

Cryptic Codes and a Violent King: A New Proposal for Matthew 11:12 and Luke 16:16-18

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THE SAYINGS in Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16 are among the most enigmatic in the NT. Indeed, I do not believe any truly satisfactory explanation of these verses has ever been given in either ancient or modern scholarship. I. Howard Marshall is representative in saying with reference to Luke 16:16, “few sayings in the Gospels are **so uncertain in interpretation as this one.**”¹ In this article I present what I regard as a cogent new solution—I can only hope that the reader is likewise persuaded. For ease of discussion I will split these texts into clauses:

Matt 11:12a ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ ἕως ἄρτι ἡ
βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν βιάζεται

11:12b καὶ βιασταὶ ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν.

Luke 16:16a Ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται μέχρι Ἰωάννου²

16:16b ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται

16:16c καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται.³

I thank David E. Aune and Joshua Yoder for helpful comments on early drafts. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 630.

² Although the best manuscripts read μέχρι (p⁷⁵ κ B L f^{1,13} 579. 892. 1241. 2542. pc), a significant number of manuscripts evidence ἕως (A D W Θ Ψ M). Also some manuscripts (D [Θ] pc vg^{ms} sy^c) add ἐπροφήτευσαν to the end of this clause, probably under the influence of Matt 11:13.

³ This entire clause is omitted by κ*. Although the starting point of analysis in this article is not Matthew and Luke’s source(s), the standard reconstruction of Q 16:16 can be found in James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis*

There are a number of features of Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16 that make analysis particularly challenging for the expositor who dares to attempt to plunder these strong men. First, **should βιάζεται** in Matt 11:12a and Luke 16:16c be read with a **positive nuance** (“is violently advancing” // “all force their way”) or in a **negative sense** (“is suffering violence” // “all are inflicting violence”)—while other translational possibilities must be considered as well. Second, should βιάζεται be taken as **middle** (with a self-interest nuance) or as a **passive?** And if as a passive, is the presumed agent human or, as Ilaria L. E. Ramelli has recently argued for Luke 16:16c, divine?⁴ Third, how do Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16 **fit into a scheme of Traditions-geschichte**, especially in light of the various proposals for a common source?

In what follows I will argue that we can be quite precise in saying that **Herod Antipas is almost certainly the primary referent with regard to the violent activity in both Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16-18**. My proposal goes beyond any previous suggestions in arguing that Jesus, as he is portrayed by the evangelists, is **deliberately speaking in code** in these passages in his denouncement of Herod Antipas. Moreover, it will become apparent that Matthew and Luke are fairly conservative tradents with respect to the βιάζεται saying, preserving a coded criticism of Antipas that was directly relevant to the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* but not to their own circumstances. As part of my solution, I will argue that **Matthew retains the more probable historical setting for Jesus’ words, while it is likely that Luke more accurately preserves the original βιάζεται saying** via the larger, coded unit of Luke 16:16-18.

James C. Scott has argued that dominated individuals and groups express **resistance** toward oppressive sociopolitical overlords in complex ways.⁵ Only under extreme circumstances is it normal for the oppressed to “speak the truth to power” or openly rebel. Rather, it is much more common for the dominated to keep up the appearance of submission by *seeming* to say all the right things in their “public transcript.” The oppressed, however, often reveal their deep-seated discontent via a “hidden transcript.” Analyzing the discrepancy between the public transcript and the hidden transcript shows that there are a variety of common **methods** for expressing **sociopolitical dissatisfaction**.⁶ As Scott indicates, one

Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 464: ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται ἕως Ἰωάννου· ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ βιάζεται καὶ βιασται ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν.

⁴ Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Luke 16:16: The Good News of God’s Kingdom Is Proclaimed and Everyone Is Forced into It,” *JBL* 127 (2008) 737-58.

⁵ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For a helpful introduction to Scott’s theoretical construct, along with essays that seek to apply his model, see *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; SBLSS 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

⁶ Scott, *Domination*, 1-16. Although this connection is not made by Scott, ancient rhetoricians,

such method of resistance utilized by the oppressed is that of *disguise and concealment*:

The practical modes of concealment are limited only by the imaginative capacity of the subordinates. The degree of disguise, however, that elements of the hidden transcript and their bearers must assume to make a successful intrusion into the public transcript will probably increase if the political environment is threatening and very arbitrary. Here we must above all recognize that the creation of disguises depends on an agile, firm grasp of the codes of meaning being manipulated. It is impossible to overestimate the subtlety of this manipulation.⁷

I would like to note two things here. First, Scott argues that the necessary “degree of disguise” increases in situations in which “the political environment is threatening and very arbitrary.” I will argue below that Antipas’s brutal treatment of John the Baptist created just such a threatening and unstable situation for Jesus—that is, Luke 16:16-18 and Matt 11:12 reflect a *Sitz im Leben* of the historical Jesus in which it was safer and more cleverly pointed to make coded, derisive allusions to Antipas’s well-known misconduct than to say such things forthrightly.⁸

Second, Scott suggests that the “creation of disguises depends on an agile, firm grasp of the codes of meaning being manipulated,” while further affirming that the manipulation of the codes by the oppressed is often extraordinarily subtle. This helps explain why, in my opinion, previous scholarship has not picked up on the Antipas-based link between Luke 16:16c and Matt 11:12. Jesus as he is portrayed in the Synoptics is being deliberately cryptic, and his words are carefully crafted so that they can be understood only by insiders who are familiar with the “hidden transcript.” Herod is thereby degraded, and Jesus gains social prestige among those who have “ears to hear.”⁹ If my hypothesis is accepted, not only is a long-standing puzzle in Matthew and Luke resolved, but also the most likely historical *Sitz im Leben Jesu* for this obscure saying is established. The coded nature

such as Quintilian, were fully aware that sociopolitical dissatisfaction could be expressed by veiled remarks. See, e.g., Quintilian’s discussion of *emphasis* (Greek: ἔμφασις) in *Inst.* 9.2.64 and following. I owe credit to Yancy W. Smith for bringing this to my attention at an SBL seminar. See Smith’s own application of ἔμφασις in “Bible Translation and Ancient Visual Culture: Divine Nakedness and the ‘Circumcision of Christ’ in Colossians 2:11,” in *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch* (ed. Aliou Cissé Niang and Carolyn Osiek; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012) 320-41.

⁷ Scott, *Domination*, 139.

⁸ Quintilian makes precisely this point, saying that *emphasis* is often employed “if it is unsafe to speak openly” (*Inst.* 9.2.66; trans. Butler, LCL), such as when one must “speak against [political] tyrants” (*Inst.* 9.2.67).

⁹ With regard to the elevation of the speaker’s social status in such circumstances, Quintilian states, “If the danger [to the speaker] can be avoided by any ambiguity of expression, the speaker’s cunning will meet with universal approbation” (*Inst.* 9.2.68; trans. Butler, LCL).

of the saying is more easily detected in Matthew, so I will start there before moving on to Luke.

I. The Matthean Evidence

Matthew 11:12 is set in the midst of an extended discourse about John the Baptist that stretches from 11:2 to 11:19. Throughout the history of interpretation, a staggering number of proposals for v. 12b (καὶ βιασταὶ ἀρπάξουσιν αὐτήν) have been set forward, some of which overlap with proposals for Luke 16:16, and here I can only briefly summarize some of the most influential and arresting options.

