The Preeminence of Active Metaphors:
Functional Linguistics and Earthen Vessels
in 2 Corinthians 4:7

C. ERIC TURNER
Assistant Professor of New Testament and Greek,
Hannibal LaGrange University

Dedication

This article is written in honor of Alan Tomlinson, PhD, who I have enjoyed the privilege of knowing for the last twelve years. Dr. Tomlinson was, first of all, my New Testament and Greek professor and most recently, the chair of my dissertation. His influence on my academic writing, teaching, and preaching is immeasurable. It is no exaggeration to say that Tomlinson's impact is currently felt in classrooms and pulpits across the world. I am confident that on this side of heaven we will not apprehend the scope of his investment in the Kingdom. His knowledge of first century backgrounds and Greek are what make his classes at Midwestern Seminary some of the most enjoyable and sought after by students. I will always treasure the time he spent investing in my life and ministry, especially the hours spent drinking coffee in his office and pouring over the Greek text. Thank you Dr. Tomlinson for your faithfulness and example; your voice will continue to resound for many years. Your Christ-like humility is the touchstone we will strive to emulate.

Introduction

The study of metaphor has experienced dramatic shifts in the last decade, especially in the domain of linguistic modeling. These new methods are making it easier to examine the biblical metaphors which occur in the Greek New Testament (GNT). However, a divergence often occurs between the existence of these objective methods and the application of them by researchers to the biblical text. In other words, New Testament scholars have neglected available linguistic tools for studying metaphors

more accurately, especially with respect to the discipline of systemic functional linguistics (SFL).[1] It is time for new arguments to emerge that metaphorical analysis, understood through SFL models, deserves a central role in the practice of biblical interpretation.

SFL holds promise for how metaphors are identified objectively, rather than subjectively, a cornerstone of proper research methodology. Various answers are given for how to find metaphors in a literary text. For example, an interpreter could rely on simple intuition and often, this practice is all that is needed. However, simply locating a metaphor and arriving at a proper interpretation of it are not always guaranteed, particularly when the interpreter is working in a non-primary lanuage such as Koiné Greek.

The problem is that current research on Pauline metaphor is limited to texts read through the grid of cognitive intuition.[2] Furthermore, few scholars state their objective methodology for metaphorical analysis, primarily because they do not believe one is needed.[3] The aim here is to offer a new objective linguistic model that will provide a way forward for NT researchers in the study of metaphor. Thererfore, the focus of this article will be on identifying and interpreting one of Paul's strategic metaphors in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) using an objective, hybrid functional linguistic model.

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[1] Portions of this article are taken directly or adapted from this author's dissertation on linguistic metaphor in 2 Corinthians. See C. Eric Turner, "The Signalling and Syntactical Configuration of Active Metaphors: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 as a Test Case" (PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

[2] This statement is not meant to imply that intuition could never lead a person to the proper interpretation of a metaphor. The point here is that complete reliance on intuition may be a less reliable subjective methodology than one that is grounded in objectively measured evidence.

[3] The following will suffice as representative of studies on Pauline metaphor which rely on intuition: Reider Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters! Christian Siblingship in Paul* (London: T & T Clark, 2003); Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); and Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," *BSac* 161 (2004): 343-359.

The Definition and Classifications of Metaphor

Metaphor is often described as nothing more than a rhetorical flourish of the pen or as verbal gymnastics, a sly turn-of-a-phrase. It has even been described as an ornamental decoration a writer adds a finishing touch.[4] If these opinions are true, then someone might ask, "Why does metaphor seem to be everywhere?" In modern culture, metaphor is not found just in literature, but also in music,[5] movies,[6] and certainly, in daily conversations.[7] Metaphor is as much a part of everyday life, it seems, as breathing and eating. As a result, metaphor is either ignored or misunderstood for the contribution it produces in linguistic comprehension.

Defining what one means by a metaphor is not an easy task. Admittedly, the definition of metaphor is not of the utmost importance, rather, it is the identification, function, and interpretation of metaphor that should be the focus. Goatly's defintion of a metaphor reveals several

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[4] This view, of course, is not new. The classical defintion of metaphor as a "deviant use of words" possessing "just an ornamental function in discourse" was first established by Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* 1475b.7 (Freese, LCL).

[5] Kevin Cronin, the lead singer of REO Speedwagon, once wrote, "It is time to bring this ship into the shore and throw away the oars forever." See Kevin Cronin, "I Can't Fight this Feeling," by Kevin Cronin, recorded on November 11, 1984 with Gary Richrath, Neal Doughty, Alan Gratzer, and Bruce Hall, on *Wheels are Turnin´*, Epic Records, $33^{1/3}$ rpm. Clearly, Cronin was being metaphorical. No one imagines that he is writing a song about leaving behind nautical equipment after a difficult day of sailing.

[6] It is sometimes argued that James Cameron's movie *Aliens* is actually a metaphor for the Vietnam War where a group of American soldiers are sent to a strange land by incompetent leaders and as a result, they are slaughtered. See *Aliens,* directed by James Cameron, screenplay by James Cameron (20th Century Fox, 1986), DVD (1987).

[7] If you overheard the sentence, "Cori is a night owl," then you more than likely would not assume that the person is describing their new pet owl. You would correctly understand that the person being spoken about is someone who likes to stay up late at night. Because the metaphor is a common one in English, its meaning is taken for granted. In other words, you do not need to know anything about what species of owl the person is talking about in order to arrive at the correct interpretation.

important concepts.[8] Perhaps his definition can be re-worded for better comprehension in order to establish a foundation for this study. In other words, a metaphor occurs,

when a word, or group of words is used to refer to an object/process/concept that it normally would not refer or colligates in an unconventional way. This unconventional reference can be understood when the reader of the metaphor is able to match the metaphor in his mind with similar concepts. This matching primarily occurs when the reader reasons to the meaning of the metaphor by way of analogy, usually through shared knowledge, context, or common cultural experiences.

