

Paul in the Roman Triumph: Pitfalls and Possibilities in the Interpretation of θριαμβεύω (2 Cor 2:14)

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INTRODUCTION

In 2 Cor 2:14, Paul depicts himself as a participant in one of the most spectacular events of the ancient world – the Roman triumph. By describing himself as the object of the verb θριαμβεύω, usually translated “to lead in triumph,” he metaphorically takes place within the triumphal procession. But what is the apostle aiming to communicate to the Corinthians? This perennial question has a particularly interesting history of interpretation to it, and, as we will see, the scholarly discussion is far from settled. To clarify the wide range of the more recent interpretations, this article examines and discusses two of the latest proposals: George Guthrie’s article “Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery (2 Cor 2.14–16a): Neglected Points of Background” from 2015,¹ and Christoph Heilig’s monograph *Paul’s Triumph: Reassessing 2 Corinthians 2:14 in Its Literary and Historical Context* published in 2017.² Guthrie’s article is examined most thoroughly, while Heilig’s monograph is used as a discussion partner in the later part of the article.

¹ George Guthrie, “Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery (2 Cor 2.14–16a): Neglected Points of Background,” *NTS* 61 (2015): 79–91.

² Christoph Heilig, *Paul’s Triumph: Reassessing 2 Corinthians 2:14 in Its Literary and Historical Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017). For Swedish readers, an overview can be found in Ludvig Svensson, review of Christoph Heilig, *Paul’s Triumph*, *SEÅ* 83 (2018): 236–35.

THE STATE OF THE QUESTIONS

Scholars commonly treat 2 Cor 2:14–16a as a unit and the verb *θριαμβεύω* is at the heart of the interpretation. The discussion of the passage can briefly be summarized in three questions: (1) What is the background of the metaphor?; (2) What is the meaning of the verb *θριαμβεύω* in 2:14, especially with a direct object?; (3) Is the metaphor coherent, or does it combine different motifs?³ To answer the first question we may conclude, in accordance with the majority of scholars, that the background of the metaphor is to be found in the Roman triumph.⁴ When it comes to the second and third questions the debate is still more vivid. This article has its emphasis on the second question where the transitive use of *θριαμβεύω* is in focus.

Before turning to the strictly philological aspects of the discussion, it might be helpful to briefly sketch a picture of the Roman triumph. This triumphal procession, designated as the *pompa triumphalis* in Latin, was a manifestation of the power and splendor of a victorious Roman general returning to the city of Rome.⁵ The procession was surrounded by spectators as it made its way through the streets of the city, finishing outside the temple of Jupiter located at the Capitoline Hill. The victorious general was the main character of the *pompa triumphalis*, but he was far from alone in the procession. He was accompanied by the soldiers of

³ This summary is proposed by Cilliers Breytenbach in the article “Paul’s Proclamation and God’s ‘ΘΡΙΑΜΒΟΣ’” *Neot* 24/2 (1990): 258–59.

⁴ Other backgrounds have been proposed, for example a triumphal procession in honor of Dionysus (George Findlay, “St. Paul’s Use of ΘΡΙΑΜΒΕΥΩ,” *The Expositor* 10 [1879]: 403–21) or a combination of *pompa triumphalis* and other triumphal processions (Paul. B. Duff, “Metaphor, Motif, and Meaning: The Rhetorical Strategy Behind the Image ‘Led in Triumph’ in 2 Corinthians 2:14,” *CBQ* 53 [1991]: 79–92). Others have argued for a more general meaning of *θριαμβεύω*, such as “display” (e.g. Rory B. Egan, “Lexical Evidence on Two Pauline Passages,” *NovT* 19 [1977]: 34–62).

⁵ For a thorough analysis of the Roman triumph, see H. S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

his army, celebrating the previous victory together with their leader. They were also accompanied by dancers, lyre-players, incense bearers, and other groups of people celebrating the victory.⁶ Brought along were also defeated captives and booty from the battlefield, put on display to amplify the power of the victor. The triumph was simply a grand spectacle at the heart of Rome, with the twofold purpose of thanking the gods for giving victory and showing the supremacy of the Roman army.

