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Aural Cues as Guides to the Interpretation of New Testament Texts

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Introduction

Systematic sound analysis, or sound mapping,[1] of New Testament writings is a recent addition to the field of biblical exegesis, which finds as its antecedents ancient literary critics, rhetoricians, grammarians, and church fathers. Scholars who wish to analyze the sound of New Testament writings often find, however, that the threshold for entering this particular field is high. The threshold consists of at least two parts: an intricate and extensive methodical apparatus, and the fact that the sound analysis process itself is complicated and time-consuming. The unfortunate result is a situation in which scholars and doctoral students are wary of entering a field, which is demonstrably demanding in terms of the work you have to put in and still may seem uncertain when it comes to the potential outcomes of all that work.

In this article, I will introduce and apply some of the key concepts of sound mapping. The aim is both to demonstrate how analysis of aural features can aid exegesis and to indicate ways in which the high threshold of entering and employing sound analysis can be lowered. It is possible to analyze the sound quality of a passage without first delimiting

[1] The recent scholarly approach, now regularly referred to as "sound mapping," was first described by Margaret E. Lee (then Margaret E. Dean) in "The Grammar of Sound in Greek Texts: Toward a Method for Mapping the Echoes of Speech in Writing," *ABR* 44 (1996): 53–70.

cola, identifying periods, understanding sound structures (some of the constituent parts of sound mapping), and so on. In the rest of this article, I will therefore introduce how different aspects of sound analysis can be implemented to aid exegesis without forcing one to comprehend and employ the full methodical apparatus. It is my hope that this will encourage scholars to implement sound analysis in their exegesis and discover the potential that such an approach has for the study of the New Testament and early Christianity. In particular, I will focus on the areas of sound quality and the use of periods.

Quality of Sound

With the term *Quality of Sound* I refer to the aural effects of a text as it is read aloud or otherwise pronounced. It involves features such as euphonious and dissonant sounds, which affect the smoothness of a passage, and clashes of letters between words, which impact its rhythm. Instances of euphony, dissonance, and clashes between words also attract the attention of listeners and influence their impression of the passage in question. In some instances, the distinctive sound quality of a passage interacts with its content and influences the interpretation of the passage by those who hear the (Greek) text read aloud. This is especially true for particularly euphonious or dissonant passages. In this part of the article, I will discuss the two most important features of sound quality: euphony and dissonance.[2]

Euphony

One of the features that generate euphony is the repeated use of the same type of vowel in a limited passage. The harmony increases if the

[2] For other categories of sound quality, see Dan Nässelqvist, *Public Reading in Early Christianity: Lectors, Manuscripts, and Sound in the Oral Delivery of John 1–4*, NTOA 116 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 153.

vowel is long or found in noticeable positions, such as at the beginning or the end of a word. The fact that long vowels in conspicuous positions constitute the most euphonious sounds is not an objective truth for all languages, of course, but it expresses the specific aural aesthetics of ancient Greek.[3]

An example of euphony is found in Jesus' discourse on the true vine in John's Gospel. John 15 includes several euphonious passages, but the most noticeable is found in 15:9–10. In this case the euphony is caused by a high concentration of long vowel sounds of the same type:[4]

9a	καθὼς ἠγάπησέν με ὁ πατήρ,	As the Father has loved me,
9b	κἀγὼ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα·	so I have loved you.
9c	μείνατε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ.	Abide in my love.
10a	ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολάς μου τηρήσητε,	If you keep my commandments,
10b	μενεῖτε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ μου,	you will abide in my love,
10c	καθὼς ἐγὼ τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ πατρός μου τετήρηκα	just as I have kept my Father's commandments
10d	καὶ μένω αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ.	and abide in his love.

