

Punctuating Paul's Letters in Light of the Ancient Theory of *Côla* and Periods

The Example of 2 Corinthians 10:8–11

Abstract

This article argues that the micro-structure of Paul's letters is intrinsically linked to an aural logic. Taking 2 Corinthians 10:8–11 as an example and using the notions of *côlon* and *period* as described in the rhetoric and stylistic treatises of the Graeco-Roman world, I will show both the methods and the extent to which it is possible to reconstitute its original "punctuation"—i.e., the different breaks that punctuated this passage when it was read aloud. This will allow me to shed new light on the structure of the passage and, especially, on the debated question of the place of verse 9, namely the extent to which it is linked with either verse 8 or verses 10–11, or is rather independent. More generally, this article is an invitation to develop colometric analysis as an additional tool in debates concerning micro-structure and punctuation of NT texts.

Keywords

punctuation; rhetoric; sound; performance; *côlon*; period

Introduction, problem and hypothesis

In the study and translation of Paul's letters, scholars are faced with an interpretative difficulty of deciding where punctuation marks should be placed, and which sort of marks these should be. Indeed, the frequent usage of conjunctions in Paul's style, as well as his general way of constructing his arguments, can give the impression that all of the arguments he makes are intrinsically linked. As a result, the interpreter who does not want to simply place blind trust in the punctuation choices in the critical editions (NA or UBS) is faced with a complex question: according to which criteria should the placement of punctuation be determined? While for most of the passages the choice of punctuation appears mainly as a stylistic issue, with little to no impact on the meaning of the text in question, there are also a

significant number of passages in Paul's letters where exegetical issues are closely linked to this choice of punctuation. Concerning such passages, the arguments traditionally used by scholars concerning grammar (what is possible or probable on the morpho-syntactical level?) and meaning (what makes sense in regards to the context?) are not always sufficient for determining the best choice.

One example of such a passage is 2 Cor. 10:8–11, where the choice of punctuation between verses 8 and 9 is a highly debated issue which clearly impacts on the meaning of the text. Given its clear relevance for the issue at hand, I will use it as a case study. Below is the text from the NA²⁸, from which the punctuation marks have been removed¹:

8 ἐάν τε² γὰρ περισσώτερόν τι καυχῆσωμαι³ περὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἡμῶν ἧς ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος⁴ εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν **οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι** **9** ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν **10** ὅτι αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν φησὶν⁵ βαρεῖται καὶ ἰσχυραὶ ἢ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος **11** τοῦτο λογιζέσθω ὁ τοιοῦτος ὅτι οἱοί ἐσμεν τῷ λόγῳ δι' ἐπιστολῶν ἀπόντες τοιοῦτοι καὶ παρόντες τῷ ἔργῳ

One of the most difficult and debated challenges regarding this passage concerns how we are to understand the link between οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι, at the end of verse 8 (*I shall not be ashamed*), and verse 9, ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν (literally: *so that I may not seem as if I am terrifying you by letters*). More specifically, the question is: should we understand verses 8 and 9 as forming one single sentence, and then verse 10 as starting a new sentence (and therefore place a comma between verses 8 and 9)? Or should we consider the ἵνα clause of verse 9 as introducing a new sentence (and therefore place a full stop after

¹ For different possible translations of this text, see below, pp. 17–22; the translation I will argue for is found on page 22.

² τε is attested in a number of important manuscripts (⋈ C D K L P Ψ), but is absent in ℱ⁴⁶ B F G H etc. Internal evidence pleads in favor of its presence: since the combination τε γὰρ is uncommon (in the NT, only here and in Rm 7:7; 14:8), it is easier to imagine its suppression in later copies rather than its addition.

³ Many witnesses have the indicative καυχῆσομαι (⋈ L P 0209. 0243. 6. 104. 326. 1175. 1241. 1505. 1881*), but the presence of ἐάν supports the subjunctive καυχῆσωμαι (B C D F G K Ψ 81. 365. 630. 1739. 1881^C. 2464 ℳ).

⁴ An additional ἡμῶν is found here (⋈² D² F G K L 0209. 104. 1241 ℳ sy^h) or before ὁ κύριος (P Ψ 629. 1505. 1881 it) in some witnesses, probably under the influence of the parallel in 13:10 (τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἣν ὁ κύριος ἔδωκέν μοι).

⁵ The plural φασὶν instead of the singular φησὶν is found in a few manuscripts (B lat sy), while others omit a verb (ℱ⁴⁶ vid 1881 b bo^{mss} Ambst); the most-attested reading, however, is the singular.

οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι)? As we shall see, the choice of punctuation here is not only a stylistic issue: the different choices which interpreters make clearly give different meanings to the text.

The approach that I propose in this study is to imagine, as best as we are able, how ancient readers in the Graeco-Roman world would have dealt with non-punctuated manuscripts when they had to read them aloud, and then try to reproduce their analysis. The aim is thus to propose a new tool for punctuating Paul's letters—one which is based on the ancient notions of *côlon* and *period* as described in rhetorical and stylistic treatises, such as those of Demetrius (*De elocutione*), Cicero (*Orator* and *De oratore*, vol. III), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De compositione verborum*), or Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*, books VIII, IX and XI).⁶ *Côla* (sg. κῶλον) and *periods* (sg. περίοδος)⁷ constitute the main structural elements of ancient texts, both in Greek and Latin. They are widely described and illustrated in the ancient treatises of rhetoric, mainly in the part devoted to *elocutio* (the third canon of rhetoric), as well as, to a lesser extent, in the parts devoted to *actio*. Broadly described—and with the understanding that I will elaborate on this definition below—a *côlon* is a semantico-syntactic but not always complete unit which is short enough to be uttered in a single breath, and a *period* is the combination of many *côla* which together form a complete semantico-syntactic unit (we would call that a complex sentence in modern grammar). As I will argue, these served as the main criteria for ancient readers charged with reading aloud the texts of non-punctuated manuscripts as to where they should introduce silences, as well as the emphasis which they should award to them, where to fall in pitch, where to breathe, etc. The overarching proposal of this study is that, by identifying the *côla* and *periods* which structure a text, we should be able to reconstitute its original punctuation, namely the one that a skilled reader of Paul's time would probably have chosen according to the conventions of his time.

⁶ For the Greek or Latin texts with translations, see Demetrius, *De elocutione*, in *Aristotle: Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style* (trans. D.C. Innes and W. Rhys Roberts; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press / London: W. Heinemann, 1995); Cicero, *Orator*, in *Brutus. Orator* (trans. G.L. Hendrickson and H.M. Hubbell; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939); Id., *De oratore*, III, in *On the Orator: Book 3. On Fate. Stoic Paradoxes. Division of Oratory* (trans. H. Rackham; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942); Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De compositione verborum*, in *Critical Essays, vol. II: On Literary Composition. Dinarchus. Letters to Ammaeus and Pompeius* (trans. Stephen Usher; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press / London: W. Heinemann, 1985); Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* VIII, IX and XI, in *The Orator's education*, vol. 3-5 (trans. Donald A. Russel; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Unless otherwise stated, the translations cited below are from these editions.

⁷ In Latin, κῶλον is translated *membrum*, while περίοδος receives various names: *ambitus*, *circumitus*, *comprehensio*, *continuatio*, *circumscriptio* (see Quintilian, *Inst.* IX, 4, 124).

The notions of colon and period are little known in the field of the NT. They are not used in the so-called *rhetorical analysis* of Paul's letters,⁸ which is somewhat surprising given that they are described, among other things, in the same rhetorical treatises to which these scholars refer. This can be partly explained by the origins and development of the rhetorical analysis of the NT, which emerged as a literary approach. As a consequence, it focused almost exclusively on *inventio* and *dispositio*, while parts of rhetoric which are more clearly oriented towards orality and delivery—i.e., *actio* and *memoria*—have been neglected, or even ignored. As for *elocutio*, it has received limited attention; however, style is considered only from a literary perspective, such that its aural aspects are not discussed.⁹ Characteristics of NT texts related to *actio*, *memoria*, and *elocutio* (in its aural dimension), have been paradoxically

⁸ In the field of biblical studies, “rhetorical criticism” refers to the use of principles and conventions described in ancient rhetorical treatises in order to analyze NT texts; it is mainly applied to Paul's letters, which are then regarded as speeches. The approach was initiated in the 1970' by H.D. Betz and then formalized by G.A. Kennedy (H.D. Betz, “The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians,” *New Testament Studies* 21:3 [1975], pp. 353–379; Id., *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* [Hermenia Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979]; G.A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill / London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984]). Following these pioneering works, a countless number of scholars made use of this approach, so that rhetorical criticism became—and still is—a leading approach in the field of Pauline studies. In respect to the use of ancient treatises, the approach I propose in this article can be seen as a new development within rhetorical criticism.