For instance, take note of the italicized metaphor in the following sentence, *"The politician is a fox,* you cannot trust what he says." According to the definition above, the word "fox" is used to refer to an object, "the politician." This unconventional reference is understood because of the context which is supplied, that is, "you cannot trust what he says." Even if this context were not available, it would not be difficult to reason towards why the politician is described as a fox. Based on common cultural experiences that politicians are sly and cunning, like a fox, the interpretation is relatively easy. Again, this definition and example are a simplification, however, as pragmatics are applied, it becomes more accessible and workable for researchers.

Before this article goes further, it is critical to explain how metaphors are classified. Typically, metaphors are placed in one of three broad categories: *dead, inactive,* or *active.*[9] Dead metaphors are ones that are so commonly used that they are no longer recognized as metaphors.[10] In other words, they are lexicalized. They have moved from metaphorical

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[8] See Goatly, *The Language of Metaphors,* (2d ed.; London: Routledge, 2011), 9.

[9] Goatly, *The Language of Metaphors,* 29-38. The terminology for metaphorical classification is confusing, especially in the realm of classification. Rather than wade through all of the possible nomenclatures, this study will adopt Goatly's categories as sufficient ones.

[10] Stephanie was able to explain the three *branches of government.* It is doubtful that this metaphor evokes an image of the three sections of the federal government sitting on a tree. However, because of shared knowledge which comprehends that branches belong to trees, i.e., separate but connected, one readily grasps the meaning that different divisions of the government exist that are connected and dependent on one another.

to literal status, reducing their potential within language for rhetorical effect. Inactive metaphors have their foundation in shared cultural knowledge, yet unlike dead metaphors, they are easily recognized.[11] They have not reached lexicalized status for their readers. The final category is that of *active* metaphors. These are metaphors that are located in a specific cultural framework and are constructed with creative semantic potential, yet are unpredictable with respect to their interpretation because of an amputated lexical relationship.[12] Buss and Jost describe active metaphors as ones that possess innovative power to view the world differently, "For they produce strikingly novel, yet *unheard of* similarities."[13]

The battle against subjective interpretation is especially acute in the case of active metaphors. As Goatly rightly observes, "There is, in fact a decisive break between active and inactive metaphors."[14] The reason for this break rests in the reality that active metaphors are highly dependent on context for their interpretation. Thus, active metaphors are both *unique* and *unpredictable* apart from context. These factors increase the potential for misinterpretation, especially if they are present in a biblical text that is separated from its reader by both culture and time. In short, relying on intuition alone will not suffice for their interpretation – a new way forward must be offered in the study of biblical metaphor.

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[11] Chase is an *early bird*. This sentence contains an inactive metaphor. The interpretation of the metaphor is accomplished almost instantaneously in the mind of the reader. One does not have to stop and complete aviary research in order to understand that Chase likes to get up early in the morning.

[12] Carson was sitting at the table eating his *green day ice cream*. The metaphor of green day ice cream is unique because it stands apart as unpredictable apart from a specific cultural framework. However, with appropriate context the expression's meaning is illuminated. If green day refers to a student's good behavior at school and ice cream, or lack thereof, is a reward/consequence, then the metaphor communicates that Carson was being rewarded with ice cream because he behaved at school. The metaphor is unique and unpredictable.

[13] Mareike Buss and Jörg Jost, "Rethinking the Connection of Metaphor and Topos," *Metaphorik de* 23 (2013): 1-14.

[14] Goatly, The Language of Metaphors, 35.

A Proposed Model

Three areas within the field of linguistics that show methodological aptitude for the study of active metaphors are *systemic functional linguistics* (SFL),[15] *corpus linguistics* (CL),[16] and *relevance theory* (RT).[17] Thus, the proposed model for this article is one that cross-pollinates SFL, CL, and RT into one hybrid theory, bringing to bear on the interpretation of metaphors their complementary components of signalling, frequency,

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[15] SFL addresses what language does through the study of actual texts set within a historical context. It is often contrasted with cognitive linguistics which focuses on subjective reasoning to linguistic principles based on the assumption that the mechanisms for language are universal. The seminal works in the field of SFL are by M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (England: Longman Group, 1976) and *Language, Context, and Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[16] Corpus Linguistics refers to the study of language as it is expressed in corpora, or relative samplings of texts. One of the genesis studies in CL was by W. Nelson Francis and Henry Kucera, *Computational Analysis of Present Day American English* (New York: Brown University Press, 1967). The primary way that words are examined is through the use of computers. For example, a useful computer model for linguistic study of corpora is called the COBUILD project, or Collins Birmingham University International Language Database developed by John Sinclair, ed., *Looking Up. An Account of the COBUILD project in Lexical Computing* (London: Collins, 1987). The COBUILD project is a result of a collaboration between Collins Publishing and the University of Birmingham. The purpose of the joint venture was to create the largest corpus of English in the world and thereby to use it for the publication of dictionaries and reference materials. Currently, the COBUILD database contains over 4.5 million words and is updated monthly. Thus, the advent of computers as a tool has become both critical and necessary for an accurate, objective sampling of how words work together.

[17] Relevance theory was first proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 265. RT argues that metaphorical interpretation depends on three sources of knowledge between the writer and his readers: knowledge of the language system, knowledge of the context (situation and co-text), and knowledge of background schematics (factual and socio-cultural).

and context. This hybrid model is important for understanding *active* metaphors since they are neglected in the field of biblical studies.[18]
Signalling: The SFL component

One objective way for finding metaphors is known as signalling.[19] The concept of signalling refers to the main textual markers which identify a metaphor and the effect that these markers have on the metaphor itself. Signals may be overt and obvious or hidden and vague.[20] The problem of identifying active metaphors through signalling is that they are not only unconventional, but also rare. Furthermore, they may not emit explicit markers. Because of their inexplicitness, they are, more often than not, unmarked in a text. For this reason, researchers in the realm of functional linguistics have struggled to locate active metaphors in a corpus.