Almost one in three syllables in lines 3–5 include a long e-sound (the letter η). They accumulate at the point of Jesus' exhortation about abiding in his love.[5] This repetition of long e-sounds is found in distinctive and noticeable positions, at the end of each line and predominantly also at the end of the words. The parallel repetition makes the exhortation of Jesus euphonious. At the same time, it attracts the attention of listeners to what is the aurally most noticeable portion of the section about the true vine. This passage includes more and stronger attention-attracting

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[3] Evidence of such aural aesthetics can be found not only in works of ancient literary criticism, such as the ones by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Comp*. 14) and Pseudo-Demetrius (*Eloc*. 176–177), but also in the most commonly used grammar of the ancient world, by the second-century BCE grammarian Dionysius Thrax (*Gramm*. 6).

[4] This and the following translations are, if nothing else is stated, from the NRSV.

[5] It would be possible to make a case for including 15:9a–9b in the euphonious figure, but some of the long e-sounds would then be found close to the beginning of the cola and thus not in a parallel position in successive lines.

features than, for example, Jesus' commandment about loving one another in John 15:12. The aural characteristics of a text thus informs us about points of emphasis and about passages that were particularly noticeable to ancient readers and listeners.

Analysis of sound also affect our impression of the stylistic level of the text.[6] When considering the whole Gospel, there is a stylistic variation between direct discourse by Jesus and all other types of discourse (whether indirect or in the voice of other speakers). There is a clear tendency towards euphony in much of the direct discourse by Jesus. This fact makes it even more interesting to note instances where Jesus' speech is characterized by dissonance. Later on, I will give an example of this feature.

Noticeable euphony is not only found in direct discourse by Jesus, however, but also in several passages that comprise significant statements. The condensed and highly significant Prologue of John includes several such euphonious passages (e.g., 1:1–2, 4, 7, 9). One of these, John 1:4, includes repeated long vowels (of both η and ω) in more than two thirds of the syllables:

3a	πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,	All things came into being through him
3b	καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν.	And without him not one thing came into being.
3c/4a	ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν,	What has come into being in him was life,
4b	καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·	and the life was the light of all people.
5a	καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει,	The light shines in the darkness,
5b	καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.	and the darkness did not overcome it.

As a result of this assonance, the statement "in him was life, and the life was the light of all people" produces a strong and noticeable euphony,

[6] For more information about how aural characteristics affect style, see Dan Nässelqvist, "Style," in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel*, edited by Douglas Estes and Ruth Sheridan, RBS 86 (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 23–39.

even in an environment with such elevated prose as the Prologue. Similarly to John 15:9–10, it combines euphony with important content, in what is the Gospel's first allusion to the eternal life promised to believers in Christ (see, e.g., John 3:15, 16; 5:24; 6:40; 10:28; 17:2). Euphony is clearly one of the ways in which John's Gospel directs the attention of listeners to significant statements with which they can interpret and evaluate the text.

Dissonant Letters

As with euphonious sounds, dissonant sounds also attract the attention of listeners, guide it to certain passages, and affect the listeners' interpretation of them. The sounds that produce dissonance include some harsh consonants, such as θ and φ,[7] and letters that include an s sound, such as σ, ξ, and ψ, which cause a hissing sound when they are pronounced. Only frequent repetition of such harsh or hissing letters in a limited passage will cause noticeable dissonance. An extreme and often commented upon example from antiquity is a passage from Euripides' *Medea* (473–477):[8]

ἐγώ τε γὰρ λέξασα κουφισθήσομαι	I shall ease the burden of my soul
ψυχὴν κακῶς σε καὶ σὺ λυπήσῃ κλύων.	by reviling you, and you will be sorry for it.
ἐκ τῶν δὲ πρώτων πρῶτον ἄρξομαι λέγειν.	I will begin from the very beginning:
ἔσωσά σ', ὡς ἴσασιν Ἑλλήνων ὅσοι	I saved you; this knows every son of Greece
ταὐτὸν συνεισέβησαν Ἀργῷον σκάφος	that went aboard with you on Argo's hull

[7] Such aspirated consonants were considered harsh since they cannot be pronounced without a strong release of breath. Compare, for example, the difference in pronunciation between thick and tick (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp*. 14–16; Dionysius Thrax, *Gramm*. 6).

