritan, Syriac-Orthodox, and Coptic communities. A translation of East-Syriac provenance [...] was borrowed by the Syriac-Orthodox Church but also circulated

among the Mozarabs of Spain.” (Vollandt 2015:IX). The Gospels were similarly mobile; see, for example, “family K” below.

The approach to the families established by Kashouh is straightforward: every family for which microfilmed versions exist was examined, irrespective of their *Vorlage*, dating, or linguistic characteristic. Thus, even if the witnesses of a family postdate the *Mağdal*, they were still considered, as in many cases it cannot be ruled out that they derive from much earlier exemplars. “Family F” and “family O” are rhymed translations, the latter also employing obscure language (unlike the biblical quotations in the *Maṣābiḥ* chapter), yet both were examined, and—as we shall see—this was not done in vain (see 5.2).

The collated families established by Kashouh are:

1. **Family A:** Of Greek origin; represented by **Sinai, Ar. 74**.
2. **Family B:** Of Greek origin with some Syriac influence; represented by **Sinai, Ar. NF M 8**.
3. **Family C:** Of Greek origin with some Syriac influence; represented by **Sinai, Ar. 75**.
4. **Family D:** Of Peshitta origin; represented by **Sinai, Ar. 70**.
5. **Family F:** Of Peshitta origin; represented by **Leiden, University Library, Or. 561**.
6. **Family G:** Of Peshitta origin; represented by **Bibliothèque orientale, Or. 430**.
7. **Family H:** Of Peshitta origin; represented by **Vatican, Ar. 13**, which contains many lacunae.
8. **Family J:** Of Syriac origin; showing some Greek influence, divided to three subgroups:
 - **Family J^A:** Kashouh’s representative ms is not microfilmed, therefore another ms from this family, **Sinai, Ar. 115**, was used as the collated base
 - **Family J^B:** Represented by **Sinai, Ar. 106**
 - **Family J^C:** Represented by **Sinai, Ar. 76**
9. **Family K:** This is the most complex Arabic translation tradition. Previously referred to as the “Alexandrian Vulgate” or “Egyptian Vulgate”, it was once believed to have been translated from the Coptic Bohairic. Kashouh rejects this theory, arguing instead that it was translated “either from Syriac and Greek with some of its witnesses later corrected against the Coptic version, or from Syriac and then corrected on some occasions against the Greek and on other occasions against the Coptic.” (Kashouh 2012:205). He further notes that this tradition circulated widely outside Egypt, including in Syriac churches (Kashouh 2012:206). Kashouh assigns ninety-nine manuscripts to this group, with additional manuscripts likely belonging here based on Graf’s work, though he could not consult them (Kashouh 2012:250). Due to their

complexity, no definite subgroups are outlined. Kashouh selects Sinai, Ar. 101 as the representative manuscript; since I could not consult it, **Vatican, Copt. 9** was instead chosen. A long test passage from Sinai, Ar. 101 presented by Kashouh is almost identical to that of Vat., Copt. 9, justifying this substitution.¹¹ To increase diversity, **Sinai, Ar. 112** was also examined; this ms will be referenced only in 5.3, footnote.

10. **Family L:** This tradition was produced by the Coptic Ibn al-‘Assāl in the mid-thirteenth century. He relied mostly on the Coptic version but also drew on existing Arabic translations (Kashouh 2012:262). As this version postdates the *Maḡdal*, it could not have served as the source for our author; nevertheless, it was briefly consulted to determine whether the *Maṣābīḥ* readings show any congruence with it or a shared source. Kashouh outlines three subgroups within this family, but only one microfilmed manuscript, **Leiden, University Library, Cod. 223** was examined.
11. **Family M:** Of Latin origin; collated base: **Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Ar. 238**.¹²
12. **Family N:** A mixture of *Vorlagen*: Old Latin, Peshitta, and Greek (Kashouh 2012:280). Its sole witness is **Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Do. 162**. As it begins with Matthew, 10:28, many test passages could not be verified.
13. **Family O:** Edited from an Arabic lectionary; collated base: **Bibliothèque orientale, Or. 432**
14. **Family P^J:** Its only witness is **Sinai, Ar. NF M 6, 5 and 63**, originally a single codex. The texts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke appear to belong to Family C, while John represents a distinct tradition (hence the sigla P^J), originally translated from the Peshitta and subsequently corrected against either the Harklean or a Greek version, though not consistently (Kashouh 2012:288–291).¹³
15. **Family R:** Matthew and John appear to be independent translations, while Mark and Luke are offshoots of Family C (Kashouh 2012:298). Collated base: **Leipzig, University Library, Cod. Tischend. XII**.¹⁴ Due to numerous lacunae, not all test passages could be verified.