Of course, this effort to locate active metaphors need not be in vain. As Goatly remarks, "Researchers of metaphor might profitably use markers as a partial solution to the vexed problem of locating active metaphors."[21] What he means is that active metaphors might be identified through an expanded understanding of metaphorical marking. What kind of markers help to identify active metaphors? Active

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[18] The study of metaphor has, more often than not, only been addressed at the *conceptual* rather than the *functional* level. For an example of grasping metaphor at the conceptual level, see the signature work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980).

[19] Andrew Goatly's theory is built on what is known as the "Genre Relevance, Graded Risk Approach to Metaphor Scalarity" [i.e., his so named 2(GR)AMS model]. It will be impossible in this article to completely explore his theory, but it is important for the following reason: most linguistic studies only provide a *framework* for metaphorical theory, while he provides the *pragmatic mechanisms* for metaphorical interpretation within a contextual framework.

[20] For example, if a person says, "I feel *like* I have been hit by a ton of bricks," then he/she is probably not making a literal statement. The word *like* signals that a metaphor exists. On the other hand, in the sentence, "Max is a beast," one could not be as certain if Max is metaphorically *a beast* or literally *a beast*. Max might be *a beast* on the basketball court or he might literally be *a canine beast*, a dog.

[21] Goatly, The Language of Metaphors, 183.

metaphors are primarily marked (*signalled*) through one of the seven categories listed below.[22]

Table 1.1 Markers (signals) of active metaphors

Types of Markers	Examples
Explicit	<u>He</u> is a **savage**, figuratively* speaking.
Hedges	Immediately, something* like **scales** fell from his <u>eyes</u> (Acts 9:18).
Downtoners	served the <u>creation</u> rather* than the **Creator** (Rom 1:25).
Superordinate terms	<u>we</u> would be a kind* of **first fruits** (Jas 1:18).
Copular similes	their <u>message</u> will spread its infection like* **gangrene** (2 Tim 2:17).
Clausal similes	as though* <u>I</u> were an **angel** of God (Gal 4:14).
Verbal processes	He was, so to speak,* a **bear** of a <u>man</u>
Conditionals	<u>agitators</u> would* go so far as to **castrate** themselves! (Gal 5:12).

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[22] The marker (signal) for the metaphor is denoted by the symbol (*). The metaphor itself is in **bold**. The term which receives the characteristics of the metaphor is <u>underlined</u>.

As seen from table 1.1, other than the categories of *explicit* and *verbal processes,* the biblical text provides some clear examples of metaphorical marking. These examples reinforce the belief that metaphors may be located in a text using this component. It also indicates the potential for them to be categorized as active, even though some marking devices (*explicit markers* and *copular similes*) may reduce their perception. As a result, the reader may have to exert more effort recognizing a metaphor because of less than prominent signals in the text, producing greater rhetorical effect. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a newly created metaphor may still emit signals and exert considerable rhetorical influence upon the reader. At the most basic level, then, the markers for metaphors aid in the first step of the process, namely, *identification* which leads to *classification.*

Frequency: The CL component

The second component of the hybrid model is foundational for establishing the relative *frequency* or *infrequency* of metaphors in a corpus.[23] In order to understand frequency, this article will apply Luhn's CL methodology, i.e., his so-named key-word-in-context (KWIC) model.[24] Of course, two limitations are normally considered when adopting a KWIC method for locating metaphors in this manner. These include the size and the genre of the corpus. In short, a corpus must be balanced and relevant for the searches conducted.

While the study of how metaphors are used over time is an interesting endeavour, the primary goal here is to grasp how active metaphors are interpreted in their immediate context. For this reason, a

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[23] A corpus is best defined as, "A collection of naturally occurring examples of language, consisting of anything from a few sentences to a set of written texts or tape recordings which have been collected for linguistic study." See Susan Hunston, *Corpora in Applied Linguistics* (eds. Carol H. Chapelle and Susan Hunston: Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

[24] H. P. Luhn, "Keyword-in-Context Index for Technical Literature (KWIC Index)," in *Readings in Automatic Language Processing* (ed. David G. Hays; New York: American Elsevier, 1966), 159–67. The KWIC method takes the search term (*node*) results and places them into a table with their contextual terms (*collocates*) on either side. Usually, a limit of +/- 5 words is used as a proper span in order to determine how the nodes are used in context.

corpus must be appropriately balanced,[25] that is, large enough to adequately represent the language studied, including various styles and text types. Additionally, the corpus must be restricted in order to provide objective data and to avoid skewed samples.

For example, a quick search of the word σαρκικός, or "fleshly" in the GNT only returns 6 occurrences, all from Pauline literature. The Septuagint (LXX) has 0 returns and the Apostolic Fathers (AF) 11. The representative sample, 17, is too small. On the other hand, a different problem arises with a word such as δουλός, or "slave" which occurs 53 times in the AF, 572 times in the LXX, and 59 times in the GNT for a total of 684 occurrences. Such a sample is too large.

