

John 15.14 and the ΦΙΛ- Lexeme in Light of Numismatic Evidence: Friendship or Obedience?

MICHAEL P. THEOPHILOS

School of Theology, Australian Catholic University, Locked Bag 4115, Fitzroy MDC, VIC 3065, Australia. Email: michael.theophilos@acu.edu.au

Commentators regularly note the alleged tension in John 15 between ‘friendship’ and ‘obedience’. This article employs numismatic inscriptional evidence to explore the ΦΙΛ- lexeme and more carefully denote the semantic domains of relevant terminology. This analysis confirms that no such tension exists within the socio-political context in which the Gospel was written. The inclusion of specific political terminology on Roman coins (for example, ΦΙΛΙΑ; ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ; ΦΙΛΟΚΛΑΥΔΙΟΣ; ΦΙΛΟΡΩΜΑΙΟΣ; ΦΙΛΟΣΕΒΑΣΤΩΝ) was one way in which elite concepts of political friendship, evidenced in Cicero and Seneca, were communicated to the masses. In light of the numismatic evidence, the ΦΙΛ- lexeme can refer not only to the emotional bond of friendship, but also the dimension of obligation.

Keywords: John 15.14, friendship, friend of Caesar, numismatics, Roman coins, lexicography

1. Introduction

John 15 consists of what is commonly referred to as the ‘vine metaphor discourse’,¹ wherein Jesus encourages his followers to ‘remain in him’ (vv. 4, 7), as well as warning them of the world’s hatred of them, and consequent future suffering (vv. 18–26). In v. 14, Jesus declares to those in his hearing, ὑμεῖς φίλοι μου ἐστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν. The reference to φίλος is understood variously by commentators, the majority of whom equate it to the basic semantic domain provided in BDAG, that is, (1) pertaining to having a special interest in someone, loving, kindly disposed, devoted, or (2) one who is on intimate terms or in close association with another, that is, a friend.² There is, however, a

1 B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982) 281.

2 W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999³) 1058–9.

fundamental tension in the secondary literature as to whether φίλος is intended to highlight the emotional dimension of intimacy or a sense of obligation within the context of John 15.

The trajectory of this paper is part of a larger project entitled *Numismatics and Greek Lexicography*,³ which explores the implications of the numismatic material for contributions to lexicography, particularly as it pertains to linguistic features of post-classical Greek. The working aim and methodology adopted in both that larger work and this paper can be summarised as follows: to employ dated and geographically legitimate comparative numismatic data to refine, illuminate and clarify the relevant semantic domains of New Testament vocabulary, with a particular interest in New Testament exegetical difficulties.

2. John 15.4 and the ΦΙΛ- Lexeme

Robert Kysar is representative of BDAG's interpretive tradition when he states, '[the] declaration that the disciples are friends involves a transformation of the usual servant/master pattern ... Friendship implies ... relationship [and] intimacy, as opposed to the singular quality of the obedience demanded of a slave.'⁴ Although in no way dependent, this echoes Ambrose of Milan (333–97 CE), who also defines friendship in terms of close companionship and intimacy, 'God himself made us friends instead of servants ... He gave us a pattern of friendship to follow. We are to fulfil the wish of a friend, to unfold to him our secrets that we hold in our own hearts, and are not to disregard his confidences. Let us show him our heart, and he will open his to us ... A friend, then, if he is a true one, hides nothing' (*Duties of the Clergy* 3.22.135.42).⁵

One of the first modern commentators to recognise a tension between the emotional connotations and the element of obligation was Rudolf Bultmann, who noted that 'the reciprocity of the relationship created by his [i.e. Jesus'] choosing them is of a different sort from that of a purely human friendship'.⁶ Raymond Brown argued in a similar manner that φίλος 'does not capture sufficiently this relationship of love'.⁷ Bultmann, however, contended that v. 14, ὑμεῖς φίλοι μου ἐστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν, was 'not a question of their still having to *become* his friends by fulfilling his commands; they *are* his friends already'.⁸ Bultmann maintained this interpretation through appeal to v.