⁹ The fact that style (*elocutio*) has been largely neglected within rhetorical analysis was noted by S.E. Porter, among others (S.E. Porter, “The Theoretical Justification for Application of Rhetorical Categories to Pauline Epistolary Literature,” in S.E. Porter and T.H. Olbricht [eds.], *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], pp. 100–122). Porter suggests that it is the canon of rhetoric which we can expect to have the closest link with letters: “If one wants to consider the epistles as the ancients would have, so far as their explicit relation to rhetoric was concerned, one must analyze style” (pp. 116–117). However, the application of rhetorical theory to Paul's letters, as has been attempted in *rhetorical criticism* since the 1970s, has been the subject of harsh criticism. Indeed, the theoretical relevance of the entire approach has regularly been questioned, mainly because of the difference of genre between a speech and a letter (see for e.g. Porter, 1993, *art. cit.*; C.J. Classen, “Paul's Epistles and Ancient Greek and Rhetoric,” in Id., *Rhetorical Criticism of the NT* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000], pp. 1–28; C. Forbes, “Ancient Rhetoric and Ancient Letters: Models for Reading Paul, and Their Limits,” in J.P. Sampley and P. Lampe [eds.], *Paul and Rhetoric* [London: T&T Clark, 2010], pp. 143–160; Troy W. Martin, “Invention and Arrangement in Recent Pauline Rhetorical Studies: A Survey of the Practices and the Problems,” in *Paul and Rhetoric, op. cit.*, 48–118). It is striking, however, that the only aspect of rhetoric which has escaped criticism is *elocutio*, since stylistic theory seems to be more broadly applicable at the time to varied literary genres, even to the letter genre (see Porter, *art. cit.*, 115). Regarding this point, it should be noted that the Church Fathers indeed already applied rhetorical theory to Paul's letters—as has often been pointed out by scholars involved in *rhetorical criticism* when seeking to justify their approach. Crucially, the Church Fathers focused on style: Augustine even proposed an analysis of 2 Cor. 11:16–30 in terms of *caesa* (=commata), *membra* and periods (*Doctr. Chr.* IV, VII, 13). Yet even in the modern studies which involve stylistic analysis, the focus is almost exclusively on figures of speech, with little to no interest in colometric structure (see for ex. C. Jacon, *La Sagesse du discours. Analyse rhétorique et épistolaire de 1 Corinthiens* [Genève: Labor et Fides, 2006], pp. 88–102). This blindspot among modern exegetes is somewhat reminiscent of the tendency observed in the works of 19th century exegetes like Johannes Weiss (*Beiträge zur paulinischen Rhetorik*, 1897).

addressed outside rhetorical criticism, by the movement of *performance criticism*¹⁰—which can be described as a specific methodological development within the broader movement of biblical orality studies.¹¹ Scholars involved in performance criticism try to reconstitute the material context and the practical details of how NT texts were read aloud. In so doing, they take seriously the aural dimension of texts, which represents *per se* an evolution whose significance should not be underestimated—even if the main trend of the movement suffers from many oversimplifications.¹² The approach I propose in this study is located at the crossroads of rhetorical criticism and performance criticism; a close parallel can be found in the work of Americans Margaret E. Lee and Bernard B. Scott (*Sound Mapping the New Testament*, 2009) and in a PhD dissertation by Swedish scholar *Dan Nässelqvist* (published in 2016).¹³ There is indeed an emerging interest among some scholars involved in orality studies and performance criticism to analyze aural stylistic features of NT texts in light of the ancient conventions of *elocutio*, including an attempt to use the notions of *côla* and periods for the

¹⁰ For a general presentation of *performance criticism*, see D. M. Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies – Part 1,” *BTB* (2006); id., “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies – Part 2,” *BTB* (2006); see also W. Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg/London/New York: Trinity Press International, 2003); W.D. Shiell, *Reading Acts: The Lector and the Early Christian Audience* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). From 2008, Cascade Books also publishes a monograph series called “Biblical Performance Criticism.”

¹¹ See e.g. C.W. Davis, *Oral Biblical Criticism: The Influence of the Principles of Orality on the Literary Structure of Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); J.D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters* (Baker Books, 1999).

¹² On the oversimplifications that are often present in the works of scholars involved in performance criticism, as well as for an attempt to draw a more reliable picture of the status and function of texts in early Christianity, see L. Hurtado, “Oral Fixation and New Testament Studies? ‘Orality’, ‘Performance’ and Reading Texts in Early Christianity,” *NTS* 60/3 (2014), p. 321–340.

¹³ M.E. Lee and B.B. Scott, *Sound Mapping the New Testament* (Salem, OR.: Polebridge Press, 2009); D. Nässelqvist, *Public Reading in Early Christianity: Lectors, Manuscripts, and Sound in the Oral Delivery of John 1-4* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). This interest can be described as a new development since almost no studies were devoted to this topic during the past few decades. To be sure, a few attempts have already been made to display NT texts in *côla* according to a definition of *côlon* provided by *discourse analysis* (*côlon* being understood merely as a sense unit, comprising a subject and a predicate with any dependent or subordinate additions to either of those elements, and without referring to the principles of orality). However, such a definition arguably corresponds only very loosely to the ancient notions which I am speaking about here; see e.g. volumes 11 and 16 of *Neotestamentica* (vol. 11: *The Structure of Matthew 1–13: An Exploration into Discourse Analysis* [1977]; vol. 16: *Structure and Meaning in Matthew 14–28* [1983]); see also J.P. Louw, *A Semantic Discourse Analysis of Romans*, 2 vol. (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1987). During the first part of the 20th century some short discussions were published in which the ancient notion of *côlon* was applied to NT texts: see, e.g., R. Schütz, “Die Bedeutung der Kolometrie für das Neuen Testament,” *ZNW* 21 (1922), pp. 161–184; J.A. Kleist, “Colometry and the New Testament,” *Classical Bulletin* 3 (1927), pp. 18–19; Id., “Colometry and the New Testament (Concluded),” *Classical Bulletin* 4 (1928), pp. 26–27; A. Debrunner, “Grundsätzliches über Kolometrie im Neuen Testament,” *TBI* 5 (1926), pp. 231–233. What is really original in the approach taken by Lee and Scott and Nässelqvist is therefore not the idea of using *côla* and periods to structure NT texts, but rather the attempt to develop a methodology and criteria which are based on the ancient treatises.

purpose of structuring texts. The works by Lee & Scott and Nässelqvist made an outstanding contribution to NT studies in the way that they highlighted the relevance of the issue of sonority. My own approach is deeply indebted to their insights, specifically to their optimism that the notions of *côla* and periods can significantly contribute to reconstituting the micro-structure of NT texts. However, a question which I would pose to these scholars is whether they use definitions of *côlon* and period which are somewhat oversimplified.¹⁴ This is perhaps due to their focus being not so much on the issue of punctuation but on the effects of sounds on the listeners of a given text.¹⁵ For this reason, I will not rely on the definitions and criteria that they already developed, but will instead work with the results of my own research, which are presented below (see point 2) in condensed form.¹⁶

As mentioned above, I will consider a specific case study (2 Cor. 10:8–11, esp. vv. 8–9) in the hope of demonstrating the effectiveness of the method I am proposing, as well as its significance for the interpretation of Paul’s letters. But before I turn to discuss in detail the various options which have been advocated by scholars for the punctuation of this specific text, and how we might assess the merits of these different options in light of the theory of *côla* and periods, I will first focus on methodological issues.

Specifically, I will begin, first, by asking how ancient readers most likely dealt with non-punctuated manuscripts: namely, according to which criteria they were able to decide where to place silences, where to fall in pitch, where to take a breath, etc. Second, I will look more closely at the definitions of *côla* and periods and propose criteria that can be used to identify them, and then return, third, to explore three different ways of punctuating 2 Cor. 10:8–11, and to assess which of them provides the best fit with the structural elements of *côla* and periods. Finally, I will evaluate the significance of my preferred option for punctuating the text for how we reconstruct its probable meaning.