With the *pompa triumphalis* as the backdrop of the interpretation, scholars have reached a number of different conclusions regarding Paul's metaphor in 2 Cor 2:14–16a. Some have argued that the apostle identifies himself with the victorious soldiers celebrating the triumph together with their general.⁷ Others claim that Paul is rather depicting himself as one of the defeated captives in the procession, being led shamefully through the streets of Rome.⁸ Some even claim that Paul wants to picture himself as being led to death, like some of the prisoners who were executed at the end of the triumph.⁹ Since the proposals differ so significantly from one another, it is necessary for us to start our analysis with the actual verb itself.

THE VERB θριαμβεύω

The verb θριαμβεύω was imported from the Latin language and is used in a similar way as the equivalent term *triumphare*.¹⁰ It does not occur at all in the LXX and only twice in the NT (2 Cor 2:14; Col 2:15). In

⁶ See, e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 7.72.13; Appian, *Pun.* 66.

⁷ E.g. C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, HBC (London: Harper & Row, 1973).

⁸ E.g. Murray Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

⁹ E.g. Scott Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14–3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986).

¹⁰ Silva, ed., *NIDNTTE*, s.v. “θριαμβεύω.”

both occurrences the verb functions as an active participle taking a direct object. A major difference, though, appears when these direct objects are compared. In 2 Cor 2:14 the object of the verb is the personal pronoun ἡμεῖς, which refers to Paul;¹¹ whereas in Col 2:15 the object is αὐτούς, which refers to the rulers and authorities (τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας). Put differently, God is leading Paul in triumph in the same way he leads the rulers and authorities. This fact has been puzzling scholars for a very long time, and it has contributed to the long list of interpretations that have been suggested for θριαμβεύω. BDAG lists six different proposed meanings for the verb in the NT:¹²

- (1) *Lead in a triumphal procession* – The direct object is being led as a captive in the procession or is exhibited in triumph.
- (2) *To lead in triumph* – The direct object (e.g. victorious soldiers) is celebrating a triumph with the general. There is no lexical support for this meaning.
- (3) *Cause to triumph* – This meaning was proposed by John Chrysostom in the fourth century CE and has remained in the discussion ever since.¹³ It is often described as theologically motivated, and there is no lexical support for this meaning.
- (4) *Triumph over* – This meaning has often been proposed for Col 2:15, but not for 2 Cor 2:14.

¹¹ Since Paul starts off an apology of his own apostleship, the plural pronoun is often taken as an epistolary plural (see, e.g., Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit*, 8–12). The discussion is, however, far from settled and the matter is discussed thoroughly also in recent contributions (see the helpful discussion in Heilig, *Paul's Triumph*, 219–23). Harris, *Second Epistle*, 244–45, seems to blend the interpretations, arguing on the one hand that ἡμεῖς refers to Paul and his co-workers and on the other that the implied prior defeat would be Paul's own Damascus experience.

¹² Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit*, 21, lists ten different meanings, but these are more specific rather than different from the ones presented in BDAG, and thus fit within these six categories.

¹³ “Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 12, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 301.

- (5) *Expose to shame* – This meaning is proposed particularly by Peter Marshall in an article from 1983.¹⁴
- (6) *Display, publicize, make known* – This meaning is commonly considered to be a later development of the verb,¹⁵ although some scholars have argued that it existed in Paul's time.¹⁶

Since the verb occurs only twice in the NT and not at all in the LXX, the discussion about its meaning is dependent on extrabiblical occurrences. By using the TLG-database, we may conclude that *θριαμβεύω* is used about 15 times before or contemporary to Paul in the extant sources.¹⁷ The number may vary because of uncertainty of the authenticity of some of the texts.¹⁸ The verb then becomes common during the first and second centuries CE, and occurs extensively in the works of Plutarch and Appian.¹⁹ The intransitive use is far more com-

¹⁴ Peter Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame: ΘΡΙΑΜΒΕΥΕΙΝ in 2 Cor. 2:14," *NovT* 25 (1983): 302–17.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Lamar Williamson, "Led in Triumph: Paul's Use of *Thriambeuō*," *Int* 22 (1968): 317–32.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Egan, "Lexical Evidence."