3 M. P. Theophilos, *Numismatics and Greek Lexicography* (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

4 R. Kysar, *John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986) 240.

5 All translations are my own.

6 R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 545.

7 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John xiii–xxi* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1970) 664.

8 Bultmann, *John*, 543.

15, which, he states, ‘specifies the condition whereby what they already are can be fully realised in them’.⁹

In contrast to this view, however, Urban C. von Wahlde notes that ‘the language of contingency here strikes the modern reader as peculiar’.¹⁰ Similarly, Ernst Haenchen observes that ‘with respect to his friends Jesus is the one who gives commands, who assigns tasks’.¹¹ C. K. Barrett highlights the tension in v. 14 by noting that ‘it is clear that the status of a friend is not one which precludes obedient service; this is rather demanded’.¹² Barrett, however, draws back from affirming Adolf Deissmann’s observation that φίλος is attested in reference to a highly placed official in the Ptolemaic court,¹³ simply stating that ‘there is no need to suppose ... that this usage strongly influenced John’.¹⁴

D. A. Carson does not permit an interpretation of friendship ‘of the modern variety’,¹⁵ yet he seems to do so out of a concern for ‘demeaning God’¹⁶ rather than on any lexicographic or contextual grounds. Carson focuses on the ‘revealed plan’ as foundational to the definition of friendship, even though he confesses that such a definition was not a component of the friendship of Moses (Exod 33.11) or Abraham (Isa 41.8; 2 Chron 20.7): ‘In times past God’s covenant people were not informed of God’s saving plan in the full measure now accorded to Jesus’ disciples.’¹⁷ In tacit agreement with Bultmann, Carson argues that ‘obedience is not what makes them friends; it is what characterizes his friends.’¹⁸ As noted above, this view is untenable in light of the subsequent conditional phrase ‘if you do what I command you’ (John 15.14b).

J. Ramsey Michaels attempt to avert the conditional nature of v. 14 by suggesting that ‘if it were a true conditional we would have expected “If you do the things I command you, you *will be* my friends”, making friendship dependent on per-

9 Bultmann, *John*, 543.

10 U. C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 682.

11 E. Haenchen, *John*, vol. II (trans. R. W. Funk and U. Busse; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 132.

12 C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Cambridge: SPCK, 1978²) 477.

13 A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts from the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927²; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 383. Several commentators in the late nineteenth century trace the friendship idea to Abraham, see for example B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: Butcher and Tanner, 1882) 220; cf. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, vol. III (trans. David Smith and G. A. Kon; New York: Crossroad, 1982) 109–10, who traces the theme of friendship in Jewish sapiential literature citing examples such as Ecclus 6.5–17.

14 Barrett, *John*, 477.

15 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1991) 533.

16 Carson, *John*, 533.

17 Carson, *John*, 533.

18 Carson, *John*, 522.

formance'.¹⁹ Yet such an explanation is not sustainable in light of the many examples, even within John's Gospel, of conditional statements consisting of a verb in the present tense followed by the conjunction ἐάν: see for example John 3.2; 5.19; 7.51. So it remains that the friendship of which Jesus speaks in 15.14 entails, and presupposes, obedience as a condition, an aspect that would presumably be difficult to reconcile if φίλος, in this context, was referring solely to intimacy and/or emotional companionship.