A word of clarification should be made, however, concerning the usage of ancient rhetoric treatises that will be made in this study, since I will continually refer to them. They are

¹⁴ See below, note 45.

¹⁵ They consider the structuration in *côla* and periods as only the first step of a broader method of sound analysis (Lee and Scott, *op. cit.*, 167–193; Nässelqvist, *op. cit.*, 119–180). In a way, my attempt is more modest, since I am not trying to propose a complete method of sound analysis: I am interested only in the “first step.” However, this focus allows for a deeper reflection on the definitions of *côla* and periods and on the criteria which help to identify them.

¹⁶ The definitions and criteria presented in this article are a first—and simplified—version of those I am currently working on in the context of my doctoral thesis, provisionally entitled “The Colometric Structure of Paul’s Letters” (Université de Lausanne, Switzerland).

regarded as reflecting the conventions of their time—even if differences between theory and practices should not be underestimated. As such, they offer an excellent window into the codes and habits that directed ancient systems of communication. In this study, rhetoric and stylistic treatises will serve as a base for establishing the communication scenario I hypothesize (see under 1.1), the general theory of (oral) punctuation (see points 1.2 and 1.3), as well as the definitions and criteria which allow for an identification of colometric structure (see point 2).

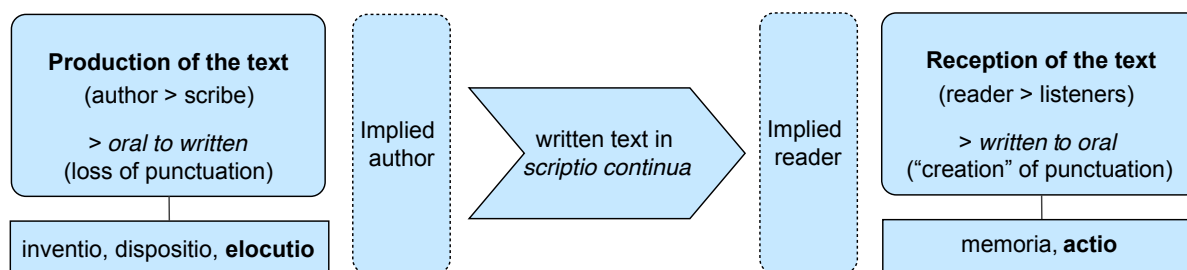
1. How did ancient readers in the Graeco-Roman world deal with a non-punctuated text?

1.1. Antique system of communication

I will begin by examining the ancient system of communication in the Graeco-Roman world with regards to texts which were written down primarily with the intention of being read aloud. As is well known, literacy rates were very low in ancient Graeco-Roman world, including among Pauline communities, meaning that most people could access texts only by listening to recitations performed by a skilled reader.¹⁷ In the below diagram, I have outlined a possible scenario in the case of the oral reception of a given text. To be clear, this diagram should not be taken to mean that public reading (reading aloud before an audience) was the only way of reading in antiquity.¹⁸ My point is rather that most of the texts were composed with an oral delivery in mind, such we can reasonably assume that authors were used to structuring their texts according to conventions which were suited to oral delivery.

¹⁷ The interrelation between orality and literacy in the Graeco-Roman world has attracted the attention of biblical scholars since the 1980's. A turning point can be seen with the publication of W. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), which indeed marked the beginning of a growing awareness and interest of biblical scholars with the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry and Albert Lord (M. Parry, *L'épithète traditionnelle dans Homère*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1928; A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1960; see also J.M. Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, Bloomington, 1995). The works of E. Havelock (*Preface to Plato* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963]); W. Ong (*The Presence of the Word* [New Haven: Yale University, 1967]; Id., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* [London / New York: Routledge, 1982]), and R. Finnegan (*Orality and Literacy: Studies in the Technology of Communication* [Oxford / New York: Blackwell, 1988]), among others, were also noteworthy studies on the interlinks between orality and literacy.

¹⁸ On the different ways of reading in Antiquity, focused on the case of Rome but also more broadly applicable in the context of the Graeco-Roman society, see E. Valette-Cagnac, *La lecture à Rome. Rites et pratiques* (Paris: Belin, 1997).



The first step, the production of the text, begins with the composition by the author. It results in (a) manuscript(s) which is/are ready to be circulated, and so is invariably a process which results in the loss of information: that is, an oral composition which originally contained intonations, stresses, clear distinctions between sentences, etc., is transformed into a silent text written in *scriptio continua* and with no punctuation marks, generally by a scribe who receives the text via dictation.¹⁹ Consequently, at the step of reception, the reader has to supply some of the information which has been lost in the process of writing. Punctuation is one such piece of information which must be resupplied. The job of the reader at the time was therefore much more complex than that of a reader today. In the latter case, the reader is almost always supplied with a text which already provides spaces between words and structures the text according to a system of punctuation marks, indicating the places and the respective importance of breaks, as well as their nature (declarative, interrogative, exclamative). This is addition to the organization of the text into paragraphs. In antiquity, by contrast, it was the reader's job to decide where to put silences, what importance should be assigned to them, and what was their likely nature: in other words, it was the ancient reader's task to supply the punctuation.

1.2. Why no system of punctuation marks?

Many questions arise here: how were ancient readers able to supply punctuation, and according to which criteria did they do so? And to what extent is it possible to remake their analysis and get the same result now? In the specific case of 2 Cor. 10:8–9, what would have likely been the result of their punctuation of the text? In particular, what kind of break did they place between οὐκ αἰσχυρθήσομαι and ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν

¹⁹ This step was, in reality, multifaceted (drafts, copies, corrections, etc.) and should therefore be seen as a multistaged process. See on the specific case of Paul's letters, but also with considerable information concerning the practices of composition in general, E.R. Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

ἐπιστολῶν, if any? The last two questions will be discussed later; I will now focus on the first one.

But to resolve this, a more basic question must first be asked: why was there almost no punctuation in ancient manuscripts?²⁰ Two common and simplistic answers are: 1) it was strictly a matter of cost, since the provision of punctuation would have increased the cost of producing the manuscript; or 2) punctuation marks had not yet been invented at the time. Concerning the first argument of cost: it is clear that placing a few punctuation marks would not have added significantly to the number of sheets which were needed. Moreover, it was even possible to place the marks above the line, so to ensure that the punctuation did not occupy more space. Additionally, it is difficult to imagine that the people who ordered costly manuscripts in vellum, like the Codex Sinaïticus or Codex Vaticanus, did not have enough money to buy the few additional sheets which would have been needed for supplying punctuation marks. Concerning the second argument, even a cursory read of the chapter in the Τέχνη Γραμματική attributed to Dionysius Thrax (probably around 100 BC for this chapter),²¹ which treats the three different kinds of points, shows that punctuation already existed at the time.

In light of the manifold problems with these two possibilities, I suggest an alternative reason for the absence of punctuation, which is both easy and also difficult to understand from our modern point of view. This reason is hinted at in the writings of Aristotle:

that which is written should be easy to read [εὐανάγνωστον] or easy to utter [εὐφραστον], which is the same thing. Now, this is not the case when there is a number of connecting particles, or when the punctuation is hard [μὴ ῥάδιον διαστίξαι], as in the writings of Heraclitus. For it is hard, since it is uncertain to which word another belongs, whether to that which follows or that which precedes; for instance, at the beginning of his composition he says: “Of this reason which exists always men are ignorant” [τοῦ λόγου τοῦδ’ ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι ἄνθρωποι γίνονται], where it is uncertain whether “always” should go with “which exists” or with “are ignorant.”²²

²⁰ The common claim that there is no punctuation at all in ancient manuscripts of the NT, or ancient manuscripts in general, is mistaken. Some of them did contain some punctuation marks (among others, see the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaïticus), although they do not correspond to a unified system and are not systematically placed; on the absence of a unified system of punctuation, see M. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: an Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), pp. 9–19, 65–76

²¹ The date of the treatise is a matter of debate. Chapter 4 (περὶ στιγμῆς), however, is generally recognized as forming part of the oldest material. On this question, see the introduction of J. Lalot, in *La grammaire de Denys le Thrace*, transl. J. Lalot (Paris: CNRS, 1998: 13–40).