¹¹ His selection of Sinai, Ar. 101 appears to be aleatory, given the overwhelming number of witnesses and their tangled textual nature, and not the result of textual criticism, as in other cases.

¹² As Kashouh’s representative manuscript was unavailable, an alternative from this family was selected using the same method as for Family K.

¹³ On p. 289, there is a typographical error: it states that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke “contain the same family as *b*”, but it should read *c* (see p. 114).

¹⁴ This is the only undigitised manuscript that was examined.

16. **Family S^A**: According to Kashouh, Matthew belongs to Family L, while Mark, Luke, and John belong to Family K. Its only witness is **BNF, Ar. 57** (Kashouh 2012:298).

17. **Family T**: A mixture of families A, J, and K. Its only witness is **Sinai, Ar. 102** (Kashouh 2012:298).

Other traditions were not considered, either because they are inaccessible¹⁵ or too fragmentary.¹⁶

4.2 Syriac Gospels:¹⁷

- Old Syriac type: The Sinaiticus (S) and Curetonian (C) versions.
- Peshitta (P).
- Harklean (H) version.

4.3 The Arabic Diatessaron

The *Diatessaron* is a Gospel-harmony, i.e. a single, non-repetitive narrative of the four Gospels. It is attributed to Tatian, who composed it around 180 A.D., although the original has not survived (Monier & Taylor 2021:193). Its Arabic translation, attributed to Ibn at-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), survives in several manuscript versions and constitutes the most significant witness (Monier & Taylor 2021:203–208). Marmadji's 1935 edition of the Arabic version is regarded as the reference edition, though he introduced numerous "corrections" to the text. The situation is further complicated by the existence of other Gospel harmonies beyond the *Diatessaron* (Monier & Taylor 2021:212). Consequently, the examination of Marmadji's edition provides only limited value.

Other relevant sources include lectionaries, Gospels interspersed with commentaries, Karšuni Bibles, and non-Diatessaronic Gospel harmonies. However, scholarly research on these is almost non-existent (except for one specific lectionary, the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary), and they fall beyond the scope of this study, as do the Ethiopic and Armenian versions of the Bible.

In this article, not all twenty test passages of the *Maṣābīḥ* are discussed; instead, five types are presented:

1. Two examples demonstrating how even a "precise" quotation cannot be linked to any of the examined Arabic versions. The term "precise" is used

¹⁵ Families E, I, and Q; according to Kashouh, E and I follow the Syriac literally (Kashouh 2012:126, 172), so examining them would likely be unnecessary, since the Syriac versions have already been studied.

¹⁶ Families S^B, U, V, W, and X.

¹⁷ Consulted in the standard reference editions: Pusey & Gwilliam (1901); Kiraz (2004).

cautiously here, meaning that the quotation contains no omissions, additions, or textual deviations compared with the main known versions.

2. An example illustrating a textual deviation.
3. An example of a pericope in which the sequence of verses is altered, yet the verses remain “precise” (in the sense defined above), highlighting the issue of translating a single word from the Syriac.
4. An example in which the author presents an alternative reading.
5. Four examples indicating the author’s use of a Syriac Bible.