Option 1. “And violent people grab hold of the kingdom [in order to enter it].” According to this interpretation, although it was unavailable prior to John, the kingdom can now be attained by those who zealously and forcefully press to enter it—a reading that was heavily favored in the patristic era and is supported by a number of modern scholars.¹⁰ As a perusal of the major translations shows, this basic interpretation continues to be a favored solution for Luke 16:16c,¹¹ although recent translations of Matt 11:12 prefer to leave the interpretation open-ended.¹²

¹⁰ Some important early interpretations include, e.g., Irenaeus *Haer.* 4.37.7; Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 4.2.5; 5.3.16; *Quis div. salv.* 21.3; Origen *Hom. Lev.* 4.4-5; cf. *Comm. Jo.* 6.105. The earliest reflection of Matt 11:12/Luke 16:16 is Justin Martyr *Dial.* 51.3, which combines Lucan and Matthean elements but does not clearly support a particular interpretative trajectory. For additional patristic references, see Peter Scott Cameron, *Violence and the Kingdom: The Interpretation of Matthew 11:12* (2nd ed.; ANTJ 5; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988) 3-22. Those modern scholars who favor option 1 for both Matthew and Luke include Alan H. M’Neile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (1915; repr., London: Macmillan, 1961) 155-56; Marshall, *Luke*, 630; and Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 339-40. Option 1 is favored for Luke, however, but not for Matthew by a great many, including among others, Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1907) 116; John Martin Creed, *The Gospel according to St. Luke: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (1930; repr., London: Macmillan, 1960) 206-7; Gottlob Schrenk, “βιάζομαι, βιαστής,” *TDNT* 1:609-14; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 209-10; and Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 429-30.

¹¹ E.g., Luke 16:16c: “everyone tries to enter it by force” (*NRSV*); “everyone is forcing his way into it” (*NIV, NASB*); “everyone forces his way into it” (*ESV* [English Standard Version]); “people are forcing their way into it” (*TNIV* [Today’s New International Version]); “everyone who enters does so with violence” (*NAB*); “tous s’efforcent d’y entrer par violence” (*Bible de Jérusalem*); “jedermann drängt sich mit Gewalt hinein” (Lutherbibel 1984); “jeder dringt mit Gewalt hinein” (Elberfelder 1993). The *NET* (New English Translation) is exceptional in translating 16:16c as “everyone is urged to enter it.”

¹² E.g., Matt 11:12: “has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (*NRSV, ESV*); “suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force” (*NAB*); “suffers violence, and violent men take it by force” (*NASB*); “souffre violence, et des violents s’en emparent” (*Bible de Jérusalem*);

Option 2. “And violent people lay hold of the kingdom [in order to force God to bring it about].” That is, certain individuals are forcefully trying to compel God to bring about the kingdom, whether by penitent contrition for past misdeeds,¹³ perhaps followed by a renewed zeal for law-keeping,¹⁴ or by Maccabean-style zealous violence.¹⁵

Seemingly, it is rare for biblical scholars to agree about anything, but there is a growing consensus that the linguistic evidence strongly supports the *in malam partem* reading over against the *in bonam partem* for Matthew,¹⁶ which makes options 1 and 2 very improbable.¹⁷ And this growing consensus should be endorsed. Since the nominal βιασται has an exclusively negative meaning in the Hellenistic era,¹⁸ it is very difficult to take the clause και βιασται ἀρπάξουσιν αὐτήν as a positive statement reflecting entrance to the kingdom or the like—doubly so inasmuch as ἀρπάξω almost always carries a negative meaning such as “to snatch, steal, or drag away,” usually implying the use of unwanted force,¹⁹ especially when

“leidet das Himmelreich Gewalt, und die Gewalttätigen reißen es an sich” (Lutherbibel 1984); “wird dem Reich der Himmel Gewalt angetan, und Gewalttuende reißen es an sich” (Elberfelder 1993). The *NIV* is exceptional among the major translations in rendering this phrase as unambiguously positive: “has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.” The *TNIV*, however, reverses course: “has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.”

¹³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (trans. W. Montgomery; 2nd Eng. ed.; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005) 355-56.

¹⁴ Stephen Llewelyn, “The *Traditionsgeschichte* of Matt. 11:12-13, par. Luke 16:16,” *NovT* 36 (1994) 330-49, here 338; cf. *y. Sanh.* 2.6 (as discussed by Llewelyn) and *Sifre Deut.* 49.

¹⁵ So Alexander Schweizer, “Ob in der Stelle Matth. xi, 12 ein Lob oder ein Tadel enthalten sei?” *TSK* 9 (1836) 90-122; see the discussion in S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Scribner, 1967) 200 n. 5.

¹⁶ On this consensus, see, among many others, Frederick W. Danker, “Luke 16:16—An Opposition Logion,” *JBL* 77 (1958) 231-43, here 233-36; Schrenk, “βιάζομαι,” 609-14; Ernest Moore, “βιάζω, ἀρπάξω and Cognates in Josephus,” *NTS* 21 (1974-75) 519-43; Barbara E. Thiering, “Are the ‘Violent Men’ False Teachers?” *NovT* 21 (1979) 293-97, here 294; David R. Catchpole, “On Doing Violence to the Kingdom,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 25 (1978) 50-61, here 58; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1988-97) 2:256; Joseph Verheyden, “The Violators of the Kingdom of God: Struggling with Q Polemics in Q 16:16-18,” in *Jesus, Paul, and Early Christianity: Studies in Honour of Henk Jan de Jonge* (ed. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, Harm W. Hollander, and Johannes Tromp; *NovTSup* 130; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 397-415, here 403-4.

¹⁷ See evidence in Cameron, *Violence*, 54-55.

¹⁸ The noun βιαστής is not attested elsewhere in the LXX or the NT. In all the extrabiblical literature from our period, it is exclusively pejorative; see BDAG, s.v. βιαστής, for references.

¹⁹ Of the fifty-four occurrences of ἀρπάξω in the NT/LXX almost all entail unwanted force, but especially vital in this regard are the two uses of ἀρπάξω in Matthew. In 12:29 it refers to the act of forced robbery (τὰ σκευὴ αὐτοῦ ἀρπάσαι). In 13:19 it designates the activity of the evil one, who snatches away that which has been sown in the heart (ἔρχεται ὁ πονηρὸς καὶ ἀρπάξει τὸ ἐσπαρμένον ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ). Some exceptions that seemingly preclude active resistance to the “snatching” include Acts 8:39; 1 Thess 4:17; and Rev 12:5.

it or its cognates are in close association with the βία- word group.²⁰ In short, since the clause καὶ βιασταὶ ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν is almost certainly negative, it becomes highly unlikely that the verb βιάζεται (which is cognate to the nominal βιασταὶ) in the previous clause can be taken as anything other than negative.²¹ Thus, it is linguistically probable in Matthew (and in Luke) that whatever Jesus says is happening to the kingdom of heaven, it is experiencing forceful opposition, not being forcefully joined, violently brought in, or compelled.