²² Aristotle, *Rh.* III, 5, 1407b (trans. J.H. Freese; *Art of Rhetoric*, vol. III; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

This excerpt suggests that a common idea during Aristotle’s time was that a well-composed text should also be easy to read or utter: specifically, it should be easy to punctuate (διαστίξαι). The sentence from Heraclitus is an example of a text which is hard to punctuate correctly, because the term ἀεί could either be understood with ἐόντος or with ἄξύνετοι; in other words, it is not clear if the break is needed before or after ἀεί. What Aristotle does not explicitly state, but which is obvious from the socio-historical context, is that a text should be easy to read or utter without punctuation marks—that is to say that the text had to be easily understood, with a structure which had to appear obvious and clear to the person charged with reading it. This does not mean that the reader would not have experienced some hesitations at different points, and that readers would have always been able to find the correct way to punctuate at first sight. Indeed, reading at first sight seems to have been a rare practice.²³ Owing in the main to the habit of writing in *scriptio continua*, but also to the ideal of good delivery, the correct reading of a text required, in principle, preparatory work by the reader, involving a reflection on how the text should be punctuated.²⁴ But the point remains that, in the mind of ancient rhetoricians, the structure of a text was supposed to be clear enough without punctuation marks that a skilled reader could understand it and deliver the text in a way which closely resembled what the author had in mind. In sum, ancient texts were usually not punctuated because punctuation marks were simply not considered necessary to the understanding of a text—at least in an ideal or theoretical sense.²⁵

1.3. The link between punctuation and the structure in cōla and periods

Returning now to the first question of how ancient readers were able to understand the structure of a text, my hypothesis is that the places where main punctuation signals (breaks, breaths, fall in pitch, etc.) were located corresponded to the boundaries between cōla and/or periods: in other words, to the major places of division within the text. As a result, if we are able to identify cōla and periods, we should be able to reconstitute the places where the original punctuation was placed: namely, the placement of the punctuation which would have

²³ In the *Satyrica of Petronius* (75, 4), we find the anecdote of Trimalchio, who explained that he had kissed a boy not because he was beautiful, but because “he can divide by ten and read a book at sight” (*librum ab oculis legit*). This provides clear evidence that reading at first sight was considered unusual.

²⁴ On the figure of the *lector* and his preparatory work before reading aloud, see Nasselqvist, *op. cit.*, 77–83.

²⁵ The presence in some copies intended for teaching of various marks functioning as reader aids, as well as the development from the 5th century A.D. onwards of *codices distincti*, reflects the difficulties that readers faced and the limits of the ideal described by Aristotle; cf. Parkes, *op. cit.*, 12–14.

been chosen by a skilled reader, according to the conventions of his time. To name but a few points which might justify this hypothesis.

The treatises clearly identify the structure in *côla* as the first answer to the question of how the reader might rest and breathe. Demetrius writes:

Just as poetry is organized by meters (such as half-lines, hexameters, and the like), so too prose is organised and divided by what are called *côla*. These *côla* give a sort of rest to both the speaker and what is actually being said; and they mark out its boundaries at frequent points, since it would otherwise continue at length without limit and simply run the speaker out of breath.²⁶

Here Demetrius explains that prose is structured by *côla*, and that these *côla* serve two goals: to give a sort of rest to the speaker, as well as to the discourse itself. These two goals are related to the constraints of oral delivery: the first one to the need for the reader to breathe (it would otherwise “run the speaker out of breath”), while the second one probably refers to the need for the listeners to have enough time to understand. Similarly, Cicero explains the origin of periodic structure by the limits of the breathing capacity of the speaker: “It was failure or scantiness of breath that originated periodic structure and pauses between words.”²⁷ Quintilian explicitly affirms the link between breathing and *côla* (called *membra* in latin), explaining that breathing is possible at the boundaries between them: “There are short units [*membra*] in all speech, where we can draw breath if we need to.”²⁸

Since punctuation in an oral delivery consists mainly of silences, and the boundaries between *côla* are the places where resting and breathing are possible, it is logical that the places between *côla* are the main places of punctuation during the reading aloud of a given text. They also broadly correspond to those places where we would now place the main punctuation marks—I say “broadly” because modern systems of punctuation marks do not reproduce exactly the punctuation that would have occurred when reading aloud.²⁹

Of all ancient writers, Quintilian arguably provides the most detailed description of the correct way of reading and placing silences and breaths. In vol. 11 of his *Institutes of Oratory*,

²⁶ Demetrius, *Eloc.* 1, trans. D.C. Innes and W. Rhys Roberts [slightly modified].

²⁷ Cicero, *De or.* III, 46.

²⁸ Quintilian, *Inst.* XI, 3, 110.

²⁹ Depending on the language, the placement of punctuation marks is either strongly related to an oral logic (as is the case, for e.g., in French and English), or based more on grammatical grounds without close link to orality (e.g. German, Czech). As a result, we should be careful when speaking of a correspondence between oral punctuation and the placement of punctuation marks.

he discusses the last canon of rhetoric, the *actio*,³⁰ and gives general rules and also concrete examples to help illustrate how a text is meant to be punctuated. He states that breathing – and therefore a short silence—is possible at boundaries between *côla*, as is explicitly affirmed in the quotation above. At the end of a period, a fall in pitch is to be observed so as to mark the end of the meaning, and there is also time for the speaker to take a deeper breath and to rest before beginning the next period.³¹ Besides these two kinds of breaks (called *distinctiones* by Quintilian), suspensions (very short silences) are acceptable within a *côlon* when they are needed to clarify the meaning.³² Although there remain many interpretative difficulties surrounding these passages devoted to punctuation—the sense of the different technical terms is not always clarified and can therefore seem vague to us, additionally the terminology does not seem consistent throughout all of the examples—and without denying the many nuances would have been observed by the speaker, it is nevertheless possible to frame a three-level system of punctuation³³ and to suggest how it might correspond to modern systems of written punctuation.

inside *côlon*: if needed, very short silences (without breath) are possible

> *modern commas*

between *côla*: required silence + if needed a breath

> *modern comma, or sometimes semicolon or colon*

at the end of periods: falling intonation + breath + long silence

> *modern full stop*

³⁰ See *Inst.*, XI,3,30–64 for general considerations regarding pronunciation and delivery, and XI, 3,35–39 for concrete examples. Cf. also *Inst.*, IX,4,67–68.

³¹ Cicero (*De or.* III, 190) also distinguishes between two main kinds of breaks: the *côla* should be separated (*distinguatur*), but the periods should be terminated (*habeat absolutas*).

³² Quintilian, *Inst.* XI, 3, 36–37. On the very short silences within a *côlon*, see also *Inst.* IX, 4, 68.

³³ The difficulties of this passage have often been noted, with scholars disagreeing on the possible link between the system described by Quintilian and the system of three different points described in the Τέχνη Γραμματική of Dionysius of Thrax (chapter 4): “There are three points: final [τελεία], medium [μέση], lower [ὑποστιγμή]. The final point denotes that the thought is complete, the medium point is a sign of where to take breath, the lower point shows that the thought is not yet complete but that something is still lacking” (my translation). For a brief discussion and references, see T.H. Habineck, *The Colometry of Latin Prose* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 47–51.

To move from this comparison to reconstituting the original punctuation of a text, we have to look closer at the definition of *côla* and periods and to seek criteria which might permit us to identify them. It is to this task which I will now turn in point 2.

2. Identifying *côla* and periods: towards definitions and criteria

In the ancient rhetoric and stylistic treatises, the terms *côlon* and period appear in a significant number of passages, frequently in cases where an author cites a portion of a well-known text and then analyzes it in terms of *côla* and periods and comments on the style and appraisal of it. In this sense, the treatises include parts of what might be termed literary criticism. What appears when we look carefully at these examples is that the notions of *côlon* and period elude definition for at least two reasons: first, because they do not correspond to precise syntactic units like clauses or sentences; and second, because there are some variations in the recommendations which the different authors make, with each author having his own particular tendencies when analyzing a text. Nevertheless, there is enough stability between the authors so that we can still speak of the theory of *côla* and periods, and the sheer amount of examples is enough to allow us to frame a modern definition with criteria expressed in modern terms. The method I propose for reconstituting the colometric structure contains three kinds of descriptions, as well as some criteria.

