

Sounding Out the Heirs of Abraham (Rom 4:9-12)

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Recent studies in the fields of orality and oral performance reveal that the recognition of oral features within texts can clarify vexing issues of interpretation and lead the interpreter to a more complete understanding of authorial intent.¹ Specifically with regard to ancient authors and hearers, sound played a very strategic role in conveying meaning. Not having the luxury or ability² to reread sections of texts to determine meaning semantically, ancient auditors relied upon oral cues such as repetition and word placement to convey meaning.³ Ancient hearers actively listened to compositions orally declaimed. Thus, John Foley remarks (1991:59), “the ‘reader’ of an oral traditional ‘text’ is more a participant actively involved in making the work than an analyst interested only in plumbing the depths of a textual artifact.”⁴

¹ Twyla Gibson (2011:102) writes that the recognition of “traditional poetics” [oral features within works] “clarify a number of challenging issues of interpretation.” According to her, “Critical strategies that focus exclusively on the historical and philosophical content while ignoring the overall form will be incomplete, if not misguided” (*ibid.*). See also Maxey 2009:123. In *The Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters* John D. Harvey (1998:283-84) identified eight categories of oral features in Paul’s letters. These are chiasmus, inversion, alternation, inclusion, ring-composition, word-chain, refrain, and concentric symmetry.

² Due to the high rates of illiteracy, ancient hearers depended upon oral recitation for learning. As Margaret Lee and Bernard B. Scott remark (2009:12), “The safest conclusion is that in major urban areas not more than fifteen percent of the population was capable of reading and/or writing.” As William Harris notes (1989:13), there “was no mass literacy” in the Greek and Roman worlds; “the majority of people were always illiterate.”

³ Audiences must process compositions in “real time,” whereas “readers can refer backward and forwards in the text” (Lee and Scott:135). An audience cannot afford to rely primarily on semantic meaning to make sense of a spoken composition because real-time processing does not afford the opportunity to register every word’s full semantic force. Listeners cannot even identify a series of syllables as a lexeme until after the sounds have been spoken and no longer exist as sound but only as memory (*idem*). See also Ong 1982:32, 90.

⁴ See also Maxey 2009:99. As James Maxey states (2009:99), “Meaning is negotiated between performer and the audience.” The audience fills in the gaps and the performer relies more heavily on the traditions of his or her audience (139-41). See also Kelber 1997:15.

In *Sound Mapping the New Testament* (2009), Margaret Lee and Bernard Brandon Scott⁵ historically trace and discuss in lengthy detail the role sound played in ancient compositions. They comment that an ancient manuscript's primary function was to "capture and record a linear stream of sound" (70) and cite, for example, the ancient Greek teacher of rhetoric Longinus (*Subl.* 39.3) reporting that a particular first-century CE author described his composition as a "kind of melody in words" (119). With the invention of the phonetic alphabet, the Greeks made possible the reproduction of sound in script, and they recorded sounds employing a style called *scriptio continua*, uninterrupted writing.⁶ While the lack of clearly delineated words handicaps modern readers, by orally declaiming these compositions, ancients allowed the sounds to distinguish the words or lexemes for them. Ancient authors employed elements such as arrangement and sound signals within their compositions to convey meaning, elements often lacking in modern compositions intended for silent readers (80). They created their compositions with their auditory reception in mind at every level of construction and even revised their works to improve upon their sound quality (121). These compositions were dynamic in that they came to life with each new oral performance. Authors of New Testament texts composed with oral reception in mind, but so too did most if not all authors of the ancient and Hellenistic periods (80).

To aid modern interpreters in recovering the sound signals recorded in ancient compositions, Lee and Scott developed an analytical tool called a "sound map."⁷ The tool enables modern interpreters to visualize sound patterns ancient authors would have left behind. As they explain it, a sound map is "a visual display that exhibits a literary composition's organization by highlighting its acoustic features and in doing so depicts aspects of a composition's sounded character in preparation for analysis" (2009:168). In *Sound Mapping* Lee and Scott guide modern interpreters through the entire process of map creation and analysis by means of sound features (135-95). The creation process begins by defining a particular compositional unit. Grammar is often an aid in delineating these units, as elements such as a change in verbal aspect or in person or number signal unit breaks. The next step entails the division of the unit into individual components called cola (breath units). Once defined, cola can later be recombined either "paratactically" or through "grammatical subordination" into periods (169-75). With the arrangement into cola and periods made, elements such as repetitive and

⁵ Bernard B. Scott is a well-known scholar of the New Testament. He is perhaps best known for his work on the parables of Jesus (*Hear Then the Parable* [1989] and *Re-Imagine the World* [2001]). He has also written on the subject of resurrection from the dead within the New Testament (*The Trouble with Resurrection* [2010]), on the subject of religion and film (*Hollywood Dreams and Biblical Stories* [2000]), and on many other New Testament themes. *Sound Mapping* is a revision of Margaret Lee's Ph.D. dissertation. Lee has worked and written extensively on the topic of orality in the New Testament, especially as it regards the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew.