[8] The translation, which is mine, does not aspire to recreate the meter.

These reproachful words of Medea are strong enough in terms of their content. When we take into account their sound quality as well, however, we find that Euripides has dressed the opening of Medea's verbal attack on her unfaithful husband in the most dissonant way possible. At the very moment when she begins her story, her words are full of hissing consonants. There are no less than twelve σ in twenty-four syllables at this point (i.e. in the last two lines shown).

What are we to make of this clearly dissonant soundscape in terms of interpretation? Noticeable sound quality often influences the understanding of the passage in which it is found. In this case, it sharpens the reproachful and antagonistic air of Medea's response to Jason.

Many similar examples of dissonant soundscape can be found in the New Testament, although they are rarely as over-explicit as in *Medea*. It is now that it becomes really interesting, at least to my ears. For it should not surprise us when Jesus delivers a pleasantly sounding exhortation about love (as in John 15:9–10) or when sublime statements in the Prologue are characterized by euphony (as in John 1:4). But what about when glorification is explicated in a dissonant voice?

This is what we find in John 13:31–32, in the second half of the Gospel, which is regularly referred to as "The Book of Glory." From chapter 13 onwards, Jesus turns to his own disciples and teaches them in private about himself. After having commanded Judas Iscariot to leave and betray him (John 13:27), he picks up the theme of glorification in a strongly repetitious and aurally noticeable passage (John 13:31–32):

31a	ὅτε οὖν ἐξῆλθεν, λέγει Ἰησοῦς·	When he had gone out, Jesus said:
31b	νῦν ἐδοξάσθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου	"Now the Son of Man has been glorified
31c	καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐδοξάσθη ἐν αὐτῷ·	and God has been glorified in him.
32a	εἰ ὁ θεὸς ἐδοξάσθη ἐν αὐτῷ,	If God has been glorified in him,
32b	καὶ ὁ θεὸς δοξάσει αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῷ,	God will also glorify him in himself
32c	καὶ εὐθὺς δοξάσει αὐτόν.	and will glorify him at once."

As is readily noticeable, the passage not only involves frequent repetitions of the verb "glorify" (δοξάζειν), but combines these with other

words (υἱός, "son"; θεός, "God"; εὐθύς, "at once") in such a way that each short colon contains three hissing consonants in close proximity.[9] These hissing sounds produce a dissonant aural impression, which affects how listeners interpret it.

How can we make sense of the dissonance in this passage? Surely, the harshness of the impression cannot simply render a "positive" message "negative"? I would rather argue that the distinctive soundscape imparts critical information about the glorification of Jesus. Through creative use of dissonance, the author may well be communicating that glorification is an ambiguous concept and not something to simply delight in. It will soon become clear to the listeners that the glorification of Jesus indeed involves suffering and death. The dissonance and the almost *staccato* sense of the repetitious statements imparts something of both the inevitability and the harshness that accompanies glorification.

Dissonant Clashes of Letters

Another aural feature that produces dissonance consists of frequent clashes—between words—of letters of the same type. Such clashes give rise to a rough aural impression and could destroy the rhythm. Clashes between consonants, i.e. when one word ends with a consonant and the next begins with one, are quite common in Greek prose. They only result in dissonance if the frequency of such clashes is considerably higher than in surrounding passages or if the clashing consonants are of a harsh or hissing nature (such as θ, φ, σ, or ψ).[10]

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[9] Note that δοξάζειν in the present tense comprises one hissing consonant (σ) as well as one euphonious consonant (ζ). This verb is therefore not dissonant in the present tense, yet the conjugated forms used in John 13:31–32 (the aorist ἐδοξάσθη and the future δοξάσει) do not include the euphonious letter, but rather two hissing s-sounds (σ and ξ) as well as a harsh consonant (θ; only found in the aorist form).

