

# Preface to the Second Edition

## WHY SOUND MAPPING?

The 2009 publication of *Sound Mapping the New Testament* made a bold claim: spoken sound makes a critical difference for New Testament interpretation. To understand an ancient Greek composition, sound mapping is both essential and necessary. Why this is so can be summarized in three short statements:

1. Historical criticism attempts to understand a composition in its historical context.
2. A composition's sound signature indicates how it wants to be heard and interpreted.
3. Sound mapping reveals a composition's sound signature based on evidence of how an ancient audience would have heard it.

That in a nutshell is our argument. The theoretics of sound analysis outlined in *Sound Mapping the New Testament* demonstrates that discernment of a composition's audible features constitutes a crucial first step for interpretation.

Historical criticism, a product of the printing press, precipitated a revolution in the intellectual life of the West. Historical methodology became the essential discipline for understanding the past. Beginning in the 1970's, historical criticism's immense achievements have been augmented by other disciplines, especially literary criticism, anthropology, sociology, feminism, and many more. These have supplemented but not superseded historical criticism, calling for its revision, expansion, or shifts in focus. Historical criticism is

not a fixed method, but an evolving series of methods responding to new data and new insights. Understanding constantly deepens.

The hermeneutical presuppositions of print persist in historical criticism.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes the most important aspect of that hermeneutics is that an ancient composition is treated as static and silent. The unexamined assumption is that ancient compositions behaved in their cultures like silent print functions in a print culture. The hermeneutics of silent reception prioritizes a composition's meaning over its language—the signified.<sup>2</sup> The modern rush toward meaning all but ignores the signifier—the ancient artifact—to the point that the signifier disappears into the print itself.

While the quest for meaning seems natural to us moderns, it runs contrary to the reception practice of the ancient world. Full literacy in the ancient world seldom exceeded ten percent in urban areas and much less in rural ones. Illiteracy came with no penalty, nor did literacy confer special status. Slaves were trained for the purposes of literacy. A scroll written in continuous script offers few chirographic clues to its interpretation. Read silently, ancient manuscripts are difficult to decode for a simple reason: they were meant to be heard, not read silently. Reading out loud, vocalizing syllables one by one, enables comprehension.

Publication in the ancient world did not depend on scribal copying but a composition's public performance, again accenting that compositions were meant to be heard. While some few people may have been able to read silently, standard practice was to read out loud, even when reading alone.

Ancient reception was aural, through the ear, and stressed first the signifier, a composition's spoken sounds. Sound mapping analyzes these aural dimensions, which provide clues as to how a composition is to be heard and understood. It attends to sound's organizing power, its initial directions for structure and interpretation. By first analyzing a composition's audible speech patterns we gain access to the signified, the meaning, on the composition's terms, rather than our terms. A composition's sound arrangement points the way to its signified. To skip, ignore, or avoid a composition's sound signature is to underread or misread its signified.

1. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*; see esp. vol. 2, chaps. 6 and 8.

2. The distinction between signifier and signified is from de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*.

Historical method must be reconceived from the ground or sound up. A composition's meaning, its signified, is not fully available except from its sound. To skip an analysis of its sound signature produces an ahistorical analysis. Exclusive emphasis on the meaning, or signified, leads to viewing a writing as a text, today's common euphemism for a composition or a writing. Text implies fixity. But from the point of view of ancient compositional technique, a writing is a composition, in Latin *compositio*, in Greek συμπλοκή. It is a combination, something put-together, made up of parts: signifier and signified, sound and meaning. By approaching the New Testament as a collection of silent texts, traditional historical criticism has analyzed only the signified, not the full composition. A fully historical understanding of a composition must take account of both its sound signature and its meaning, its signifier and signified. The tension or interaction between the two produces meaning.

Werner Kelber's *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (1983), was a voice crying in the desert. As the title indicates, Kelber called for New Testament scholarship to attend to the oral character of its writings, a much-needed corrective. Kelber depended highly on Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, which drew too sharp a distinction between these two cultures. Kelber was correct to call for a hermeneutics that differs from print but his model and much subsequent discussion of ancient communication employs an imprecise category: orality.

Orality implies a culture of speech and hearing, as well as the absence of writing. Unlike the archaic Greek epics crafted in an oral culture, New Testament writings took shape in a culture permeated by writing, in forms such as inscriptions, wax tablets, manuscripts, and graffiti. Writing affected everyone, even those who could not read. But even literate people depended on speech and memory to compose and publish their literary works. Instead of classifying cultures in terms of whether and to what extent its members could read, our cultural labels should identify the media for literature's storage and publication. Homer's epics were orally composed in the absence of writing. New Testament writings emerged from a manuscript culture replete with written materials in which verbal art was shared through speech and stored in memory. Historical criticism needs to take stock of what we know about media culture

in antiquity and account for both speech and writing, memory and manuscript, signifier and signified.