⁶ This type of writing was only possible with the invention of consonants and vowels that could reproduce sound (Lee and Scott 2009:71). Ancient readers/oral performers could decipher this script because of the aural indicators. By contrast, modern readers have a very difficult time deciphering uninterrupted script.

⁷ John Foley (1991:43) also refers to the concept of a map. He writes, "[O]ral performance or oral-derived texts also consists of a 'map' made up of explicit signals and gaps of indeterminacy that must be bridged in accordance with certain rules and predispositions."

beginning and ending sounds become apparent and the analysis process can begin. The lengthy second half of *Sound Mapping* consists of examples of the creation and analysis of six sound maps; their detailed sample maps assist the modern novice in his or her own employment of sound maps for analysis (199-384).

By relying upon the insights of orality studies on the role sound plays in conveying meaning and upon the sound mapping tool developed by Lee and Scott in particular, I will here demonstrate how ancient auditors would likely have heard a structural unit in Paul's letter to the Romans (4:9-12). My aim in using the sound mapping tool is to resolve a long-standing interpretive problem that concerns the identity of the ethnic group involved in the last phrase or colon of Rom 4:12. I will begin with an explanation and short history of the interpretive debates surrounding this unit from Romans and then provide a sound map of the structural unit to be used in reassessing the unit on the basis of sound patterns. It is these repetitive sounds that provide the identity of the ethnic group in question.

A Short History of the Interpretive Problem

It is frequently argued and often assumed that Paul has both Gentiles and Jews becoming heirs of Abraham on the same criterion of faith, usually understood to be faith in Christ Jesus. Pauline scholars often make their determination of Paul's standard for the heirs of Abraham by "correcting" the text of Rom 4:12, removing what they consider to be an unintended dative article (τοῖς, "to those") located just after the correlative conjunction ἀλλὰ καὶ ("but also") and just prior to the participle στοιχοῦσιν ("who walk"). The entire Greek phrase and its English translation follow; the problematic τοῖς and its English translation are in boldfaced type (Rom 4:12):

καὶ πατέρα περιτομῆς τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ περιτομῆς μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ **τοῖς** στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἴχνεσιν
τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστία πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ.

and father of circumcision, to those not only from the circumcision but also **to those** walking in
the footsteps of the faithfulness of our father Abraham while he was in foreskin.

The presence or absence of the article τοῖς significantly alters the meaning of Rom 4:12. Without the τοῖς, Paul addresses a single group of circumcised Jews who demonstrate faithfulness similar to that of Abraham prior to his becoming circumcised; with it, Paul addresses two different ethnic groups: circumcised Jews *and* then a group of foreskinned Gentiles who demonstrate this Abrahamic faithfulness.

Near the start of the twentieth century, William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam (1902:108) addressed the situation of the τοῖς and justified its omission by calling it a scribal

slip.⁸ Their interpretive solution has held sway and influenced the majority of commentators⁹ and translators¹⁰ of Romans to the present time.¹¹ They write (108):

As it stands the article [τοῖς] is a solecism: it would make those who are circumcised one set of persons, and those who follow the example of Abraham's faith another distinct set, which is certainly not St. Paul's meaning. He is speaking of Jews who are *both* circumcised *and* believe. This requires in Greek the omission of the art[icle] before στοιχοῦσιν. But τοῖς στ. is found in all

⁸ The 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Nestle et al. 2006) signals the τοῖς and refers the readers to possible alternatives. By contrast, the 1899 2nd edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* by Nestle has no critical markings in Rom 4:12 (see Nestle 1899:399). The alternatives listed in the critical apparatus of the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland are to two earlier editions, the Hort and Beza. In the 1881, 1882, 1895, and 1953 Westcott and Hort editions of the New Testament, the words καὶ τοῖς are signaled as "suspected readings," meaning that the editors suspect that the text contains a primitive error (see Westcott and Hort 1881:lxxxix, 357; 1895:356-57; and 1953:357, 582-83). In the 1906 Westcott and Hort edition (357, 586) there is a note in which the editors suggest that καὶ τοῖς is probably a "primitive error for καὶ αὐτοῖς." The Beza 1588 edition (28) contains no variation from the καὶ τοῖς to anything else. The same is true for the 1590 edition of Beza (8).

⁹ Käsemann 1980:114; Leenhardt 1981:70; Cranfield 1985:89; Dunn 1988:195; Barrett 1991:81; Byrne 1996:150; Moxnes 1980:81; Watson 1986:222, n. 76; Hays 1985:90; Hays 1989:56; Martyn 1997:237. Anthony Guerra writes (1995:122), "Paul stresses that Abraham is the Father only of those among the circumcised who follow the footsteps of Abraham's faith, that is, before his circumcision (4.12)." See also Elliott 1990:161, 163 n. 1; Gager 2000:123; Stowers 1994:243.

¹⁰ The NAB, NRSV, NASB, NIV, AB, BEB, ASV, and KJV translations ignore the τοῖς and effectively render one group of circumcised Jews, those who are not only circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of Abraham while he was still uncircumcised. By contrast, the English Darby Version and the Rheims New Testament recognize the τοῖς and effectively suggest that there are two groups in view.