Option 3. “And [so-called] ‘violent people’ lay hold of the kingdom.” This is the stigmatic interpretation proposed by Frederick W. Danker.²² This interpretation suggests that in employing the term βιασταὶ, Jesus is deliberately picking up a term that his enemies were in the habit of using to denigrate or stigmatize Jesus and his followers. That is, members of the Jesus movement were called βιασταὶ (“violent ones”) by their opponents, and Jesus is subverting this language by saying that indeed these so-called violent ones are the very individuals who are truly gaining the kingdom by forcing their way in. This proposal commendably takes the linguistic evidence favoring the *in malam partem* interpretation seriously by treating it as irony. The problem is that there is zero evidence that the language of βιάζω or βιαστής was stigmatic in the Hellenistic era, although this has not stopped the proliferation of highly speculative proposals attempting to refine this basic thesis—as the recent contributions of Gerd Theissen and Joseph Verheyden demonstrate.²³ Thus, unless new linguistic evidence surfaces, in my opinion, this option cannot be considered to be anything more than a very remote possibility.

Option 4. “And violent people [like the Pharisees] are laying violent hands on the kingdom.” In this interpretation, the Pharisees, as Jesus’ typical opponents and Jesus’ primary conversation partners in the Lucan parallel, are being implicated as those who are forcefully opposing the kingdom.²⁴

²⁰ See, e.g., Josephus *A.J.* 1.2.2 §61; 5.2.8 §146; 5.10.1 §339; 9.8.1 §159; 14.12.4 §316; 20.9.4 §214; *B.J.* 2.14.5 §291; 7.8.1 §261; *Vita* 58 §303; *Ap.* 2.24 §200; Philo *Gig.* 13; *Flacc.* 62; see also Moore, “βιάζω,” 534. Additional references can be found in Schrenk, “βιάζομαι,” 611 n. 7.

²¹ For my own linguistic analysis of βιάζω (and cognates), see n. 41 below.

²² Danker, “Luke 16:16,” 231-43.

²³ Gerd Theissen, “Junger als Gewalttater (Mt 11,12f.; Lk 16,16): Der Stürmerspruch als Selbststigmatisierung einer Minorität,” in *Mighty Minorities? Minorities in Early Christianity, Positions and Strategies. Essays in Honour of Jacob Jervell on His 70th Birthday, 21 May 1995* (ed. David Hellholm, Halvor Moxnes, and Turid K. Seim; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995) 183-200; and Verheyden, “Violators,” 408. Verheyden recognizes the lack of evidence for Danker’s basic proposal and seeks to avoid objections: “The saying does not reflect what these [the Pharisees] would actually have said . . . They are presented as people who are absolutely overstating their case.”

²⁴ Moore, “βιάζω,” 541-42; see also Werner Georg Kümmel (*Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus* [trans. Dorothea M. Barton; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1957] 121-24), who vacillates between options 4 and 5, seeing both as viable.

Option 5. “And violent beings are plundering the kingdom.” That is, malevolent spiritual forces are attempting to derail the kingdom movement through spiritual warfare.²⁵

Option 6. “Violent people [like Antipas] are laying violent hands on the kingdom.” According to this interpretation, the violence refers to the death of the Baptist, which at the very least implicates Antipas. It also points to the escalating official resistance to the kingdom movement and to the inevitability of suffering for those who follow Jesus.²⁶

Option 7. Whatever earthly violence the kingdom is suffering, this violence has a corresponding counterpart in a heavenly eschatological struggle between the forces of good and evil, and this is the meaning of the saying.²⁷ Thus, interpretation 7 potentially encompasses 4, 5, and 6 but goes significantly beyond them.

I believe that option 6, the death of John the Baptist via Antipas, substantially outshines the other possibilities for Matt 11:12. Violent resistance to the kingdom is the hallmark of the Herodian dynasty as it is portrayed in Matthew. Our first introduction to the Herodian family describes a horrific infanticide calculated to eliminate the threat that a newborn βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων might pose to Herod the Great’s own βασιλεία (2:1-18). Later, when Matthew describes John’s execution, his description of Herod Antipas portrays Antipas as licentious, rash, and unabashedly violent. On the occasion of his birthday, Antipas caves to the disgusting request of Herodias and her daughter to cut off John’s head and present it on a platter (14:6-11). Although this extreme violence may have in some manner “grieved” Antipas (λυπηθεὶς ὁ βασιλεὺς; 14:9), he could not have been too grieved, for the text makes clear that the forcible elimination of John was his express intention: θέλω αὐτὸν ἀποκτεῖναι (14:5). The gruesome violence of the entire Herodian family, including the actions of Antipas, is repeatedly stressed in Matthew. This activity serves as a harbinger for escalating violent resistance by other authorities (12:14; 16:21; 26:3-4), culminating in the brutal finale of the trial and crucifixion (26:57-27:50).

Since Matt 11:12 sits right in the middle of an extended section dealing with John the Baptist (11:2-19), whom the reader discovers Antipas has thrown in prison (14:3-4), it is plausible enough solely on the basis of the evidence already presented that Antipas should be seen as the primary target in “the kingdom of heaven βία-

²⁵ E. Earle Ellis (*The Gospel of Luke* [NCB; London: Nelson, 1966] 204-5) seems to see “demonic powers” as the most likely referent but also mentions the Pharisees.

²⁶ Allen, *Matthew*, 116; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (trans. James E. Crouch; 3 vols.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001-7) 2:141; Gundry, *Matthew*, 210; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33A-B; Dallas: Word, 1993-95) 1:307; France, *Matthew*, 429-31.

²⁷ Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 74-77; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:256.

ζεται and βιασταὶ ἀρπάξουσιν it.” In fact, Herod Antipas’s violence toward John the Baptist was so well known that some sixty years after the events occurred, Josephus reports that “the verdict of the Jews was that the destruction visited upon Herod’s army was a vindication of John, since God saw fit to inflict such a blow on Herod” (*A.J.* 18.5.1 §119).²⁸ This reference is to Antipas’s defeat at the hands of Aretas, the king of the Nabateans, who was also the father of the princess whom Antipas had agreed to divorce (ἐκβαλεῖν [18.5.2 §111]) in order to consummate his illicit marriage with Herodias (18.5.1 §§109-13)²⁹—the very activities that had prompted John the Baptist’s censure of Antipas (18.5.2 §§117-19).³⁰

In addition to the evidence above, my claim that Matt 11:12 intends Antipas is made infinitely more likely by two coded digs at Antipas in the near context. First, consider Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus’ question to the crowds concerning John in the verses leading up to 11:12: “What did you go out to the wilderness to see—a reed being shaken by the wind” (11:7b)? Although it has rarely been observed, and even when noticed not applied to the interpretation of 11:12, this question is almost certainly a poke at Herod Antipas, who between ca. 19 and 27 C.E. placed an image of a reed on his coins rather than risk the charge of blasphemy among his Jewish subjects by including his own portrait, as is confirmed by an analysis of the numismatic remains.³¹ In fact, the image of the reed is encircled by

²⁸ Trans. LCL. Josephus *A.J.* 18.5.2 §116 qualifies §119 by asserting that the belief that Herod’s army was destroyed by God for his treatment of John the Baptist was held only by some of the Jews (τισὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων).