#### A DECADE OF EXPERIMENTATION

Nearly a decade of experimentation following the publication of *Sound Mapping the New Testament* produced diverse approaches to sound mapping and identified several points of critique. In 2018, *Sound Matters: New Testament Studies in Sound Mapping*<sup>3</sup> collected this range of experience. The volume contains new sound mapping studies by ten scholars, representing five nations and three continents. Their contributions address questions that sound mapping has raised for methodology and interpretation. Margaret Lee's essay, "Sound Mapping Reassessed," summarizes the history of sound mapping, enumerates its enduring advantages, and examines methodological questions.

Jeffrey Brickle's essay, "Caves, Cattle, and *Koinonia*: Acoustic Shadows across Textual Walls," advances a new definition of sound mapping: "the interpretation of audible sounds generated by a vocalized text and converted into a visual display."<sup>4</sup> While we would problematize the use of "text" in this and many other contexts, Brickle's definition highlights sound mapping's pragmatic components and suggests where questions have arisen. He correctly places "audible" first, emphasizing the centrality of sound for interpretation. Brickle was among the first to perceive sound mapping's promise<sup>5</sup> and has pioneered the application of sound mapping to broader media studies, ancient and modern, that examine sound's crucial role in memory and the mental and digital manipulation of visual images.<sup>6</sup> His essay concludes, "Sound mapping permits readers to cross the threshold separating sight and sound."<sup>7</sup>

#### PRONUNCIATION

In specifying sound mapping's object as a "vocalized" composition, Brickle takes up the question posed most frequently about sound

3. Lee, ed., *Sound Matters*.

4. Brickle, "Caves, Cattle, and *Koinonia*," 69.

5. Brickle, *Aural Design*.

6. Brickle, "Sing in me, Muse': Converging Soundscapes."

7. Brickle, "Caves, Cattle, and *Koinonia*," 80.

mapping: how to map sounds when Greek pronunciation during the Roman period remains unclear. Three essays in *Sound Matters* explore this conundrum. Brickle experiments with two different pronunciation schemes, Erasmian pronunciation and the Historical Greek Pronunciation (HGP) scheme devised by Chris Caragounis. Brickle concludes that HGP exposes “a significantly more unified and coherent soundscape than had been attainable by visually examining the text with an Erasmian ‘pair of eyes.’”<sup>8</sup>

Bernhard Oestreich and Tom Boomershine explore Greek pronunciation from still different perspectives. In “Investigation into the Sound’s Message of Philippians 1:12–2:18,” Oestreich applies his proposal regarding the pronunciation scheme likely employed in a specific time and place. His analysis of Paul’s letter to the Philippians affirms sound’s role in establishing structure and delineating a composition’s component units, finding that “sound reveals a subtext that can even contradict the semantic content of the utterance.”<sup>9</sup> Further, he emphasizes the importance of euphony in Greek composition and shows how sound mapping uncovers the emotional aspects of meaning.

In a third approach to pronunciation, Boomershine’s “The New Testament Soundscape and the Puzzle of Mark 16:8” declares the necessity of hearing the gospel story spoken aloud in its original language. Boomershine insists that, since sound shapes understanding, modern audiences can and must come to terms with the New Testament in Greek to properly discern its meaning. Like Oestreich, Boomershine finds auditory subtexts that can undermine and even contradict conventional interpretations. He therefore devotes extraordinary effort to the performance of gospel stories in Greek and to teaching others to do so. His popularizing program requires him to employ the most familiar pronunciation scheme for his audiences, Erasmian pronunciation, while acknowledging that original audiences did not experience this scheme. Sound mapping serves as an essential tool in Boomershine’s performances and uncovers new insights about the gospel message.

Greek pronunciation is the most frequent and obvious question posed about sound mapping’s methods but the essays that explore pronunciation in *Sound Matters* prove that it imposes no limit on

8. Brickle, “Caves, Cattle, and *Koinonia*,” 73.

9. Boomershine, “Investigations into the Sound’s Message of Philippians 1:27–2:18,” 116.

sound mapping's enduring value. Oestreich hints that sound mapping might even prove a valuable tool in resolving pronunciation questions. Further study of the pronunciation scheme(s) employed for the New Testament's first audiences remains a necessary and important endeavor. Nevertheless, we have argued that the phonetic Greek alphabet guarantees consistency in vocal performance, however a particular vowel or consonant many have been pronounced, ensuring the perception of audible patterns embedded in a composition. In the absence of consensus, the studies addressing pronunciation in *Sound Matters* show that sound mapping detects meaningful structural features and audible patterns, even when applying different approaches to Greek pronunciation and without finally resolving the issue. In fact, sound mapping enables interpretive insights unavailable through other methods of inquiry.