3. The Greco-Roman Context

A revealing aspect of the semantic domain of φίλος (and related terminology) is evident in Roman friendships of 'unequals'. Warren Carter defines this phenomenon as 'involving people of different socioeconomic levels, where inequalities of wealth, power, and status were common in patron-client relations, with their attendant repertoire of duties and obligations'.²⁰ Φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος (friend of the emperor), and the related Φίλος τοῦ Σέβαστου (friend of Augustus), were official titles which Deissmann traced back to the 'language of the court under the successors of Alexander'.²¹

In a compelling monograph, David Braund explores the representation of imperial-period provincial rulers and the portrayal of their relationship with Rome to their subjects.²² In providing a study of the institution of client kings as a whole, the study helpfully highlights the extent to which a ruler 'might advertise his friendship with Rome in his very titulature'.²³ As will become evident in our analysis below, not only did this titulature take the form of the φιλ- stem, but this terminology occurs most regularly on the provincial coinage of Rome.²⁴ Braund concludes that 'a king with a special debt to Rome or an emperor

19 J. R. Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 813.

20 W. Carter, *Empire and John* (London: T&T Clark, 2008) 278.

21 Deissmann, *Light*, 383.

22 D. Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of Client Kingship* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), esp. 105–8.

23 Braund, *Rome*, 105.

24 The earliest attested use of φιλορόμαιος is that of Ariobarzanes I, king of Cappadocia from 95 to 63 BCE (R. D. Sullivan, 'The Dynasty of Cappadocia', *ANRW* II.7.2 (1980) 1125–68). After the advent of the Principate both φιλοκλαύσιος and φιλοσέβαστος were common titles adopted by client kings. The more specific designations of φιλογερμάνικος (Gaius) [Polemo II of Pontus, *IGR* IV.145] and φιλοκλαύδιος (Claudius) [Herod of Chalcis] (see A. Reifenberg, *Ancient Jewish Coins* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1947) 23–4), are also attested on coinage. E. Schürer suggests that the adoption of the title would be 'a natural act of homage to the emperor to whom he owed all his splendor' (E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)* revised G. Vermes and F. Millar, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973) 572).

might be particularly expected to use these epithets',²⁵ and provides, among other examples, that of Mannus VIII of Osrhoene who, after he was restored to his throne by Rome, issues coins with φιλορώμαιος.

John Crook traces the evolution of the *amici principis* from the Hellenistic kingdoms through the Republic and into the imperial period.²⁶ He suggests that the ultimate catalyst for the designation φίλοι seems to have been that of legitimation,²⁷ initially as advisors and then later 'an honorific institution'.²⁸ Crook argues that 'the concept of *amicus* was an integral part of the complicated political pattern of the Republic. Political *amicitia* was bound up with *clientele*, *hospitium*, *patronatus*, as one of the innumerable ways in which a man could win support by lending it – the nearest thing, in fact, that Rome ever had to a party system.'²⁹ Relevant to our discussion is Crook's conclusion that '[i]t was not necessary, in order to be an *amicus principis*, to be a personal friend of the emperor in any emotional sense',³⁰ and that this friendship 'is often shown not as a passive, but an active and arduous honour, which may take a man's whole time and attention'.³¹

Further literary evidence for the pervasive phenomenon of the φίλος Καίσαρος comes from the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria's 'historical' treatise *In Flaccum*. In sections 36–40, there is a mocking ceremony, of sorts, against Agrippa, where the antagonists of the Jewish people parade a lunatic named Karabas as a king, paying him royal honours. Philo condemns Flaccus, the governor of Egypt, appointed by Tiberius, for not 'interfering in this insult ... [and] thus giving the Alexandrians immunity and free play in their actions against the Jews'. Philo suggests that it would have been more prudent if Flaccus 'had apprehended the maniac and put him in prison, that he might not give to those who reviled him any opportunity or excuse for insulting their superiors, and if he had chastised those who dressed him up for having dared both openly and disguisedly, both with words and actions, to insult a king and a friend of Caesar (φίλον Καίσαρος), and one who had been honoured by the Roman senate with imperial authority; but he not only did not punish them, but he did not think fit even to check them, but gave complete license and impunity to all those who designed ill'.³²

25 Braund, *Rome*, 107.

26 J. Crook, *Consilium Principis: Imperial Councils and Counsellors from Augustus to Diocletian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955) 21–30.