5 Examples

5.1 “Precise” quotations with no known Arabic source

5.1.1 Luke, 12:35: “Let your loins be girded about, and your light burning.”

Maṣābīḥ (117r, 20–21): تكون اوساطكم مشدودة وسرجكم ملهيه

Sinai, Ar. 74 (151v, 7–8): تكون احقاكم متنتقه (!) وسرجكم توقد
 Sinai, Ar. NF M 8 (85r, 15): يكون حقوكم متنتقه وسرجكم واقده
 Sinai, Ar. 75 (64v, last–65r, 1): تكن حقايكم مشدودة وسرجكم نيره
 Sinai, Ar. 70 (74r, 14): لتكن جفويكم مشدودة وسرجكم منيره
 Leiden, Or. 561 (96v, 4): شدوا اوساطكم وانتدبوا لانواركم مشتعلين
 B.O., Or. 430 (227, 3): لتكن ظهوركم مشدودة ومصايحكم نيره
 Sinai, Ar. 115 (166r, 3–4): لتكن اوساطكم (!) مزنره ومصايحكم منيره
 Sinai, Ar. 106 (117r, 12–13): لتكن اوساطكم مشدودة ومصايحكم منيره
 Sinai, Ar. 76 (199v 8–9): لتكن اوساطكم مشدودة ومصايحكم موقوده
 Vat., Copt. 9 (316r, 21–22–316v, 1): لتكن اوساطكم مشدودة وسرجكم موقده
 Leiden, Cod. 223 (118r, 6): لتكن اوساطكم مشدودة ومصايحكم موقده
 Munich, Staatsb., Ar. 238 (59v, 15): لتكون (!) اصلايكم مشدودة وسراجاكم موقوده
 Berlin, Staatsb., Do. 162 (96r, 17): لتكن اوساطكم مشدودة وسرجكم نيره موقوده
 B.O., Or. 432 (84v, 15): لتكن احقاوكم مشدودة ومصايحكم متقده
 Leipzig, Cod. Tischend. XII (89v, 1–2): لتكن ظهوركم مشدودة وسرجكم نيره
 BNF, Ar. 57 (163r, 4–5): كونوا (!) اوساطكم مشدودة وسرجكم موقده
 Sinai, Ar. 102 (136v, 3–4): لتكن اوساطكم مشدودة وسرجكم موقده
 Diatessaron (Marmardji 1935: 414): تكون اوساطكم مشدودة وسرجكم مسرجة

Although the *Maṣābīḥ*’s version is close to several traditions, none of them render ‘burning’ as ملهيه. Consequently, the verse was either memorised (from any language); translated directly from a non-Arabic *Vorlage*; or drawn from a source not examined in this study.

5.1.2 Luke, 14:13–14: “But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Maṣābīḥ (128v, 6–7): اذا اتخذت وليمه فادعوا المساكين والزمني والمقعدين والاضرا وطوباك اذ ليس لهم ما يقضوك فتكون مكافاتك في موقف الاتقيا

Sinai, Ar. 74 (157r, 1–4):

اذا صنعت نزل لا تدعوا الا مساكين كسح عرج عماء وطوبا لك يكون لانه ليس لهم ما يكافوك فتجزا في قيامه الصديقين

Sinai, Ar. NF M 8 (87v, 17–20):

اذا ما صنعت نزل فاعدي المساكين الضعفا المقعدين العمى فطوباك حينئذ لان ليس لهم ما يكافوك فيكون جزاك في قيامه الصديقين

Sinai, Ar. 75 (67r, 8–10):

اذا ما انت صنعت غذا فادعوا المساكين والمكتعين والمكسرين والعمى فطوبي لك لانهم لا يستطيعون ان يجازوك بحق لتكونن جزاك في قيامه الابرار

Sinai, Ar. 70 (75v, 10–12):

اذا صنعت صنعيا فادع المساكين والزمنا العرج العمى وطوباك ان ليس لهم يكافوك فتكون مكافاتك في موقف الصديقين

Leiden, Or. 561 (100r, 11):

متي ما عملت الوليم فادع المساكين من عمي واولي عرج وذوي عسمة يجمعون وطوبي لك اذا ليس لهم ما به يجزون الا فليك جزاوك بمقام امين لبارين صديقين