¹¹ In his 1980 article, "The Curious Crux at Romans 4,12," James Swetnam (111) called attention to this issue. Although Swetnam argues for the inclusion of the τοῖς, his reasons for doing so are untenable. According to him, the two groups in 4:12 are both Christian. That is, πατέρα περιτομῆς ("father of the circumcised") refers to Abraham's spiritual circumcision. Thus, Abraham is the father of two groups; the first are physically circumcised Jewish Christians, and the second are foreskinned Christians. Swetnam follows on the thoughts of Lucien Cerfaux, who writes (1954:335), « *et il est père en circoncision (de tous les chrétiens), de ceux de la circoncision, et non seulement de ceux-ci, mais encore de tous ceux qui marchent sur les traces de la foi, reçue dans l'incirconcision, de notre père Abraham (v. 12).* » See also Fitzmyer 1993:381-82. While they both pay heed to the dative article τοῖς that occurs just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν and they both argue, as I do, that Paul has two groups in view and that the second group are foreskinned Gentiles, their interpretation of the phrase πατέρα περιτομῆς as referring to Abraham's spiritual circumcision is unwarranted and the first group likely refers to circumcised Jews and not to Jewish-Christians, as they argue. Responding to their interpretation, Robert Jewett (2007:320) comments that it is unlikely that Paul would use the term "circumcision" in two different senses in the same sentence. Maria Neubrand (1997:235-36, 40) somewhat refines the work of Swetnam and Cerfaux and remarks that there are two groups in verse 12 as indicated by the two occurrences of τοῖς; the first are circumcised Jewish Jesus-followers and the second are uncircumcised Gentile Jesus-followers. According to her, the πατέρα περιτομῆς would refer to a group of circumcised Jews and not to Abraham's spiritual circumcision. Thus, according to Neubrand, verse 12 refers to three separate groups: circumcised Jews (as indicated by the πατέρα περιτομῆς), circumcised Jewish Jesus-followers, and Gentile Jesus-followers. See also Mußner 1980:213.

By contrast, Thomas Tobin translates Rom 4:11-12 as I am proposing in this essay. Indeed, he writes that one can consider Rom 4:11-12 as a chiasmic pattern, with Abraham's promises going first to the Gentiles (Rom 4:11 or colon 5.1 and 5.2), then twice to the Jews (Rom 4:12, colon 6.1), and then finally again to the Gentiles (Rom 4:12, colon 6.2). See Tobin 1995:446-47.

existing MSS. We must suppose therefore either (1) that there has been some corruption. WH thinks that τοῖς may be the remains of an original ἀὐτοῖς; but that would not seem to be a very natural form of sentence. Or (2) we may think that Tertius made a slip of the pen in following St. Paul's dictation, and that this remained uncorrected. If the slip was not made by Tertius himself, it must have been made in some very early copy, the parent of all our present copies.

While some exegetes argue for its omission on grammatical grounds,¹² the majority, following the lead of Sanday and Headlam, simply ignore it for ideological/theological reasons. This latter and large group of commentators is convinced that here and elsewhere Paul is redefining Abraham's heirs to include only those who have faith similar to that of Abraham in his foreskinned state. Philip Esler's translation and comments on Rom 4:12 (2003:189-90) well illustrate the dominant interpretation. He writes,

He [Paul] immediately continues: "and father of those of the circumcised who rely not merely on circumcision but also walk in the footsteps of our father Abraham who had faith while he was uncircumcised" (4:12). Once again the argument is radical. Paul is saying that Judeans trace descent from Abraham not in virtue of his circumcision but from the righteousness by faith he had prior to it and of which circumcision was merely a sign. Paul has thus achieved a result fundamental to his communicative strategy in the letter. He has recategorized the two subgroups of the Christ-movement in Rome into an ingroup identity that is unified by virtue of their sharing exactly the same relationship with Abraham. He is the father of all of them in relation to righteousness that comes from faith.

By two subgroups, Esler has in mind the foreskinned Gentiles defined in Rom 4:11 and the circumcised Jews-in-Christ defined by Rom 4:12. He, like others, formulates this group of Jews-in-Christ by ignoring the τοῖς, the "to those" that occurs just prior to the participle στοιχοῦσιν "who walk."¹³

¹² For instance, C. E. B. Cranfield (1985:89) writes that the τοῖς should be "ruled out grammatically by the position of the previous definite article in the Greek in relation to the words represented by 'not' and 'only.'" Interestingly, Cranfield acknowledges that emending the text rests on shaky ground, as there are no extant Greek manuscripts that omit the τοῖς. See also James D. G. Dunn (1988:211), who remarks that the syntax is "awkward," because for two groups to be in view, one would expect to see οὐ τοῖς at the start of the phrase rather than τοῖς οὐκ. Both of these interpreters make the false assumption that Greek grammar has a fixed syntactical structure.