Beginning with the descriptions: *côlon* and period can be characterized in terms of semantics, length and syntax (see the table below for a synthesis). First, description in terms of semantics is commonly found in the treatises. The period is described as a complete thought, which is composed of many *côla* and/or *commata*³⁴:

From the combination of such *κώλων* and *κομμάτων* are formed what are called periods. The period is a combination of *κώλων* and *κομμάτων* which square with the underlying thought in a well-turned manner. For example: “Chiefly because I thought it was in the interest of the state for the law to be repealed, but also for the sake of Chabrias’ boy, I have agreed to speak to the best of my ability in their support.” This three-clause period has a sort of rounding off and compactness at the end.³⁵

³⁴ In this passage, Demetrius also uses the term *comma*: it can be described as a short *côlon* (*Eloc.* 9) or a metrically incomplete one due to its brevity (Quintilian, *Inst.* IX, 4, 122). It is also associated with the vehement style (Demetrius, *Eloc.* 241); according to Cicero, *commata* are to be used like daggers for close-fighting (Cicero, *Or.* 224).

³⁵ Demetrius, *Eloc.* 10 (slightly modified).

While a period is composed of many cōla, the reverse (cōlon as part of a period) is not always true, since a cōlon can also stand on its own without being integrated in a period. Two different kind of cōla should therefore be distinguished, as Demetrius makes clear:

The proper function of such *cōla* is to mark the conclusion of a thought [διάνοια]. Sometimes the *cōlon* forms a complete thought in itself [...] Sometimes, however, the *cōlon* constitutes not a complete thought but just a part of it, while being in itself complete.³⁶

Two different kind of style exist, depending on the way the cōla are combined: that is to say, whether they are found within periods or outside periodic structures. Demetrius calls the former case *κατεστραμμένη ἐρμηνεία*, while the style composed of independent cōla is called *διηρμένη ἐρμηνεία*.³⁷ In what follows, we will focus exclusively on the case where a cōlon is part of a period, since 2 Cor. 10:8–11 exhibits a *κατεστραμμένη* style. So long as we speak only of cōla which take place within a period, a cōlon can be described as an incomplete thought which still makes a sense on its own; or in other words, the sense is complete but the meaning is lacking because it needs the rest of the period.³⁸ A period is, by contrast, a complete thought, that is to say, it has a complete meaning. A good illustration can be found in the example mentioned above (the slashes signal the boundaries between cōla): *μάλιστα μὲν εἵνεκα τοῦ νομίζειν συμφέρειν τῇ πόλει λελύσθαι τὸν νόμον / εἶτα καὶ τοῦ παιδὸς εἵνεκα τοῦ Χαβρίου / ὠμολόγησα τούτοις, ὡς ἂν οἷός τε ὦ, συνερεῖν* (“Chiefly because I thought it was in the interest of the state for the law to be repealed / but also for the sake of Chabrias’ boy / I have agreed to speak to the best of my ability in their support.”) Each of these three cōla makes sense on its own; however, the meaning is completed only at the end of the third cōlon, i.e., when the period comes to its end.

Second, the description of cōlon and period in terms of length is also common in the treatises. Concerning the cōlon, however, no minimum or maximum length is clearly given: it is only claimed that it should neither be too long nor too short.³⁹ However, the examples given and the comments on them allow us to know what was regarded as a normal length, or at least an acceptable length: a “normal” cōlon comprises 10–25 syllables, while a length between 5 and

³⁶ Demetrius, *Eloc.* 2–3 (my translation).

³⁷ On the two styles, see Demetrius, *Eloc.* 12–13 and Cicero, *Or.* 221–226; see also Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* VI, 9, 10–11; and Quintilian, *Inst.* IX, 4, 126.

³⁸ In the *διηρμένη* style, every cōlon corresponds to a short sentence.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Rh.* III, 9, 1409b; Demetrius, *Eloc.* 4.

30 syllables appears to be still acceptable in some cases.⁴⁰ Regarding the period, recommendations in terms of number of *côla* are given, but they vary among the authors. The maximum length recommended by Aristotle (2 *côla*) expanded up to 4 *côla* by Demetrius, while Cicero and Quintilian give it “no maximum”,⁴¹ Some authors also admit the existence of the one-*côlon* period, called *monocôlon*.⁴² The normal length can thus be fixed between 2 and 4 *côla*, while the acceptable length is arguably between 1 and 7 *côla*.

Third, turning to descriptions in terms of syntax, these are not present in the treatises, where *côla* and periods are never described according to grammatical categories. Part of the explanation is that grammar and rhetoric remained separated fields until the Roman imperial period, so that rhetorical treatises do not integrate grammatical theories and terminology.⁴³ However, by looking closely at the many examples, it is possible to identify and list which syntactic units can constitute a *côlon* or a period. Describing the period in terms of syntax is easy, since it corresponds to a sentence (most of the time a complex sentence): that is to say, it designates that which stands between two full stops—which is still relatively flexible. In the examples given in the treatises, a tendency to cut where the syntactical dependence ends can be observed—for example, before a coordinating conjunction when it introduces an element which is not syntactically dependent on what precedes—, so that most of the periods correspond to sentences comprised of syntactically dependent *côla*. To express the syntactic nature of the *côlon* is more complex,⁴⁴ since it does not correspond to any single syntactic unit that exists in our modern grammatical system: most of the time a *côlon* corresponds to a clause, but sometimes it comprises two short clauses, and sometimes only a phrase⁴⁵ (in the

⁴⁰ A 5 syllables-*côlon* would have been considered very short and preferably called a *comma* (short *côlon*); see note 34.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Rh.* III, 9, 1409b 13–15; Demetrius, *Eloc.* 16; Cicero, *Or.* 221–222; Quintilian, *Inst.* IX, 4, 125. However, they all agree on the fact that a period should not be too long because of the breathing of the reader and the understanding by the listeners.

⁴² On the *monocôlon*, see Demetrius, *Eloc.* 17; Quintilian, *Inst.* IX, 4, 124.

⁴³ On this issue, see P. Chiron, “Les *côla* en rhétorique: respiration, sens, esthétique,” *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d’histoires anciennes* LXXXIV (2010/1), pp. 31–50, esp. pp. 38–40.

⁴⁴ As far as I know, the best attempt to describe the syntactical nature of the ancient notion of *côlon* is T.N. Habineck, *op. cit.*; see also E. Fraenkel, *Noch einmal Kolon und Satz* (München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1965).

⁴⁵ This is the main point where my analysis departs from that which is offered by Lee and Scott, *op. cit.*, 169–171 and Nässelqvist, *op. cit.*, 126–132. Both of these works focus on the presence of a verbal element and claim that a *côlon* is always equivalent to a clause (according to a broader definition of “clause,” though, where the verb can also be non-finite or implied). It should also be noted in passing that, in the English translations of the rhetorical treatises, the term “clause” is often used to translate *κῶλον* or *membrum*, which often leads to misunderstanding. For examples, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 6, 18, 3–5, where a noun phrase

majority of cases, a phrase which is qualified by at least one of its dependents, which gives it a kind of semantic completeness).

Descriptions of cōlon and periods

Cōlon (member of a period)	Period
<i>semantic</i>	
incomplete thought but still makes sense on its own	complete thought
<i>length</i>	
normal length: 10–25 syllables acceptable length: 5–30 syllables	normal length: 2–4 cōla acceptable length: 1–7 cōla
<i>syntax</i>	
a cōlon can correspond to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a clause or a combination of short clauses; - a phrase (NP, AP, AdvP, PP, VP) + at least one dependent which qualifies it; - a combination of phrases. 	a period corresponds to a sentence (usually a complex sentence)

functioning as a subject is called a cōlon (Οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ τῶν ἐνθάδε ἤδη εἰρηκότων), or *Comp.* 6, 9, 4–5, where a noun phrase associated with a prepositional phrase, both of them functioning as indirect objects, is clearly described as a cōlon (τοῖς πράξασι παρὰ τῶν ἀκουσάντων); see also Cicero, *Or.* 223, where *Cur de perfugis nostris copias comparant contra nos?* is described as a short period with two *membra*, meaning that the prepositional phrase *de perfugis nostris* associated with the interrogative *cur* is considered a cōlon. Some passages in Paul's letters are difficult to analyse if we rely on a definition of cōlon as always equivalent to a clause; see e.g. 2 Cor. 10:1 (αὐτὸς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς διὰ τῆς πραύτητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὃς κατὰ πρόσωπον μὲν ταπεινὸς ἐν ὑμῖν ἀπὸν δὲ θαρρῶ εἰς ὑμᾶς): here, a division in clauses would result in a 36 syllables long cōlon (αὐτὸς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς διὰ τῆς πραύτητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ), while it is more harmonious to place a break after ὑμᾶς and thus read the prepositional phrase διὰ τῆς πραύτητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ as a second cōlon (note the exact same length, 13 syllables, thus created between the two first cōla, and the repetition of ὑμᾶς at the end of the first and third cōla).