The main thrust of this component is not only one of balance, but of relevance. It is easy to see how word meaning can change depending upon its genre. The word *trunk* in a zoology journal would yield a different semantic field than if the same word occurred in a furniture store ad of a local newspaper.[26] Since metaphors in 2 Corinthians are under examination, it is important to study similar genres. Furthermore, research on metaphors should limit itself to genres which theoretically hold the greatest potential for containing metaphorical speech. Thus, the primary corpus for this article will include the genres of the NT, the LXX, the AF, and the OT Greek Pseudepigrapha. A secondary corpus will contain the genres represented by Philo, Strabo, and Josephus. Therefore, the corpora chosen includes

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[25] The difference is between a *diachronic* analysis and a *synchronic* one. Diachronic studies examine language from a historical viewpoint, that is, how language has changed from its inception to the present day. Synchronic analysis refers to the study of linguistic change over a particular period of time. Clearly, in metaphorical interpretation, researchers should not be concerned with how a language has exhaustively developed with respect to a metaphor's interpretation. Instead, how these metaphorical constructions are used during a specific time period across similar literary forms is worthy of consideration. For this reason, synchronic analysis provides appropriate limitations for interpreting metaphors that are active in their classification.

[26] Anyone was has attended a class lecture with F. Alan Tomlinson, PhD will immediately get the *trunk* reference. Once of his favorite illustrations of the principle *context determines meaning* is to write the word "trunk" on the board and then ask students what he means. The exercise serves the purpose of explaining that apart from context you will never know what he means. It could be the *trunk* of a tree, the *trunk* of a car, the *trunk* of an elephant, et al.

epistolary, apocalyptic, wisdom, biographical, legal, and historical genres. This range of literature is more than sufficient for determining whether or not the metaphor "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) is *frequent* or *infrequent*.[27]

Context: The RT component

Once a metaphor is *signalled* as active and assessed for *frequency*, the proposed model may finally wrestle with the metaphor's interpretation. In this manner, the final component (RT) serves as a check for the other components. RT argues that metaphorical interpretation depends on three sources of knowledge: knowledge of the language system (*linguistic competence*), knowledge of the context (*situation* and *co-text*), and knowledge of background schematics (*factual* and *socio-cultural*). RT is important, therefore, because it supplies the final mechanism through which pragmatics are applied to the interpretation of the metaphor.

The aim of RT is to explain, based on the evidence (*context*) available how a reader understands a writer's meaning. What then is the importance of RT for the study of active metaphors? The degree to which metaphors are difficult to interpret, especially active metaphors, does not mean that they are less relevant or that their meaning cannot be apprehended in the text. Rather, it simply means that a *qualitative* difference exists between active metaphors and other kinds of metaphors. Active metaphors need more than just objective *signalling* and *frequency* in order to be understood. They need context.

It is safe to assume linguistic competence on the part of Paul's readers, that is, they could understand Koiné Greek. However, defining the term *context* is not as easy. Part of the problem in linguistic analysis

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[27] John Sinclair, *English Collocation Studies: The OSTI Report* (London: Continuum, 2004), 17, suggests that a word count in the range of 90 – 290 times is necessary for establishing word meaning through collocation. This article will not employ CL in order to arrive at lexical meaning. Instead, CL will be used to reveal the *infrequency* of metaphors that may be active. It is believed that if a metaphor is newly created (*active*), then occurrences in similar genres across a sufficiently specified time period will be rare. This reverse use of CL may aid in establishing the uniqueness of Paul's metaphors in 2 Corinthians. Computers are easily able to handle this component. For this article, searches are done using *BibleWorks,* CD-ROM (Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks LLC, 2006).

is that context is left undefined, with researchers supposing that everyone involved understands the reference. Turan and Zeryk make this difficulty explicit when they write,

> The term *context* (original emphasis) is used in abundance in linguistics for a number of different phenomena, ranging from linguistic context to socio-cultural context and has a range of meanings. There is not a single established definition of context and its meaning is taken for granted by those who use it. This proliferation and the implicit use of the term make it difficult to define context.[28]

Their cautionary note is well-taken. For the purposes of this article, *context* will refer to the *immediate* words and clauses which precede or follow the metaphor,[29] the *discourse* environment in which the metaphor is located,[30] and the *extra-linguistic* socio-cultural setting.[31] This

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[28] Ümit Deniz Turan and Deniz Zeyrek, "Context, Contrast, and the Structure of Discourse in Turkish," in *Context and Contexts: Parts Meet Whole?* (eds. Anita Fetzer and Etsuko Oishi (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 148.

[29] Here is where the metaphor's G-term, if explicit or ambiguous, will present itself and allow for an understanding of which shared characteristics of the metaphor are applicable. A G-term is the immediate words or clauses which surround the metaphor. For example, in the previous example, "The politician is a fox, *you cannot trust what he says*," the italicized portion is the G-term or Grounds of the metaphor. If a G-term is absent, then it is incumbent for the discourse and extra-linguistic context to provide a path forward for interpretation.

[30] This domain could include the paragraph, wider discourse section, or even the entire epistle. The issue of a controlling metaphor for an entire Pauline epistle could be a possibility that remains relatively unexplored in NT studies. For example, a controlling metaphor of stewardship could be argued as applicable to the Pastoral Epistles. See F. Alan Tomlinson, "The Purpose and Stewardship Theme within the Pastoral Epistles," in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 68.

[31] The extra-linguistic context is often a combination of both the *present* and *historical* situation of the writer and his audience. Various terms are used for referring to this domain of contextual analysis. The term *meso-context* is

definition allows for a three-pronged approach for identifying the context that will assist in the interpretation of the active metaphor in question.

Rationale for the Study of Metaphors in 2 Corinthians

Several statements are necessary before proceeding with the interpretation of Paul's strategic metaphor in 2 Corinthians 4:7. An argument could be made that Paul's metaphor of "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) is active in its classification, that is, it is completely unique to Pauline literature and unpredictable apart from its context. As proof of this claim, the following methodology will be applied. First, if this metaphor is indeed active, then it may be *identified* as such through signalling (SFL). Second, it can be further tested for active status by how *frequently* or *infrequently* it occurs in a defined corpus (CL). Third, if active classification is bestowed on it, then the metaphor will need a detailed consideration of context (RT) for its proper interpretation.