¹³ Pamela Eisenbaum comments (2009:202), "For centuries Pauline interpreters assumed Paul's discussions of Abraham were intended to show how the patriarch represents the exemplary model of faith. Jews, too, both of antiquity and beyond, perceived in Abraham the perfect embodiment of obedient faith. But traditional Christian interpreters of Paul have not seen Abraham merely as a figure whose exemplary faithfulness provided Paul with a model for Christians to emulate. Rather, the patriarch is taken to be the ultimate proof of Paul's most important theological postulate: that one is justified by faith."

In contrast to Esler and to the many commentators and translators who interpret this passage as he does, factors pertaining to sound¹⁴ indicate the appropriateness of the τοῖς prior to στοιχοῦσιν. Sound patterns indicate that the τοῖς contributes to the balance and harmonic quality of the entire unit (Rom 4:9-12). Indeed, an analysis of the sound patterns of the unit reveals that while Paul emphasizes the faith (πίστις) of Abraham, his faith is important in so far as it concerns the foreskinned (ἀκροβυστία). The foreskinned are Paul's primary focus; they are the ones signaled out to receive righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). The repeated emphasis on the foreskinned throughout the unit strongly suggests that they are the group to whom Paul refers in the final phrase of Rom 4:12. Paul intended to refer to two distinct groups of people: to circumcised (περιτομαί) Jews, as indicated by the first instance of the dative article τοῖς (Rom 4:12), and to foreskinned Gentiles (ἀκροβυστία),¹⁵ as indicated by the second and so-called problematic one (Rom 4:12). Paul makes the case that the ἀκροβυστία are heirs to Abraham based on trust.¹⁶

An Analysis of Rom 4:9-12 Based on Sound Patterns

Romans 4:9-12 is a small portion of a larger diatribe defined by Rom 2:17-5:11,¹⁷ in which Paul debates with a fictitious Jewish teacher of Gentiles¹⁸ over how foreskinned Gentiles can be considered "circumcised" Jews, though not themselves physically circumcised (2:25-29), and how foreskinned Gentiles are made righteous and heirs to Abraham through faith or trust (4:9-12). The structural unit naturally divides into six periods. The periodic structure within the sound map coincides with the unit's dialogical form, in which periods one and three represent the voice of Paul's Jewish interlocutor, and periods two, four, five, and six express the voice of Paul. To facilitate the analysis of the unit, I have numbered the periods and cola beneath them sequentially. Corresponding repetitive sounds are indicated by bold-faced, italic, and underlined type. Following on the work of Lee and Scott, I have employed the asterisk (*) between lexemes that end and begin with a vowel to indicate a glottal stop or hiatus.

¹⁴ Robert Jewett writes (2007:40), "The key question in interpreting Paul's letter is therefore how it would have sounded to its intended hearers, and what kind of participation would it have evoked." Werner Kelber (1997:xxvi) remarks that Paul's letters are "permeated with oral sensitivities."

¹⁵ Other commentators have honored the τοῖς and understand Paul to refer to two groups, to circumcised Jews and foreskinned Gentiles, as I am suggesting. While Lloyd Gaston and Thomas Tobin observe chiasmic patterns, their analysis does not explicitly refer to sound. Gaston (1987:124) observes a chiasmic pattern begun in verse 11 and consisting of Gentile, Jew, Jew, and Gentile. Tobin (1995:447) also observes the same chiasmic pattern as Gaston.

¹⁶ In a similar vein, Krister Stendahl (1995:14) maintains that Gentiles are justified by faith on the model of Abraham without circumcision; the argument of justification by faith is "hammered out on the anvil of the question: how can Gentiles become part of God's people?"

¹⁷ On the diatribal form of this unit, see Stowers 1994:231.

¹⁸ For a description of Paul's dialogue partner, see Stowers 1994:168.

Sound Map of Rom 4:9-12

Period 1 (Jewish Interlocutor)

1.1 ὁ μακαρισμὸς οὖν οὗτος ἐπὶ τὴν *περιτομὴν* ἢ καὶ*ἐπὶ τὴν *ἀκροβυστίαν*;

1.1 The blessing, then, (is) it on the circumcised/or also on the foreskinned?

Period 2 (Paul)

2.1 λέγομεν γάρ Ἐλογίσθη τῷ*Ἀβραάμ ἡ πίστις εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

2.1. For we say / the faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.

Period 3 (Jewish Interlocutor)

3.1 πῶς οὖν ἐλογίσθη; ἐν *περιτομῇ**ὄντι*ἢ*ἐν *ἀκροβυστία*;

3.1 How, then, was it reckoned? / when (he was) circumcised or when (he was) in foreskin?

Period 4 (Paul)

4.1 οὐκ ἐν *περιτομῇ** ἀλλ' ἐν *ἀκροβυστία*;

4.1 Not when (he was) circumcised / but when (he was) in foreskin.

4.2 καὶ σημεῖον ἔλαβεν *περιτομῆς*, σφραγίδα τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῆς πίστεωςἢς ἐν τῇ**ἀκροβυστία*

4.2 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith when (he was) in foreskin.