B.O., Or. 430 (235, 3–5):

اذا ما صنعت مايده فادع المساكين والعسم والمقعدين والعميان وطوباك لانه ليس لهم ان يكافوك لان مكافاتك تكون في مقام الصديقين

Sinai, Ar. 115 (171r, 11–14):

اذا صنعت وليمه فادع مساكين اصحاب مخال عرجانا عميانا مساكين فتصير مغبوطاً اذ ليس لهم ان يجازوك ولكن لك ان تكافا في قيامه الصديقين

Sinai, Ar. 106 (121r, 7–10):

اذا صنعت مايده فادعوا المساكين والعرج والعميان اصحاب مخالي لتصير مغبوطاً اذ ليس لهم ان يجازوك ولكن لك ان تكافي في قيامه الصديقين

Sinai, Ar. 76 (206r, 9–12):

اذا صنعت وليمه فادع المساكين والزمنا والعرج والعميان فتصير مغبوطاً اذ ليس لهم ما يجازونك ولكن تكون لك المكافا في قيامه الصديقين

Vat., Copt. 9 (326v, 10–19):

اذا صنعت طعماً ادع المساكين المعوزين والمقعدين والعميان وطوباك لانه ليس لهم ما يكافونك ومجازاتك تكون في قيامه الصديقين

Leiden, Cod. 223 (121r, 13–15):

اذا ما صنعت وليمه فادع مساكين وضعفاء وعرجاً وغمياناً فتصير مغبوطاً لانه ليس لهم هناك ما يكافونك وانك ستكافا في قيامه الابرار

Munich, Staatsb., Ar. 238 (62r, 1–2)¹⁸:

إذا اعددت صنيعاً فادع اليه الفقراء والضعفا والعرج والعمي فطوباك اذا عجزوا عن مكافاتك فتكافا عند مكافاة الصالحين

Berlin, Staatsb., Do. 162 (99v, 16...18–100r, 2):

إذا هيات غذا او عشا ... ادعي الي طعامك المساكين البائسين والعميان والعرج والزمان حينئذ تكون مغبوطاً اذا ليس لهم ما يكافوك وتبقا مجازاتك مذخوره لك تاخذها في قيامه الصديقين

B.O., Or. 432 (87r, 12–14):

متى ما عملت الوليم فادع المساكين وذوي العلل والمقعدين والعمي وطوباك اذا ليس لهم ما يكافونك فان مكافاتك تكون في قيمة الصديقين

Leipzig, Cod. Tischend. XII (93r, 8–12):

إذا صنعت طعاما فادع المساكين والزمنى والعرج والعميان وطوبى لك انه ليس عندهم ما يجازوك به بحق ليكون جزاوك في مقام الابرار

BNF, Ar. 57 (167r, last–168v, 2):

إذا صنعت طعاماً ادع المساكين والضعفاء والمقعدين والعميان فطوباك لان ليس لهم ما يكافونك ومجازاتك في قيامه الصديقين

Sinai, Ar. 102 (140v, 12–15):

إذا صنعت وليمه فادع المساكين والمعورين والمقعدين والعميان فمغبوطاً تكون لان ليس لهم ما يكافونك لان مجازاتك تكون في قيامه الصديقين

Diatessaron (Marmardji 1935:284–286):

إذا ما عملت دعوة فادع المساكين والشل والعرج والعمي وطوباك حيث ليس لهم ان يجازوك ليكون جزاوك في قيام الابرار

This quotation in the *Maṣābīḥ* differs markedly from all known Arabic Bible traditions. For instance, none of these traditions render ‘thou makest’ as ‘اتخذت’, ‘the blind’ as ‘الاضرا’, or ‘the resurrection of the just’ as ‘موقف الاتقيا’, as found in the *Maṣābīḥ*.