[10] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp*. 20, 22; Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.4.37. Consequently, the phrase γυναικὸς Σαμαρίτιδος ("a Samaritan woman," John 4:9) produces a dissonant consonant clash, since the first word ends with the same hissing consonant with which

Clashes between vowels (often referred to with the term *hiatus*) are not as common as clashes between consonants, but they produce a stronger dissonance.[11] The two vowels force the reader or lector to make a short pause between the words, which affects not only the sound quality of the passage, but also its approximate rhythm.[12]

An example of how clashes between letters affect the impression of a passage can be found in John 21:4–5:[13]

4a πρωΐας # δὲ ἤδη γενομένης ἔστη Ἰησοῦς εἰς # τὸν αἰγιαλόν,
4b οὐ μέντοι ἤδεισαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν. #
5a λέγει οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· #
5b παιδία, μή τι προσφάγιον ἔχετε;
5c ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ· οὔ.

4a Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach,
4b but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.
5a Jesus said to them:
5b "Children, you have no fish, have you?"
5c They answered him, "No."

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the second begins (σ). The phrase Σίμων Πέτρος ("Simon Peter," John 21:2) includes a consonant clash, yet it is not dissonant, since the consonants are not identical, harsh, or hissing. In these and the following examples, I indicate clashes of letters between words with underlining at the point of the clash.

[11] Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.4.33, describes the nature of the dissonance: "When a clash of vowels occurs, the speech gapes, pauses, and is afflicted. Long vowels, which connect with the same letter, sound the worst."

[12] For a brief introduction to prose rhythm and the impact of a text's aural properties upon rhythm, see Näsellqvist, *Public Reading*, 171–174. A brief passage from John 17:2 exemplifies these different types of clashes: (ἔδωκας αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν # πάσης # σαρκός). The first clash, αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν, involves a long and short vowel (*hiatus*) and is thus dissonant. The second clash, ἐξουσίαν # πάσης, is not dissonant, since it only involves two regular consonants coming into contact. The third clash, πάσης # σαρκός, involves a meeting of two hissing letters and it is therefore dissonant.

[13] In what follows, consonant clashes are signalled with number signs (#) at the point of each clash, *hiatus* is marked with underlining of the two vowels involved, and especially dissonant examples of *hiatus* are indicated with double underlining.

The preceding verses describe how several of the disciples—following the death and resurrection of Jesus—go fishing in the Sea of Tiberias. This section includes more clashes of both consonants and vowels than what is usual in John's Gospel. The pattern continues into John 21:5 and includes its opening phrase, "Jesus said to them" (which has a dissonant clash of vowels between the words λέγει and οὖν, as indicated by double underlining).

At this point, however, the clashes disappear altogether and the question posed by Jesus flows without any interruptions or dissonance: "Children, you have no fish, have you?" Immediately following this question, the clashes resume and the disciples' brief answer includes another example of dissonant hiatus (in αὐτῷ οὔ, also indicated with double underlining). The rest of the Gospel continues in much the same manner.

What are we to make of this variation of dissonant and smooth passages? The words of Jesus in John 21:5b comprise the only sentence in chapter 21 which is free from clashes between letters.[14] It seems as though the author may have arranged it to be noticeably smooth. In the context of the story, in which the disciples have not yet realized that they are talking to Jesus, the change in sound quality creates irony. The listeners know that it is Jesus—they can even hear it!—whereas the disciples act with less than perfect insight.[15] The euphonious nature of Jesus' address also matches the fact that the difficulties between Jesus and his disciples have now been resolved.[16] So in this passage, the soundscape serves not only to further identify Jesus, to produce irony, and to render a sense of privilege among the listeners, but it also strengthens the impression that the disciples' position now has been finally settled.

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[14] There is a meeting of consonants between the cola 5a and 5b (Ἰησοῦς παιδία), although it is not dissonant.

[15] Jesus more often than any other character in John's Gospel speaks in memorable and well-turned sentences.

[16] In the preceding chapter, the disciples received the Spirit and were commissioned for their mission as apostles (John 20:21–23).

