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»You are no Friend of Caesar«: Threat and Intrigue in the Johannine Account of the Sentencing of Jesus in John 19:12-16a

»Ti nisi cesarjev prijatelj«: grožnje in intrige v Janezovem poročilu o Jezusovi obsodbi v Jn 19,12-16a

Abstract: The handing over of Jesus by the Johannine Pilate for crucifixion in John 19:12-16a may be closely linked to the implications of the phrase, »you are no friend of Caesar« in v. 12b. This phrase harbours an element of threat and intrigue that may be political and economical. The aim of this work, therefore, is to identify the threat content of the phrase ‚Friend of Caesar‘ by undertaking a historical-critical analysis of v. 12b in its immediate narrative context of John 19:12-16a. The study reveals that the expression ‚Friend of Caesar‘ was used to observe, recognize and monitor loyalty in the Roman Empire especially in the satellite territories superintended by the emperor’s appointees. To fail to be a friend of Caesar therefore meant disloyalty and risking one’s political and economic position and life. The conclusion is that the Jewish party intriguingly employed the statement as a threat to destabilize Pilate and constrain him to hand Jesus over for crucifixion.

Keywords: Friend of Caesar, Gospel of John, Kingship, Lese Majesty, Loyalty, Passion Narrative

Povzetek: Pilatova izročitev Jezusa v smrt s križanjem, kakor jo prikazuje Janezov evangelij (19,12-16a), je lahko tesno povezana z implikacijami izjave »Ti nisi cesarjev prijatelj« v vrstici 12b. Ta poved namreč vsebuje prvino grožnje in intrige, ki je lahko političnega ali ekonomskega značaja. Cilj tega prispevka je prepoznati vsebino grožnje v besedni zvezi ‚cesarjev prijatelj‘ s pomočjo zgodovinsko-kritične analize vrstice 12b v neposrednem pripovednem kontekstu Jn 19,12-16a. Študija razkriva, da je bila zveza ‚cesarjev prijatelj‘ v uporabi za opazovanje, prepoznavanje in nadzorovanje zvestobe rimskemu cesarju zlasti na pridruženih ozemljih pod nadzorom cesarjevih visokih uradnikov. Ne biti cesarjev prijatelj je tako pomenilo nezvestobo – in tveganje za lasten politični in ekonomski položaj ter življenje. Sklepamo, da je judovska stran ta izraz uporabila kot intrigo in grožnjo, da bi Pilata omajala in ga prisilila k izročitvi Jezusa v smrt s križanjem.

Ključne besede: cesarjev prijatelj, Janezov evangelij, kraljevanje, žalitev veličanstva, zvestoba, pasijon, pripoved

1. Introduction

After having confessed to the innocence of Jesus on three occasions (18:38; 19:4,6) and after having twice sought to release Jesus (18:39; 19:12a) the Johannine Pilate latterly chooses to hand Jesus over for crucifixion in 19:16a. Is Pilate's decision influenced by the suggestion by the Jews in v. 12b: »if you release this man you are not a ,friend of Caesar'?« And is the statement presented as a form of threat to force Pilate's hand? Authors are divided in their responses to some of these questions. S. Lim identifies in the phrase an attempt by the Jews to scapegoat Jesus in the tension between Jewish and Roman authorities. This situation he holds causes Pilate's anxiety as a judge (2016, 214). C. Keener suggests that Pilate's decision to hand Jesus over was informed by his preference for friendship with Caesar (2012, 1129). L. Richey examines the meaning of the phrase ,friend of Caesar' with a view to illuminating the anti-Roman polemic in the Johannine passion narrative (2007, 167). He suggests that the response of the Jews in 19:12 is a demand for Pilate to choose between loyalty to Caesar and his supposition of the innocence of Jesus in 19:6 (2007, 170). R. Brown discusses the possibility of the expression being used as an honorific title during the time of Pilate or the possibility of its being used in a general sense to signify loyalty to the emperor (1970, 63). He concludes that being of the equestrian order Pilate would have been eligible for the honour (64). Most of the works above are however commentaries on the Gospel of John, they do not pay specific attention to particular verses. Available articles are rather on the entire trial of Jesus in John 18–19 and on the Roman imperial authority motif in John. It has therefore become necessary to study the phrase ,friend of Caesar' in the narrative context of John's Gospel to determine the threat element that would possibly have influenced the decision of Pilate to accept to deliver Jesus to the Jews for crucifixion.