Period 5 (Paul)

5.1 εἰς τὸ*εἶναι*αὐτὸν πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων

δι**ἀκροβυστίας*

5.1 For him to be / father of all who trust although in foreskin

5.2 εἰς τὸ λογισθῆναι καὶ αὐτοῖς τὴν δικαιοσύνην

5.2. So that it is reckoned / also to those, the righteousness.

Period 6 (Paul)

6.1 καὶ πατέρα *περιτομῆς* τοῖς οὐκ ἐκ *περιτομῆς* μόνον

6.1 and father of circumcision / to those who are not only from the circumcision

6.2 ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἴχνεσιν τῆς ἐν *ἀκροβυστία* πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ.6.2 but also / **to those** who walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham while (he was) in foreskin.

From the beginning of the structural unit through to its end, there is an emphasis on the foreskinned. The Jewish interlocutor opens the unit with a question to Paul regarding whether the blessing came (only) to circumcised (περιτομαί) persons or also to the foreskinned, the ἀκροβυστία.¹⁹ The final lexeme ἀκροβυστίαν is the implied correct answer, as this lexeme is made prominent by its location at the end of the colon.²⁰ The hiatus or clash of vowels at the start of the final prepositional phrase (ἡ*έν) interrupts the sound at that point, creating an additional auditory effect through dissonance, serving to reinforce the prominence of ἀκροβυστίαν. As Lee and Scott explain (2009:177), there was a concern for melodious sounds in both classical and Hellenistic Greek culture. Unlike modern writers, Hellenistic authors aimed to achieve harmony in their compositions. Harmony penetrated the emotions in pleasurable ways. Those sounds strike the ear with particular force, but so too do sounds that are dissonant, cacophonous, or unpleasant. Hellenistic Greek authors recognized certain consonants as being harmonious and others as being harsher. A clash of vowels was considered inharmonious, yet it could be used effectively to invoke an audience's attention.

Throughout the structural unit a recurring²¹ sound group περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- becomes apparent and functions to provide structure.²² As I demonstrate below, this repetitive structuring device helps to provide some indication of the ethnic group Paul has in view at the end of Rom 4:12. The lexemes περιτομήν and ἀκροβυστίαν are metonyms, which feature prominently within oral works.²³ A metonym relies on the audience to complete its intended referent (Foley 1991:8; Maxey 2009:99); the use, repetition, and placement of these particular metonyms reveal their importance for the overall meaning of the unit; they refer respectively to Jews and Gentiles. As mentioned, in this unit Paul is in the midst of a discussion with a fictitious Jew, but his intended

¹⁹ Joel Marcus (1989:77-78) writes that the term ἀκροβυστία was most likely a derogatory one used by Jews for Gentile others. I do not assess the term as a derogatory one.

²⁰ Sounds that occur at the beginning or ending of a sound group “receive special attention” (Lee and Scott 2009:151).

²¹ In his book *Immanent Art*, John Foley (1991:56-57) discusses the importance of repetition for oral performance and the transmission of meaning. He remarks that with oral-derived texts, the term “repetition” is really a misnomer and is better described as re-creation. Each occurrence summons again metonymic meaning. It re-signifies meaning each time. Walter Ong (1982:40) also finds that redundancy is a feature of oral delivery.

²² The pattern repeats in cola 1, 3, 4.1, 4.2, and with variation in 6.1 and 6.2.

²³ John Foley writes (1991:8), “[A] traditional work depends primarily on elements and strategies that were in place long before the execution of the present version or text, long before the author learned the inherited craft. Because the idiom is metonymic, summoning conventional connotations to conventional structures, we may say that the meaning it conveys is principally *inherent*. The ‘author’ uses this idiom most felicitously when inherent meaning is orchestrated coherently, so that the performance or text makes sense not only at the superficial (that is, decontextualized) level but more importantly with reference to the tradition.”

audience is Gentile.²⁴ Gentiles are meant to hear from a “Jew” about how both Jews and Gentiles are related under the one Jewish patriarch Abraham. The repetitive sound group περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- also functions in and of itself to create a connection between Jews and foreskinned Gentiles.

Acoustics makes δικαιοσύνην (“righteousness”) in period two prominent by position, and its placement also brings it into close association with ἀκροβυστίαν of period one. Indeed, both δικαιοσύνη- and ἀκροβυστί- are prominent on account of their position throughout the entire structural unit. The lexeme δικαιοσύνη- ends cola 2.1 and 5.2 and occurs within 4.2; ἀκροβυστί- terminates cola 1.1, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, and 5.1 and occurs within colon 6.2. With the exception of the final two cola, all cola of the unit terminate in one of these two lexemes. Sound itself also draws δικαιοσύνην and ἀκροβυστίαν together, as their five-syllable sound group and ending sound, the final Greek consonant *nu*, create harmony.