Dissonant Jesus

For a final example of sound quality, I will turn to one of those instances in which the author of the Fourth Gospel lets Jesus speak in a dissonant voice. Although Jesus regularly expresses himself more smoothly, in the brief dialogue with Nathanael at the end of the first chapter (John 1:48–51) he suddenly produces a question riddled with dissonance (v. 50):

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς # καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ·	Jesus said to him:
ὅτι εἶπόν σοι ὅτι εἶδόν σε	"Do you believe because I told you
	I saw you
ὑποκάτω τῆς # συκῆς # πιστεύεις;	under the fig tree?
μείζω τούτων ὄψῃ.	You will see greater things than that."

Immediately prior to this, Nathanael had produced a double confession of Jesus' identity, as Son of God and King of Israel (John 1:49). This confession is characterized by both rhetorical figures and rhythm, in a rather smooth turn of phrase.[17] It is all the more interesting, therefore, to note how Jesus' reply opens with a cacophony of clashes and hissing sounds. Almost all of the words begin with a clash of either consonants or vowels, and the question itself ends with a stressed concentration of hissing sibilants.[18]

What are we to make of this uncharacteristic harshness in the aural impression of Jesus' utterance? I would argue that Jesus here turns his jarring question not only to Nathanael, but also to any other potential follower among those hearing the Gospel read aloud.[19] He quite bluntly questions the nature of the faith of *any* potential follower and his skepticism is strengthened and clearly communicated by the grating aural expression. What is the foundation of your faith? Does your faithfulness

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[17] Näsellqvist, *Public Reading*, 216–217.

[18] There are five σ in just six syllables at this point. Two of them also jar against each other in what is the most dissonant form of consonant clash.

[19] This impression is strengthened by the fact that Jesus in the following verse reverts to plural (ὄψεσθε, "you will see").

spring from the right conviction? From the right experience? Simply from the fact that he knows something about you? Aided by the harsh soundscape, Jesus' query demands a place in the mind of any listener who claims to follow him. This might well have been the effect of having Jesus suddenly speak in quite a different aural register. What follows is a set a pronouncements, initiated with "You will see greater things than these." Immediately the dissonance disappears and the assertions are delivered in a matter-of-fact voice.[20]

It is only for a brief instance, then, that Jesus' voice turns harsh in calling each believer to question the nature of their faith in him. It is all the more effective for being both unexpected and awkward.

Sound Quality in Leading Questions

Thus far, we have seen examples of what features in a text affect the sound quality, such as high concentrations of long vowels or dissonant consonants, and frequent clashes of letters between words. Such aural features are best understood in the context of a full-scale sound analysis, in which cola are clearly defined, sound structures have been described, and so on.[21] They can, however, be identified on their own and immediately related to the content of the passages in which they are found, as I have tried to show. One need not examine anything else in Euripides' passage to benefit from the realization that Medea's antagonistic tone is clearly strengthened by the dissonant soundscape.

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[20] Nässelqvist, *Public Reading*, 218.

[21] For a description of the process of "sound mapping" or "sound analysis," see Margaret Ellen Lee and Bernard Brandon Scott, *Sound Mapping the New Testament* (Salem: Polebridge, 2009), 167–189; Dan Nässelqvist, "Underexplored Benefits of Sound Mapping in New Testament Exegesis," in *Sound Matters: New Testament Studies in Sound Mapping*, edited by Margaret E. Lee, Biblical Performance Criticism 16 (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), 120–132.

We have also seen that distinctive sound quality can attract the attention of listeners to passages of particular importance, as well as affect the way they understand especially euphonious or dissonant sentences. An even less explored area of sound quality is its usefulness for aiding the interpretation of leading questions.