The aim of this study is therefore to establish the correlation that may exist in the Johannine narrative between the phrase ,friend of Caesar' and Pilate's decision to crucify Jesus. In other words, to identify the extent to which the ,No friend of Caesar' phrase in v. 12b constitutes blackmail used by the Jewish party to influence Pilate's decision to hand Jesus over for crucifixion.

The synchronic approach of exegesis is employed in this work; the approach studies a biblical text in its present and final form, and wholeness. This method permits an assessment of the historical, religious and social imports of the phrase ,friend of Caesar' in the narrative context of the Gospel of John with a view to possibly identifying the harboured meaning supposedly intended by the author. The work begins by situating v. 12b in the organizational framework of John 19:12–16a. It acknowledges the central role of v. 12 as the verse that necessitated the narrated actions within the pericope. The study is then restricted to a brief anal-

ysis of v. 12 under two headings: the attempt by Pilate to release Jesus (12a), and the resistance from the Jews (12bc). Within this study, an attempt is made to identify the relationship between Pilate, Emperor Tiberius and his vicegerent Lucius A. Sejanus. This is undertaken to establish the possible impact of the disgraceful dismissal of Sejanus by Tiberius on Pilate.

These summary analysis leads up to a historical study of the phrase ‚friend of Caesar‘, and the crime of lese majesty. The analysis reveals that the phrase ‚friend of Caesar‘ is synonymous with the Asia Minor political privilege expression ‚friend of the king‘. It owes its origin to the Hellenistic times and from there it was adopted and adapted by the Roman Empire. It was then used by the Roman Empire to suit its special needs for unwavering loyalty and unity towards the emperor in its crave to keep in check the vast territory and diversified provinces under the influence and unified authority of Rome. The use of the phrase in v. 12b is therefore a figurative way of denoting loyalty to the emperor.

2. John 19:12b within the Context of John 19:12-16a

John 19:12b belongs to the pericope of John 19:12-16a which constitutes the final phase of the larger pericope on the trial before Pilate in 18:28-19:16a. John 19:12-16a is organized in a chiasmic pattern ABA¹ thus:

A 12abc

- 12 a From then on Pilate sought to release him,
- b but the Jews cried out, »If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend.
- c Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.«

B 13-14ab

- 13 a So when Pilate heard these words,
- b he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.
- 14 a Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover.
- b It was about the sixth hour.

A¹14c-16

- 14 c He said to the Jews, »Behold your King!«
- 15 a They cried out, »Away with him, away with him, crucify him!«
- b Pilate said to them, »Shall I crucify your King?«
- c The chief priests answered, »We have no king but Caesar.«
- 16a So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.«

Within this chiasmic structure, the exercise of the office of the prefect from his βῆμα in ‚B‘ (vv. 13-14b) is sandwiched by Pilate’s quest to release Jesus in ‚A‘ (v. 12), and his decision to hand Jesus in for crucifixion in ‚A¹‘ (v. 16a). Thematically

the headings are thus: A – Pilate’s Attempt to Release Jesus and the Jewish Party’s Resistance (v. 12abc), B – The Judgement Seat (vv. 13-14b), and A¹ – The Decision to Crucify Jesus (vv. 14c-16a). V 12b is the object of interest for this study. It forms part of the unit on Pilate’s attempt to Release Jesus and the Jewish Party’s Resistance. Vv. 12-16a is the conclusion of the trial narrative in John. But while all of v. 12a connects vv. 12-16a to the preceding trial narratives, v. 12bc stands as a catalyst for the activities narrated within vv. 12-16a, it is presented as the turning point for the conclusion of the trial and the premise for Pilate’s arrival at a verdict.