27 Crook, *Consilium Principis*, 21.

28 Crook, *Consilium Principis*, 21.

29 Crook, *Consilium Principis*, 22.

30 Crook, *Consilium Principis*, 22.

31 Crook, *Consilium Principis*, 26.

32 P. W. van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 128.

Similarly, in his discussion of the otherwise unknown Marcus Terentius (*Annals* 6.8), Tacitus records the deep entrenchment of the patron–client relationship in which Terentius was involved. Tacitus has these words on the lips of Terentius: ‘I confess that not only was I the friend of Sejanus [commander of the Praetorian Guard from 14 to 31 CE], but that I strove for his friendship, and that when I attained it, I rejoiced ... The closer a man’s intimacy with Sejanus, the stronger his claim to the emperor’s friendship.’ Among other references to advisors and colleagues, the political relationship is described in terms of friendship (*amicitia*) with the emperor.

Furthermore, the geographer Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.5.5), writing of the political turmoil of the Laconians, refers favourably to their φιλικῶν λειτουργιῶν (‘friendly services’) to the Romans after the overthrow of the Macedonians. In his description, Strabo refers specifically to a certain man named Eurycles who ‘stirred up some disturbances among them, having apparently abused the friendship of Caesar (τῇ Καίσαρος φιλίᾳ) unduly to maintain his authority of his subjects’.³³ In doing so, Strabo correlates ‘the exercise of his authority’ with his τῇ Καίσαρος φιλίᾳ (‘friendship of Caesar’).³⁴

The cumulative weight of this evidence, together with that which follows, suggests that the semantic domain of φίλοι included clients who were the recipients of political favours or privilege from their patron. This political matrix indebted the client to a relationship of obligation, responsibility and commitment to their patron, in what could only be described as fidelity and allegiance.³⁵

4. The Numismatic Evidence

Turning to the numismatic record, a sample of the relevant material that contributes to this debate is summarised in [Table 1](#). Of particular interest is occurrence of ΦΙΛΙΑ in *Roman Provincial Coinage* volume 1³⁶ (*RPC* 1) 4982, a coin of Agrippa I ([Fig. 1](#)). The obverse has three figures, and the inscription reads (reconstructed on the basis of several specimens), ΒΑΣ ΑΓΡΙΠΠΙΑΣ ΣΕΒ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ ΒΑΣ ΗΡΩΔΗΣ (‘King Agrippa, Augustus [i.e. Claudius] Caesar, King Herod’), LH (‘year 8’). Agrippa is to the left, Claudius in the centre, and Herod of

33 For a disparaging ancient perspective on Eurycles, see Josephus, *A.J.* 16.301, 306, 309–10; *B.J.* 1.513, 518, 526, 530, 532.

34 For further discussion on ‘friend of Caesar’, see F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London: Duckworth, 1992) 110–22; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Published Papyri in 1978* (Sydney: Macquarie University, 1983) 87–9.

35 B. J. Malina and R. L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 236.

36 A. Burnett, M. Amandry and P. P. Ripollès, *Roman Provincial Coinage*, vol. 1: *From the Death of Caesar to the Death of Vitellius (44 BC–AD 69)* (London: British Museum, 1992).

Table 1. Sample of relevant material.