Treasure in Earthen Vessels: 2 Corinthians 4:7

The phrase "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) is, at the most basic level, one of Paul's most paradoxical statements. Byrnes locates the meaning of this metaphor in the OT usage of clay jars in sin offering rites.[32] He argues that when the priests finished with the vessels, they were smashed as a symbolic picture of the destruction of sin. Harris comes closer to the meaning of the metaphor when he writes that the clay (σκεύεσιν) vessels, "although weak in

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sometimes applied to refer to the combination of the macro-context (text genre of which a passage is a part) and the interdiscursive/intertextual context (outside texts to which the passage is connected). While these terms are helpful they still do not include or consider the overlap of background context, or the social-cultural environment which members of a society share. See Frans H. van Eemeren, *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010), 18-19.

[32] Michael Byrnes, Conformation to the Death of Christ and the Hope of the Resurrection: An Exegetico-Theological Study of 2 Corinthians 4, 7-15 and Philippians 3, 7-11 (Rome, Italy: Gregorian University Press, 2003), 49.

themselves, become God's powerful instruments in communicating the gospel."[33] The point offered here is that, once again, subjectively speculating over the meaning of a metaphor may lead to interpretations that are far removed or close to the text, but not *true* to intended meaning of the text. In light of these considerations, what does the objective methodology of signalling, frequency, and context have to say?

Signalling of the Metaphor

In general, the following rule in metaphorical classification is important to note: a metaphor that does not possess explicit syntactical markers is more than likely active. Explicitness, or inexplicitness, in marking aids in determining the ambiguity of the metaphor. The relationship of the terms to one another either highlights or reduces the ambiguity of the metaphor. So, it may be asked with respect to markedness, is the metaphor in question explicitly marked (*signalled*) for the reader? Moreover, if the metaphor is marked, what are its constituent terms?[34] These two questions provide the foundation for identifying the metaphor as active.

Two observations suggest that the metaphor "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) is unmarked in the text. First, the metaphor is located within a prepositional phrase. Halliday argues that prepositional phrases downgrade metaphors, causing them to lose their status as recognizable entities.[35] Because

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[33] Murray J. Harris, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 340.

[34] The terminology for metaphorical study is somewhat technical in nature. Usually, metaphors are described as possessing three important parts: the T-term (*unconventional referent*), the V-term (*conventional referent*), and the G-term (*similarity/analogy*). These are shorthand for a metaphor's topic, vehicle, and grounds. In other words, the vehicle (*V-term*) is the metaphor itself, the T-term (*topic*) is the referent to which the metaphor's characteristics are applied, and the G-term (*grounds*) is the further information provided which illuminates the characteristics of the metaphor. For example, in the sentence, "The politician is a fox, you cannot trust what he say," the T-term is *the politician,* the V-term is *fox,* and the G-term is the phrase, *you cannot trust what he says.*

[35] M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (4d ed.; ed. M. I. M. Matthiessen; New York: Routledge, 2004), 650.

prepositional phrases are syntactically subordinate, they push the metaphor further down the chain of interpretation making it secondary for the reader rather than primary. Second, the metaphor is introduced by an ambiguous first person plural copular verb, "we have" ("ἔχομεν). According to Goatly's markers (see table 1.1), the metaphor does not contain an explicit signal. Thus, since the metaphor is in a downgraded syntactical construction and it is indistinct in its signalling, then it initially may be classified as active.

As a result of this initial classification, the metaphor's terms may be disclosed. The T-term (*unconventional referent*) of the active metaphor is the embedded subject "we" in the first person plural verb. The V-term (*conventional referent*) is the phrase, "treasure in earthen vessels." The G-term (*analogy/similarity*) is conspicuously absent in the immediate context. The metaphor is followed by a purpose/result clause, "so that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." It is preceded by an OT allusion to Genesis 1:3 (cf. Isaiah 9:2), describing light shining out of darkness in reference to the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Certainly, either one of these phrases would need more attention to draw out the connections Paul is making for the reader. So, the G-term does not explicitly give an answer for how to interpret the metaphor.

The metaphor's marking, specifically with respect to how it is syntactically arranged, point to active status. In other words, the metaphor is both inexplicitly marked and syntactically ambiguous for the reader. This structural ambiguity creates tension for the reader and the possibility of multiple interpretations. While these characteristics provide a first step in objectively measuring the nature of the metaphor, it is also important to examine the metaphor's frequency in order to further test for active classification.

Frequency of the Metaphor

The principle of frequency is sourced in how *common* or *uncommon* a similar metaphorical construction appears in literature of like genres and time periods. Thus, if a metaphor is infrequent in a chosen corpus of texts, then it is most likely active, possibly even newly created by an author. The main tool for determining frequency is the search criteria established by the discipline of CL. Once more, the hybrid model presented in this article relies on applying CL in a reverse

direction, that is, to prove *infrequency* of collocation rather than frequency.

When adopting CL as a component, a similar phrase may show up frequently even though it is not being used metaphorically. Herein lies a vital point to be made about CL; the only contribution that CL can provide is the raw evidence of word occurrences and their collocations. In other words, a CL search will not reveal for a researcher if a phrase is employed metaphorically in a given set of texts. Intuition constrained by the context of the metaphor's occurrence must be applied to determine metaphorical existence.

So, a few parameters are in order before proceeding to the CL search for "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν). Four hypothetical scenarios may exist when examining a phrase for metaphorical frequency. First, a phrase could return a result of *metaphorical* and *frequent.* In this case, the classification is potentially inactive or dead rather than active. Second, an expression might yield a result of *literal* and *frequent.* These outcomes are not considered metaphors. Third, a search might reveal that a phrase is *literal* and *infrequent.* Like a literal, frequent occurrence, these results are discarded. Finally, a search phrase might show a *metaphorical* and *infrequent* quality. It is these search returns that would qualify a metaphor as active.