These three kinds of descriptions should be regarded as minimal descriptions, as a cōlon or period has to fulfil the three of them at the same time. But even combined, they are often insufficient for identifying the periods and especially the distinctions between the cōla within it. This is the reason why other criteria are needed—criteria which are not necessary elements but rather elements whose presence can influence or confirm the analysis. Indeed, some elements are often present in the recommendations and examples given in the treatises and can thus serve as criteria to delimit the boundaries between cōla and/or periods. In particular, there are many parallels that typically occur between cōla. Here is a non-exhaustive list:

- antithesis;
- equal length between cōla, namely approximately the same number of syllables (*isocōlon*);
- the same sounds at the beginning or end of cōla (anaphora, rhymes);
- similar syntactic structure;
- similar rhythms at the end of cōla.⁴⁶

The idea is that a division which would enable one or sometimes two of these parallels to appear is to be preferred over a division which does not.

3. Application to 2 Cor. 10:8–11

Turning now to 2 Cor. 10:8–11, to what extent does the theory articulated above help in deciding which is the best choice of punctuation? In what follows, I will present the three possibilities of punctuation that are used by scholars, but will rearrange them in cōla and periods—each cōlon is placed on a separate line, and each paragraph represents a period—and evaluate which of them fits best with the descriptions and criteria presented above.

⁴⁶ In what follows, I will not rely on rhythmical criteria. It is difficult to determine whether, or not, the distinction of vowel length still existed in spoken Koine Greek in the second part of the 1st century (see G. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* [Malden, MA / Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd edn.], pp. 160–170). As a result, it is impossible to provide a solid analysis of the rhythmical patterns in the text.

1st option

⁸ Ἐάν τε γὰρ περισσώτερόν τι καυχῆσωμαι περὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἡμῶν
ἧς ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν
οὐκ αἰσχυρθήσομαι.

⁹ Ἴνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν

¹⁰ (ὅτι αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν, φησὶν, βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραὶ

ἢ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος)

¹¹ τοῦτο λογιζέσθω ὁ τοιοῦτος

ὅτι οἰοί ἐσμεν τῷ λόγῳ δι' ἐπιστολῶν ἀπόντες

τοιοῦτοι καὶ παρόντες τῷ ἔργῳ.

Here we have two periods, the first one with three *côla*, ending straight after οὐκ αἰσχυρθήσομαι, and the second one with seven *côla*, beginning with verse 9 (“Ἴνα μὴ δόξω...”). Verse 9 is regarded as a protasis, verse 11 as an apodosis,⁴⁷ and verse 10 is to be understood as an explanatory parenthesis. Although it is not the most popular option among scholars, it has been regularly advocated during the last few decades, and is often mentioned by scholars as at least representing a sensible approach.⁴⁸

Following Harvey, a possible loose translation would be: “Lest I should seem to be relying on letters to frighten you into obedience (for this is what there are accusing me of), let anyone who thinks this take note of the fact that what I say in my letters I carry out in practice.”⁴⁹ The warning of verse 11 would thus be a means for Paul to avoid what is expressed in verse 9 and explained by the mention of the rumor in verse 10: that is to say, if we follow Harvey’s suggestion, it would seem as if he is using the letters to frighten at distance because he is unable to frighten into obedience when present.

⁴⁷ In a conditional sentence, “protasis” and “apodosis” are the technical terms used to refer, respectively, to the dependent clause expressing the condition, and to the main clause expressing the consequence.

⁴⁸ Advocated by R.P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Waco: Word books, 1986), pp. 310–311; A.E. Harvey, *Renewal Through Suffering: A Study of 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 96; D.E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (Nashville Ten.: Broadman & Holman, 1999), p. 445; or more recently Guthrie, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2015), pp. 481–482; Mentioned as a sensible approach by, among others, M.J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich. / Milton Keynes: Eerdmans / Paternoster, 2005), pp. 696–97; R.S. Schellenberg, *Rethinking Paul’s Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetorics and 2 Corinthians 10–13* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), p. 268.

⁴⁹ A.E. Harvey, *Renewal Through Suffering*, *op. cit.*, p. 96, n. 13.

Besides the fact that the construction *protasis introduced by ἵνα / apodosis* is difficult without the presence of a connective such as δέ or καί,⁵⁰ this interpretation is problematic because it results in an odd disjuncture between the protasis and the apodosis: “In order that I should not seem... let such a one consider.”⁵¹ In fact the subject of verse 11, ὁ τοιοῦτος, would have its antecedent in the parenthesis of verse 10. Such a formulation would be, at the grammatical level, awkward.

Additionally, this option does not fit well with what is recommended in the treatises. Indeed, a period with 7 cōla would be considered too long, with the risk of making the reader run out of breath and at the same time of complicating the listeners’ understanding. Long parentheses are also not recommended because of the risk, in the context of reading aloud, of confusing the meaning.⁵² This should lead us to seek a different option.

2nd option

⁸ Ἐάν τε γὰρ περισσώτερόν τι καυχῆσώμαι περὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἡμῶν
ἧς ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν
οὐκ αἰσχυρθήσομαι.

⁹ Ἴνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν.

¹⁰ Ὅτι αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν, φησὶν, βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραὶ
ἢ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος.

¹¹ Τοῦτο λογιζέσθω ὁ τοιοῦτος
ὅτι οἳ οἶοῖ ἐσμεν τῷ λόγῳ δι’ ἐπιστολῶν ἀπόντες
τοιούτοι καὶ παρόντες τῷ ἔργῳ.

⁵⁰ See J. Héring, *La seconde épître de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens* (Neuchâtel / Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1949), p. 72. Note the addition of δέ after ἵνα in Chrysostom’s homily on 2 Cor. (*Hom. 2 Cor. 22.2*) and of *autem* in the Vulgate.

⁵¹ This is the paraphrase proposed by Schellenberg so as to highlight the problem. Note, however, that he does not consider this option to be absurd (*Rethinking Paul’s Rhetorical Education, op. cit.*, p. 268).

⁵² “Understanding is also often impeded by a parenthesis (a device which both orators and historians frequently use in order to insert a thought in the middle of a sentence), unless the insertion is short.” (Quintilian, *Inst. VIII, 2, 5*)

Here we have a first period (verse 8) with 3 cōla, a second one (verse 9) with one cōlon (so a period called a *monocōlon*), then a period with 3 cōla (verse 10) and again the last one with 3 cōla (verse 11). Again, ἵνα is regarded as introducing a new sentence.

This option necessitates that something be supplied before ἵνα, for example θέλω, which would give the sense “I do not want to seem ...,” or τοῦτο λέγω, “I say this so that I may not seem ...”. This is the choice made by the editors of the NA²⁸ and UBS⁵, and consequently, the one that is privileged in recent translations. It is also the most frequently advocated option by commentators.⁵³ Although there is no consensus concerning the exact meaning which would result from such punctuation, the general idea is that terrifying the Corinthians with the letters is not at all Paul’s intention and so verse 9 would be a way to reassure the Corinthians: “I do not want you to think that I am trying to terrify you by letters!”

However, to my mind this is not yet the best choice. Besides the fact that a verb has to be supplied before ἵνα, it results in an abrupt end to the first period: indeed, we would have a first period beginning with 2 long cōla and then ending with a very short one (οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι, 6 syllables), a layout that Cicero highly recommends we avoid.⁵⁴ Of course it could be argued that this abrupt end is deliberate for stylistic purpose or to stress the absence of shame. However, we should still see if a more obvious option can be found.

3rd option

⁸ Ἐάν τε γὰρ περισσώτερόν τι καυχῆσώμαι περὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἡμῶν
ἧς ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν
οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι, ⁹ ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν.

⁵³ NIV (2011); ESV (2016); SEG 21 (2007); TOB (2010). For commentaries, see A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), p. 281; C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Black, 1982), p. 259; M. Carrez, *La deuxième épître de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, Genève: Labor et Fides, 1987), p. 203; M. Thrall, *A critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 626–629; J. Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 157; Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, *op. cit.*, pp. 695–698; E. Grässer, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther*, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), pp. 96–97. Among the recent translations, note the exception of KJV (“I should not be ashamed: That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.”), which is easy to explain since it is based on the *Textus Receptus*, where a raised point is placed between verses 8 and 9.