ΦΙΑΙΑ	Judaea	42-4 CE	RPC I.4982
ΦΙΑΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ	Judaea	40-95 CE	RPC I.4979
	Judaea	40-95 CE	RPC I.4983
	Judaea	40-95 CE	RPC I.4985
	Philadelphia/Lyd.	37-41 CE	RPC I.3027
	Philadelphia/Lyd.	37-41 CE	RPC I.3028
	Philadelphia/Lyd.	37-41 CE	RPC I.3029
	Philadelphia/Lyd.	37-41 CE	RPC I.3030
	Philadelphia/Lyd.	37-41 CE	RPC I.3031
	Tripolis/Lyd.	14-37 CE	RPC I.3054
	Tripolis/Lyd.	14-37 CE	RPC I.3055
	Tripolis/Lyd.	14-37 CE	RPC I.3056
	Tripolis/Lyd.	14-37 CE	RPC I.3057
ΦΙΑΟΚΛΑΥΔΙΟΣ	Chalcis	43-4 CE	RPC I.4778
ΦΙΑΟΡΩΜΑΙΟΣ	Galatia	58 CE	SNG France ¹ 2336
	Cappadocia	96-63 BCE	Alram ² 166
	Commagene	36-20 BCE	Alram 248
ΦΙΑΟΣΕΒΑΣΤΩΝ	Stratonicea/Kar.	79-81 CE	RPC II.1196

¹*Sylloge nummorum Graecorum. France 2. Cabinet des Medailles: Cilicie* (Paris/Zurich: BNF, 1993).

²M. Alram, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch: nomina propria Iranica in nummis* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986).

Chalcis (i.e. Agrippa's brother) to the right. Agrippa and Herod have an arm extended and crown the central figure with a wreath. On the basis of Josephus *A.J.* 19.274-9,³⁷ Ya'akov Meshorer concludes that this scene is a reference 'to a

³⁷ 'Now, when Claudius had taken out of the way all those soldiers whom he suspected, which he did immediately, he published an edict, and therein confirmed that kingdom to Agrippa which Caius had given him, and therein commended the king highly. He also made an addition to it of all that country over which Herod, who was his grandfather, had reigned, that is, Judea and Samaria; and this he restored to him as due to his family. But for Abila of Lysanias, and all that lay at Mount Libanus, he bestowed them upon him, as out of his own territories. He also made a league with this Agrippa, confirmed by oaths, in the middle of the forum, in the city of Rome;



Figure 1. PC 1.4982 (25 mm, 16.78 g), used with permission.

ceremony held in the forum of Rome on the occasion of the signing of a treaty of friendship between Claudius and the Jewish kings'.³⁸ And indeed the image of clasped hands (a symbol of agreement) and inscription on the reverse confirms this interpretation, ΟΡΚΙΑ ΒΑΣ(ΙΛΕΩΣ) ΜΕ(ΓΑΛΟΥ) ΑΓΡΙΠΠΙΑ ΠΡ(ΟΣ) ΣΕΒ(ΑΣΤΟΝ) ΚΑΙΣΑΡΑ Κ(ΑΙ) ΣΥΝΚΛΗΤΟΝ Κ(ΑΙ) ΔΗΜΟ(Ν) ΡΩΜ(ΑΙΩΝ) ΦΙΛΙ(Α) Κ(ΑΙ) ΣΥΝΜΑΧΙ(Α) ΑΥΤΟΥ ('sworn treaty of Great King Agrippa to Augustus Caesar [i.e. Claudius] and to the Senate and to the People of the Romans, his friendship and alliance'). This was perhaps a result of Claudius' willingness to grant Agrippa rule of the Judea and Sameria, in addition to consular rank, in effect restoring the extent of territory 'governed by his grandfather Herod the Great'.³⁹ Josephus *A.J.* 19.339 demonstrates the extent of Agrippa's diplomatic participation in the patron-client matrix when, at a meeting with other Roman client kings in Tiberias (Antiochus, king of

he also took away from Antiochus that kingdom which he was possessed of, but gave him a certain part of Cilicia and Commagene; he also set Alexander Lysimachus, the alabarch, at liberty, who had been his old friend, and steward to his mother Antonia, but had been imprisoned by Caius, whose son [Marcus] married Bernice, the daughter of Agrippa. But when Marcus, Alexander's son, was dead, who had married her when she was a virgin, Agrippa gave her in marriage to his brother Herod, and begged for him of Claudius the kingdom of Chalcis. Now, about this time there was a sedition between the Jews and the Greeks, at the city of Alexandria; for, when Caius was dead, the nation of the Jews, which had been very much mortified under the reign of Caius, and reduced to very great distress by the people of Alexandria, recovered itself, and immediately took up their arms to fight for themselves. So Claudius sent an order to the president of Egypt, to quiet that tumult; he also sent an edict, at the request of King Agrippa and King Herod, both to Alexandria and to Syria, whose contents were as follows ...'