5.2 A puzzling textual deviation

Matthew, 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”

Maṣābīḥ (quoted twice, 102r, 19 & 116r, 15):

الطوبي لفاعلي الخير فان ابنا الله يدعون / الطوبي لعاملي الخير فان ابنا الله يدعون

One might initially suggest that the author relied on memory, accounting for the two renderings of ‘makers’ and the textual deviation *ḥayr*. However, the latter does appear in one Arabic tradition, Leiden, Or. 561, albeit in the plural:

¹⁸ Note the textual deviation مكافاة الصالحين (“the recompense of the just”) instead of “the resurrection of the just.”

Sinai, Ar. 74 (7r, 8): طوبا لصانعي الصلح لانهم ابنا الله يدعوا
Sinai, Ar. NF M 8 (10v, 14–15): طوبا للذين يصنعون الصلح لانهم ابنا الله يدعون
Sinai, Ar. 75 (5v, 4): طوبي للمصلحين فانهم ابنا الله يدعون
Sinai, Ar. 70 (7r, 6–7): طوبا لصانعي السلام انهم يدعون ابنا الله
Leiden, Or. 561 (5v, 2–3): الطوبي للذين يفعلون الخيرات فانهم يدعون لله ابناء
B.O., Or. 430 (10, 12–13): طوبا للفاعلي السلامة فانهم بنو الله يدعون
Vat., Ar. 13 (4r, 11–12): طوبا للمصلحين بين الناس لانهم يدعون ابنا الله
Sinai, Ar. 115 (9v, 7): طوبي لصنعة السلم لانهم يدعون ابنا الله
Sinai, Ar. 106 (6r, 14–15): طوبا لصانعي السلامة فانهم ابنا الله يدعون
Sinai, Ar. 76 (22v, 6): مغبوطون مبدعوا السلامة فانهم يدعون بنينا (!) لله
Vat., Copt. 9 (34r, 13–15): طوبي لفاعلي السلامة فانهم بني الله يدعون
Leiden, Cod. 223 (22r, 4–5): طوبى لصانعي السلامة لانهم سيدعون ابناء الله
Munich, Staatsb., Ar. 238 (5r, 3–4): سعد المصلحون فانهم يدعون اولاد الله
B.O., Or. 432 (8v, last): الطوبي لصانعي السلامة انهم يدعون ابناء الله
BNF, Ar. 57 (23r, 11–12): طوبى لصانعي الصلح والسلامة فانهم بني الله يدعون
Sinai, Ar. 102 (9r, 3–4): مغبوطون صانعي السلامة فانهم ابنا الله يدعون
S & C: طوبى لصانعي الصلح والسلامة لانهم يدعون ابنا الله
P: طوبى لصانعي الصلح والسلامة لانهم يدعون ابنا الله
H: طوبى لصانعي الصلح والسلامة لانهم يدعون ابنا الله
The Arabic *Diatessaron* reads السلام and السلامة (Marmardji 1935:74).

Although Leiden, Or. 561 (Family F) is the only manuscript containing this reading variant, it could not have served as a significant source for our author, since the other quotations in the *Maṣābīḥ* bear no resemblance to this tradition. It is possible, however, that our author was aware of this tradition and recalled this particular variant. Alternatively, could this be an accidental congruence? In any case, although Leiden Or. 561 is a rhymed translation that frequently paraphrases rather than translating literally (Kashouh 2012:128), it remains puzzling why it reads *al-ḥayrāt* where the Peshitta—its *Vorlage* according to Kashouh—reads *šlāmā*. It is also possible that the reading *ḥayr/ḥayrāt* derives from a source currently unknown.

5.3 Altered verse order: issues in translating a Syriac term

There are numerous instances of combining different verses from the same book—or even from different books—as well as of amalgamating parallel Gospel passages. More intricate, however, are quotations in which the sequence of verses is altered within the same narrative. The following example illustrates this, combining five verses from the sixth chapter of Matthew: it begins with verses 20–21, followed by verse 1, and concludes with verses 3–4:

“... [6:20–21] lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. [6:1] Take heed that ye do not your alms

Maṣābīḥ (128r, 10–14):

מסכת אבות מסכתא דאורייתא דאורייתא דאורייתא דאורייתא דאורייתא

[illegible][illegible]

¹⁹ Sinai, Ar. 112 of Family K reads ارضه and سوس, whereas Vat., Copt 9 of the same family reads اكل (“corroding”) and سوس.

vocalisation: *āklā*, meaning ‘moth’ or ‘woodworm’, which is listed in Brockelmann (1928), Payne Smith (1957), and Costaz (2002).