⁵⁴ “If they [the *membra*] are shorter at the end, this makes a break in the periodic structure of the words [...]. Consequently the later clauses must either be equal to the preceding ones, and the last ones to the first, or they must be longer, which is even better and more pleasing.” (Cicero, *De Or.*, III, 48).

¹⁰ Ὅτι αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν, φησὶν, βαρεῖται καὶ ἰσχυραὶ
ἢ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος.

¹¹ Τοῦτο λογιζέσθω ὁ τοιοῦτος
ὅτι οἳ ἐσμὲν τῷ λόγῳ δι' ἐπιστολῶν ἀπόντες
τοιοῦτοι καὶ παρόντες τῷ ἔργῳ.

This is the option which seems to me best. I propose to regard this passage as consisting of three periods. Each of them is composed of three cōla. Let us focus on the first period: the three cōla are well balanced, all of them having almost the same length (23 syllables for the first, 21 for the second, and 24 for the third one). In addition, the end of these three cōla all rhyme, since they produce the same sound -ῶν (ἡμῶν, ὑμῶν, ἐπιστολῶν). These two points make the first period easy to utter and harmonious. Due to the length of the cōla, a breath is welcome between each of them. At the end of the third cōlon (verse 9), a fall in pitch can be imagined to mark the end of the period and so the end of its meaning, associated with a longer silence which permits the speaker to rest and the listeners to assimilate what has just been said.⁵⁵

Although it is obviously the best and easiest option from a grammatical point of view, this option is the least popular among scholars,⁵⁶ and is regarded by many as absurd. The reason why most of scholars are so reluctant to consider this option is that this way of punctuating implies a relation of finality between verses 8 and 9: namely, that verse 9 would be the purpose or result clause of verse 8. And it is often stated that there is simply no logical connection between Paul's refusal to be ashamed and his willingness to not appear as if he terrifies the Corinthians by letters.⁵⁷ However, is it really so difficult to see a logical

⁵⁵ Additionally, a very short break is, in my opinion, necessary inside the third cōlon (see the comma between οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι and ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν), in order to clarify the meaning: without this short break, it could be understood that the shame, and not the absence of it, is the means for Paul to avoid seeming as if terrifies the Corinthians through letters, which makes no sense.

⁵⁶ It was, however, advocated by J. Héring, *La seconde épître de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens* (Neuchâtel / Paris: Delachaux & Niestle, 1958), p. 80; R. Bultmann, *Der Zweite Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), p. 191; F. Young and D. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 272 and more recently by F.J. Long, *2 Corinthians: a Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2015), p. 189. These scholars then evinced major variations regarding the meaning of the text.

⁵⁷ See for example Schellenberg, *op. cit.*, 267: "There simply is no logical connection between Paul's refusal to be ashamed and the purpose or result clause that follows."

connection between verses 8 and 9? Let us turn, in point 4, to examine whether the punctuation proposed (the 3rd option) can make sense within the context of the whole passage.

4. Is this punctuation consistent with the meaning of the text?

Here is the translation that I propose, with the arrangement in cōla and periods made explicit:

⁸ If⁵⁸ I do boast somewhat more about our authority
which the Lord gave for your edification and not for your destruction
I shall not be ashamed,⁹ lest I may seem as if I am terrifying you by letters.

¹⁰ For his letters, it is said, are weighty and mighty
but his bodily presence is weak
and his speech is contemptible.

¹¹ Such a person should understand this
that such as we are in word by letters when absent
such we will be when present in deed.

In verses 8 and 9, Paul probably alludes to his next visit, because οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι (v. 8) is a future. He plans to boast about his authority—he specifies that it was given to him by the Lord—and he refuses to be ashamed about that, ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν (v. 9), literally “so that I may not seem as if I am terrifying you by letters.” δοκέω has here an intransitive sense: “seem” or “give the appearance of,” and ὡς ἂν can be translated literally by “as if.” The issue is thus one of perception or judgment. This formulation already indicates that Paul denies what comes next, but that it is at the same time something he is either accused of or might be accused of. The accusation he tries to prevent or refute, verse 9, is ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν, so “terrify [the Corinthians] with [his] letters” or less literally, “using the letters to terrify [the Corinthians].”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ I do not translate γάρ because I cannot find a corresponding term in English. “For” seems inappropriate, because I think that γάρ introduces here neither a cause nor an explanation for what precedes, but is rather a discourse marker without meaning, whose function is to signal the beginning of a new period.

⁵⁹ ἐκφοβέω means to cause intense fear or terror (the prefix ἐκ- has probably an intensive force; see Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 696), and should thus not be translated *frighten*, as is often the case, but rather with *terrify*.

Why is Paul speaking about terror which is or may be induced by his letters? Namely, because a rumor was circulating about him among the Corinthians. This rumor, reported in verse 10, is introduced by a ὅτι which indicates the reason for Paul's concern: it is a rumor that the Corinthians might think that he is using letters to terrify. It stands as follows: *his letters are weighty and mighty, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is contemptible*. The first comment (his letters are βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραὶ) can be considered as either a positive concession (*yes, his letters are weighty and strong... however, his bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible*), or already something negative (*first, his letters are tyrannical and aggressive, and additionally his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible*), depending on the way we understand the terms βαρὺς and ἰσχυρός, which can have both positive and negative meanings.⁶⁰ In any case, the focus of verse 10 is not on the terror or potential terror induced by Paul's letters, but on the *inconsistency* of Paul: that is to say, the difference between his appearance through letters and his real behavior when present. Now, the idea expressed in verse 9, that Paul is using the letters to terrify the Corinthians at distance, appears to be either a simple reformulation of the rumor, or, more probably, a potential reinterpretation of it that Paul wishes to prevent—in this sense, the ambiguity of βαρὺς and ἰσχυρός is perhaps deliberate, leaving the door open to the reinterpretation of the rumor in terms of *terror* (verse 9, ἐκφοβεῖν).

This is precisely the type of interpretation that Paul wishes to prevent in verses 8 to 9. But he does not plan to achieve this by taking a nicer approach in his letters. His strategy is different: he decides to boast about his authority and he refuses to be ashamed of that during his next visit (so he will keep boasting about his authority when present). Why? Because that which he wishes to refute—and this is something which many scholars, in my opinion, have failed to see—is not primary the accusation of writing tyrannical, aggressive or terrifying letters, but more the associated idea that his authority is not authentic, and thus that the strength of his letters is only a dishonest means to maintain a usurped (that is to say non-christological, κατὰ σάρκα)⁶¹ power. In fact, I personally think that he does not really care if some of the Corinthians might be afraid by his letters. The issue is not to seem nice and to avoid

⁶⁰ BDAG 167 (βαρὺς) and 483–84 (ἰσχυρός); ThDNT, vol. I: 556–58 (βαρὺς) and vol. III: 397–402 (ἰσχυρός). The meaning of these terms in 2 Cor. 10:10 is one of the main points of debate among scholars and is often discussed in the commentaries.

⁶¹ This is precisely the accusation reported a few verses before, in 10:2: *I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world* (my translation); see also, immediately before the passage, 10:7, where Paul feels the need to claim that he is *Christ's* (καθὼς αὐτὸς Χριστοῦ, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς).

appearing intimidating, but rather to appear as a strong apostle who has received authority of divine origin (verse 8): in other words, the issue concerns his status as an apostle.⁶² In fact, being ashamed to claim his authority during his next visit would only prove that the rumor about his inconsistency and his weakness in presence is indeed true, and additionally to allow the Corinthians to think that he is using the letters to terrify at a distance in order to maintain his usurped authority (cf. verse 9). I think we have here the logical link between verses 8 and 9: the boasting about his authority in Christ and the refusal to be ashamed about it are in fact the means by which Paul plans to prevent an accusation (real or potential)⁶³ based on the rumor reported in verse 10. The ἵνα is thus to be understood according to its primary function, as establishing a relation of finality between what precedes and what follows it; and there is no need to look further for a grammatically more complicated construction.

