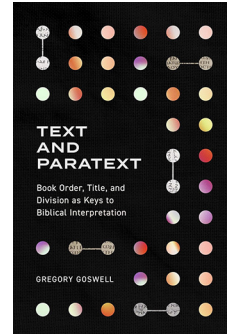


## Book Review

Greg Goswell.

*Text and Paratext: Book Order, Title, and Division  
as Keys to Biblical Interpretation*  
Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022. 256 pp.  
£22.42 ISBN: 9781683596110.

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One of the most promising avenues of biblical manuscripts today is the study of the biblical text as it appears within its material context, known as new philology. Many researchers around the world aim to understand how the text was transmitted as part of a codicological eco-system that cannot be ignored and superseded by our own projected views. In this respect, Professor Greg Goswell of Christ College (Australia) has published the new study on *Text and Paratext*. The objective of this book is to introduce the shape of the canon, as it appears in the manuscripts that survive today. A reader of the book title would expect to find a survey of both textual and paratextual features in ancient biblical manuscripts. However, the author limits his scope to book order, title, and division as keys to biblical interpretation. This led me to wonder what was really meant by “paratext” in the title. According to Goswell himself, a paratext “may be defined as everything in a text *other than words*, that is to say, those elements that are adjoined to the text but are not part of the text itself if ‘text’ is limited strictly to the words” (p. 1). This definition strikes me as inaccurate. A paratext is by definition a *text*, even if it is a secondary text,

being supplementary to the main (running) text, yet it cannot be reduced to symbols or structures (division). Therefore, the book continues to define paratext as the order of the books and their respective divisions (pp. 180-2). Goswell even adds a footnote to this definition, in which he quotes Martin Wallraff and Patrick Andrist’s definition of paratext, being “all contents in biblical manuscripts except the biblical text itself”<sup>1</sup> which is very different from what Goswell says.

The book is divided into three parts corresponding to the canonical structure, book titles, and textual divisions. Under each part, Goswell surveys the main aspects of the Old and New Testament books in order, concluding every chapter with guidelines for interpretation. These guidelines are particularly helpful as they enable the reader to see the relevance of the studied themes of canon, order, titles, and book divisions for contemporary application, and how to negotiate what is found in ancient manuscripts with modern scholarly views. This practice

1 Wallraff, M., & Andrist, P. (2015). Paratexts of the Bible: A New Research Project on Greek Textual Transmission. *Early Christianity*, 6(2): 237–243, at 239.

justifies Goswell's very important statement in the beginning of the book: "every Bible is a Study Bible" (p. 4). This study does not go into detail regarding the diversity of manuscript witnesses, but it offers an essential and handy tool for students to familiarise themselves with the aforementioned themes, and how to use them in their own study of the Bible. In this respect, and within the limitations of its scope, it is a welcome book particularly for those who teach Biblical modules.