Given that eight Syriac-related Arabic Gospel traditions, as well as the Arabic *Diatessaron*, use two words for ‘moth’ (or ‘moth’ and ‘worm’) without reference to ‘rust’, it seems clear that the translators interpreted ܪܬܠܐ as ‘moth’ or ‘worm’, and not as ‘rust’. This reading is likewise reflected in the *Maḡdal*. One might therefore suggest that the Arabic translators misinterpreted the skeleton ܪܬܠܐ as *āklā* and took it to be a synonym of the preceding ܪܬܠܐ.

Yet a difficulty remains. If, as Pusey and Gwilliam (1901) propose, ܪܬܠܐ should indeed be read *aklā*, meaning ‘rust’, why do the major Syriac dictionaries, mentioned above, not record this meaning? It is true that the Semitic root *’-k-l* generally means ‘to eat’ or ‘eat away’ in both Syriac and Arabic, and both ‘moth’ and ‘rust’ share this semantic field. Moreover, the root also carries the sense ‘to corrode’ in both languages; in Arabic, the feminine active participle *آكلة* denotes ‘rust’, so it is conceivable that a Syriac derivative (regardless of vocalisation) bore the same signification. The absence of this gloss in the lexica, however, remains perplexing.

In any case, the evidence shows that the Arabic translators of the Syriac Bible understood ܪܬܠܐ as ‘moth’ (or, in one case, ‘worm’), and the *Maḡdal* reflects the same reading. It therefore remains inconclusive whether our author was drawing directly on the Peshitta or Harklean, or on an Arabic version ultimately dependent upon them.

5.4 An alternative reading offered by the author

When quoting Matthew, 5:37 (123r, 2), the author concludes the verse by explicitly noting that there is an alternative reading of the final word.

“«Let your communication be yes, yes or no, no; anything more than this is corruption» (M.5:37), or, according to another version: «anything more than this comes from evil.»”²⁰

وليكن قولكم نعم نعم ولا لا الزايد علي هذا فساد ويقال الزايد علي هذا من الشر

This verse occurs as part of a much longer quotation; therefore, the Arabic translation traditions are not presented here, as the passage does not correspond to any of them. The principal concern lies with the final word of the verse. Six Arabic traditions read الشرير (A, J^B, K, L, O, S^A, T), five read الخبيث (B, C, D, G, J^C), F reads زعيم الغرور, H reads من الشيطان, and M reads لا خير فيه. Only one tradition, J^A, has الشر, which corresponds to the second word given by our author. By contrast, فساد does not appear in any of the examined Arabic Bibles.

All Syriac versions read ܪܬܠܐ, which may be rendered into Arabic as شرير or even شيطان. The source of the *Maṣābīḥ*’s reading فساد is unclear. In any case, this example

²⁰ Translated by the author (Á.G.-T.).

demonstrates that the author was aware of different variants, though their exact origin cannot be determined. It is particularly striking that he considered it important to draw attention to this variant, since the two words are semantically very close, and in no other instance does he present alternative readings in the *Maṣābīḥ*.

5.5 Quotations suggesting the use of a Syriac Bible

5.5.1 The three quotations below all display the same pattern in the *Maṣābīḥ*. As they cannot be linked to any of the Arabic Bible translations, they are not presented here.

Luke, 11:28 (103r, 10): “... blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

والطوبى للذين سمعوا وصية الله وتقواه وحفظوها²¹

John, 8:31 (102r, 17): “Jesus said [...]: If you abide in my word [you will know the truth and the truth] will set you free.” Although the rendering in the *Maṣābīḥ* is very free, the quotation is identifiable:

قال سيدنا المسيح من تمسك بالوصية حررته من العبودية

John, 8:51 (105r, 5): “... If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.”