The search phrase "treasure in" (i.e., θησαυρ* ἐν) will suffice for locating potential metaphors. It is unlikely that a CL search will yield this exact metaphor, but it is possible a similar construction of a "treasure in + substantive noun"[36] might occur. Furthermore, a parameter of N+/-5 will provide more than enough immediate context for determining which of the four possibilities just discussed exist.[37] For ease of viewing, the search results are located in Appendix A.

The primary and secondary corpora search results reveal several occurrences of the phrase "treasure in" (θησαυρ* ἐν), however, none of the instances outside of 2 Corinthians 4:7 appear metaphorical in nature.

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[36] It is probable that other semantic parallels may turn up once the CL search is completed. A reasonable expectation is that "treasure" could occur with a synonym for "earthen vessels."

[37] The linguistic convention N+/-5 denotes the boundaries of the CL search, where N refers to the node words (θησαυρ* ἐν) and +/-5 indicates how many words to the left or right of the node words were taken into consideration.

The initial instance comes from Genesis 43:23 and the well-known story of Joseph putting the treasures of Egypt in the traveling bags of his brothers. The only other example in the LXX was found in Jeremiah 48:8 (41:8), a context where the men who murdered Gedaliah offer Ishmael a bribe of "treasures (wheat, barley, oil and honey) in a field" so that they may not be killed and cast into the cistern.

In the NT, Matthew relates Jesus' use of the collocation, "treasures in heaven" to contrast that which is gathered on earth to what is given in heaven. The metaphorical use here is different from 2 Corinthians 4:7 in that Jesus grounds the metaphor in a principle of the desires of the heart (see Matthew 6:21). With respect to frequency, the phrase is observed only four times in the primary literature corpus, one of which is a parallel text between the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

In the secondary corpus, the *exact* phrase only occurs one time. Philo records how a reserve (θησαυρίζω) is stored up in certain cities (ἐν πόλει). An additional search of the works of Josephus yielded 34 examples of θησαυρ* and its cognates. Specifically, no instances of the node followed by the preposition ἐν or any other similar prepositional phrase were found.[38] Therefore, of all of the search returns in the secondary corpus, none were metaphorical.

It is reasonable to conclude that the linguistic construction used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7, namely, the collocation θησαυρ* ἐν, is both *metaphorical* and *infrequent*. The metaphor could be described as *weak* in its frequency, that is, even though the signalled phrase *substantive + preposition* occurs 5 times in the corpora examined, of these 5 occurrences, none yield the syntactical construction, *substantive + preposition + metaphor*. The fact that the occurrence in 2 Corinthians 4:7 is *metaphorical* and *infrequent* implies that it is active in nature.

Context of the Metaphor

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[38] Syntactically, the breakdown for the search was as follows: direct object of verb (13), object of preposition (10), genitive construction (6), indirect object of verb (4), and attributive adjective (1). Surprisingly was the fact that θησαυρ* was often the object of the preposition ἐν rather than the substantive governing the preposition.

Paul did not need to provide a detailed explanation for the cultural references he included in his letters, predominantly because it was a world his readers experienced every day. The problem for modern interpreters of the biblical text is that they are separated from this world, a culture that is completely foreign to them. However, it is not impossible for researchers to understand the cultural context in which Paul and his readers lived. The proposed model presented has benefits for merging Paul's world into the hermeneutical process.

Too often, an interpretation of a metaphor is rushed before all possible options are explored. As a result, readers of the text may unnecessarily or even unknowingly force an interpretation apart from context. Or, in the extreme, metaphorical interpretation is viewed through the lens of a poetically creative process which destroys worlds and opens up new, previously unknown linguistic worlds.[39] It is not difficult to argue that Paul's metaphors are grounded in *actual*, not *hypothetical* contexts. What is left for the modern reader, then, is to reconstruct this context and through intuitive processes, apply this knowledge to the active metaphor in question. The triad of contextual elements (*discourse, immediate,* and *extra-linguistic*) will aid in the interpretation of Paul's earthen vessel metaphor.

Immediate Context

An initial clue in the *immediate* context is the contrastive conjunction (δέ) that introduces Paul's argument. It is possible that Paul is beginning a new thought through the use of this conjunction, but more than likely he is setting up a contrast with the statement he has just made concerning the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of [Jesus] Christ" (φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ ['Ἰησοῦ] Χριστοῦ). Paul follows this metaphor with a purpose/result clause, "so that the surpassing greatness of power will be from God, and not from ourselves," (ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ᾖ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ μὴ ἐξ ἡμῶν).

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[39] This view is the one held by Paul Ricouer (following Hans-Georg Gadamer) who describes this process as *Horizontverschmelzung* or a "fusion of horizons." For Ricouer, this fusion is a necessity in metaphor because the literal world must be abolished for new worlds to emerge. See Paul Ricouer, *La Métaphore Vive* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), 234.

The argument in the immediate words and clauses surrounding the metaphor appears heavily influenced by the knowledge of God's glory, rooted in the preaching of Jesus Christ, "for we do not preach ourselves, but [we preach] Jesus Christ as Lord, and [we preach] ourselves as your slaves through Jesus, (οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν). In short, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ) is more than likely an expanded reference to the glory of the gospel which followers of Jesus Christ possess within themselves by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Discourse Context

The *discourse* context surrounding and leading up to the Pauline metaphor of earthen vessels reveals the qualifications for those who are set apart for new covenant ministry.[40] It provides an awareness of the burden that followers of Jesus Christ can expect to bear for the sake of this calling. Beginning in 2 Corinthians 1:23 and continuing through 7:16, Paul provides for the Corinthians his defense for the new covenant ministry God gave to him. Throughout this section of discourse, he portrays the dispatched gospel ministry in both a positive and negative manner.