3. Pilate’s Attempt to Release Jesus (v.12a)

ἐκ τούτου ὁ Πιλάτος ἐζήτει ἀπολῦσαι αὐτόν – from then Pilate sought to release him

The phrase ἐκ τούτου serves as a link between v. 12 and v. 11 of the previous pericope. Pontius Pilate was the Roman procurator of Judaea from AD 25-27 to AD 35 (McKenzie 1965, 677). Emperor Tiberius or Lucius Aelius Sejanus appointed him to his position. Sejanus was the emperor’s influential vicegerent who between 26 and 27 AD to 31 AD was responsible for the administrative details in Rome (Brown 1994, 693). As prefect Pilate had the authority to sentence people to death. The Jews could judge someone guilty of an offence against their laws but would have to hand such person to the prefect for conviction. Pilate seeks for the second time in the trial to set Jesus free from the accusations brought against him by the Jews. The first attempt is in 18:39. His decision is founded on his conviction of Jesus’ innocence in 18:38 and 19:4, 6. This second attempt is based especially on Pilate’s conversation with Jesus in vv. 8-11 to which the temporal sequence phrase ἐκ τούτου refers.

The infinitive verb ἀπολῦσαι denotes to grant acquittal, to set free, while the imperfect ἐζήτει denotes ‘to find a way or attempt’. Placed together the two verbs underscore the sensitivity and weight of the trial for Pilate. The life or death of Jesus at this moment is in the hands of Pilate and therefore the need to be scrupulous (Gers-Uphaus 2020, 22). The seriousness of this is reflected in the seeming flip-flopping by Pilate who seeks to placate the Jews (18:39) and at the same time offers Jesus the opportunity to defend himself and provide him with evidence to insist on his innocence (19:10).

4. Resistance from the Jews (v. 12bc)

οἱ δὲ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐκραύγασαν λέγοντες: ἐὰν τοῦτον ἀπολύσης, οὐκ εἶ φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος: πᾶς ὁ βασιλεία ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν ἀντιλέγει τῷ Καίσαρι.

But the Jews cried out saying: »If you release this man, you are not a friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself a king is against Caesar.«

The attempt by Pilate to release Jesus is met with stiff opposition from the Jews who politically spin the case by apparently putting Pilate instead on trial. »If you release this man, you are no Friend of Caesar.« 12b While the case against Jesus by the Jews was initially a religious one about Judaism and Jesus' claim to divinity, the perception by them of Pilate's sympathetic stance on Jesus forces them to spin it into a political one around the sovereignty of the emperor. Jesus is accused in v. 7 of claiming to be Son of God; Caesar as emperor is considered and revered as the divine son of god (Cuss 1974, 31). By claiming to be the Son of God Jesus has placed himself at the same level with Caesar as king and divine. His charges of claim to kingship are already implied in the question by Pilate »are you the king of the Jews?« (18:33). Thus in v. 12c Jesus is depicted by his Jewish brothers as king standing against the emperor ἀντιλέγει τῷ Καίσαρι the only recognized king in the empire and under whose reign all must submit.

4.1 The Crime of Lese Majesty and the Friend of Caesar

The verb ἀντιλέγω denotes »speaking against, to contradict, or oppose« (Bauer, Danker and Arndt 2000, 89). It is used here in terms of opposition (Isaiah 65:2). As throne claimant Jesus is opposing Caesar and acting against him. Those who present themselves as king against the emperor and those who tolerate them are enemies of the emperor and guilty of the crime of lese majesty. *Lèse-Majesté* is from the Latin *laesa majestas*, which literally means ‚injured majesty‘. It is the crime of affront against a sovereign power, acting against the dignity or sovereignty of a reigning monarch or a state. By declaring himself king and being treated as one, Jesus is thus considered guilty of this crime (12c) and Pilate is equally accused of the same crime for attempting to release Jesus (12b).