¹⁷ Here presented in chronological order (some of the texts are only preserved in fragments; in these cases, the references are to Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* [Berlin: Weidmann, 1923]): Ctesias of Cnidus, *Pers.* 13, 58; Polybius. 6.53.7; Posidonius. 4.38; Diodorus Siculus 16.90.2.7; 31.8.10.4; 31.26.4.2; 38/39.4.2.4; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 8.70.1.3; Nicolaus of Damascus, frag. 83.3; Castor of Rhodes, frag. 11.8; Strabo 3.5.3.22; 7.1.4.20; 12.3.6.12; 12.3.35.6; *Res Gest. Div. Aug.* 4.1.

¹⁸ See especially the two texts from the Greek historian Ctesias of Cnidus who wrote in the fourth century BCE. These are the two earliest occurrences, and *θριαμβεύω* seems to bear a general meaning like "to display" (Silva, ed., *NIDNTTE*, s.v. *θριαμβεύω*); a meaning usually regarded as a later development of the verb (alternative 6 in the BDAG list above). The problem with these occurrences is that the earliest form of the passages that are preserved are the summaries written by Photius in the ninth century CE. It is therefore highly uncertain if the use of the verb by Ctesias should affect our interpretation of 2 Cor 2:14, even though the development of meaning is interesting to note.

¹⁹ A search in the TLG database results in more than 50 occurrences of *θριαμβεύω* in the works of Plutarch, and around 20 in the works of Appian.

mon than the transitive, and the object of the verb is often used with a prepositional phrase to express different aspects of its meaning. The most important ones are ἀπό²⁰ or κατά²¹ to express an object that is triumphed over, μετά²² to express an object that joins in the triumph, and ἐπὶ²³ to express the reason for the triumph. We may conclude that the transitive use of θριαμβεύω, as in 2 Cor 2:14, is very rare in the sources roughly contemporary to Paul.

GUTHRIE'S PROPOSAL

In his article "Paul's Triumphal Procession Imagery (2 Cor 2.14–16a): Neglected Points of Background," George Guthrie argues for a rather unique interpretation of 2 Cor 2:14–16a. By "probing a number of neglected aspects of both lexical and cultural background,"²⁴ the author concludes that the entire passage constitutes a coherent metaphor of the *pompa triumphalis*, in which Paul identifies himself with the incense bearers that were part of the procession, spreading fragrant incense along the route. He argues that the common interpretation of θριαμβεύω in 2 Cor 2:14, with its focus on Paul being led as a captive, is misleading.²⁵ The construction with the verb θριαμβεύω and its direct object ἡμᾶς should, according to Guthrie, be interpreted as referring to the incense bearers. These belonged to the victorious side of the triumph, and thus celebrated the victory along with the general and his army.²⁶ The Roman historian Appian describes how the incense bearers

²⁰ E.g. Diodorus Siculus 39.4.2.5; Plutarch, *Rom.* 25.6.1.

²¹ E.g. Appian, *Bell. Civ.* 1.9.80.22.

²² E.g. Plutarch, *Mar.* 27.6; Appian, *Bell. Civ.* 2.93.

²³ E.g. Appian, *Bell. Civ.* 1.11.101.20; 4.5.31.2; Plutarch, *Sull.* 3.3.7.

²⁴ Guthrie, "Paul's Triumphal Procession Imagery," 79.

²⁵ This interpretation (alternative 1 in BDAG) has been argued by a majority of scholars during the last decades, the most well-known example being Hafemann's monograph *Suffering and the Spirit*.