²⁹ For ἐκβάλλω as divorce, see, e.g., Ezra 10:3; Prov 18:22[A]; Sir 7:26; see additional references in BDAG, s.v. ἐκβάλλω, def. 1. In actuality, before Antipas could expel the Nabatean princess, she caught wind of the impending action and escaped to Arabia (*A.J.* 18.5.1 §§111-12).

³⁰ On historicity and the possibility of later Christian interpolations in Josephus, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; Anchor [Yale] Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday; New Haven: Yale University Press [vol. 4], 1991–2009) 1:56–69, 2:19, 56–62. In spite of some discrepancies, both Josephus and the Synoptic accounts agree on two critical points: (1) Herod put John to death, and (2) the setting of the execution somehow involves Herod’s brazen marriage to Herodias, who was his half-brother’s wife.

³¹ This observation was first brought to my attention in the highly entertaining work of historical fiction by Gerd Theissen, *In the Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 6, 197 n. 5. Theissen gives full scholarly support, including images of the coins, for this interpretation of the numismatic evidence in his *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (NTOA 8; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989); Eng. trans. *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 26–42, with images on p. 30. Theissen’s observation is picked up by Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 2:247 n. 54) and by Gundry (*Matthew*, 662 n. 120), but they do not follow Theissen’s interpretation, even though no reason for rejecting it is given. Theissen’s analysis is supported by recent study of Herod’s coinage by Morten H. Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and Its Socioeconomic Impact on Galilee* (WUNT 2/215; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 204–6. It is surprising, at least to my mind, that Theissen’s article “Junger als Gewalttäter”

the words ΗΡΩΔ[ΟΥ] ΤΕΤΡΑ[ΡΧΟΥ] (“[of] Herod the Tetra[rch]”), which would have reinforced the mental link between Antipas and the reed in the minds of his subjects. Thus, the statement contains a hidden transcript for those with ears to hear, “What did you go out in the wilderness to see, a reed shaken by the wind [code: a maneuvering, shifty character like Herod Antipas (cf. Luke 13:32)]?”

Second, the subtle jab at Antipas in 11:7 is certified by the parallelism with the next question: “But what then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?—Behold, those who wear soft garments are in the homes of kings” (11:8). Although unlike his father, Antipas was not the *de jure* king (his official title was tetrarch; see Luke 3:1), his authority made him the *de facto* king. He is in fact incorrectly called “the king” (ὁ βασιλεύς) in Mark 6:14 and Matt 14:9. Moreover, Josephus calls the fortress at Machaerus where Antipas sometimes dwelled a “kingly home” or “palace” (βασιλείον; e.g., *B.J.* 7.6.2-3 §§175, 178). In addition, Josephus affirms that luxurious attire was worn in the court of Antipas’s father (e.g., *A.J.* 14.9.4 §173; 16.7.3 §204; *B.J.* 1.24.3 §480) and it was also worn by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:21; *A.J.* 18.6.6-7 §§191-95; 19.8.2 §344), so the same might be presumed for Antipas. Thus, we find another concealed remark by Jesus, “But what then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments [code: a rich man like Antipas]?—Behold, those [code: like Antipas] who wear soft garments are in the homes of kings.” In brief, since Antipas was closely associated with the royal house as the son of a genuine king, lived in a palace, presumably wore luxurious clothes, held an office that functionally approximated to a kingship, coveted the title of king (see *A.J.* 18.7.2 §§247-52), and is called “the king” in Mark and Matthew, it is probable that Matthew’s Jesus is referring obliquely to Antipas with his “those who wear soft garments are in the homes of kings.” Thus, the questions and answers in 11:7-8 are mutually reinforcing when Antipas is identified as the coded referent in a hidden transcript.

In light of the location of this saying in the context of a discussion about John the Baptist as prompted by John’s imprisonment, which in turn was instigated by Antipas (Matt 11:2; 14:3-4), and in view of the cryptic polemic against Herod Antipas found on Jesus’ lips in Matt 11:7-8, should we be surprised if in Matt 11:12 Jesus is portrayed as continuing his sly, coded critique of Antipas? Thus understood, βιάζεται is passive rather than middle and decidedly negative. The subject βιασταί is plural, so Jesus as portrayed by Matthew is generalizing beyond Antipas, but I would contend that Antipas is being put forward by Matthew’s Jesus in a disguised fashion as a prototypical perpetrator of violence. Accordingly I would paraphrase the hidden transcript in Matt 11:12 as follows: “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is experiencing brutal opposition [code:

(pp. 183-200), which is devoted to interpreting Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16, does not apply his observations about Matt 11:7-8 to 11:12. Theissen prefers to follow Danker’s lead in taking a stigmatic approach.

by people such as Antipas], and brutal men [code: like Antipas] are laying [violent] hands on it.”

Can this same basic interpretation be sustained for Luke 16:16c? As was observed above, although some scholars, especially of more recent vintage, have been prepared to see Antipas as one of the primary referents in Matt 11:12, when it comes to the Lucan parallel, virtually all recent scholarship has either rejected or not considered this possibility. I believe, however, that once overlooked evidence is brought forward—evidence that, in Luke, just as in Matthew, Antipas is being referenced in a coded fashion—it can be shown that the scholarly consensus should be reversed.

II. The Lucan Evidence

When one picks up a commentary or journal article, a common refrain with respect to Luke 16:16c is that “it is better to read Luke 16:16 in the light of Luke itself . . . than to try to harmonize it with its corresponding passage in Matthew,” or the like.³² Referential continuity between Matthew and Luke, however, is *prima facie* significantly more likely than individualism,³³ and when we are assessing probability, all else being equal, a solution that harmonizes should be slightly favored.

The first three interpretative explanations that were discussed above with respect to Matt 11:12b are possible also for Luke 16:16c, but they are improbable for the reasons already discussed above. Below is a critical assessment of the three best remaining proposals for Luke 16:16c (καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται).

Option 1. “And everyone is insistently urged to enter the kingdom.” This suggestion for Luke 16:16c has gained terrific momentum in the most recent literature—to such a degree that it is not far-fetched to suggest that a consensus is emerging³⁴—and it is indeed an attractive solution at first blush. According to its

³² Ramelli, “Luke 16:16,” 740; cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (2 vols.; Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 3; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994–96) 2:1352; Juan B. Cortés, S.J., and Florence M. Gatti, “On the Meaning of Luke 16:16,” *JBL* 106 (1987) 247–59, here 258; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (2 vols.; AB 28, 28A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981–85) 2:1117.

³³ See Cameron, *Violence*, 138.

