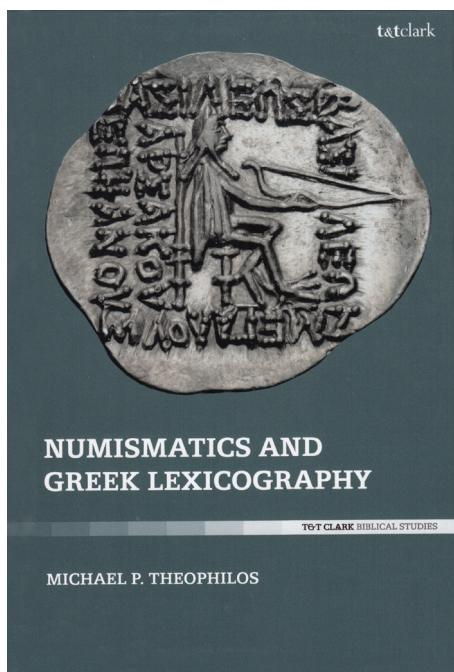


## Reviews



**M.P. Theophilos, *Numismatics and Greek Lexicography*, London: T&T Clark, 2020, pp xiv + 280; 76 Figures, 23 Tables; ISBN 978-0-5676-7436-4; also available in electronic form; A\$170**

Reviewed by G.H.R. Horsley

Not many specialists in New Testament studies have made serious use on a more than occasional basis of numismatic evidence for contextualising the former. Above all because of his *Licht vom Osten* (1908), Adolf Deissmann was certainly in the vanguard — if not the actual pathfinder — of the few others a century ago who drew on coin evidence as well as inscriptions and papyri to illuminate the early Christian texts and those who sought to live by them. Among those equally few who come to mind from over a generation ago who recognised anew the potential of numismatic material for NT studies, neither Richard Oster nor L.J. Kreitzer should be forgotten.

The aim, well worth testing, of this book is to draw attention to the potential for NT lexicographical research of the wording found on coins. To achieve this, the author undertakes several interconnected tasks; and the result is a volume which could be a *vade mecum* for users with NT training who are interested particularly in the language employed in those texts, and wish to familiarise themselves with roughly contemporaneous numismatic material and its potential to illuminate certain lexical usages in the earliest Christian documents. Consequently, the focus is almost entirely on coins with Greek text, though occasionally other languages make an appearance.

Michael Theophilos has given considerable thought to what can be included, and how to present it effectively to those possessing no real acquaintance with this kind of evidence. To that end it is a notable plus about the book that his publisher has agreed to the inclusion of so many (76) plates of coins, obverse and reverse, every one of which is visually sharp, as much as the condition of each one permits; and the placing of these close to where each is being discussed is much more effective than the still-common practice of quarantining them at the end of the book. Inevitably, however, this is a factor in the book's high cost.

There are ten chapters, bookended by an introduction and a conclusion, plus an extensive bibliography (much larger than needed, since *c.* 15pp. of it repeats the SNG vols from Table 3, now alphabetically by author instead of by region), and two indexes: modern authors — not always to be trusted for its accuracy (e.g. two Horsleys are subsumed under one; Oster at 73, but not at 74 or 75) — and references to Biblical passages and other ancient sources. Part 1 of the book (chs 1–4) explains clearly and reasonably concisely the history of coinage, draws back the curtain on the mysteries of technical terminology employed by specialist numismatists and the abbreviations they consistently use, as well as conveniently listing the main collections worldwide. The 30pp. comprising ch. 4 attempt to anticipate some uncertainties which may well occur to those considering drawing on numismatic evidence without prior training or experience in dealing with that material. Tables 7–9 are useful, clarifying the dates which certain abbreviations on the coins indicate. There may be more than a single explanation for people hoarding coins in antiquity, but the reason advanced (77) is certainly worth reflecting on for its wider social ramifications. Since the book is intended to be introductory, the author should clarify which view is to be preferred when he cites contrasting views of specialists (eg 88–89 re *RPC* 1.76), as the anticipated readership is in no position to make a judgement. This *c.* 100pp. comprising Part 1 permits the inference that the author intends the volume to be for those with a NT focus who have little or no experience of dealing with ancient coinage in technical volumes presenting that material.