Period two also marks the beginning of Abraham’s prominence, a figure who remains so throughout the unit. Paul alludes to Gen 15:6 to draw Abraham,²⁵ the Jewish patriarch that Paul introduced earlier (Rom 4:1), into this discussion on circumcision and foreskin (περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-). A hiatus just prior to the name Abraham (Ἀβραάμ) signals the name’s importance. Abraham is mentioned again at the close of the unit (colon 6.2) and thus Paul’s beginning and ending responses to his interlocutor reference Abraham.²⁶ According to Paul, Abraham is not only the father of circumcised Jews and foreskinned Gentiles (cola 5.1 and 6.1-2) but also a model for the foreskinned to follow. Abraham is the link that draws these two groups together.

At the acoustic level, period three closely resembles period one and thereby functions to reinforce sounds already declaimed. Repetitive sounds draw these two periods together. Like period one above, we hear the voice of Paul’s Jewish interlocutor, this time asking about how blessedness was reckoned. We once again see the sound group περιτομή-ἀκροβυστί as part of the question. The two periods have approximately the same number of breath-units, each contains

²⁴ See Rom 1:5, 13-14; 11:13; 15:15-16, 18. However, the issue of the ethnic makeup of Paul’s audience in Rome is heavily debated. Werner Kümmel’s remarks reflect some of the underlying confusion regarding this issue. In his *Introduction to the New Testament* he writes (1975:309), “Rather the letter characterizes its readers unambiguously as *Gentile Christians*.” Later, however, Kümmel undermines this insight when he remarks that the Roman community is “*not purely Gentile-Christian*” (310). Lloyd Gaston (1987:7-8) writes that Paul addressed Gentiles, and his churches were “*exclusively Gentile*.” Stanley Stowers (1994:30) is convinced that Paul explicitly describes a Gentile audience and “*nowhere explicitly encodes a Jewish audience*.” See also Pamela Eisenbaum (2009:216-17, 44, 48-49), who writes that Paul’s letter to the Romans is addressed to Gentiles and concerns messages for them. By contrast, Robert Jewett (2007:70-71) acknowledges that the current consensus among the modern commentaries is that Paul’s audience was Gentile, yet he also mentions that the discussion regarding the weak and strong (14:1-15:13) pertains to Gentiles and Jews, contradicting the majority opinion.

²⁵ By contrast, Robert Jewett (2007:318) calls this verse (Rom 4:9b) “a striking rhetorical shift to the first person plural.” Ernst Käsemann (1980:114) remarks that Gen 15:6 serves to confirm the prior reference to Psalm 32.

²⁶ Abraham is certainly central to Paul’s argument for how Gentiles can be folded into God’s promises. Two recent Pauline commentators speak of Abraham. One group of scholars states, “In effect, claiming the lineage of Abraham gave one a competitive advantage over others” (Dewey et al. 2010:220). According to Pamela Eisenbaum (2009:202), Paul considers that his divine mission “*finally fulfills the promises made to Abraham*.” According to her, Paul himself functions like Abraham and now brings all the peoples of the earth into God’s family under him (Abraham).

the intervening conjunction ἢ (“or”), and each terminates with a question or the elevation of the voice. The change in the case of the περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- group functions at the level of sound to provide “interest and sustain attention” (Lee and Scott 2009:147).

The emphasis within the period, however, is on the lexeme that regards foreskin, ἀκροβυστία, the noun that terminates the period. With regard to semantics, the first use of the noun “foreskin” (period one) is metonymic and refers to a foreskinned person, while the second (period three) is literal and regards Abraham’s condition of being in the foreskin. At the level of sound, however, both nouns harmonize, serving to bring the foreskinned person into the literary/cultural realm of the formerly foreskinned Abraham.

The fourth period begins Paul’s rather lengthy summary of this small structural unit. Aspects pertaining to sound demonstrate that Paul continues to emphasize the themes of circumcision and foreskin with special emphasis given to the Greek lexeme for foreskin. While parallel cola containing the structuring lexeme pair περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί- create balance²⁷ within the period, the κ of οὐκ (“not”) that heads the period (colon 4.1) creates dissonance, serving to shift the emphasis away from περιτομή and toward ἀκροβυστία, the final lexeme. Paul clarifies for his interlocutor that God declared Abraham righteous *not* while circumcised but while in foreskin (ἐν ἀκροβυστία). Rounding—defined as “the repetition at the period’s end of sounds heard at the beginning” (Lee and Scott 2009:171)—is achieved through the repetition of the opening and closing ἐν sound, and thus the final prepositional phrase regarding Abraham’s condition in foreskin (ἦς ἐν τῇ*ἀκροβυστία) (colon 4.2) provides closure. Notice, too, that ἀκροβυστία not only ends the colon but also is preceded by a hiatus for emphasis.

While righteousness came to Abraham before he was physically circumcised, commentators often diminish the importance of the receipt of Abraham’s circumcision,²⁸ the first part of colon 4.2, yet sound suggests otherwise and instead indicates that Paul makes no such concession. The περιτομ- is an integral part of the repetitive sound group, suggestive of its importance. Paul, then, is not denying the importance of Abraham’s circumcision in and of itself, but is instead emphasizing for his Gentile audience that he received (ἔλαβεν) righteousness (δικαιοσύνης) while he was in foreskin (ἦς ἐν τῇ ἀκροβυστία).