³⁴ According to Cortés and Gatti (“Meaning,” 255), the first to suggest this translation appears to be F. Godet (*Commentaire sur l'évangile de saint Luc* [3rd ed.; 2 vols.; Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1888–89] 2:259), who suggests the translation: “Tous sont fortment pressés d'entrer.” Godet's proposal was given new impetus by Philippe H. Menoud (“Le sens du verbe *biazetai* dans Lc 16,16,” in *Mélanges bibliques en hommage au R. P. Béda Rigaux* [ed. Albert Descamps and André de Halleux; Gembloux: Duculot, 1970] 207–12, here 207), who translates: “et chacun est expressément invité à y entrer.” Subsequently this basic interpretation has been adopted by Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (17th ed.; trans. Howard C. Kee; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975)

advocates, this position enjoys three substantial advantages over its competitors. First, it takes the πᾶς of καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτήν βιάζεται with utmost seriousness. Other explanations have struggled to explain how *everyone* can be implicated in the action of βιάζεται. As Juan B. Cortés and Florence M. Gatti put it, “There seems to be no satisfactory explanation of how those assertions would be universally true of everyone; of all Jesus’ listeners and followers. The meaning of the pronominal adjective *pas* is ‘everyone without exception,’ ‘all.’”³⁵

Second, this solution is deemed advantageous because it construes βιάζεται as a passive, and several adherents of this view claim that the passive should be favored since εὐαγγελίζεται in the preceding clause is passive.³⁶ Finally, and most vitally, although the meaning of “insistently urged” or “persistently invited” or “warmly constrained” is less common in the Hellenistic era for βιάζεται (and cognates) than “unwillingly forced,”³⁷ such a meaning can legitimately be demonstrated (e.g., Gen 19:3, 33; 33:11; Judg 13:15[A]; 19:17; 1 Sam 28:23; 2 Sam 13:25, 27; Jos. Azen. 20:5; P.Oxy. 294.16-17). In fact, the cognate παραβιάζομαι occurs in this sense for the author of Luke-Acts in Luke 24:29 and Acts 16:15.

Despite these seemingly weighty points in favor of “insistently invited,” I believe that the alleged advantages of this proposal have been substantially overstated. For instance, the supposed inability of competing explanations to make sense of πᾶς is not as severe a limitation as adherents of the “insistently invited” option claim. The use of πᾶς in Luke is frequently hyperbolic. Should we really think that “*all* were wondering in their hearts” (διαλογιζόμενον πάντων ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν) whether John might be the Messiah (3:15)? Or is it plausible that Jesus “was praised by *everyone*” (δοξαζόμενος ὑπὸ πάντων) in the synagogues he visited in his initial itinerant ministry (4:15)? Or, in light of direct evidence to the contrary (John 21:25), should we believe that the author of Luke-Acts has written “about *all the things*” (περὶ πάντων) that Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1)? A plethora of other hyperbolic uses of πᾶς in Luke-Acts could easily be produced. Moreover, Jesus’ characteristic style of speech, as he is portrayed by the evangelists, frequently includes hyperbole (e.g., Matt 5:21-38; Luke 6:41-42). In fact, the immediate context of Luke 16:16 both in its Matthean parallel (11:11: “among those born of women, *nobody* has arisen who is greater than John the Baptist”) and its Lucan form (16:17: “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away *than for*

144; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1117; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 603; Bock, *Luke*, 2:353-54; Hans Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 548; Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 555-56. In addition, the translation “and everyone is urged to enter it” can be found in the *NET*.

³⁵ Cortés and Gatti, “Meaning,” 251.

³⁶ Menoud, “Le sens,” 208-9; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1117; Cortés and Gatti, “Meaning,” 258; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 556.

³⁷ See n. 41 below for evidence.

one stroke [of a letter] of the law to fall”) suggest that **hyperbole is operative here**. So if Jesus’ method of teaching, the near context, and Luke’s own use of πᾶς are all friendly to Luke’s use of hyperbole in 16:16c, then we must conclude that Cortés and Gatti have set up a false criterion when they demand that the words πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται refer to “*universal and uniform*” action.³⁸ I will argue below that the hyperbolic use of πᾶς functions as part of a **code masking Antipas’s identity**.

Likewise, the assertion that the presence of the passive εὐαγγελίζεται in the preceding clause substantially elevates the probability that βιάζεται is likewise passive rather than middle should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism. It would seem that a passive is more likely for the second clause when two such clauses *share the same subject*—although this is not an invariable rule.³⁹ Yet, since in Luke 16:16 the two verbs in question have *different subjects* (βασιλεία and πᾶς respectively), the claim that the passive for βιάζεται is substantially more likely is unwarranted. Consider the alternation between the active and the passive in a passage such as Luke 7:22: τυφλοὶ ἀναβλέπουσιν (active), χωλοὶ περιπατοῦσιν (active), λεπροὶ καθαρίζονται (passive) καὶ κωφοὶ ἀκούουσιν (active), νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται (passive), πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται (passive).⁴⁰ No one wants to argue that all the verbs in 7:22 are more likely to be passive just because the final verb, εὐαγγελίζονται, is passive; likewise one should not claim that it is substantially more probable that βιάζεται is passive in Luke 16:16c because εὐαγγελίζεται is passive in 16:16b. The clauses have different subjects and the different types of actions must be assessed individually.

Additionally, the third point put forward in favor of “insistently urged,” that the semantic range of βιάζω permits this meaning, is certainly and indisputably true. Just because this meaning is *permitted*, however, does not make it *probable*, and an analysis of βιάζω shows that in a hypothetical context-neutral (unaffected) instantiation, the meaning of βιάζω as “unwanted or unnatural compulsion” is some *fourteen times* more likely than “warmly constrained” as measured in the literature most relevant to the question, even using a generous system of measure.⁴¹

³⁸ Cortés and Gatti, “Meaning,” 251 n. 11.

³⁹ Some exceptions include, e.g., Luke 1:29 (διεταράχθη [passive] καὶ διελογίζετο [middle]); 6:11 (ἐπλήσθησαν [passive] ἀνοίας καὶ διελάλουν [active]); 8:14, 23; 13:13; 22:5; Acts 5:33; 9:22; 11:23; 13:45.

⁴⁰ Other examples include Luke 1:32 (καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται [passive] καὶ δώσει [active] αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ; 1:57 (Τῇ δὲ Ἐλισάβετ ἐπλήσθη [passive] ὁ χρόνος τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐγέννησεν [active] υἱόν); 4:6; 5:37; 11:17; Acts 1:9.

⁴¹ The lexical pool I used in my analysis included all the references to βιάζω in the NT (there are zero occurrences when Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16 are excluded), the LXX (17x), the Apostolic Fathers (2x), Philo (90x), and Josephus (138x). The occurrences were divided into three categories: (1) unwanted, undesirable, or unnatural force indicative of compulsion against someone’s will or against what is deemed natural, (2) neutral or unclear, (3) warm desire to constrain. Of the 247 occurrences of βιάζω in this literature, the meaning of “warm desire to constrain” clearly occurs by

In summary, despite the recent surge in popularity of the “urgently invited” translation of βιάζεται in Luke 16:16, the specific evidence adduced is inadequate. This translation is approximately fourteen times less likely in any given hypothetical context-neutral environment than “is acting violently.” Thus, “urgently invited” should not be favored if a contextually plausible alternative solution is available that permits the translation “is acting violently.”