38 Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (Jerusalem: Amphora Books, 2001) 101.

39 D. Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins* (Jerusalem: Amphora, 2010⁵) 265.

Commagene, Sampsigeramus, king of Emesa, Cotys king of the Lesser Armenia, Polemo king of Pontus, and Herod of Chalcis), 'his converse with all of them when he entertained and showed them courtesies was such as to demonstrate an elevation of sentiment that justified the honour done him by a visit of royalty'. Other coins similarly celebrate the political 'friendship' of Agrippa I with the Caesar. *RPC* 1.4983 translates as 'Great King Agrippa, friend of Caesar'. The reverse depicts a temple with two columns.

Among the coins from Stratonicea is *RPC* II.1196, a coin bearing the inscription ΤΙΤΟΣ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ with the laureate head of Titus on the obverse, and ΣΤΡΑΤΟΝΙΚΕΩΝ ΦΙΛΟΣΕΒΑΣΤΩΝ with a goddess standing facing holding the patera (libation bowl) and torch. In view, perhaps, is that the city herself is indebted to Titus.

The coins of Philadelphia fall into three categories, the second of which have a Capricorn on the reverse and the title ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ. Interestingly all coins from Attalikos, Moschion, Kleandros and Antiochus seem to be from the same obverse die. Under Caligula, no fewer than seven ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ types were in circulation. *RPC* 1.3031 has the bare head of Caligula looking right, with the standard inscription ΓΑΙΟΣ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ (Fig. 2). On the reverse there is a capricorn leaping to the left, and cornucopia with the inscription ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΕΩΝ ΜΑΚΕΔΩΝ.

The coinage of Tripolis is renowned for illustrating the difficulty in sorting issues by Augustus or Tiberius. However, *RPC* 1.3056 certainly depicts Tiberius, despite some curious features of the portrait on the obverse. The reverse has the inscription ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΚΑΙΣΑΡ ΤΟ Δ (Fig. 3).

The title 'friend of the emperor' (or equivalent) on provincial coinage was certainly not empty titlature but served to 'indicate to the inhabitants of the Empire the importance of those sent to govern them ... [that] they are representative of the *auctoritas* [authority] of the emperor'.⁴⁰ This relationship was one defined by obligation and responsibility rather than affection or an emotional connection. This aspect of obligation is plainly seen in a later episode within the Gospel of John where the Jewish crowds taunt Pilate, in what could be mistaken as political blackmail: οἱ δὲ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐκράγασαν λέγοντες· ἐὰν τοῦτον ἀπολύσης, οὐκ εἶ φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος· πᾶς ὁ βασιλεὺς ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν ἀντιλέγει τῷ Καίσαρι (John 19.12).⁴¹ This is precisely the force of the word in the context in John 15.14, that is, being Jesus' friend (φίλοι μου) comes with responsibilities and obligations (n.b. verse 14b, ἐὰν ποιῆτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν). Just as being a

40 Crook, *Consilium Principis*, 24.

41 Cf. Philo *Leg. ad Gai.* 302 where Jewish leaders threatened to refer a matter to Tiberius, whereupon Pilate 'feared that if they actually sent an embassy they would also expose the rest of his conduct as a governor by stating in full the bribes, the insults, the outrages and wonton injuries, the executions without trial constantly repeated, the ceaseless and repeated cruelty'.



Figure 2. RPC 1.3031 (18 mm, 5.12 g), used with permission.



Figure 3. RPC 1.3056 (21 mm, 5.99 g), used with permission.