²⁷ Balance suggests parallel or antithetical cola (Lee and Scott 2009:171).

²⁸ C. K. Barrett’s remarks (1991:85, 87) best capture the diminished status Abraham’s actual circumcision receives among Pauline commentators. He labels verse 11a as a parenthesis and writes, “Abraham’s circumcision did not confer righteousness upon him, and was not a token that he was obliged henceforth to keep the law in order to be justified, but confirmed by a visible sign the fact that he had already been justified by faith.” Robert Jewett writes (2007:318), “In a skillful paraphrase of Gen 17, Paul makes the case that circumcision was not only performed long after Abraham’s reckoning as righteous, but also that it was *merely* a ‘seal’ of the righteous status that he had already received” (emphasis my own). While I disagree that Paul states that Jews and Gentiles must have faith to be heirs to Abraham, the remarks of James Dunn well capture the notion of the broadening of the definition of circumcision that I suggest is operative in this verse. Dunn (1988:209) states that the first part of verse 11 (colon 4.2) “should not be taken as a parenthesis,” but that Paul is reworking the significance of Abraham’s circumcision so that it can pertain universally to those (Gentiles and Jews) who have faith.

According to Paul, Abraham received the sign of circumcision for two purposes, each signaled by the repetitive openings (εἰς τὸ)²⁹ that head each colon of period five. Each of these purposes, however, concerns the foreskinned. The first is so that Abraham would be father to all those who trust through foreskin, or while they are themselves in foreskin (δι' ἀκροβυστίας) (colon 5.1). The second is so that this same group, as heard by the pronoun αὐτοῖς, could be made righteous (δικαιοσύνην) (colon 5.2). The repetition of the ending -ς at the end of the two leading prepositions εἰς and the pronoun αὐτοῖς reinforces the link between the two purpose clauses and the foreskinned persons. A similar auditory connection is made between the αὐτοῖς and the τοῖς sounds in the following period (six). In addition, the -ναι of λογισθῆναι (colon 5.2) refers back to periods two and three, in which the same lexeme is found. Whereas in periods two and three the reckoning (ἐλογίσθη) of righteousness (δικαιοσύνην) concerns Abraham, here it shifts to the foreskinned person.

Sound patterns associate the trust of Abraham with the trust of the foreskinned (colon 5.1). The lexeme πιστε- (“trust”) identified with Abraham alone in colon 4.2 retains that connection but now also becomes associated with the foreskinned who trust, made clear by the δι' ἀκροβυστίας that ends the colon. The long harmonious sound group distinguished by *homoioteleuton* involving rhyming and alliteration helps to strengthen the connection (πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων). Rhyming is achieved through the repeated final -ων of several lexemes in the phrase, and the initial π- sound of πατέρα πάντων and πιστευόντων adds alliteration. Echoes of this longer alliterative sound pattern that contains the πιστε- recur in the final colon of the unit (6.2) and thus create an auditory connection back to this reference, one that clearly identifies the foreskinned as those who trust. Notice too the absence of a reference to trust required of the circumcised. Indeed, the customary and anticipatory περιτομ- heard at the start of nearly every colon of the unit is absent from this colon.

In the final period of the structural unit, Paul designates the conditions for being an heir of Abraham. Sound features indicate that Paul continues to have two groups in view in this final period but that he emphasizes the foreskinned. The first feature is a modification³⁰ of the signature sound grouping περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-. While the lexeme περιτομῆς occurs twice in succession, the lexeme ἀκροβυστία occurs only once in the final colon, breaking the otherwise consistent one-to-one symmetry of the pattern. At first glance, this variation would seem to indicate that Paul privileges the first group, the περιτομή-, over the ἀκροβυστί-, but just the reverse is the case. Variation in the pattern does not detract from its overall effect but instead functions to call attention to it. According to Lee and Scott (2009:155), “established sound patterns shape a listener’s expectations. Distinctive sounds that diverge from an established pattern can also receive special importance because they surprise a hearer.” In this case, the ἀκροβυστί- is present by suggestion and expectation. The second feature is balance, achieved in part through the correlative conjunctions (οὐκ μόνον—ἀλλὰ καὶ), but also by the *two* dative

²⁹ While ending sounds receive special attention, so too do beginning ones (Lee and Scott 2009:151). Here, the repetitive opening sounds create rounding and balance within the period.

³⁰ While the essential form remains the same, modification is the change in one or more pattern components (Lee and Scott 2009:149).

articles τοῖς,³¹ one prior to οὐκ (colon 6.1) and the second—the problematic one—just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν (colon 6.2). Here, the presence of the second, problematic τοῖς helps to resolve the unevenness of the signature sound pattern περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-. Without the problematic τοῖς, there would be no emphasis on another group, yet this second group (the ἀκροβυστί-) has been indicated and featured *throughout* the unit and indeed receives special emphasis here with an additional τοῖς that follows the στοιχοῦσιν. The third feature is elongation (the lengthening of a colon), often found at the end of well-formed periods, a feature that serves to call attention to that phrase (Lee and Scott 2009:171).