The title Καίσαρος, ‚Caesar‘ was originally a proper name of the Julian family, notably of Julius Caesar, and of Augustus (Lk 2:1). It later developed into a title referring to ‚the Emperor‘; it is often used in the New Testament to underscore the legitimate and sovereign power of political authority (Dunn 1975, 269). Jesus' claim as king arrogates to him an authority that pitches him against the sovereignty of Caesar. The Jewish counsel now politically presents Jesus before Pilate as *persona non grata*, a threat to the emperor and the emperor's authority over the Jews (Acts 17:7). If Pilate is loyal to Caesar he should therefore consider Jesus' action treasonable and convict and crucify him otherwise he would be petitioned to the emperor as not being ‚the friend of Caesar‘.

4.1.1 The Friend of Caesar and its Hellenistic Origin

The phrase φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος is traced to the Idumaeen king Herod the Great. During the decades of material prosperity of his reign and imperial favour from the emperor Octavian Herod chose to style himself as ‚Friend of Rome‘ and ‚Friend of Caesar‘ to underscore his loyalty as a client king to his Roman overlords (Smallwood 1976, 71). In the context of Palestine during the time of Jesus, the

use of the phrase in Judaea under the Roman rule was therefore often for the expression of allegiance to the emperor and the empire of Rome. In relation to the Fourth Gospel, the phrase is Roman. There are, however, some OT similarities in the LXX: »the king's friend« (1 Chr 22:33), »the friend of the king« (1 Macc 15:32), »the friend of Hezekiah« (Prov 25:1), »the king's friends« (Dan 3:27). 1 Macc 14:40 uses the expression with specific reference to the Roman republic when it alludes to ,friends and allies and brothers' of the Romans. This usage has some similarities with the intended sense in John 19:12 though without referring specifically to Augustus and his empire (Richey 2007, 167). In Matthew 7:3// Luke 7:34 Jesus is addressed as »a friend of tax collectors and sinners« merely in a descriptive sense to underscore his association with tax collectors and sinners. Abraham is given the name φίλος θεοῦ ,friend of God' in James 2:23. The same James uses the phrase a ,friend of the world' as synonym for an ,enemy of God' in 4:4. The typical Johannine usage of φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος has no scriptural parallel and can be traced instead to the Hellenistic and later Roman period.

4.1.1.1 The Hellenistic Origin

The title οἱ βασιλέως φίλοι was commonly and strategically used for politically privileged positions in Asia Minor before the Roman conquest (Richey 2007, 167). It was predominantly used with various shades of meaning during the Hellenistic period under the Seleucids and Lagids (Spicq 1959, 239–45). To be the ,king's friend' attracted great privilege that subsequently developed into a complex system of title conferment to reflect the degree of intimacy with the king (Cuss 1974, 45). While the king used the system to win loyalty, the beneficiaries saw it as an opportunity for power, prestige, and political and economic gains that arose from associating with the kings. It gave the beneficiaries easy access to the kings even in the earliest hours of the day. It is reported that Hermeias the chief minister of king Antiochus III was murdered while Antiochus III was taking his medically recommended morning walk accompanied by »those of the king's friends who were privy to the plot« (Polybius, *Histories* V. 56, 10). The king's friends accompanied the king during his journeys and shared his stress and misfortunes. And Seneca is noted to have remarked cynically that the king had different grades of friends; the first class friends and the friends of the second class, they were never true friends, but only collaborators who had a number for paying homage to the king (Seneca, *De Beneficiis* VI. 34, 1). The king received some of these friends privately, some in small groups, while others *en masse*. From this Hellenistic usage, the title was adopted and adapted as *amicus Augusti* by the Romans under Augustus for the special needs and political machinations of the empire.