Part 2 of the book (chs 5–11) gets to the heart of the matter. Its *c.* 115pp., consisting of seven chapters (plus brief conclusion, rather repetitive of what has gone before), seek to link the often severely-abbreviated wording on coins with certain words appearing in the NT, and elsewhere, of course, in order to demonstrate the potential of numismatic evidence as a contribution to the better understanding of some NT terminology. All but one (ch. 8) of these chapters consider a single word or word-group:

- *philos* (ch. 5, pp. 105–14; certainly interesting for its discussion of NT Jn 15.14, though not crisply argued): T. argues from consideration of Jn 15.14 that a friendship of equals is not primarily in view. Jesus determines who his friends are; and so the notion of

‘friend of Caesar’ is apt to adduce. So *philos* may refer to a friend whom one loves altruistically; or it may be a politically-loaded word for a person who has received the favour of a social or political superior, such as a Caesar or a provincial governor, in return for loyalty through ‘thick and thin’, by looking after that superior’s interests and reputation locally. The question for reflection then becomes whether Jesus saw this bifurcated meaning that way, or the Gospel writers used this terminology to clarify the reality as they saw it, by means of the *philokaisar* analogy;

- *karpophoros* (6, pp. 115–26; not everyone may agree that this adjective is to be considered ‘rare’ [p. 115], though the related verb is certainly quite rarely attested in non-literary texts);

- *neokoros* (7, pp. 127–42; the best chapter in this part of the book);

- a rather odd miscellany of words which are given an appearance of coherence by being associated with one city, Thessalonike (8, pp. 143–63);

- *kharakter* (9, pp. 165–73; another valuable chapter);

- *ktistes* (10, pp. 175–91; a chapter which will hopefully provoke reflection from the book’s readers about the meaning of the term at NT 1 Pt 4.19);

- *basileus basilewn* (11, pp. 193–215; the quotation from D.S. 1.47.4 [ref. not given at 194 n.11, simply a p. no. in the Loeb, which has therefore been looked at simply online]). Concerning this chapter, the first word of the coin text on Sellwood 27.2 [fig. 66] quoted at p. 195 has a misprint, as the photo indicates: read –ΕΩΣ. Accordingly, the translation needs revising: ‘(coin) of the king of kings ...’ This reading is confirmed by Sellwood 41.8, 42.2 and 51.9 (figs 67, 68 and 69, respectively), and whose translations, therefore, all need minor revision as suggested here for 27.2. The last line of text on p. 195 is potentially confusing in quoting the first word as nom. sing. instead of the expected gen. sing. used by the coins on pp. 196–97.

Yet lexicography involves more than simply finding and piling up a list of attestations of a particular word. Definition (not simply glossing) is required. Were this aspect of the book to be given further consideration, then the users whom the author has most in mind would be able to appreciate better the benefit of engaging with numismatic evidence, even if lexicography may not be their main focus. Ch. 5 on the *φιλ-* lexeme makes the point well, that words in which it features are not always solely dealing with friendliness as an inter-personal characteristic, but also political or social obligation. This is not a range in meaning confined to coins or literature, of course: it is everywhere, including on inscriptions and papyri. The numismatic witness to the lexical range simply confirms what occurs everywhere in Greek of the period; and therefore it should not be felt unexpected that

occurrences of *φιλ-* words in the NT may exhibit a similar variety of meanings.

Does the book presuppose that its readers already have a reasonably good grasp of Greek (or at least of the NT texts in the original language)? The answer appears to be ‘no’. For example, the comment at 181 n. 16 implies that the author anticipates little knowledge of Greek among his readers; yet no guidance is offered about how the word *κτίστης* in *SEG* 36.1092, if a gen. case, is to be understood instead of the nom.: perhaps ‘(in honour) of the city of the founder’? The translation of (mostly) every instance of Greek wording in the book reinforces this impression of the relatively low level of control of Greek expected of the book’s readers. If so, how can those readers be expected to follow the arguments advanced in the book, and make any independent evaluation of them? When no rendering is provided, such users of the book are left high and dry (a case in point occurs at 152, 5 up).

The 23 Tables are well-placed throughout the book at appropriate points, close to where their content is discussed. Several are very useful for those new to *numismatica* but wanting to gain a broader acquaintance with the field as a means to contextualising their primary NT interest (eg 1 for indications of denomination on bronze coins; 2 for alloy proportions on provincial coins). One may wonder whether the amount of detail in some (eg Tables 17 — where the significance of ‘twice, thrice, and four times’ *neokoros* is not explained — and 23, in particular) is really needed for the envisaged readership. Occasionally, translations of NT extracts have otiose wording when matched against the Greek being quoted (eg Table 16, s.vv. Col. 1.6 and 1.10).