‘friend of Caesar’ entailed responsibility, duty and obedience, so too does ‘friendship with Jesus’, in which his followers are to ‘do as I say’ or else risk their standing as friends of Jesus.

Warren Carter, and others, have demonstrated that there is a porous interchange between Roman imperial ideology and the New Testament, at the level of literary structure, thematic elements and lexicographic detail. Carter’s most recent extended work on the subject, *John and Empire*,⁴² although controversial, has raised the vivid possibility of a profound connection between John and imperial ideology as a viable and attractive contributing feature to the narrative interpretive horizon. The foregrounding of the Roman political context avoids the dichotomy of either the too narrow identification of sectarian disputes or, conversely, the historical decontextualisation of the Gospel. The reading of John

⁴² Carter, *John*.

15.14 presented here, confirmed and illuminated through the numismatic record, not only does justice to the semantic range of φίλος, but also coheres with the political and literary context of the Johannine pericope.

5. Conclusion

Scholarly attention to the numismatic record as it pertains to the study of the New Testament is in its infancy. Studies on the shared symbolic iconography of Roman coins and the New Testament are becoming more common,⁴³ but very little attention has been devoted to the question as it relates to lexicography.⁴⁴ I have argued in this paper that when one takes into consideration the numismatic material in conjunction with the literary evidence a substantial case can be made that the ΦΙΛ- lexeme, includes not merely an emotional or personal dimension of friendship, but also the dimension of obligation. This is not to say that the emotional dimension is lacking in John's Gospel, or elsewhere in the New Testament (see for example Jesus' friendship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in John 11.5),⁴⁵ but the term can also be used to highlight the responsibilities and obligation of two parties, and it is this force that seems to be highlighted in John 15. The attestation of the ΦΙΛ- lexeme and associated symbolism in the numismatic record is particularly significant because of the widespread geographic distribution of the coins across the Mediterranean world and their ability to clearly communicate an ideological message to a semi-literate or illiterate audience.

43 Some pertinent examples are R. E. Oster, 'Numismatic Windows into the Social World of Early Christianity: A Methodological Enquiry', *JBL* 101 (1982) 195–223; *idem*, "Show me a denarius": Symbolism of Roman Coinage and Christian Beliefs', *ResQ* 28 (1986) 107–15; L. J. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images: Roman Imperial Coinage and the New Testament World* (JSNTSup 134; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); M. Reiser, 'Numismatik und Neues Testament', *Biblica* 81 (2000) 457–88, at 457; A. Weissenrieder and F. Wendt, 'He is a god! Acts 28:1–9 in the Light of Iconographical and textual Sources Related to Medicine', *Picturing the New Testament: Studies in Ancient Visual Images* (ed. A. Weissenrieder, F. Wendt and P. von Gemünden; WUNT 11/193; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 127–56; D. May, 'The Empire Strikes Back: The Mark of the Beast in Revelation', *Review & Expositor* 106 (2009) 83–98; *idem*, 'Interpreting Revelation with Roman Coins: A Test Case, Revelation 6:9–11', *Review & Expositor* 106 (2009) 445–65.

44 Some exceptions are F. Thielman, 'God's Righteousness as God's Fairness in Romans 1:17: An Ancient Perspective on a Significant Phrase', *JETS* 54 (2011) 35–48; J. A. D. Weima, "Peace and Security" (1 Thess 5.3): Prophetic Warning or Political Propaganda?', *NTS* 58 (2012) 331–59; M. P. Theophilus, 'The Numismatic Background of ΧΑΡΑΚΤΗΡ in Hebrews 1:3', *ABR* 64 (2016) 69–80; *idem*, 'Ephesus and the Numismatic Background to "νεωκόρος"' (Atlanta: SBL, forthcoming); *idem*, *Numismatics and Greek Lexicography* (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

45 Cf. Aristotle's description of happiness, 'good birth, plenty of friends, good friends, wealth, good children, plenty of children ...' (*Rhet.* 1.5.4).