4.1.2 The Friend of Caesar in the Roman Empire

The Roman adoption of this Hellenistic political system introduced various changes to the title. These included the reception of official and semi-official functions that were originally not part of the Hellenistic practice. The Latin form *amicus Augusti* or *amicus Caesaris* was extended to include members of the imperial family. It was

effectively used by the Romans and became very popular during the first century as an honorific title of privilege given to the friends of the emperors who »were admitted into this group of the emperor's ,friends' as a mark of gratitude for their loyalty and support towards their sovereign« (Cuss 1974, 48). To be a friend of the emperor therefore attracted enviable political and religious privileges greatly coveted at the time. It was this group of friends around the emperor who taking advantage of their unfettered access to the emperor Domitian orchestrated a plot and killed him in AD 96 (Cuss 1974, 49). The emperor conferred this title also on some of his closest friends who were equally given provinces to supervise. Thus Pomponius Flaccus and L. Pison described by the emperor as the closest friends were given the province of Syria and the Prefecture of the town respectively (Suetonius, *Tiberius*. 42, 3). Pilate is thus likely to have been given the province of Judaea as the friend of Tiberius or of Sejanus in recompense for his amiable service and pronounced loyalty to the imperial cause (Cuss 1974, 48).

It was therefore a title conferred in the Roman Empire as a mark of imperial gratitude on persons for their faithful and loyal services and dispositions towards the emperor. To be the emperor's friend thus meant to serve him and to enjoy his favour (Zumstein 2016, 710). The Roman Empire saw the title as an instrument at the service of imperial propaganda in the exercise of soft power, attracting, cultivating, and managing loyalty, and exercising authority within its conquered territories. This was used in tandem with the imperial religious cult of worshipping the emperor as divine son of god »to unite the vast Roman empire by a common bond of loyalty towards the person of the emperor, linked with the personification of the power of Rome« (Cuss 1974, 32). This cult of the Divi and the genius of the living emperor were made most popular especially during the time of Augustus, as a concession for the tradition of the Hellenized East. It became a unifying force that permitted the Romans to identify the friends and enemies of their emperor among the varied nationalities within its frontiers. It was thus one of the necessary instruments in the hands of the Roman Empire to enlist its adherents in the management and consolidation of the enormous power it wielded over its vast territories (Syme 1954, 264).

It is within this context of the Roman Empire's quest for loyalty from its conquered territories in the use of this title that the Herodian connection with the title in relation to Rome is to be established. Herod the Great publicly laid claims to this title and used it as an expression of his unfettered loyalty to the emperor in return for establishing and preserving his authority and dynasty in Judaea. Subsequent Herodian successors maintained this tradition of loyalty to the emperor. Agrippa for example was in return for loyalty honoured by Gaius Caligula and subsequently Claudius with a kingdom larger than his grandfather's. He ruled the kingdom in submission to Rome as »Great king, Friend of Caesar and Friend of Rome« (Smallwood 1976, 192; Richey 2007, 169).

4.1.3 Pilate and Sejanus, and the Threat of Lese Majesty

Pilate's position as the procurator of Judaea is linked to his relationship with Lucius Sejanus (Richey 2007, 169). Sejanus was a dynamic young man who gained

the admiration of emperor Tiberius. He was a Roman noble and had access to power at an early age when he took charge of the day-to-day administration of the empire while Tiberius retired to the peninsular of the isle of Capri. His position as almost the co-emperor to Tiberius gained him the privilege of appointing prefects to the numerous provinces under the empire; one of these prefects was that of Alexandria (Brown 1994, 693–695; Richey 2007, 169). Pilate is likely to have been another of Sejanus' appointed prefects and a client of Sejanus (Spicq 1959, 239–245; Schnackenburg 1982, 262). As a client of Sejanus, Pilate may probably have been numbered among 'the friends of Caesar' (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.8). Brown, however, cautions against the hypothetical nature of this connection between Sejanus and Pilate (1994, 844).

It became evident that Sejanus was plotting against the imperial family and on the grounds of treasonable ambitions he lost the confidence of Tiberius and was killed on 18 October, 31 for lese-majesty (Brown 1994, 693). His death put at risk all his appointees who were considered his loyalists. Most of these loyalists were already stripped of their responsibilities, and the onus was therefore on the remaining ones to prove by their activities that they were loyal to Tiberius. Given that, based on the dating above, Pilate is likely to have been a loyalist or 'friend of Sejanus' and mindful of what had befallen his patron, he had the weight of working the tight rope of not betraying any lack of loyalty to the emperor Tiberius (Richey 169).