Paul's opening statement in 1:23, "now I call God as witness on behalf of my soul," (ἐγὼ δὲ μάρτυρα τὸν θεὸν ἐπικαλοῦμαι ἐπὶ τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχήν), is the opening statement in support of his argument that he is legitimately grounding his character in the manifest judgment of God. He is aware that another visit could possibly cause the Corinthians pain. His delay in coming to them is not a sign of weakness, but is rather a test to see if they will be obedient to the gospel (2:1-2:13). The Corinthians

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[40] I am indebted to F. Alan Tomlinson, PhD for this terminology. The phrase "new covenant ministry" is derived from the statement Paul makes in 2 Corinthians 3:6 that God is the one who made the Corinthians, and Paul, adequate as "servants of a new covenant." Not much later in the discourse, he declares that we "have this ministry," a reference to the previous context of the new covenant.

are to endure the test of suffering which will validate their character and prove their loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The reality of suffering on account of persecution is the core defense of Paul's ministry as he utilizes a stark metaphor from Roman life, the triumphal procession, to prove that God leads captive those who are obedient to the gospel (2:14-2:16b). In turn, this manifests the gospel to those who are being saved and to those who are perishing. The ironic truth is that suffering for the gospel is to the latter "death" while to the former it is "life." This progression in the discourse anticipates one of the key questions of the entire letter, namely, "who is sufficient for these things?" (καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἱκανός;).

From this hinge in his argument, Paul then gives three answers to his question of who is sufficient to undertake new covenant ministry. He states that sufficiency is characterized by sincerity, not boastful self-promotion (2:17). In short, Paul is not like the so-called false apostles, who are using the word of God deceptively for selfish gain. Next, he claims that this sufficiency is characterized by the reality that the Corinthian church is his letter of recommendation (3:1-3). They are the evidence that Paul does not need outside commendation to legitimize his ministry for the gospel. Finally, sufficiency is characterized by those who possess the empowering Holy Spirit (3:4-6). The context makes clear, therefore, that suffering for the gospel is only able to be endured by those who have the Holy Spirit.

As the earthen vessel metaphor draws closer, Paul locates and further expands his argument for new covenant ministry in the example of Moses, specifically alluding to the incidents of Exodus 34:29-35. In a startling series of statements, Paul says that the ministry of the Corinthians will far exceed that of Moses. Whereas Moses engaged in a ministry of condemnation and death, their ministry will bring life through the Spirit. Ultimately, the glory of new covenant ministry will be greater because of unveiled boldness, a glory that is increasing rather than fading away. Nevertheless, Paul reminds them that their labor will be opposed by the god of this world. He concludes by encouraging them to not lose heart, even though the gospel is veiled by the schemes of the god of this world, it is not veiled in the sight of God. In fact, new covenant ministers are servants who proclaim the gospel right before the face of Christ.

The discourse leading up to the earthen vessel metaphor may be summarized as follows. New covenant ministry is positive in that it results in great glory, however, it is negative in that faithfulness to it results in suffering. This truth is further revealed in the statements Paul makes immediately following the metaphor. In a series of paradoxical word-plays, he describes how the life of Jesus is manifested in his mortal flesh. The participial chain in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 connected by the contrastive conjunction "but" (ἀλλὰ) reveals that even if suffering brings physical death, the "the life of Jesus" (ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) will still be proclaimed. Farther along in the context, Paul gives reassurance that even if "the tent" (τοῦ σκήνους), the physically persecuted mortal body, is torn down that the Corinthians possess a "building from God" (οἰκοδομὴν ἐκ θεοῦ), a permanently resurrected physical body. As a result, this promise leads to a life that is pleasing to the Lord, namely, boldly preaching the gospel in the face of physical suffering. It is this reality of physical suffering that prepares the readers for new covenant ministry. They should expect persecution in the present, but glory in the future.

Extra-Linguistic Context

Paul's earthen vessel metaphor is not only grounded in the context of his present difficulties, but also in the socio-cultural environment of the ancient world. Of possible significance is the discovery of Roman treasure hoards and the *containers* in which they are found. R. Anthony Abdy writes that, "Roman denominational system has left evidence of prolific hoarding of coins. The current number of recorded Roman coin hoards is approaching two thousand."[41] The *prolific* nature of Roman coin hoards is important to establish before one begins to draw connections to the *type* of containers in which they are found. If Roman coin hoards are numerous in the ancient world, then they may be said to reside in the arena of common knowledge within the society.[42] In fact, these finds are

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[41] Abdy's estimation of the number of coin hoards as around two thousand was made in 2002; it is even larger today. See Richard Anthony Abdy, *Roman-British Coin Hoards* (Buckinghamshire, UK: Shire Publications, 2002), 7.

[42] Many examples of Roman coin hoards are available for examination. See Roger Brand and Robert Andrew Glendinning Carson, *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain: The Blackmoor Hoard* (vol. 3 of *Recent Coin Hoards from Roman Britain;* UK: British

so common that even amateur archaeologists are stumbling across them.[43] What follows, then, is that the containers in which these Roman coin hoards are stored are images that are understood by both Paul and the readers at Corinth.

Elena Minarovičová remarks that "Coin hoards were deposited in various places. They were hidden underground, in water, in wells, gardens and fields, inside the walls of houses, under floors, in lofts and cellars, under the foundation of buildings, etc."[44] She goes on to reveal that "Many such coin hoards, together with their containers or wrappings, [were] most frequently earthenware vessels."[45] It is significant that these clay jars are imperfect, that is, many of them are cracked or flawed. This first century imagery of a cracked/flawed vessel holding coins fits well with Paul's earthen vessel metaphor in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Therefore, it may be argued that Paul grounds this metaphor in a common visual experience of these treasure hoards to communicate a newly created message, namely, the treasure of the gospel inside of the persecuted Corinthians.