Leading questions are formed so as to indicate the expected answer in a way that is overtly clear to the audience (and thus also to those reading or listening to a text being read aloud). In Greek, this is easily accomplished by embedding the preferred answer at the beginning of the question, in the form of a negative particle (some form with οὐ to indicate that a positive answer is expected and some form with μή for a negative answer).[22]

Most leading questions in the New Testament do not have a distinctive sound quality. When they do, however, questions with an expected positive answer are often accompanied by euphonious sound quality whereas dissonant sounds are found in tandem with an expected negative answer. Such cases not only confirm that sound quality guides the interpretation of questions, but also that it amplifies the impression of them.

A good example of a leading question, which is affected by the aural characteristics of the passage in which it is found, occurs in John 4:29. The question posed by the Samaritan woman to her neighbors in Sychar revolves around the identity of Jesus:

28b	καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὴν πόλιν	She returned to the city
28c	καὶ λέγει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις·	and said to the people:
29a	δεῦτε ἴδετε ἄνθρωπον	"Come and see a man
29b	ὃς εἶπέ μοι πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησα·	who told me everything I ever done.
29c	μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός;	Surely, he is not the Messiah?"

[22] A thorough introduction to leading questions can be found in Douglas Estes, *Questions and Rhetoric in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 268–272.

The question in John 4:29c is a leading question with an expected negative answer: "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" or "Surely, he is not the Messiah?" The initial negative particle μήτι provides ample indication of a leading question, yet some commentators argue that it should rather be understood as a semi-confession, or even as the positive expression of a "mentally and socially transformed" individual.[23] In this case, the sound quality of the question guides the reader away from such an interpretation.

The question in John 4:29 is riddled with dissonant sounds in the form of hissing consonants. They begin already in 4:29b and continue until the end of the question. These dissonant sounds reinforce and confirm the expected negative answer. Rather than point to a semi-confession on the part of the Samaritan woman, they imply a skeptical attitude towards Jesus and towards the notion that he should be the Messiah.[24] In the case of John 4:29, the sound quality of the passage thus strengthens the guidance given by the leading question.

The Use of Periods

Another aural feature that attracts the attention of listeners and guides the interpretation of a text is the period, a set of artistically arranged cola with a circuital structure. It involves a sophisticated sequence of

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[23] For the first interpretation, see Jo-Ann Brandt, *John*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 87. For the second, see Victor H. Matthews, "Conversation and Identity: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman," *BTB* 40 (2010): 215–226, esp. 224–225.

[24] This impression is strengthened by the sound quality of a question that she poses directly to Jesus (John 4:9): "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" This question, which is not leading, produces a strongly dissonant sound quality (the question and its introductory formula include several dissonant vowel clashes, due to long vowels at the end and beginning of adjoining words, and two dissonant consonant clashes when hissing consonants collide between words). The already skeptical question is thus rendered even less friendly by the dissonant sounds. Ancient listeners may well have perceived it as an intentional insult.

clauses that end with a rounding (a sort of micro-scale *inclusio*), which connects the end to the beginning.[25] Periods regularly comprise a single sentence and, according to Pseudo-Demetrius, the sophisticated arrangement of its parts brings "the underlying thought to a conclusion with a well-turned ending."[26]

When read aloud, a period is followed by a brief pause, in which listeners can reflect over and react to what they have heard.[27] Quintilian describes the end of a period as an occasion for interaction between the lector/performer and the listeners: "This is where the speech rests; this is what the listener awaits; this is when all praise breaks out."[28] This statement by Quintilian is itself an example of a period.

I have not searched for periods throughout the New Testament,[29] but I have gone through most of John's Gospel and it contains a surprisingly large number of periods. Almost every chapter, even the brief and plain second chapter,[30] includes at least one.

There are several recurring features in periods, which can be used as criteria to identify them in New Testament writings. The fundamental requirement is that the clauses "bend back" at the end, in the sense that

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[25] Occasionally, especially elaborate periods also include a *clausula*, a rhythmic ending.

[26] Demetrius, *Eloc*. 10.

[27] Quintilian, *Inst*. 9.4.61–62; see also Cicero, *Or Brut*. 168.

[28] Quintilian, *Inst*. 9.4.62.