Keener (2012, 1128) suggests that provincial governorship positions were always for men of senatorial ranks who always aspired to higher offices. This aspiration was often thwarted by unfavourable reports to the emperor against them. Pilate on his part was more vulnerable because he was of a lower rank by birth but rose to the position by grace from Sejanus (1128). Like all governors, any abuse of office could be considered a treasonable offence and releasing one accused of contesting Caesar's position was more treasonable. Philo notes that Herod Agrippa presented Pilate as an inflexible, corrupt and cruel leader who had much to hide from his Roman superiors (*Embassy* 38, 301). Pilate had once backed down at the threats of denunciation from the Jewish aristocrats when he planned to tinker with Herod's palace in Jerusalem (38, 301–302). According to Philo's Agrippa, this threat of sending an embassy to the emperor exasperated Pilate, made him very fearful that his venality, his violence, robberies, assaults, abusive behaviour, frequent executions of untried persons and his endless savage ferocity were going to be exposed (38, 302). On the basis of an appeal to Tiberius by the Jews, Pilate was once humiliated by the emperor for the very fact that he attempted to fiddle with the traditions of the people (38, 304–305).

From these descriptions by Philo, it is evident that the Jewish leaders repeatedly confronted Pilate with threats of denunciation to the emperor. Smallwood notes that from Josephus' account of the squabble between the Jews and Pilate about the 'standards and the medallion busts of the emperor' (*AJ* 28, 55–59) the Jews were equally aware that though brutal and stubborn Pilate was vulnerable when matched with equal stubbornness and threat (1976, 161–162). Pilate on his

part was therefore always anxious about his wrongdoings being exposed by any embassy to his unpredictable emperor and made efforts to prevent such denunciations. Thus even if there were no connection between Pilate and Sejanus, Pilate already understood from these previous experiences of humiliation, the political, economic and existential implications of his being denounced by Tiberius.

5. The Threat Element of the Phrase ‚Friend of Caesar‘ on Pilate

The statement »you are no friend of Caesar« used of Pilate by the Jews in v. 12b for seeking to release Jesus denotes disloyalty. It implies that if Pilate releases Jesus who is presented as the enemy of Caesar, he is equally against Caesar and does not protect the interest of the emperor (Gers-Uphaus 2020, 22). The Johannine Jewish authorities were conscious of the subtlety surrounding the relationship between the Roman emperor or his representatives and the traditions of the Jews. Meier notes that the High Priests were often burdened with the responsibility of maintaining this balance between the exercise of the powers of the emperor and the preservation of the traditions of the Jews (2001, 296). They were often expecting from the emperors minimum of concession and respect for their traditions. This qualifies for what Matjaž Muršič Klenar describes as the necessity of cohabitation (2020, 575). The Johannine Jewish authorities were therefore aware of the need for an emperor to be sympathetic towards the preservation of their traditions (Philo, *Embassy* 38:301). They were conscious of Roman emperors' intolerance of disloyalty from subordinates and collaborators, like Sejanus. They were conversant with Pilate's wrongdoings and abuse of authority and of Pilate's fear for his wrongdoings, especially of these being exposed (38, 302). They were conscious of the fact that Pilate would do much to make sure he was not petitioned to the emperor Tiberius especially about his abusive behaviours. They were equally aware that their resistances have often broken Pilate's stubbornness and resolve even at the cost of lives (Smallwood 1976, 161–162). Armed with these vulnerabilities of Pilate, and aware that Pilate was tilting towards releasing Jesus, the Jews used the »you are no friend of Caesar« figure as a veiled threat to force Pilate's hand and get crucifixion for Jesus.