من يحفظ وصاياي لا يري الموت ابداً

None of the Arabic versions examined employ the word *waṣiyya* in these verses; instead, they use *kalām*, *kalima*, *kalimāt*, *kalim*, *qawl* or *aqwāl*. In all three verses, the Greek reads *logos*, and all three Syriac versions read *mellā*. In the *Maṣābīḥ* chapter, the use of *waṣiyya* probably derives from one of the Syriac versions. The primary meaning of *mellā* (ܡܠܠܐ) is ‘word’, but according to Payne Smith (1957) and Costaz (2002), it can also mean ‘command’, and in these verses, this is clearly the intended sense (the word of God as command). The author was probably not familiar with the Greek²² and thought *waṣiyya* renders *mellā* more precisely, whether he was translating from memory or from a written copy.²³

²¹ The expression وتقواه appears only in manuscript Or. 4240; the other manuscripts omit it.

²² The Greek term *logos* has, of course, been interpreted in various ways in philosophy and theology. As noted above, even Greek-based Arabic Bibles render it using the roots *k-l-m* and *q-w-l*.

²³ In Christian Arabic texts, *kalima* is sometimes used in the sense of ‘commandment’, but this is attested only in the expression “the Ten Commandments” (Blau 1967:380/§264.2), which is also recorded in Hava’s dictionary (1899). In any case, even if *kalima* were occasionally used more broadly in this sense, this does not undermine the discussion above. *Waṣiyya* is a stronger term, traceable only to the Syriac. Had *kalima* been widely used in the

5.5.2 A probable Syriac mirror-translation

John, 14:21 (109v, 2): “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he [that loveth me]²⁴ shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him...”

من حفظ وصيتي وعمل بها هو المحب لي والاب يحبه وانا احبه

Most Arabic Bibles do not render “he it is that loveth me” as هو المحب لي; instead, they predominantly employ verbal sentences, usually هو الذي يحبني.²⁵ Although the former is not foreign to Arabic, it is noteworthy that even Syriac-based Arabic Bibles did not adopt it. I would argue, once again, that the author translated a Syriac Bible himself—specifically the Peshitta or the Harklean—where we find ܐܡܢ ܡܫܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ (the Old Syriac reads ܐܡܢ ܡܫܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ), of which the *Maṣābīḥ*’s version appears to be a mirror translation.

6 Conclusions

1. The author did not directly quote any of the seventeen Arabic translation traditions examined. Only sporadic similarities appear—most notably the textual deviation *ḥayr* in Matthew 5:9, which agrees with Family F—but these are most probably accidental or may derive from a yet unknown source.

2. The author did not make use of the Arabic *Diatessaron* (as known from Marmardji’s edition). The harmonised verses in the *Maṣābīḥ* do not necessarily derive from another Gospel harmony either. Since harmonising tendencies are observable in traditional four-part Gospel translations, the combination of parallel accounts in the *Maṣābīḥ* chapter could be independent of any actual Gospel harmony, instead reflecting a general tendency to bring these accounts into closer proximity.

3. In certain cases, the author most definitely relied on memory. The harmonised verses, as well as the misattributed and unidentifiable quotations, also point in this direction.

4. The most likely scenario is that the Peshitta or Harklean version served as the author’s principal source. He may have been quoting it from memory in Arabic, or he may have been consulting the Syriac text while composing his work and translating the verses himself, without aiming for a rigid, word for word translation—or he may

sense ‘commandment’ by Christians, the author would presumably have employed it, following the pattern of Syriac-based Arabic Bible translations.

²⁴ The omission of “that loveth me” in the *Maṣābīḥ* poses no difficulty: whether the author was quoting from memory or from a physical Bible, this can be explained as an effort to avoid repetition.