[29] The identification and interpretation of how periods work—in context—would, however, be a great dissertation project for a graduate student, and in 2021, such a dissertation project was indeed completed by Priscille Marschall at the University of Lausanne. Her insightful thesis, *Colometric Analysis of the New Testament: Methodological Foundations and Application to 2 Corinthians 10–13*, significantly deepens our knowledge about the use of periods in ancient prose while also presenting a much-needed methodology for identifying and understanding periods in New Testament writings.

[30] It is found in John 2:19, in the momentous statement by Jesus about the temple (or, as it will be revealed, about his body): "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it."

the ending relates to the beginning and thus creates a circuit. The Greek term for a period, περίοδος, denotes a circle or a circuitous journey. Additionally, authors regularly signal the existence of a period through the use of at least one other periodic feature, such as *symmetry* (repetition of sounds or words in parallel position), *hyperbaton* (inversion of regular word order), *elongation* (an extended final clause or colon), or a *clausula* (a rhythmic ending).[31]

An example of a well-turned period that is recognizable even in English can be found in John 3:17:

17a	οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον	For God did not send the Son to the world
17b	ἵνα κρίνῃ τὸν κόσμον,	in order to condemn the world,
17c	ἀλλ' ἵνα σωθῇ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ.	but to save the world through him.

This sentence contains three periodic features: First, the important bending back at the end. The final word of the period (αὐτοῦ, "him") connects with the first colon, since "him" refers to "the Son" (τὸν υἱόν). This reference integrates the three cola and produces the necessary circuital structure. The second period feature is *symmetry*, which characterizes the whole period. κόσμος recurs in each colon and ἵνα is found at the opening of the last two cola.[32] The third period feature is a rhythmic *clausula*. The period ends with a spondee, which consists of two long syllables (αὐτοῦ).[33]

It is no coincidence that the period in John 3:17 coincides with an important statement about God's plan for the salvation of the world. Just as with distinctive sound quality, it is often the case that a period fits and strengthens the content of the passage. The solemn message of

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[31] Näsellqvist, *Public Reading*, 134–138.

[32] These repetitions constitute the rhetorical figures *epistrophe* and *anaphora* (the period also include the figure *polyptoton*).

[33] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp*. 17, describes this foot as having "great dignity and much solemnity."

John 3:17 is thus expressed in an appropriately well-formed period characterized by both smoothness and approximate rhythm.[34]

Identification of Periods as an Exegetical Aid

For my final example, I am going to move from John's Gospel to Paul's letter to the Romans. One of the secondary aims of this article is to demonstrate to the reader that it is possible to examine aural features in New Testament writings without implementing the full methodological apparatus of sound analysis. While preparing it, I had the privilege of reading portions of a forthcoming part of a commentary on Romans by my *Doktorvater*, Professor Samuel Byrskog. In an insightful reading of Rom 9:1–5, he proved that it is indeed possible to analyze a single aspect of sound and use it to affect the interpretation of a whole passage.[35]

Here follows my translation of Rom 9:3–5, based on Byrskog's understanding of the passage (I will include and discuss the Greek text later on):

3a I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ
3b for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh,
4a which are Israelites,
4b to whom belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises,
5a to whom belong the patriarchs, from whom comes the Christ according to the flesh, he who is over all.

5b God be blessed forever. Amen.

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[34] The period includes almost no examples of vowel clashes, which is distinct in comparison with the verses that surround it.

[35] My summary of Byrskog's argument build upon a draft version of his forthcoming work. The published commentary will cover Rom 9–16 and constitute the second installment of Byrskog's contribution on Romans in the Swedish series Kommentar till Nya testamentet (KNT). The first is *Romarbrevet 1–8*, KNT 6A (Stockholm: Verbum, 2006).

Byrskog argues that the sentence in question ends in Rom 9:5a with "he who is over all." This means that the blessing in 9:5b is directed solely to God and should not be understood as a description of Christ. This is clearly a minority position in contemporary scholarship on Romans, even though it is hard (both linguistically and historically) to make the case that Paul here places Christ on a par with God. Compare the way the passage ends in NRSV, in which the blessing is integrated with the description of the Messiah rather than treated as a separate sentence: "to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."