²⁶ This proposal falls within alternative 2 in BDAG: "To lead in triumph." The object of the verb is on the victorious side of the celebration.

were walking directly in front of the general himself in the procession: “Next came a lot of incense bearers, and after them the general himself on a chariot.”²⁷

As noted above, the different proposals of interpretation concerning Paul’s use of *θριαμβεύω* cover a broad scale of suggestions. One of the most significant, and in a way somewhat extreme, is the one made by Scott Hafemann in his monograph *Suffering and the Spirit*. Hafemann’s main thesis is that Paul depicts himself as being led to his death in the *pompa triumphalis*.²⁸ He argues that the fatal outcome of the prisoners in the procession has been “largely neglected in studies dealing with II Cor. 2:14a.”²⁹ We are particularly interested in Hafemann’s conclusions concerning the verb *θριαμβεύω* in 2 Cor 2:14, since Guthrie objects to them in his article. Concerning the lexical considerations of the verb, Hafemann concludes:

The use of *θριαμβεύειν* with prepositional phrases to indicate its object or with a direct object alone, *always* refers to the one having been conquered and subsequently led in the procession, and never to the one having conquered, or to those who shared in his victory (e.g., his army, fellow officers, etc.).³⁰

Concerning this statement Guthrie notes that the occurrences where the verb is used “with a direct object alone” are of special interest, since this is the grammatical structure in 2 Cor 2:14.³¹ He also notes that Hafemann only refers to one text from Plutarch (*Comp. Thes. Rom.* 4) and Lamar Williamson’s article “Led in Triumph” to strengthen his conclusion.³² Guthrie then concludes – after discussing the occurrences pro-

²⁷ *Pun* 9.66 (White, LCL). Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 7.72.13.

²⁸ This is argued based on 1) lexical considerations of *θριαμβεύω* with a direct object; 2) an analysis of the triumphal procession with focus on the fate of the captives being led in it; and 3) a reading of the context of 2 Cor 2:14.

²⁹ Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit*, 23.

³⁰ Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit*, 33 (italics original).

³¹ Guthrie, “Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery,” 82.

³² Williamson’s article considers and evaluates the lexicons of Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early*

posed by Hafemann³³ and Williamson,³⁴ along with those from the article “Paul’s Proclamation and God’s ‘THRIAMBOS’” by Cilliers Breytenbach³⁵ – that when it comes to occurrences of θριαμβεύω with a direct object referring to those being led in the *pompa triumphalis*, “we are dealing with a very limited band of data.”³⁶

After this, Guthrie points out three occurrences of θριαμβεύω with a direct object “without reference to the defeated captives in the parade”: Plutarch, *Regum* 82.22; *Fab.* 23.2.1; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 2.15.101.³⁷ Based on these, he concludes that Hafemann’s statement that θριαμβεύω “with prepositional phrases to indicate its object or with a direct object alone, *always* refers to the one who has been conquered and is subsequently led in the procession’ does not hold true.”³⁸ From this objection to Hafemann’s statement, Guthrie proceeds to question whether Paul is really depicting himself as one of the besieged in the *pompa triumphalis*. Guthrie notes that on a conceptual level the triumphator of the *pompa triumphalis* is often depicted as leading different groups of people, both victorious and defeated, and not just doomed captives.³⁹ He then con-

Christian Literature, trans. Arndt and Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

³³ Plutarch, *Comp. Thes. Rom.* 4.

³⁴ Plutarch, *Comp. Thes. Rom.* 4; *Cor.* 35; *Ant.* 84; *Pomp.* 83.3; *Arat.* 54.3.

³⁵ Appian, *Mith.* 77; Strabo 12.3.35.6. In addition to the ones referred to by Hafemann and Williamson.

³⁶ Guthrie, “Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery,” 83 (*italics original*). With some uncertainty, he proposes that “at best we find four, perhaps five, cases in which θριαμβεύω, used in a construction roughly paralleling Paul’s at 2 Cor 2.14, is employed of captives in a *pompa triumphalis*” (*italics original*). Even though we might add a text or two to this list (e.g. Diodorus of Siculus 31.26.4.2), the fact still stands that the occurrences are very few.

³⁷ Guthrie, “Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery,” 83.

³⁸ Guthrie, “Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery,” 83 (*italics original*).