Thus aware of what had become of Sejanus, and mindful of previous humiliations suffered, Pilate preferred to preserve his position and life and bow to pressure from the Jews by handing Jesus over for crucifixion. Pilate, therefore, understood from his previous experiences the implications of the reference to Caesar in John 19:12b as a threat to his life and political ambition. The threat, therefore, helps Pilate to play along with the Jews and protect the interest of the emperor and preserve his life and office (Gers-Uphaus 2020, 23). The threat was therefore of a particular significance for Pilate in relation to his intimacy with the emperor. This intimacy was for Pilate more valuable than the Jewish squabble about a certain kingship pretender (Jossa 2002, 119). If Pilate, therefore, had the title of

,friend of Caesar' conferred on him, he would by virtue of the threat be considered unfaithful and stripped of the title and the office. If it was not conferred on him, the threat was then used to express the fact that he would be guilty of disloyalty as Caesar's representative for favouring a person who was against Caesar. The threat element of the phrase consists especially in the fact that if Pilate fails to concede to the demand to crucify Jesus the Jewish authority will bring his excesses to the attention of the emperor and convince the emperor to strip him of his office and even risk his life.

Thus when confronted with the veiled threat (accusation) by the Jews of disloyalty to Caesar Pilate quickly capitulated and handed Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate gave in for fear of having his inadequacies exposed and consequently losing his intimacy with the emperor (Dodd 1963, 120). The threat from the Jewish leadership of not being a ,friend of Caesar' implied disloyalty and was therefore an unconcealed psychological pressure on Pilate's fear of losing his very enviable status as ,amicus Augusti'. It was a political blackmail used as a trump card to twist his arms (Zumstein 2016, 710) and break his resistance to the crowd's insistence on handing over Jesus for crucifixion.

6. Conclusion

The phrase ,friend of Caesar' in John 19:12 plays an important role in the Johannine narrative on the handing over of Jesus by Pilate to the Jews for crucifixion in John 19:12-16a. A historical analysis of the phrase reveals that it can be traced to the Hellenistic expression οἱ βασιλέως φίλοι used in Asia Minor to denote the politically privileged positions of a select few who enjoyed the favour of the king. It was used as a complex system of title conferment to win loyalty for the king; while the beneficiaries saw it as an opportunity for political and economic gains. This system was adopted by the Romans from the time of Augustus and used as *amicus Augusti* or *amicus Caesaris* for the same garnering of loyalty. The Johannine usage reflects this same sense of loyalty incumbent on those who were at the service of the emperor. It however has some remote similarities with a few expressions in the LXX; the closest being the ,friends and allies and brothers' of the Romans in 1 Macc 15:32. To cease to be the ,friend of Caesar' therefore implied not being loyal to the emperor, *renuntiatio amicitiae*. Such show of disloyalty implied losing one's political office and even risking one's own life, as was the case with Pilate's mentor Sejanus. The use of the phrase by the Jews was therefore meant to be a reminder to Pilate that if they denounced him to the emperor of favouring the enemy of the emperor his office as prefect and life would be at risk. He was therefore to choose between being a friend of the enemy of Caesar or the friend of Caesar by protecting the interest of Caesar. It was a threat and a bait; a political blackmail to force Pilate's hand.

Ruffled by this threat from the Jewish counsel, Pilate bowed to political pressure from the Jews by handing in Jesus for crucifixion. He thus considered a Jewi-

sh dissident king-pretender, and the squabble around Jewish national religion unworthy of his loss of the confidence of Caesar and consequently his life and position as prefect. Pilate's surrendering of Jesus for crucifixion was therefore influenced by the linking of the trial to the authority of the emperor and consequently the loyalty of the governor to the emperor. This was because »to shut his eyes to the fact that Jesus did have a following and had made certain definite, though somewhat vague references to his kingdom would show a lack of interest in the concerns of Caesar« (Cuss 1974, 44).

The use of the phrase by the Jews highlighted the ingenuity of the Jewish council who feeding on the vulnerable side of Pilate took advantage of the entire legal and political situations and turned them maximally in their favour (Bammel 419) by extorting a sentence of the crucifixion from Pilate. The use of the phrase betrays an element of intrigue because having exhausted their list of accusations and getting a reply of innocence from Pilate, the Jewish party decided to play the political card by tapping on the fears and vulnerability of Pilate to force his hand. A threat because if he failed to concede to the demand to crucify Jesus they would convince the emperor to strip him of his office and consequently even condemn him to death.

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