One part of Byrskog's argument is that the sound produced by the passage in public reading indicates that we should understand "he who is over all" as the final part of the sentence about the Israelites. The sound of the participle phrase at the end of v. 5a (ὁ ὢν) connects it with the repeated relative pronouns of vv. 4b and 5a (ὧν). Paul thus has chosen the participle phrase ὁ ὢν to end the sentence, rather than use the more straightforward expression ὅς ἐστιν, which would relate the same thing in a more natural Greek. Byrskog argues that Paul here chooses the more convoluted participle phrase (ὁ ὢν) in order to play upon its similarity in sound to the previous relative pronouns (ὧν) in order to make a distinctive and climactic transition from the Jews to the one who came from them, namely Christ. This climax marks the ending of the sentence in question. The blessing and amen of v. 5b should therefore, in Byrskog's interpretation, be understood as a separate sentence.

3a ηὐχόμην γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ
3b ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου, τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα,
4a οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται,
4b ὧν ἡ υἱοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθῆκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελία,
5a ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων.

5b θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν

Byrskog's reading of Rom 9:1–5 proves that it is indeed possible to use a single feature of sound analysis and still be able to unearth important

information which impacts the reading of the whole passage. What I would like to add to his interpretation (as the result of a more extensive sound analysis) is that not only does the sentence end in 5a with Christ as the one "who is over all," but it also forms a period.

The sentence in Rom 9:3–5a displays at least two periodic features. First, it has a noticeable bending back at the end, since the final phrase, "he who is over all" (v. 5a), clearly refers back to "Christ" in the first colon (v. 3a). This establishes the requisite circuital structure. Second, it also displays *symmetry* through the repeated nominative phrases in vv. 4b–5a and the aural connections between the thrice repeated ὦν and the following ὁ ὢν.

But what do we gain by describing Rom 9:3–5a as a period? Not only is this yet another example of how authors relate important statements in the shape of periods, but it also tells us something about how Paul may have reflected on the blessing in v. 5b. As I mentioned before, the oral delivery of a period was followed by a brief pause,[36] during which the listeners could react to it, here indicated with a blank line between vv. 5a and 5b. Remember Quintilian's words: "This is where the speech rests; this is what the listener awaits; this is when all praise breaks out."

Paul composed Rom 9:1–5 in such a way that he provided his audience not only with a period about the Jews and the Messiah who came from them, but also with an appropriate response in the form of a blessing. The blessing in v. 5b should therefore not be taken as part of the *description* of the Christ/Messiah, but rather as the *response* to it. Following the brief pause after the period comes a fitting acclamation in the form of a blessing of God. The listeners could then join the lector in a communal "Amen," an appropriate response to a well-turned period and a blessing of God.

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[36] This is signalled above with a blank line between 5a and 5b.

Conclusions

In this article, I have tried to demonstrate how even an introductory analysis of aural features can shed light on New Testament writings. Features such as euphony, dissonance, and periods function as nexuses of meaning, which contribute further information to the exegete. Not only does the use of such features direct the attention of listeners to significant statements with which they can interpret and evaluate the text, but also occasionally guide the interpretation itself.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that it is possible to examine sound features in New Testament writings even without the full methodical apparatus of sound mapping. Byrskog's analysis of Rom 9:1–5 is an example of how an awareness of the aural properties of a passage can aid us in understanding the rhetoric of New Testament authors. At the same time, I have tried to show that if we then proceed to a more extensive sound analysis, we can go even further in the exegesis. With the identification of a period in Rom 9:3–5a, we have further arguments in favor of the view that the blessing in 9:5b should not be understood as part of the description of Christ, but rather as a response to the period. That aids us in understanding the argumentation and punctuation of the passage, as well as the role that the blessing plays in it.