Helps for Readers in Manuscripts of the New Testament:
An Ancient Resource for Modern Translators

Simon Crisp*

In his important survey of “Books and Readers in the Early Church”, Harry Gamble observes that most studies of early Christian texts – and pre-eminently of course the New Testament – focus their attention on matters of content, history and theology. While this is hardly surprising given the importance of the message conveyed in these documents, it remains the case that “it is the physical presentation of the text that is most immediately evident and effective for its readers”. 1) Gamble indeed goes further than this, affirming that

The failure to consider the extent to which the physical medium of the written word contributes to its meaning—how its outward aspects inform the way a text is approached and read—perpetuates a largely abstract, often unhistorical, and even anachronistic conception of early Christian literature and its transmission.

One aspect of this is the physical form of the manuscript itself (papyrus or vellum, codex or roll), another however is the form in which the text is presented: how many letters to the line, how many lines to the page, how many and what kind of punctuation marks, what sort of annotations and other helps for the reader may have been included in the manuscript by the scribe.

Lest it should be thought that this is an esoteric matter of interest only to palaeographers or codicologists, it is worth reminding ourselves that readers in antiquity were no less accustomed than their modern counterparts to reading texts in the form of editions which included various kinds of additional material.

* United Bible Societies Director of Translation Services.
So far as the New Testament is concerned, the amount of such material increased steadily as the texts were copied and recopied, and became an integral feature of the minuscule manuscripts of the Byzantine period. In view of all this it is perhaps surprising that such ‘helps for readers’ have not received more attention from scholars – and virtually none from Bible translators. The only recent attempt to systematise this material is the 1955 M.Th. dissertation by Harold Oliver which remains unpublished,\(^2\) and this in turn relies heavily on the labours of von Soden and his team of assistants more than fifty years earlier.\(^3\) Two articles on NT text division have been published in the series *Pericope: Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity*,\(^4\) and two papers on systems of text delimitation in the Gospels and Pauline corpus respectively were read at the UBS Triennial Translation Workshop in 2003.\(^5\)

It might be useful to begin with a short – and selective – inventory of the various helps for readers which we encounter in manuscripts of the New Testament, before focussing in more detail on some which may be of particular interest for Bible translators.

As is well known, the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament are written in so-called continuous script, with hardly any breaks between words and with very limited punctuation. In this respect the New Testament documents are not unique, but follow the normal pattern for ancient Greek manuscript writing.\(^6\)

---


However quite early in the transmission history of the New Testament the scribes began to insert spaces between certain words, presumably as an aid to correct public reading of the text (this phenomenon is found to some extent even in the early Papyrus 46 of the Pauline Epistles). We also find rudimentary attempts – for example in the great majuscule manuscripts of the fourth century – to follow the classical Greek system of superscript, subscript and medial dots to indicate pauses of different levels of significance. By the time of the proliferation of Byzantine minuscule manuscripts (approximately from the tenth century onwards) the use of word breaks and punctuation dots had become a more stable and consistent part of the transmission process.

The use of punctuation dots in particular to mark logical pauses of different kinds may be related to a more systematic way of marking sense divisions in ancient texts, a phenomenon known as colometry. This is similar in some ways to the more formal division of the text into segments of equal length (stichoi) as a means of monitoring the completeness of the copying process, but differs from it in its emphasis on logical sense units rather than on arithmetically calculated segments of text.7) It is evident that the marking of such divisions in the text – whether by arranging the text itself in logical sense units, or by indicating the logical breaks in running text by raised dots and thereby saving valuable space – not only provides the person reading the text with practical assistance in deciding when best to pause for breath, but also offers invaluable information about the way in which the ancient readers understood the structure of the text.

In addition to such ways of organising and formatting the text itself, scribes (and later editors/correctors) also made use of the margins of their manuscripts to indicate breaks in the text, particularly those required for public reading of the text in liturgical services. Indications of the beginning (archē) and end (telos) of each lection (liturgical pericope) were included in the text itself, either between the lines or in the margin, together with a note of the date in the church calendar when the marked section was to be read.8) The logical end point of this process,

---

8) This information is not included in either Nestle-Aland or the UBS Greek New Testament, but can be found (for a limited set of manuscripts) in the apparatus to Reuben Swanson’s series of aligned readings *Greek New Testament Manuscripts* (Sheffield: William Carey International...
which was indeed reached during the Byzantine period, was for manuscripts themselves to be arranged not in the order of the running text of the New Testament, but in the order in which the individual passages were read over the course of the church year.  

There are several (at least three) other systems of text division which are frequently found in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The Ammonian-Eusebian sections for the Gospels are well known through their inclusion in manual editions of the Greek New Testament: they are indicated in the inner margin of the Nestle-Aland edition, and both the canon tables themselves and the explanation of them in Eusebius’ Letter to Carpianus are reproduced in the Introduction to the edition.