A disappointing flaw throughout the entire book is the amount of faulty spelling, not just English, but also French, Greek, Latin, etc., unclear English expression, choice of the wrong word, typographical errors, and more. I do not recall having encountered any book from a reputable publisher in recent years so marred by this defect. To take only some (*sic*) instances from one chapter (no. 10): 178 subhead ‘Archaea’ (ditto next line); last line ‘leaded bronze’ needs explaining; 179, 6 up: delete ‘to’ (ditto 183 2<sup>nd</sup> new para). At 180, 3 down: ‘bare’ (‘bar’?; ‘bear’?). Some of these flaws invite the inference of the author’s — or the publisher’s sub-editor’s? — lack of control of French (e.g. 180 n. 13: 2 errors), innocence of geography occasioning a mistranslation of the wording on RPC 1.2451 rev. (thus 180 ‘Magnesia at Sipyron’; yet the translation of Tacitus on the next page should have tipped him off), uncertainty with Latin (or simply a typo? — 181 last line of the Tacitus quotation in translation: ‘... suffering a relief ...’, where and — Lat. *ac* — is needed). At 181 the three words on RPC 1.2991 obv. are rendered without regard for their parts of speech and grammatical cases. 183 para. 2, 1<sup>st</sup> line delete ‘to’ (ditto 179 6 up); 183 6 up, ‘uninterested’ or ‘not interested’, *not dis-*; 187 n. 23 ‘Esser’ not ‘Esser’s’.

Some idiosyncratic abbreviations occur. Not everyone will easily work out that ‘PBM’ equates to the papyrologists’ standard abbreviation *PLond*, numerous times in Table 13, pp. 96, 98. ‘IT’ appears twice at 154, and the footnote provides clarification. Yet the standard epigraphical abbreviation for this volume (*IG X.2.1*) should certainly be used, *a fortiori* given that this one is not included in the list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book. A new list of abbreviations for Greek epigraphical works has been produced in 2020, so, too late for this book, by a team of experienced members of the International Association for Greek and Latin Epigraphy (AIEGL), the international association whose focus is Greek and Latin epigraphy.<sup>1</sup> Just as the author rightly (and usefully) guides readers about standard abbreviations (Tables 1, 3, 4), the accepted terms for coins produced from alloys (Table 2), and includes a welcome list of online resources (Table 6), as well as other informative Tables related to coin denominations and their worth in more than one province (Tables 10–12), it would make sense to draw readers’ attention to the AIEGL’s new (2020) list of abbreviations for the few inscriptional volumes referred to — and *mutatis mutandis* for the papyri — in a new, revised edition of the present book.

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Is it the case, as the author asserts (191), that NT lexicographers ‘... continue to marginalize numismatic material ...’? This may be a fair criticism, but behind it there may be an overly-defensive perspective. The reality is, rather, that the texts on coins are perforce, so brief (especially once personal and city names are left aside) that there is not a large and broadly-based number of different words with a clear context — almost never is there space for a full sentence — useful to aid lexicographers in their assessment of the particular meaning of each occurrence, whatever texts may be their target focus. There are gains of other kinds, however. Among them are the sheer numbers of coins, their widespread dissemination both geographically, ethnically and ‘in the pocket’ of both rich and poor, as well as their survival. Furthermore, unlike other non-literary texts surviving on different media (inscriptions and papyri, in the main), coins alone — almost, at least: consider magical papyri with drawings sometimes on them, and mosaics — offer text with symbol; and the meaning of each, taken together since they have been consciously planned and devised to provide an integrated, unitary message, can enrich our understanding of the whole. Contrast the papyri, where the number of surviving texts is geographically severely limited due to climate (and other factors, of course). Contrast inscriptions, so often separated from the statue bases or buildings they once adorned, or from some other context which would have clarified better for us their significance. Each material and its text has its own contribution to make; and numismatic specialists have plenty to contribute, not least in lexical ways, as the second half of this book seeks to do.

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It is not in doubt that a great deal of effort has been invested into producing this book with the meritorious aim of making numismatic evidence more accessible to non-specialists from other disciplines, especially early Christian studies. Attention to correcting the present flaws would go a long way to improving the book’s usefulness and reliability for the intended readership. A second edition would make good sense, since (to my knowledge) the book has no contemporary, easily digestible competitor in its aim to get numismatics taken seriously by those whose focus is the NT.

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1. ‘List of abbreviations of editions and works of reference for alphabetic Greek epigraphy’ (‘GrEpiAbbr’).