³⁹ On this conceptual level Guthrie includes occurrences of the cognate noun (Plutarch, *Mar.* 27.5–6; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 2.13.93; *Pun.* 9.66) and possibly the corresponding Latin terms (Livy 45.40; Juv., *Sat.* 10.38–45) (“Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery,” 83).

cludes: “Consequently, it is not the case that when an ancient author used *θριαμβεύω* or its cognates, one automatically and only thought about the captives in the procession.”⁴⁰ This statement sums up his argument concerning the meaning of *θριαμβεύω* with a direct object. Scholars have, according to Guthrie, been too quick to identify Paul with the defeated captives of the triumphal procession, and thereby misread some key aspects of the passage.

THE PROBLEM WITH GUTHRIE’S READING OF *θριαμβεύω*

Guthrie makes a thorough contribution to the long-lasting discussion of the meaning of *θριαμβεύω* in 2 Cor 2:14, but his conclusions must be taken into consideration for several reasons. First, we may turn to the debated statement made by Hafemann about the direct object of *θριαμβεύω*. It is correct, as Guthrie proposes, that Hafemann’s statement technically does not hold true. The object of the verb, whether defined by prepositions or not, does not always refer to the conquered of the *pompa triumphalis*.⁴¹ But we must ask ourselves what implications this fact has for the interpretation of Paul’s use of the verb in 2 Cor 2:14. As noted above, Hafemann only refers to one text from Plutarch (*Comp. Thes. Rom.* 4) and the article by Williamson to strengthen his statement about the direct objects. In Williamson’s article, the author concludes that when *θριαμβεύω* takes a direct personal object, it has the meaning “to lead as a conquered enemy in a victory parade.”⁴² The

⁴⁰ Guthrie, “Paul’s Triumphal Procession Imagery,” 84.

⁴¹ For examples of the verb with a direct object, see the texts mentioned by Guthrie (Plutarch, *Regum* 82.22; *Fab.* 23.2.1; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 2.15.101). For an example where the object is governed by a preposition, see, e.g., Appian, *Bell. civ.* 4.31, where *ἐπί* is used to denote the reason for the triumph: “While these events were taking place Lepidus enjoyed a triumph for his exploits in Spain [*ἐπὶ Ἰβηρσιν ἐθριάμβευε*]” (White, LCL).

⁴² Williamson, “Led in Triumph,” 319.

problem with Hafemann's statement is that it extends Williamson's conclusion to include all direct objects, which is obviously a larger category than just the personal ones.

As mentioned above, Guthrie notes three texts, two from Plutarch and one from Appian, where the direct object of θριαμβεύω is not the captives being led in the *pompa triumphalis*:

ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν Νομαντίαν ἑλὼν καὶ θριαμβεύσας τὸ δεύτερον...
(Plutarch, *Regum* 82.22)

After he [Scipio Aemilianus] had captured Numantia and celebrated his second triumph... (Babbitt, LCL)

τοῦτον δεύτερον θρίαμβον ἐθριάμβευσε λαμπρότερον τοῦ προτέρου Φάβιος... (Plutarch, *Fab.* 23.2.1)

For this success, Fabius celebrated a second triumph more splendid than his first... (Perrin, LCL)

τοῦτο μὲν δὴ καὶ τῷ περὶ Λιβύην Καίσαρος πολέμῳ τέλος ἐγγίγνετο, αὐτὸς δ' ἐπανελθὼν ἐς Ῥώμην ἐθριάμβευε τέσσαρας ὁμοῦ θριάμβους (Appian, *Bell. civ.* 2.15.101)

This was the end of Caesar's war in Africa, and when he returned to Rome he had four triumphs together. (White, LCL)

In the first text, the adverbial τὸ δεύτερον is used to denote that Scipio Aemilianus is celebrating a triumph for a second time. In the other two, the cognate noun θρίαμβος functions as the direct object of the verb. We must raise two questions concerning these texts: (1) are they examples of the verb with a direct object at all?; and (2) how do they affect our understanding of θριαμβεύω in 2 Cor 2:14? The answer to the first question is that it is a matter of grammatical definitions and categories. The cognate noun is sometimes treated as a direct object of the verb, but sometimes it is not.⁴³ It is, then, possible to treat them as direct objects

⁴³ For an example of the former, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 189; for an example of the latter, see Breytenbach, "Paul's Proclamation," 260–61, where the authors treat it as a *figura etymologica* in the section entitled "The intransitive usage."

of the verb, but, again, how does this affect our understanding of *θριαμβεύω* in 2 Cor 2:14, where it takes a direct personal object? Regardless of how we choose to classify the occurrences mentioned by Guthrie, they are certainly not examples of this. It can, thus, be maintained that when *θριαμβεύω* takes a direct personal object, this refers to someone defeated.⁴⁴ The texts found in the TLG-database confirm that this statement holds true.