Option 2. “Everyone is forced into the kingdom [by God or Christ].” Ramelli has recently argued that Luke 16:16 should be construed as a divine passive.⁴² She makes much of the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24), in which Jesus tells a parable about a man (read: God) who gives a tremendous banquet and “invites all,” at least according to Ramelli, and allegedly makes his servants “summon all” and “force everyone” to enter. But Ramelli has exaggerated the evidence. In actuality, the man does not “invite all,” as she alleges, but rather “he invited many” (ἐκάλεσεν πολλούς [v. 16]). Moreover, when the man has trouble filling his banquet hall, he orders his servants to “go out into the streets and compel to enter” (ἀνάγκασον εἰσελθεῖν [v. 23]). Ramelli is quick to generalize the object of “compel,” which is not given by Luke, to “anyone” or “everyone,” but it could just as easily be “many” or “others” as might be expected on the basis of v. 16. In addition, Ramelli is not so eager to integrate the verse that follows v. 23: “For I tell you none of those men who were invited will taste my supper!” (λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων τῶν κεκλημένων γεύσεται μου τοῦ δείπνου [v. 24]), which suggests that not “all” were compelled to enter in the final analysis. In light of 14:16 and 14:24, it is hard to maintain that *everyone* is being forced into the banquet hall in the parable of the great banquet, as Ramelli claims. Not everyone was invited to the banquet in the first place, and subsequently those originally invited are not being compelled to enter but are deliberately excluded.

Beyond the parable of the great banquet, Ramelli presents a plethora of additional linguistic data in support of the passive “is forced” or the intensive middle

my count only **nine times**: Gen 33:11; Judg 13:15[A]; 19:7; 2 Sam 13:25, 27; Josephus *A.J.* 5.6.7 §232; 6.14.3 §338; *B.J.* 5.11.2 §456; *Vita* 12 §66. This meaning is perhaps **plausible also in four other instances**: Josephus *A.J.* 2.12.2 §271; 5.10.4 §351; Philo *Somn.* 2.124; *Spec. leg.* 3.173. It remains an **unlikely but remote possibility in six other cases**: Josephus *A.J.* 9.5.2 §99; 14.2.1 §23; 18.8.8 §299; *B.J.* 1.29.4 §578; 3.8.8 §393; 6.2.1 §108. Contra Ceslas Spicq (*Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* [trans. James D. Ernest; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994] 1:290 n. 13), classification 3 does not seem appropriate in Josephus *B.J.* 1.3.6 §83, since threats are used to extract the information, nor in *B.J.* 1.29.4 §578 (a forced separation), nor in *B.J.* 6.2.1 §101 (unwilling sacrifices), nor in several other occurrences. Some twenty other instances do not fall clearly into either category (e.g., *Ap.* 2.17 §165, “a forced expression”), while the remainder fall into category 1. If one tosses out the twenty uncertain classifications and generously credits fifteen to the “warm desire to constrain” class, then the ratio of category 1 to category 3 is about 210 to 15, which makes category 1 **approximately fourteen times more** likely than category 3.

⁴² Ramelli, “Luke 16:16,” 737-58.

“treat with violence,” but this evidence does not really support the *divine passive* over against other options.⁴³ Moreover, the evidence in the Syriac versions that she reviews also cuts both ways, demonstrating readings in favor of both the passive (Sinaiticus) and intensive middle (Curetonianus, Peshitta, Harklean). In any case, these versions are not of decisive weight but only add to the cumulative evidence of reception history. In summary, Ramelli provides a helpful catalogue of testimony, both new and old, but does not provide any decisive evidence in favor of a divine passive.

Option 3. “Everyone acts violently toward the kingdom.” This option is the generalization for the more specific options 4, 5, and 6 that were given above for Matt 11:12. As has been previously discussed, the **overall linguistic evidence stands squarely in favor of this interpretation.** Various more specific suggestions regarding Luke’s intention have been made for the true identity of the subject *πᾶς*, the more plausible of which include that “all” refers to Satan, demons, or evil spirits,⁴⁴ that “all” refers to opponents in general,⁴⁵ and that “all” is the Pharisees.⁴⁶ **Only a couple of modern scholars, however, have suggested that the “all” is directed primarily at Herod Antipas in Luke 16:16c.**⁴⁷ I will defend this proposal while going beyond it in claiming that, just as was observed in Matt 11:7-8 and 11:12, here the Lucan Jesus is making a *coded* remark about Antipas. Antipas is cryptically being put forward as a typical executor of violence, and Jesus is thereby warning the Pharisees with whom he is conversing that they are in danger of becoming like Antipas should their active opposition to the kingdom likewise become violent:

The law and the prophets were until John; from that time the kingdom of God is being proclaimed, and everyone is acting violently toward it. But it is easier for heaven and

⁴³ Ibid., 745-55.

⁴⁴ So Ellis, *Luke*, 204-5; Kümmel, *Promise*, 121-25 (who subsequently changed his mind [cf. his *Introduction*, 144] and sided with option 1).

⁴⁵ Thiering (“False Teachers,” 293-97) proposes on the basis of scant evidence from Qumran (from which dubious parallels are drawn) that the “violence” refers primarily to Jesus’ opponents, whom Jesus regards as teachers of false doctrine.

⁴⁶ See n. 24 above.

⁴⁷ The first is A. R. C. Leaney (*A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke* [BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1958] 224-25), who suggests this interpretation but does not present any evidence. The second is Cameron (*Violence*, 151-52), who is focused primarily on Matthew but also argues (based primarily around his identification of an Aramaic *Vorlage*) **that Antipas stands behind the Lucan formulation.** Yet neither of these scholars suggests that the allusions to Herod in Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16c are part of **a deliberate code.** Cameron, who has comprehensively surveyed these texts, mentions only Friedrich Schleiermacher (*Über die Schriften des Lukas* [2 vols.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1817] 1:206-8) as anticipating his conclusions. Ernst Bammel (“Is Luke 16,16-18 of Baptist’s Provenance?” *HTR* 51 [1958] 101-6) approaches this solution when he speculatively (and implausibly) proposes that Luke 16:16-18 is a saying of John the Baptist about Antipas that has **been falsely attributed to Jesus by Luke.**

earth to pass away than for one stroke [of a letter] of the law to fall. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and the one who marries a woman divorced by her husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:16-18)⁴⁸

I contend that Jesus is not just offering a platitudinous, gnomic reply to the Pharisees regarding divorce in 16:17-18, as one might think if one were to explicate this as if it were an isolated fragment in light of its parallels in Matt 5:18, 32 (cf. Mark 10:11-12; 13:31; 1 Cor 7:10-11).⁴⁹ Rather, Luke 16:16-18 is a *unit*, and it is aimed via *code* at Antipas, who upon becoming enamored of his niece Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip, divorced the Nabatean princess to whom he was married and married Herodias (Josephus *A.J.* 18.5.1 §§109-13). The mere mention of John the Baptist in 16:16 when followed by remarks about illicit divorce and remarriage would have been enough for those with “ears to hear,” that is, those with knowledge of the hidden transcript, to think of Antipas and his misconduct.

In fact, Luke has already alerted his readers to Herod Antipas’s improper behavior in this regard: “But Herod the tetrarch, having been censured by him [John] concerning Herodias, the wife of his brother, and concerning all the other evil things that Herod had done, added also this evil to all the others, and he locked up John in prison” (3:19-20). Mark and Matthew are more detailed, adding that Antipas “married” (ἐγάμησεν) Herodias and that John had incurred Antipas’s wrath by bluntly stating to him, “It is not *lawful* for you to have her” (οὐκ ἔξεστί σοι ἔχειν αὐτήν [Matt 14:4]) or “It is not *lawful* for you to have the wife of your brother” (οὐκ ἔξεστί σοι ἔχειν τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου [Mark 6:18]).