A double system of division of the text into sections is found in the important majuscule Codex Vaticanus. While the Gospels follow a single numbered sequence of sections, the Acts and Epistles have two concurrent sets of numbering, which makes for rather a complicated picture. The matter is further complicated by the fact that in what is generally considered to be the older system of divisions the numbering of the sections assumes that Hebrews is placed between Galatians and Ephesians, whereas in the manuscript itself it is in fact found after 2 Thessalonians. We must assume therefore that the section numbers were copied from a different exemplar which had this extremely unusual order of books.

The most widespread system of text division (sometimes indeed called the “official chapter-divisions of the Greek Church”) is the one known as

---

9) According to the latest figures, lectionary manuscripts comprise 2432 out of a total of 5735 manuscripts containing all or (almost always) part of the New Testament (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 50).

10) A succinct account of the Ammonian-Eusebian sections is given in Simon Wong, “Ancient Windows”, 70f.

11) The same divisions are found in the fragmentary sixth century palimpsest Codex Zacynthius.

12) The later volumes in Swanson’s series *New Testament Greek Manuscripts* (see note 8 above) include a table giving the order of the NT books in the manuscripts which he used for his edition.

kephalaia titloi (“chapters and titles”). This system consists of two components: firstly a sequence of numbered sections, and secondly a set of brief titles more or less equivalent to what we now call section headings. The section headings were written in the margin in earlier manuscripts, but in later sources are gathered together at the beginning (or occasionally at the end) of each book. As the concept of the New Testament (or at least of its major constituent parts) as an edition became more pervasive in the tradition, the section headings became one component of an increasingly stable set of ancillary materials (book introductions, biographical prologues, lists of lections and quotations, etc).

With the system of kephalaia titloi, we move from items intended to help with the process of reading, to a broader category of materials intended to help the reader in study and interpretation of the text. Let us now turn to the question of the value of this kind of material for the task of Bible translation.

Perhaps the most promising area of research in this area concerns the significance of the various kinds of text division. Bible translators are naturally concerned with the way in which the text is structured, so that the narrative or argumentative structure of the original texts may be accurately conveyed to the readers of the translation. There now exists a growing body of work on the linguistic analysis of the structure of the New Testament text, and this may usefully be complemented by studies of the ancient systems of text division which have a great deal to tell us about how early readers (or at least readers with authority in the church) perceived this structure.

More specifically, it may also be the case that the information on titloi can contribute to the elaboration of section headings which have become an important component of many modern Bible translations.

14) An example is reproduced in Metzger and Ehrman, Text of the New Testament, figure 6 on 37 (titlos written in the top margin).

15) The kephalaia numbers are indicated in the inner margin of the Nestle-Aland manual edition of the Greek New Testament (and explained in the Introduction to the volume). The titloi are listed in a kind of “majority text” von Soden, Die Schriften des neuen Testaments, 402-475; the variants from several individual manuscript witnesses can be found in the apparatus to Swanson’s series New Testament Greek Manuscripts.

16) As just one example of this we may refer to the extensive series of Semantic Structure Analysis volumes published under the auspices of SIL International. For a more general survey of the field see Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds., Linguistics and the New Testament: Critical Junctures (London: Continuum, 1997).

17) For a useful summary presentation see Euan Fry, “The Use and Value of Section Headings in
headings is essentially two-fold: firstly, to show the basis for the section divisions made by the editors; and secondly, to give a brief indication of the content of each section, thereby assisting the reader to gain (what the editor perceives to be) a correct understanding of the text.

In the remaining part of this paper we shall ask the question: To what extent are these aims also fulfilled by the ancient system of *kephalaia* and *titloi*? As an example we shall look at ancient and modern section headings in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians.

*Titloi* and Section Headings in Galatians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>von Soden I.i. p.464f</th>
<th>UBS Helps for Translators (1976)(^{18})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:11 Following the prologue, a narrative of [Paul’s] turning away from Judaism by revelation</td>
<td>1:1 Greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:1 Concerning the witness of the apostles to the life in faith</td>
<td>1:6 There is no other Gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:11 Concerning the argument with Peter about salvation by faith and not by Law</td>
<td>1:11 How Paul became an Apostle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1 How sanctification is by faith and not by Law</td>
<td>2:1 Paul is accepted by the other Apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:7 How Abraham was justified by faith as an example to us</td>
<td>2:11 Paul rebukes Peter at Antioch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10 How the Law does not justify but accuses, and brings a curse which is released by Christ</td>
<td>2:15 Jews, like Gentiles, are saved by faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 How good things come not from the Law but from the promise, while the Law prepares [the way] by accusation</td>
<td>3:1 Law or faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:1 How those in the Law were under judgement(^{19})</td>
<td>3:15 The Law and the promise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:21 How those depicted by Abraham’s free-born wife and legitimate child do not need to serve the Law</td>
<td>3:21 The purpose of the Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:8 Paul’s concern for the Galatian believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:21 The allegory of Hagar and Sarah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{18}\)UBS Helps for Translators (1976)