#### SOUND, STRUCTURE, AND UNIT DEFINITION

Several essays in *Sound Matters* focus a central issue for sound mapping: sound's organizing role in Greek literature. We have argued in *Sound Mapping the New Testament* that sound, not logic or theological themes, organizes compositions for an audience. Sound establishes a composition's architecture, providing the scaffolding and framework that structure rational and thematic arguments. Kayle de Waal, Dan Nässelqvist and Frank Scheppers confront the mechanisms by which sound creates structure in their essays for *Sound Matters*. In "A Sound Map of Revelation 8:7–12 and the Implications for Ancient Hearers," de Waal declares: "The Book of Revelation was written for a listening community of faith,"<sup>10</sup> showing that sound proves crucial to an understanding of a passage that has long confounded its interpreters. De Waal's sound map notes the passage's structural auditory features and concludes, "the sound map can assist the interpreter to better understand the organic structure of Rev 8:7–12."<sup>11</sup> Nässelqvist draws a similar conclusion in his examinations of the prologue to the fourth gospel. He finds in sound mapping a useful tool for identifying "aural intensity," which identifies a composition's important passages.<sup>12</sup>

10. De Waal, "A Sound Map of Revelation 8:7–12," 179.

11. De Waal, "A Sound Map of Revelation 8:7–12," 190.

12. Nässelqvist, *Public Reading and Aural Intensity*; Nässelqvist, "Underexplored Benefits of Sound Mapping."

Based on ancient reflections on Greek literature and composition, *Sound Mapping the New Testament* situates its observations about sound structure in its delineation of sound mapping's unit of analysis, the colon. Commentators from Plato to Quintillian identify the colon as a breath unit and prose literature's basic building block. Although their definitions of a colon lack the technical precision contemporary interpreters informed by modern linguistics seek, these ancient reflections agree that a colon's boundaries align with syntax. *Sound Mapping the New Testament* follows this pragmatic approach, using a rule of thumb that discerns a colon's scope to include a predicate, expressed or implied, and the words and phrases associated with that predicate. Both ancient writers and *Sound Mapping the New Testament* also discern a larger unit, the period, which is also delineated pragmatically and syntactically. Periods are built from combinations of cola and they exhibit features of rounding and balance, achieved through audible means.

While agreeing that cola and periods organize Greek prose, Nässelqvist has questioned *Sound Mapping the New Testament's* criteria for delineating cola and periods. In an earlier monograph, he argued that cola can contain only as many syllables as can be declaimed in a single breath.<sup>13</sup> Nässelqvist regards periods as prose figures, arguing that not all Greek prose employs periods.<sup>14</sup> He calls for clearer delineations of a colon's boundaries and greater precision in analyzing prose style.

Frank Scheppers confronts the problem of unit definition from the vantage of his expertise in classical Greek prose and modern discourse analysis. His magisterial study, *The Colon Hypothesis: Word Order, Discourse Segmentation and Discourse Coherence in Ancient Greek*, concludes that the colon is the elementary discourse unit of Greek prose, encompassing "a single 'verbal action', coinciding with a single pragmatic function."<sup>15</sup> His essay for *Sound Matters*, "Discourse Segmentation, Discourse Structure, and Sound Mapping (Including an Analysis of Mark 15)," applies these findings to New Testament material in an analysis of Mark's crucifixion narrative, in conversation with Boomershine's study of the same passage in *Sound Matters*. Scheppers affirms many of Boomershine's conclusions. His work supports *Sound Mapping the New Testament's*

13. Nässelqvist, *Public Reading and Aural Intensity*, 129–31.

14. Nässelqvist, *Public Reading and Aural Intensity*, 134–38.

15. Scheppers, *The Colon Hypothesis*, 433.

insistence that the colon constitutes the basic unit of analysis for Greek prose and that its length is not limited by any particular number of syllables, as Nässelqvist has proposed. In *The Colon Hypothesis* he considers the period in an excursus, observing, as *Sound Mapping the New Testament* does, some equivocation in the ancient sources, some of which treat the period as a prose figure while others maintain that the composition process necessarily entails the combination of cola into larger syntactic units, whether or not those larger units exhibit the period's characteristic rounding and balance.<sup>16</sup>

### SOUND EVIDENCE

Beyond these technical points, other essays in *Sound Matters* demonstrate a wide range of insight available only through sound mapping. Nina Livesey points to the importance of prose style for persuasion in "Rhythm, Sound, and Persuasion." She analyzes ancient rhetoric's dependence on rhythm in an examination of passages from Paul's correspondence. She concludes,

By emphasizing semantic meaning over style, modern rhetorical theorists forego a significant part of a composition's meaning. With its emphasis on the sound features of ancient compositions, sound mapping provides an important avenue by which modern rhetorical analysts can once again access meaning that inheres in a composition's style. At the same time, it returns rhetorical analysis of ancient compositions to its original emphasis on not just argumentation/reason but also on style/form.<sup>17</sup>

Bernard Scott's essay adopts a literary-critical approach to the parables in Luke's gospel in "Luke's Strategy for Interpreting Parables." From his vantage as an authoritative interpreter of the parables over nearly a half-century of research,<sup>18</sup> Scott takes up Luke's strategies for incorporating parable material into his gospel narrative. Focusing on the Parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10:33–35), Scott notes Luke's deft exploitation of sound's ear training effect in both the parable and Luke's narrative frame (10:1–42). Scott notes audible features that train a listener to attend to each

16. Scheppers, *The Colon Hypothesis*, 221–23.

17. Livesey, "Rhythm, Sound, and Persuasion," 211–12.

18. See especially Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* and *Re-Imagine the World*.