I would argue—and this forms the heart of my proposal—that the specific yet coded connection of Luke 16:17-18 to Antipas is threefold, and every portion is directly applicable: (1) Antipas’s actions were perceived as a violation of *the law* against sexual intercourse with a brother’s wife (see Lev 18:16; 20:21), making sense of 16:17: “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of *the law* to fall”; (2) Antipas had divorced his own wife, the Nabatean princess, which aligns with 16:18a: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery”; and (3) Antipas had subsequently married a divorced woman, Herodias, further committing adultery, which corresponds to 16:18b: “and the one who marries a woman divorced by her husband commits adultery.”

⁴⁸ Luke 16:16-18: (16) Ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται μέχρι Ἰωάννου· ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται. (17) εὐκοπώτερον δέ ἐστιν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν παρελθεῖν ἢ τοῦ νόμου μίαν κεραίαν πεσεῖν. (18) Πᾶς ὁ ἀπολύων τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ γαμῶν ἑτέραν μοιχεύει, καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένην ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς γαμῶν μοιχεύει.

⁴⁹ Intriguingly, recent source-critical studies favor the basic integrity of Luke 16:16-18 as a unit in Q but tend to fragment this unit into disconnected discrete gnomic sayings in explicating the meaning of Q 16:16-18. See, e.g., the extensive discussion by Harry T. Fleddermann, *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary* (Biblical Tools and Studies 1; Leuven: Peeters, 2005) 781-92.

The following is offered as a periphrastic summary of the way the hidden transcript operates in Luke 16:16-18:

The law and the prophets were until John; from that time the kingdom of God is being proclaimed, and everyone [code: especially Antipas] is acting violently toward it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the law to fall [code: John was right in his criticism of Antipas for his flagrant violation of the law]. Everyone [code: such as Antipas] who divorces his wife [code: the Nabatean princess] and marries another [code: Herodias] commits adultery, and the one [code: Antipas] who marries a woman divorced by her husband [code: Herodias] commits adultery.

In my opinion, in light of the evidence for veiled references to Antipas in the Matthean parallel already presented above, the similar coded fit with Antipas in Luke 16:16-18 is **too precise to be coincidental**. Furthermore, in view of the mention of Antipas's divorce, illicit remarriage to his brother's wife, and execution of John the Baptist in all three of the Synoptic Gospels and in Josephus, we can surmise that this happening was **sufficiently well known** that it could be brought immediately to mind as a hidden transcript by indirect reference when the topic at hand pertained in any way to John or Antipas, such as is the case in 16:16.

Two possible objections against identifying Antipas as the referent should be dismissed. First, it is alleged that a contrastive such as *δέ* rather than *καί* would be expected if Luke 16:16c is intended as "everyone acts violently against it."⁵⁰ This dubiously assumes that the relationship between the clauses "the kingdom of God is proclaimed" and "everyone acts violently against it" must be contrastive, illegitimately ignoring **the possibility that it is continuative**.⁵¹ The second objection, formulated by Gottlob Schrenk, is that allegedly *βιάζεσθαι εἰς* cannot possibly mean "to exert force against," but only "to forcefully press into."⁵² Schrenk's *dictum* sounds rhetorically impressive, but what does it actually mean? In my own experience I have **a difficult time thinking of any occasions on which someone might "forcefully press into" something without "exercising force toward" that object**. And primary sources such as *Philo Spec. leg.* 3.72 (*βιασάμενος εἰς ὄμιλιαν*, "forcing toward/into intercourse") and *Spec. leg.* 4.70 (*εἰς ἄγνοιαν καὶ λήθην βιάζομενον*, "forcing himself toward/into ignorance and forgetfulness") show that the concepts of "exercising force toward" and "forcefully pressing into" cannot be tidily separated for *βιάζεσθαι εἰς* in our literature.

In light of the evidence for coded invective against Antipas in Luke 16:16-18, it is worth mentioning that the pericope that begins in **16:19** is the parable of *the rich man* and Lazarus. In fact, much as in the veiled reference to Antipas in Matt

⁵⁰ E.g., Bock, *Luke*, 2:1352-53.

⁵¹ For category descriptions, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 671.

⁵² So Schrenk, "βιάζομαι," 612, followed by Marshall (*Luke*, 629) and others.

11:8, in which it is said that “those who wear soft garments are in the homes of kings,” we find in Luke 16:19 that the rich man “was in the habit of clothing himself in purple and fine linen.” Moreover, the rich man claims to have **five brothers** (16:28), and, although this is **very speculative**, it is just possible that this is intended as a reference to **Antipas’s five living brothers**.⁵³ Of course the suggestion that Herod Antipas might be the target of the parable of the rich man has long been recognized (e.g., **Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 4.34.10**), although most commentators today do not even mention this as a possible interpretative option. Yet, if the parable of the rich man and Lazarus extends a thematic but **coded poke** at Antipas operative from Luke 16:16 onwards, such an interpretation takes on a whole new plausibility. To the objection that this is a fictional parable, and that therefore the characters in it should not be made to represent historical figures, one need only point to the parable of the vineyard (Luke 20:9-20 and par.) as a clear counterexample that blends the fictive with the historically referential.

As a final piece of evidence from Luke’s macronarrative, consider the manner in which Antipas’s violence is stressed in **Luke 13:31-33**, which also, I would argue, contains irony and cryptic doublespeak designed to make the criticism of Antipas and Jesus’ intentions less explicit:

At that very hour some Pharisees approached and said to Jesus, “Go forth and depart from here, because **Herod wants to kill you.**” Jesus said, “Go, say to that fox [**ἄλωπεκι**], ‘I am casting out demons and accomplishing healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I am completing [τελειοῦμαι]. However, it is necessary for me to go [on] today and tomorrow and the next day, for it is not possible for a prophet to die outside of Jerusalem!’”

Three points are noteworthy here with respect to my thesis that Antipas is being put forward as a dangerous perpetrator of violence against the kingdom in Luke 16:16c, necessitating the use of a hidden transcript. First, in Luke 13:31 the Pharisees are represented as saying that **Antipas wants to kill Jesus**, which suggests that Antipas’s disposition toward Jesus has escalated from perplexity in 9:7 (διαπορέω; cf. 9:9) to willful violence in 13:31, making appropriate the warning to the Pharisees in 16:16 against the adoption of Antipas’s violent attitude.

Second, Jesus responds by calling Antipas an ἄλωπηξ, which is usually translated as “fox.” Much like the English word “fox,” in antiquity the ἄλωπηξ was frequently a symbol of **cunning or craftiness**, so this could be interpreted as only moderately derisive and harmless if reported to Antipas (“Go and tell that ‘fox’” = **“Go tell that cunning critter”**).⁵⁴ Yet at the same time the word ἄλωπηξ is used

⁵³ So Leaney, *Luke*, 226. Bock (*Luke*, 2:1374 n. 31) objects to the identification of Antipas as the rich man because he is **portrayed as a ruler**. This not only ignores the coded reference to Antipas in Matt 11:8, but such reasoning also embraces a false dichotomy, since rulers were almost invariably wealthy.