Printed Scriptures”, *The Bible Translator* 34:2 (1983), 235-239.
5:2 How our calling does not depend on circumcision and the Law, but on the suffering of Christ
5:13 Description of freedom according to the Spirit
6:11 Turning away from those who draw [others] to circumcision, and turning to the new life in the Spirit

5:2 Christian freedom
5:16 The fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh
6:1 Bear one another’s burdens
6:11 Final warning and greeting

In looking at this material we may begin with a few general observations on obvious differences between the ancient *titloi* and the modern section headings. Firstly, the *titloi* are usually much more detailed and extensive than the section headings; really only the *titlos* to Galatians 4:1 (which is in any case most difficult to interpret) is of comparable length to the UBS headings. Secondly, the *titloi* attempt in the main to give a short summary of the content of the section, rather than referring briefly to one key point (compare the *titlos* with the section heading at 5:2). And thirdly, they presuppose some background information and knowledge on the part of the reader (for example, Paul is nowhere referred to explicitly in the list of *titloi* to Galatians).

Given the extent of these differences and the different functions performed by the two systems of headings, it might be thought that a comparison between them has little to offer. Before reaching such a pessimistic conclusion, however, let us look in more detail at the material provided by the table (of *titloi* and section headings for Galatians).

In total there are twelve *titloi* and fifteen section headings: there are four places where there is a *titlos* but no section heading, and six where there is a section heading but no *titlos*. We shall consider first those places where there is a *titlos*, but no corresponding section heading.

3:7 – this break is not marked in the edition of Nestle-Aland (NA27) – despite

---


19) Literal translation of the difficult text οτι υπο κτισιν ησαν οι εν νομω. Swanson (ad loc.) records the manuscript variants υποκτισιν / υποκρισιν, but this hardly helps the case, and we have resorted to a conjecture based on the context.
the *kephalaia* number being given in the inner margin, but is given a new paragraph in the *UBS Greek New Testament* (UBSGNT4); however this division is not followed by the modern translations listed in the Discourse Segmentation Analysis (DSA)\(^{20}\) to that edition. The effect of it is firstly to take verse 7 with what follows rather than what precedes, and secondly to focus the reader’s attention specifically on Abraham in the short section 3:7-9.

3:10 – this time the break is marked in NA but not in GNT4; according to the DSA however this break is quite widely attested, usually by a paragraph, although the New Jerusalem Bible has a section heading at this point (“The curse brought by the Law”). The rather lengthy *titlos* may in this instance be considered an argument for the section heading at this point; like the NJB heading it picks out key words from the text (curse, law), and with its longer discursive format adds a couple of others (justify / *δικαίωσιν* verse 11, release / *λύω* corresponding to verse 13 *ἐξήγερσιν*). Translators might also wish to take note of the ancient division of 3:1-14 into three sections, compared with one section (and a very generic heading) in the UBS Helps.

4:1 – this break is not marked in either NA or GNT, except by the chapter boundary (and is deliberately not indicated even by a new line in standard editions of the *Textus Receptus*, the next paragraph break there not occurring until 4:11). A number of modern translations do include a section heading at this point, in a wide variety of formulations (Luther “Befreiung vom Gesetz durch Christus”, TOB “De l'esclavage de la loi à la liberté des enfants de Dieu”, NJB “Sons of God”, REB “Life under the law”); however it is hard to compare these in any detail with the *titlos* for this section because of the difficulty in interpreting the latter (see note 19 above). It should also be noted that this *kephalaion* is a comparatively long section covering the whole of 4:1-20 (compare the UBS Helps heading at 4:8, see below), but with an uncharacteristically short *titlos*.

5:13 – NA reflects the *kephalaia* system by making a major break here, and is followed by Segond “Vivre, non selon la chair, mais selon l'Esprit” TOB “La chair et l'Esprit” NJB “Liberty and love” REB “Guidance by the Spirit”. The

---

\(^{20}\) The Discourse Segmentation Apparatus offers information, in a very condensed form, on section breaks, paragraphs and certain other discourse markers in manual editions of the Greek NT and in translations in major European languages; for more details see the Introduction to the *UBS Greek New Testament*, 4th ed., 44-46.
**titlos** in this instance once again picks out key words from the text (freedom / ἐλευθερία verse 13, Spirit / πνεῦμα verse 16), and provides significant ancient support – and even a possible formulation – for a section heading at this point. It should be noted however that the section in the *kephalaia* system is a very long one, extending right up to 6:10; it is certainly interesting to think that not only the list of spiritual gifts and worldly vices in 5:16-26, but also the more practical exhortations of 6:1-10, can be conceived of as part of a section dealing with freedom in the Spirit.