²⁵ There is only one exception containing محب here, B.O. Or. 432, a rhymed tradition using obscure language, which is cited here for reference (f. 120r, 12–13): هو الذي محبني والذي هو لي محب فيكون محبوباً من ابي.

have employed both methods. It is also possible that he was aware of certain Arabic translations, and we cannot rule out the possibility that he knew the Bible in other languages besides Arabic and Syriac.

5. It is conceivable that the author used an Arabic translation not documented by Kashouh,²⁶ or not examined in this study. Furthermore, as noted above, other relevant literature—such as lectionaries, Gospels with commentaries, Karšuni Bibles, or a non-Diatessaronic Gospel harmony—might have served as sources, and these could yield further correspondences in readings; however, such works still require substantial research. We must also consider the possibility that non-biblical works containing Bible quotations influenced one another.

Gewarges Putrus, in his PhD thesis on another chapter of the *Mağdal*, reached a conclusion like that described in (4). He states: “... les citations qu’il a tiré de la Bible, il les a certainement traduites de lui-même, directement du syriaque en arabe. Il n’est donc pas étrange que sa source principale soit la Bible en langue syriaque et non arabe, et tout particulièrement la bible Peshitta, puisqu’il existe de nombreuses différences entre le style et la langue des citations bibliques qu’il a traduit [sic] en arabe et entre son style et sa langue propres en arabe” (Putrus 1975:19–20). However, he provides no detailed analysis or comparison of these quotations, and his methodology was partially limited and partly flawed: although he correctly consulted the Peshitta, he did not examine other Syriac versions, and he was evidently unaware of the plurality of Mediaeval Arabic Bible translations (unsurprisingly at that time), having examined only one modern Arabic Bible (Putrus 1975:626). This approach is misleading, as modern Arabic versions share little with their medieval counterparts.

The third point is corroborated by the findings of other scholars as well. Samir (1983) briefly discusses that Abū Qurra, the influential Christian Arabic theologian, often relied on memory when quoting the Gospels. His analysis, however, is limited to cases in which the same biblical verse is cited more than once but with different wording.²⁷ Abū Qurra himself admits his reliance on memory in connection with Old Testament quotations, when he writes: هذا ما رأينا ان نضعه مما حضرنا من شهادات الكتب (Bāšā, *Mayāmir* 104). Tarras likewise discusses Abū Qurra’s use of Scripture, though purely from a theological perspective, and demonstrates how this approach reflects the “Pauline antithesis between *gramma*

²⁶ While Kashouh’s work is commendable, it relies on relatively few test passages, and he acknowledges that selecting different passages might yield different conclusions (Kashouh 2012:249). In the case of families K and M, significant differences were observed between Kashouh’s representative manuscript and other manuscripts assigned to the same family.

²⁷ For related research, the reader may consult Vööbus (1947), who examined Rabbula of Edessa’s New Testament quotations in Syriac; Toenies Keating (2006), particularly the chapter *Witnesses from the Words of the Torah, the Prophets and the Saints*, which discusses some of Abū Rā’iṭa’s Old Testament quotations; and Padwick (1939), which addresses the manner in which Muslim authors quote the Bible.

['letter'] and *pneuma* ['spirit']", with the latter—"the spiritual meaning of the Scripture"—being regarded as superior to the former. (Tarras 2017:82, 90).

A striking hypothesis is advanced by Kashouh, who suggests that even the Gospel manuscript Vat., Ar. 13 (~800 A.D.) may have been, at least in part, translated not from a written source but from memory (Kashouh 2012:156). The quotations preserved in the *Kitāb al-Mağdal* provide further evidence that, in the Mediaeval Arabic-speaking world, the Bible was not treated as a rigidly fixed corpus—whether in the case of the eighth- to ninth-century Abū Qurra, at a time when Christian Arabs had only just begun to produce Arabic Bible translations, or in the eleventh-century *Mağdal*, when such translations were already numerous. Nonetheless, many more Arabic versions await systematic study, and further analysis of biblical quotations in non-biblical works is necessary to have a clearer picture of this complex and multifaceted tradition.

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