⁵⁴ For an abundance of primary source references foregrounding **the cunning of the ἄλωπηξ** in Hellenistic literature, see BDAG, s.v. ἄλωπηξ, def. 2.

to designate several distinct species in our literature—a point not mentioned in BDAG. First, it designates the fox, of which there were probably two common species in biblical times (*Vulpes palaestina* and *Vulpes flavescens*—שׁוּרֵעַל). But, second, it also denotes the jackal (*Canis aureus*—שׁוּרֵעַל, תְּנוּת, and תְּנִים).⁵⁵ The fox eats fruit, insects, birds, and mice but does not eat carrion. The jackal, however, prefers carrion, although within the desolate environment that is the jackal's domain, it will eat almost anything out of necessity. Thus, within the bounds of Hellenistic Judaism, the jackal was regarded as a particularly vile, unclean animal, since it was frequently associated with desolation, destruction, and devouring dead carcasses⁵⁶—even human carcasses, such as would be in plentiful supply after a battle.⁵⁷ Most of the LXX occurrences of ἀλώπηξ probably refer to the jackal rather than the fox, given the activities described.⁵⁸ In short, we find that Jesus' description of Antipas as an ἀλώπηξ in Luke 13:31 continues the pattern of subtle, cryptic jabs at Antipas, this time by use of ambivalent, coded doublespeak: "Go tell that 'fox'" = "Go tell that despicably unclean devourer of carrion."

Third, the Lucan Jesus is unusually vague in describing the object of his actions (τελειοῦμαι, "I am completing"), and he uses irony to refer to his impending death: "it is not possible for a prophet to die outside of Jerusalem!" Both of these features in the text support the notion that Jesus' response to Herod involves a strategy of deliberate obfuscation.

In summary, Luke 16:16-18 appears to have been a thematically arranged collection of material that denigrates Herod Antipas by hidden transcript. Additionally, Luke 16:19-31 was probably juxtaposed to 16:16-18 to further this theme, whether by Luke or his source. Thus, Luke 16:17-18 does not contain isolated, gnomic sayings about divorce and the law but rather a veiled assertion by the Lucan Jesus, spoken to the Pharisees, that John the Baptist's criticism of Antipas was valid. The hyperbolic, coded reference to Antipas using πᾶς in 16:18 ("everyone who divorces his wife commits adultery") is identical to the hyperbolic, coded reference to

⁵⁵ For this and what follows, I depend on W. S. McCullough, "Fox," *IDB* 2:323-34; and "Jackal," *IDB* 2:781.

⁵⁶ See Judg 15:4-5; Neh 4:3; Job 30:29; Ps 44:19; Song 2:15; Isa 13:22; 34:13; 35:7; 43:20; Jer 9:11; 10:22; 14:6; 49:33; 51:37; Lam 4:3; 5:18; Ezek 13:4; Mic 1:8; Mal 1:3.

⁵⁷ E.g., Ps 62:11 LXX (Eng. 63:10).

⁵⁸ So McCullough, "Fox," 324. For example, it is almost certain that ἀλώπηξ refers to the jackal rather than the fox in Ps 62:11 LXX, since it refers to the devouring of human corpses: παραδοθήσονται εἰς χεῖρας ῥομφαίας μερίδες ἀλωπέκων ἔσονται ("they will be handed over to swords; they will be portions for the jackals"). Moreover, it is also likely that "jackals" is intended in Judg 15:4-5, since it is more likely that Samson would be portrayed as capturing three hundred animals that travel in a pack (i.e., jackals) as opposed to three hundred solitary dwellers (i.e., foxes), as is noted by G. E. Post, "Fox," in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. James Hastings; 1898-1904; 5 vols.; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) 2:64. The translation "jackals" is probably also to be preferred for Lam 5:18 ("upon Mount Zion jackals [ἀλώπεκες] prowl about because it has been obliterated") and Ezek 13:4 ("Your prophets, O Israel, are like jackals [ἀλώπεκες] in the desolate places").

Antipas using $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ in Luke 16:16c (“everyone is acting violently toward it”). The coded references find further support in the irony and ambivalent doublespeak vis-à-vis Antipas in Luke 13:31-33.

III. Conclusion and Implications

The violence of Herod Antipas and the Herodian family is frequently on overt display in the Synoptics. To speak out openly against Antipas was dangerous, as is illustrated by the fate of the Baptist. Accordingly, there is evidence that Jesus’ own criticism of Antipas was characterized by covert codes and ambiguous double-speak. In light of this pattern of coded speech, I have made a new proposal: that Jesus as he is portrayed in both **Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16-18 is intentionally making a cryptic allusion to the violent opposition of Antipas against the emerging kingdom movement.** This proposal is supported by the presence of hidden transcripts in the near context of each passage—Matt 11:7-8 and Luke 16:17-18. $\beta\acute{\iota}\alpha\zeta\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ in Matt 11:12 is passive, and the translation with coded paraphrase should run: “**From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is experiencing brutal opposition [code: by people such as Antipas], and brutal men [code: like Antipas] are laying [violent] hands on it.**” Meanwhile, Luke 16:16c is a continuative clause, $\beta\acute{\iota}\alpha\zeta\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ is middle, and Luke 16:16-18 contains numerous coded referents:

The law and the prophets were until John; from that time the kingdom of God is being proclaimed, and everyone **[code: especially Antipas]** is acting violently toward it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the law to fall **[code: John was right in his criticism of Antipas for his flagrant violation of the law]**. Everyone **[code: such as Antipas]** who divorces his wife **[code: the Nabatean princess]** and marries another **[code: Herodias]** commits adultery, and the one **[code: Antipas]** who marries a woman divorced by her husband **[code: Herodias]** commits adultery.

Meanwhile, a code belittling Antipas is also plausible in Luke 16:19-31 and intentionally ambiguous doubletalk about Antipas is likely in Luke 13:31-33.

In their original *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, such hidden transcripts probably served to buffer the kingdom movement and Jesus himself from the brutal opposition of Antipas. More specifically, Matt 11:12 and Luke 16:16c function as **warnings to those among the crowds and among the Pharisees who might be prone to follow Herod’s violent example, indicating that they should refrain from violent opposition to the kingdom.** At the same time, Jesus gains social prestige as those in his audience with knowledge of the hidden transcript detect that he has cunningly mocked Herod and thereby enhanced his own reputation.

Although I leave it to others to work out the detailed implications of my hypothesis for source criticism of the Synoptics, I would like to outline the main

contours. First, the recent trend in Q studies identifying Luke 16:16-18 as a continuous unit in Q finds strong support in my hypothesis.⁵⁹ Thus, Matthew is probably responsible for redactionally splitting and dispersing Q 16:16-18 into various other locations in his Gospel. On the other hand, the Matthean setting of Q 16:16 as part of an extended discourse about John the Baptist is much more likely to be original to the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* than the Lucan setting of a Pharisaic dispute. Accordingly, I would suggest that while both Matthew and Luke redactionally modified the exact wording of their common source in minor ways,⁶⁰ Matthew preserves the most likely *Sitz im Leben Jesu* but does not accurately preserve the integrity of the full saying as a unit. Meanwhile, Luke 16:16-18 essentially preserves the complete unit of the original saying as it was found in the source but redactionally places the entire unit in an artificial setting.

⁵⁹ See *Critical Edition of Q* (ed. Robinson et al.), 464-71; Fleddermann, *Q: A Reconstruction and Commentary*, 781-92.

⁶⁰ See n. 3 above for a generally accepted reconstruction of Q 16:16.

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