The fact that the defeated captives were not the only group of people being led in the triumph is well-known. As mentioned above, the general was accompanied by victorious soldiers, dancers, lyre-players, incense bearers, and other groups of people. So, as Guthrie points out, the general was conceptually not just leading defeated captives; a fact that becomes evidently clear when we turn to the ancient sources describing the triumphal procession. But the lexical discussion of *θριαμβεύω* contributes to defining the boundaries for the possible interpretations of 2 Cor 2:14–16a. The analysis of the occurrences where the verb appears in a similar grammatical structure as in 2 Cor 2:14 leads to the conclusion that the object of the verb must be one of the defeated.⁴⁵ As we have seen, the incense bearers were not part of this group. This conclusion, thus, challenges Guthrie's proposal of the passage, and leads us back to the fact that Paul depicts himself as someone defeated.

⁴⁴ Breytenbach, after analyzing the use of *θριαμβεύω* in the ancient Greek sources, agrees with this and argues that it can be maintained that “when followed by a direct personal object, *θριαμβεύω* means ‘to lead as a conquered enemy in a victory parade’” (“Paul’s Proclamation,” 261).

⁴⁵ Even though the occurrences of *θριαμβεύω* with a direct object might not always refer specifically to the leading of the object as a captive in the triumphal procession, the fact still stands that it always refers to someone defeated. Breytenbach confirms this view: “It is clear that the function can only be in the role of one of those being conquered. The meaning of the verb excludes that the person displayed in triumph is part of the victor’s army or household” (“Paul’s Proclamation,” 265).

DISCUSSION: SOME CONSIDERATIONS BASED ON HEILIG'S CONTRIBUTION

If Paul depicts himself as being led as a defeated captive in the *pompa triumphalis*, what aspects of the triumph is in focus and how should we understand the metaphor? The scholarly discussion of 2 Cor 2:14–16a has tended to be fragmentary, and the passage has often been treated without sufficient attention to its immediate context. The many different proposals have also had other methodological flaws, especially when it comes to the meaning of *θριαμβεύω* in 2:14 and the semantic possibilities and limits of the verb. Christoph Heilig's monograph *Paul's Triumph* is therefore a welcomed contribution to the discussion. The author presents a methodologically thorough treatment of the passage, and highlights some of the flaws hinted above. Heilig applies a method based on semantic discussions that hinges on the evaluation of background plausibility and explanatory potential. The former is about the interpretation of an expression based on external and internal criteria, the latter discusses whether a certain meaning of the verb is the expected choice of the author. Applied to *θριαμβεύω* in 2 Cor 2:14, this can be expressed as defining the semantic boundaries of the verb and discussing which features within these boundaries Paul focuses on. To do justice to both of these areas is a crucial part of interpretation, and the history of interpretation shows that one or the other of the areas has often been neglected.

One potential pitfall of interpretation is to neglect the lexical and semantical boundaries of the verb, making it mean something it cannot mean. One early example of this is found in John Calvin's commentary on 2 Corinthians, where the reformer finds it theologically impossible that Paul depicts himself as being led as a prisoner in the Roman triumph. He therefore concludes that: "Paul means something different from the common meaning of this phrase,"⁴⁶ and suggests a causal inter-

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the*

pretation of the verb. This is one of the most obvious examples of this flaw, but the tendency of theologically motivated conclusions is common also in later interpretations. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, C. K. Barrett chooses to neglect the lexical support, concluding that: "Notwithstanding the lack of supporting lexical evidence it is right to follow L.S., Allo, and Kümmel in taking Paul to represent himself as one of the victorious general's soldiers sharing in the glory of his triumph."⁴⁷ Guthrie's proposal is not as clear and explicit as those made by Calvin and Barrett, but it shares the same tendency to argue for a meaning of *θριαμβεύω* that has no lexical support.