Indeed the final elongated phrase at the end of the structural unit (τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστία πίστεως τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ) describes the ethnic group that Paul has in view throughout this unit. Sound features indicate that this reference is to foreskinned Gentiles. It is a repetition with variation of the similar sounding phrase πατέρα πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων δι' ἀκροβυστίας of colon 5.1, in which there is an unambiguous reference to foreskinned Gentiles.³² In addition, the preceding στοιχοῦσιν τοῖς ἴχνεσιν at the start of the τῆς ἐν ἀκροβυστία serves metonymically as a reference to foreskinned persons (colon 6.2).³³ Thus, Abraham is father, πατέρα, first to the circumcised (ἐκ περιτομῆς) (colon 6.1) and then to the foreskinned, as noted by the second τοῖς of period six and the final elongated phrase of the unit (colon 6.2).³⁴

Conclusion

In sum, several factors that pertain to sound indicate the likelihood that Paul intended the last group in colon 6.2, as designated by the τοῖς just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν, to be foreskinned

³¹ While commentators such as Cranfield and Dunn have argued against the appropriateness of the τοῖς prior to the στοιχοῦσιν on grammatical grounds (see note 12 above), Maria Neubrand (1997:234-35) has observed that Paul employs a flexible word order. To review, Cranfield and Dunn have argued that for two groups to be in view Paul would have used the more common οὐ τοῖς construction rather than the τοῖς οὐκ. Greek grammar, however, is not restricted to a particular word order, and while the construction οὐ τοῖς is the more common one, there is nothing “incorrect” about the present τοῖς οὐκ construction. Indeed, this less common construction marks the text, making it more memorable at the level of sound.

³² Lee and Scott remark (2009:154), “sounds that occur in corresponding places within parallel sound groups frequently claim special attention.”

³³ Pamela Eisenbaum makes the observation (2009:204), “I think the similar descriptions of Abraham and Gentile believers are there precisely to reinforce the kindred connection that Paul argues Gentiles have in Abraham. People who are kin are supposed to be similar to one another; those who belong to the same family are assumed to share important characteristics.”

³⁴ Caroline Johnson Hodge (2007:5, 138) writes that Paul “relies on the logic of patrilineal descent to create a new lineage for the Gentiles, a lineage that links Gentiles through Christ to the founding ancestor, Abraham.” According to her, Paul does not create one identical group linked to a common ancestor Abraham. Her reading of Rom 4:12, however, differs from my own. While she employs the τοῖς prior to the στοιχοῦσιν, she finds that in Rom 4:11, Paul refers to the uncircumcised and that in Rom 4:12, Paul refers to faithful Jews, to those “who are both circumcised and who follow the example of Abraham’s faithfulness” (2007:88; 188, n.27). This exegetical position, however, undermines her comment about Paul not making one identical group, as on this reading, both groups would be heirs to Abraham based on Abraham’s faithfulness.

Gentiles. The lexeme ἀκροβυστί- is prominent throughout with its placement at the end of nearly every breath unit or colon of the structural unit. Sound patterns and placement link ἀκροβυστί- to δικαιοσύνη- (colon 1.1, 2.1) and then ἀκροβυστί- to πιστε- (5.1 and 6.2). The sounds of 6.2 recall those of 5.1, in which there is an unambiguous reference to the foreskinned as being those who trust, thus providing a strong indication that the final phrase of 6.2 refers to that same group. In addition, Paul emphasizes Abraham as a model because he trusted and received righteousness while in foreskin, and Abraham is re-signified with terms and sounds that concern foreskinned Gentiles (colon 5.1).

As shown, the so-called problematic τοῖς just prior to the στοιχοῦσιν is integral to the unit; it serves as a necessary structuring device. Its sound is first introduced in colon 5.2 with the pronoun αὐτοῖς, a referent to the foreskinned. It and the τοῖς that immediately precedes it (colon 6.1) along with their associated correlative conjunctions provide balance to the period. The presence of the second τοῖς helps to resolve the tension left by the imbalance in the signature sound feature περιτομή-/ἀκροβυστί-.

This analysis based on acoustic features resists the reading that all the heirs of Abraham are determined by the criterion of faith. While Paul is in dialogue with a fictitious Jewish teacher of Gentiles, his concern is with the foreskinned, the Gentiles, his intended hearers, and with how *they* become righteous and heirs of the Jewish, circumcised Abraham along with the circumcised Jews. Through the dialogue, Paul informs his Gentile hearers as to how they can be legitimate heirs of Abraham through faith and not through circumcision. As a Jew, Paul does not question Jewish descent from Abraham; that lineage is a given.³⁵ The issue for Paul is whether or not Gentiles also belong as legitimate heirs of Abraham even though they themselves are not circumcised.

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³⁵ As Pamela Eisenbaum (2009:218) cogently remarks, “Jews always stood righteous before God because of *God’s* faithfulness to the covenant.”

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