Turning now to verse 11, Paul writes: *Such a person should understand this, that such as we are in word by letters when absent, such will we be when present in deed.* This time, he directly addresses ὁ τοιοῦτος, who is the same person or group of persons which spread the rumor. The introduction of verse 11, “let this one think...,” makes the whole verse sound like a threat against this person or group. The one who considers Paul as too authoritative or even terrorizing with his letters is warned that he has good reasons to be afraid: Paul promises that he will be exactly the same in presence! This idea of threat fits well with the terms βαρύς and ἰσχυρός as potentially implying the connotation “tyrannical” and “aggressive.” Furthermore, it does not conflict with the broader context. Indeed, it confirms what is said a few verses before, in 10:2: *I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we walk according to the standards of this world* (my translation).⁶⁴ Paul makes clear that he plans to be bold during his next visit against some who accuse him of walking according to the flesh—and that is precisely what the gossipers who spread the rumor reported in verse 10 are accusing him of.

In 13:10 (*Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given to me to edification, and not*

⁶² See 2 Cor. 10:2–4, 13–14; 11:5; 12:1–6,12; 13:2–4.

⁶³ The extent to which the accusation of verse 9 is already included in the rumor of verse 10 is impossible to determine: do the persons who spread the rumor accuse Paul of using the letters to terrify? Or does Paul himself interpret the rumor in this way? Or is it, in Paul’s mind, only a potential reinterpretation of the rumor that he wishes to prevent? Actually, there is even no guarantee that the rumor reported in verse 10 corresponds to an actual rumor which was circulating among the Corinthian community.

⁶⁴ δέομαι δὲ τὸ μὴ παρὼν θαρρῆσαι τῇ πεποιθήσει ἢ λογίζομαι τολμῆσαι ἐπὶ τινας, τοὺς λογιζομένους ἡμᾶς ὡς κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦντας.

to destruction [my translation]),⁶⁵ Paul says that he does not want to act in a severe way during his next visit; but in saying this he also affirms that he is able to be harsh and that he will not hesitate to use it if needed. Here, he does not address a special group of persons within the community, as was the case for 10:2 and 10:11, but rather the whole community, like in 10:8–9. The threat to use harshness is not directed only against a special group, but against the whole community. The affirmation of the divine origin of Paul’s authority and the purpose of it (for edification, not for destruction) is reminiscent of what was already expressed in 10:8. But this time, he does not claim only his plan to boast about this authority, but goes further by expressing its potential use as an instrument of harshness—even if, as in 10:2, he says that it is not what he wants. In my opinion, the potential use of his authority as an instrument of harshness (10:2 and 13:10) against the Corinthian community, and not only against a small group of individuals, confirms that the concern of Paul in 10:9 is not at all to avoid terrifying them. While being terrifying is perhaps not his goal, the warnings or threats of 10:2 and 13:10 make clear that he does not care so much about the fact that the Corinthians might be afraid of his letters, or more generally of his behavior. In absence as well as in presence, he is ready not only to boast about his authority but also to use it with harshness, if necessary.

Conclusion

In a context where biblical interpretation tends more and more to take into account the complex relation between orality and literacy in the Graeco-Roman world, including the fact that most texts were intended to be read aloud and listened to, exegetes have to deal with the oral dimension of NT texts. This notably implies examining their aural characteristics: in other words, the point is to understand how the oral dimension of a text influences on its composition, including its micro-structure. Specifically, it is necessary to review traditional views concerning the quasi-absence of punctuation in ancient NT manuscripts, and to consider the possibility that this is closely linked to ancient habits and constraints related both to style (*elocutio*) and delivery (*actio*). Such conventions are precisely described and illustrated in rhetoric and stylistic treatises of the Graeco-Roman world, which present a theory of structuring texts based on prosodic units called *côla* and *periods*. Given the cultural context in which NT texts were written, there is every reason to think that these are also

⁶⁵ Διὰ τοῦτο ταῦτα ἀπὸν γράφω, ἵνα παρὼν μὴ ἀποτόμως χρήσωμαι κατὰ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἣν ὁ κύριος ἔδωκέν μοι εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν.

structured in a colometric way; the close examination of texts, including 2 Cor 10:8–11, tends to confirm this assumption. Regarding the micro-structure, it is obvious that exegetes cannot blindly rely on what is suggested in critical editions, but should always question the proposed punctuation and envisage other possibilities. However, I suggest that this is not enough for interpreters to argue for an option that is grammatically possible and makes sense in the context. In fact, there are sometimes different options that are correct from a grammatical point of view and, when this is the case, exegetes are left to subjectively consider the most probable “meaning.” The problem is that the chosen option appears to be influenced not only by traditional interpretations, but also by the personal conception of the interpreters: that is, in the absence of other criteria, exegetes tend to choose the option that is compatible with the meaning they expect to find in the text. This last point is especially obvious in the case of 2 Cor. 10:8–11, an example that also illustrates how a colometric approach can shed new light on old debates.

In my opinion, the suggested meaning for 2 Cor. 10:8–11, based on the punctuation that I defended in light of the colometric structure – i.e., comma at the end of verse 8, then full point at the end of verse 9 –, makes far better sense than the other suggestions because it corresponds well to the broader context of chapters 10–13 (cf. in particular 10:2 and 13:10). Additionally, it is much more logical from a grammatical point of view, to the extent that it is difficult to understand why most commentators reject it so firmly. A possible explanation of this surprising fact resides in scholars’ conception of Paul’s personality. In fact, a close logical link between vv. 8 and 9 (comma) does suggest that Paul saw no problem if his letters were considered severe and somewhat frightening. This portrait arguably conflicts with a modern trend of considering severity and use of force to be a negative trait. In this regard, the meaning that is facilitated by the stronger punctuation, which removes the logical link between vv. 8 and 9 (*I do not want to terrify you with my letters!*), is somewhat more comfortable for modern readers. It is also worth saying at this point that former editions of the NA (at least the 25th ed.) proposed another choice of punctuation for this passage, with a comma between vv. 8 and 9 and a full stop at the end of v. 9: that is to say, exactly the same suggestion as the one I am proposing here. The 26th ed. introduced the change,⁶⁶ which was kept in 27th and 28th eds., thus influencing most of the recent translations, and probably some commentators, too. For example, the French Segond edition first proposed (until the 1979 edition, included): “je ne saurais en avoir honte, afin que je ne paraisse pas vouloir vous

⁶⁶ The 25th ed. was published in 1963, and the 26th ed. in 1979. Unfortunately, I was not able to access the former editions to see if other punctuation changes occurred.

intimider par mes lettres,” but the comma was changed into a semicolon in the further version, in 2002 (“je n’en aurais pas honte; mais je ne veux pas paraître vous intimider par mes lettres”)—probably because of the change which occurred in the NA 26th ed. This later became a full stop in the final edition (2007): “je n’en aurai pas honte. De fait, je ne veux pas avoir l’air de vous intimider par mes lettres.”⁶⁷ This presents some of the best evidence of the impact of punctuation marks in critical editions on subsequent translations, and thus also on the understanding of the text by all those who read it. More generally, this example also demonstrates how the personal view of exegetes can influence the interpretation, and illustrates how colometric analysis can contribute to debates.

As a general consequence on exegesis, I suggest that NT texts can no longer be approached without a look at their colometric structure. In fact, the traditional “literate” approach of micro-structure and punctuation, that relies mainly on grammar and “meaning,” appears to be insufficient in regards to the oral dimension of such texts. In addition, as was shown with the example of 2 Cor 10:8–11, such a “method” is in the end dependent on what scholars expect to find in the text. In this context, colometric analysis is welcome both as a way to take into account the oral dimension of NT texts, and as a safeguard that could prevent exegetes from bringing their own assumptions to the reading of a text. I suggest, therefore, that the method of colometric analysis should be developed further as an additional tool in debates concerning micro-structure and punctuation. Of course, it is not a totalizing solution which would allow us to determine with certainty how Pauline letters or other NT texts were meant to be punctuated. Moreover, for most of passages, this would probably not change the interpretation, but only refine the understanding of the micro-structure as well as highlight some stylistic tendencies of their authors. Yet, for some other passages, such as for example 2 Co 10:8–11, the colometric analysis can play a crucial role, since it impacts on how the text should be structured and understood. Such a method could thus make a significant contribution to present scholarly debates, and should be considered as an additional way to approach issues related to the punctuation of NT texts.

⁶⁷ Note also the change from conditional (1979: “je ne saurais”, 2002: “je n’en aurais”) to indicative (future) mood (2007: “je n’en aurai”).