The socio-cultural *extra-linguistic* context of Corinth reveals that vessels were not
only well-known, but also widely used as treasure "hoards." The method of depositing coins in this manner, that is, in clay jars, evokes an image of value within a common instrument. It is not unrealistic to say that Paul's readers would be familiar with the usage of these jars in this manner. As a result, the *extra-linguistic* contextual evidence may be

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Museum, 1982); Robert J. Bull and Olin J. Storvick, "The Gold Coin Hoard at Caesarea," *BA* 56:3 (1993): 116-120; and Josette Elayi, "A Treasure of Coins from Arwad," *JANESCU* 18 (1988): 3-24. The best possible method for geographically locating Roman coin hoards is the electronic compilation by Kris Lockyear, *Coin Hoards of the Roman Republic Online* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 2013).

[43] Dave Crisp, a chef by trade, using a metal-detector found a Roman coin hoard containing 52,500 coins from the 3rd cent. AD. They were buried in an earthenware vessel made of black ceramic ware measuring approximately 50 cm in diameter. See Sam Moorhead, Anna Booth, and Roger Bland, *The Frome Hoard* (UK: British Museum Press, 2010).

[44] Elena Minarovičová, "From the History of Coin Hoards and Money Containers," *BIATEC* (2002): 33.

[45] Ibid.

enough to warrant a relevant connection between the characteristics of a treasure hoard and Paul's active "earthen vessel" metaphor.

Defining and establishing the parameters of context is not an easy activity, especially as observed in the θησαυρ* ἐν metaphor of 2 Corinthians 4:7. The *immediate, discourse,* and *extra-linguistic* context were all shown to be relevant factors for determining the interpretative possibilities. Two clues in the immediate context, the contrastive conjunction (de,) and the antecedent purpose/result clause (ἵνα) were presented as evidence for the preaching of the gospel grounded in God's glory and the subsequent humility brought about by obedience to this calling. The discourse context revealed an epistle charged with Paul defending his new covenant ministry in the face of tremendous suffering. The extra-linguistic context provided proof that Corinthian amphoras were not only well-known, but of prevalent usage in the ancient world. The possibility exists that Paul may be drawing the analogy between the fragility of normal, ordinary vessels and the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Corinthians are comparable to earthen vessels because of their mortal flesh. As a result, the incomparable treasure of the gospel is revealed in this manner to demonstrate the greatness of God in the humility of man.

Conclusion

Metaphor will always contain a touch of uncertainty due to the ambiguity it occupies with respect to interpretation. Nevertheless, this article has sought to push the quantifiable study of metaphor forward so that interpretation may reside less in the subjective realm. Metaphor should not be viewed as an anomaly or even decoration within the rhetoric of Paul. It should be apparent that the objective analysis of metaphor deserves a central role in the faithful understanding and application of the biblical text.

The focus of this article was on identifying and interpreting one of Paul's strategic metaphors in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) using a hybrid functional linguistic model. An argument was made that Paul's metaphor of "treasure in earthen vessels" (θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) is active in its classification, that is, it is completely unique to Pauline literature and unpredictable apart from its context. First, the metaphor was

examined for how it emitted linguistic signals in the text. It was concluded that the metaphor is best classified as active, that is, newly created by Paul for rhetorical effect. Additionally, the metaphor was tested for its relative frequency across a balanced sample of corpora. The conclusion was reached that the metaphor was infrequent, strengthening the claim of its active status. Finally, the contextual component was examined, resulting in a renewed understanding that Paul grounds this metaphor in the broader discourse theme of suffering in 2 Corinthians and in the first century socio-cultural context of clay amphora treasure hoards. His purpose is to reveal that the glory of the gospel can reside in persecuted physical flesh, a key signature of his new covenant ministry.

It is true that the potential for more research exists in the field of biblical metaphor. Hopefully, this article furthers the claim that language is best understood by interpreters at the functional level before subjective intuition is utilized. If metaphor is applied through the grid of SFL, both at the *theoretical* and *pragmatic* levels, then plausible and accurate interpretations may begin to emerge. Thus, metaphor should remain firmly entrenched as a central component of not only linguistics, but also faithful biblical exegesis. This article's contribution of a hybrid functional linguistic model is simply one step forward in this exciting new domain of metaphorical analysis.

Appendix A

KWIC Primary and Secondary Corpus Search for Treasure in (θησαυρ* ἐν)

Primary Corpus Search[46]

English translation

(1) Gen 43:23 Your father has given to you treasure in your sacks
(2) Jer 48:8 Do not slay us because there are to us treasures in the field

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[46] No occurrences were observed in the Greek OT Apocrypha or Pseudepigrapha as well as the Apostolic Fathers.

(3) Matt 6:20[47] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor
(4) Matt 19:20 And give and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me

Greek Translation

(1) Gen 43:23 πατέρων ὑμῶν ἔδωκεν ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν τοῖς μαρσίπποις ὑμῶν
(2) Jer 48:8 ἀνέλης ἡμᾶς ὅτι εἰσὶν ἡμῖν θησαυροὶ ἐν ἀγρῷ
(3) Matt 6:20 θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε
(4) Matt 19:20 καὶ δὸς καὶ ἕξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, και δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι

Secondary Corpus Search[48]

English Translation

(1) Ios 1:111 Now food, a fifth part, will be treasured in the city

Greek Translation

(1) Ios 1:111 τροφὰς ἔσται δ' ἴσως μέρος πέμπτον θησαυριστέον ἐν πόλει

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[47] See Mk 10:21 as a Synoptic parallel passage.
[48] No occurrences were observed in Strabo. There were 34 instances of θησαυρ* and cognates in the works of Josephus, but no instances of the node followed by the preposition ἐν or any other similar prepositional phrase.