Another potential pitfall is to define the lexical and semantical boundaries of the verb and then choose rather freely from the possible meanings within these boundaries. Several of the proposals suggested by scholars through the years have been interesting and worth considering, but many of them fall on the same criterion, namely the lack of letting the context guide the interpretation. Since the *pompa triumphalis* is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, the literary context is the key to a proper understanding of the metaphor. Here, Heilig has another interesting contribution, based on the assumption that 2 Corinthians is one coherent letter. This is not the place to discuss the different partition theories of the letter, but we may note that 2 Cor 2:14 is generally considered to be the opening of 2 Cor 2:14–7:4, sometimes labelled the great digression. This has led to scholars ignoring the preceding section of 2 Cor 1:1–2:13 when it comes to interpreting 2 Cor 2:14–16a. Heilig proposes that this section is the key to determine what aspect of *θριαμβεύω* Paul has in mind, namely the fact that the subject of the verb is leading the object in the public triumphal procession. It thus becomes an answer to the objections the Corinthians might have against Paul for not coming to visit them as planned, as the explanations in 2 Cor 1:12–2:4 give a hint of.

Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, trans. T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 33.

⁴⁷ Barrett, *The Second Epistle*, 98.

Heilig's proposal is interesting since it uses the immediate context as a guide for the interpretation. This also serves to establish the reading firmly within the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians. One important question to return to is: If this is what Paul intended to communicate to the Corinthian recipients of the letter, how could he have expected them to understand that from the metaphor of the Roman triumph? The triumphal procession was, as mentioned above, a complex phenomenon with many possible interpretive aspects embedded in it. The Corinthians were therefore dependent on the immediate context of the passage, in a way similar to our situation of interpretation today.⁴⁸ We cannot be certain that Heilig's proposal is correct, but it has the benefit of being established firmly in the immediate context of the passage. A similar benefit may be found in Guthrie's article, since the author argues for Paul's identification with the incense bearers of the procession based on the smell and fragrance mentioned in 2 Cor 2:14b–16a. The problem is, as concluded above, that the identification is not possible based on the lexical and semantical examination of θριαμβεύω.

CONCLUSION

The main focus of this article has been to examine and discuss two recent interpretations of the verb θριαμβεύω in 2 Cor 2:14. George Guthrie's article "Paul's Triumphal Procession Imagery" was given most of the attention and the scholar's proposal was discussed critically from a

⁴⁸ Margaret Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 193–94, discusses this in a similar way when she evaluates the probability of Peter Marshall's suggestion that Paul, in a creative way, uses θριαμβεύω as a metaphor of social shame (Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame"): "This would be consistent with Paul's general portrayal of himself in the Corinthian letters as a socially shameful figure. This is not impossible. But if this particular metaphorical use of the Greek verb was created by Paul himself (as would seem likely), one wonders how he would have expected his readers to grasp its significance without any assistance from the immediate context."

mainly philological perspective. Guthrie's proposal that Paul identifies himself with the incense bearers of the triumphal procession was considered highly improbable from a lexical point of view. Christoph Heilig's monograph *Paul's Triumph* then functioned as a partner for discussion in the latter part of the article. Heilig's methodology was used as a starting point to discuss some of the methodological weaknesses in Guthrie's article, and in the history of interpretation. The conclusion of this article is that θριαμβεύω in 2 Cor 2:14 is used by Paul to metaphorically depict himself as a prisoner being led in the Roman triumph. This might be described as a lexical boundary that limits the possible interpretations. When it comes to the more precise emphasis of Paul's wording, we stand before a more difficult task. Heilig's proposal that Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that God is responsible of his changed travel plans is definitely possible. It has the benefit of taking both the philological and the contextual aspects into consideration, which is the criterion possible interpretations of θριαμβεύω in 2 Cor 2:14 must meet.