Next, there are six places where the UBS Helps volume has a section heading, but where there is no *titlos*.

1:1 / 1:6 – the lack of *titlos* here has to do with the structure of the *kephalaia-titloi* system, where the first section is considered to be the prologue and does not have a heading.21) It is interesting, of course, that the whole of 1:1-10 is apparently considered to be a prologue; although the DSA does not provide this information, a quick check of other modern language translations shows that the overwhelming majority of them begin a new section (and include a section heading) at 1:6.

2:15 – the issue here is not so much the form of the section heading, but rather the place of the text division. While the majority of modern translations end Paul’s direct quotation of his words to Peter at the end of verse 14 and understand verses 15-21 as a more general address, the tradition reflected in the *kephalaia-titloi* system attests to the older liturgical practice of either reading the text continuously until verse 21, or making a break elsewhere in the passage.22) This is definitely a matter where every translator will have to reach a decision on how to break the text and how to punctuate the passage 2:11-21;23) and while the evidence of the lack of a *titlos* at verse 15 is not conclusive, it surely deserves to be taken into consideration along with other criteria in deciding how to handle this passage in translation.

---

21) See Wong, “Ancient Windows” (note 5 above), 72f for a useful summary of the various explanations proposed for this phenomenon.
23) For a discussion of the issues raised by this from the point of view of translation see Danny C. Arichea and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translators Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), ad loc.
3:21 – in this case the recommendation of the UBS Helps to include a section heading runs contrary not just to the ancient practice of the *kephalaia*-titloi system, but also to the view of most modern editors: as the DSA indicates, none of editions consulted includes a section heading at this point, and few begin a new paragraph here either. Translators therefore will wish to consider carefully the structure of the passage rather than automatically following the UBS recommendation at this point – and the lack of either a break or a heading in the ancient tradition is one of the criteria they may want to consider.

4:8 – the question of whether or not to include a section heading here belongs to the larger issue of the structure of the passage 3:15 – 4:20: in the *kephalaia*-titloi system there are two sections (3:15-28 and 4:1-20) in the UBS system there are three (3:15-20, 3:21–4:7, 4:8-20). The degree of mismatch between ancient and modern systems of segmentation is thus quite substantial – although as we saw earlier there is a fair amount of modern support also for a text break and section heading at 4:1. It surely cannot be considered certain that the text division and section headings recommended in the UBS Helps are the best way to understand the structure of this part of Galatians.

5:16 and 6:1 – this is in some ways a similar case to the preceding one. It is hard to argue with the appropriateness of the UBS headings themselves with respect to the content of the sections 5:16-26 and 6:1-10; once again however there is an issue of how the text itself should be segmented: the passage 5:2 – 6:10 is divided into two sections (5:2-12 and 5:13–6:10) in the *kephalaia*-titloi system, but into three (5:2-15, 5:16-26, 6:1-10) by the UBS Helps. The DSA provides the translator with valuable information about how this passage is divided in manual editions of the Greek New Testament and in several modern translations; this material needs to be supplemented with the information provided by the more ancient system of text segmentation and section headings which is preserved in the *kephalaia*-titloi system.

Lastly, there are eight places where the *titlos* and the UBS section heading relate to the beginning of the same passage. These are somewhat simpler to consider since they do not raise issues of text segmentation in such a direct way; a comparison of their respective wording however shows their value as a source for modern translators and editors.

1:11 – the *titlos* picks up individual words from the text (revelation /
and focuses on specific aspects of the content of the pericope rather than giving a general summary. It is interesting however that the *kephalaia-titloi* system considers the main point of this passage to be Paul’s turning away from Judaism rather than his becoming an Apostle.

2:1 – the respective wordings here testify to a marked difference in understanding of what should be in focus in the section heading: for the UBS Helps it is the narrative (Paul’s relations with the other Apostles), while for the *titlos* it is more a theological-pastoral issue (the life of faith). This is a general feature of the *kephalaia-titloi* system (at least as we see it in Galatians), which tends to focus on the expository rather than narrative aspects of the discourse.

2:11 – once again the *titlos* focuses on the content of the pericope; although the narrative setting is mentioned, the emphasis is on the content of Paul’s dispute with Peter rather than its occasion. This is something which modern translators may well wish to consider.

3:1 – the *titlos* and the section heading are rather similar here: both focus on the distinction between law and faith, the *titlos* doing so in somewhat expanded form (although it is rather unexpected that it takes the theme of the pericope to be *sanctification* / ἁγιάζω, when in the light of the *titloi* for the immediately following passages one might have expected “justification”). Modern translators however would be well advised to consider the implications of the way in which the *titloi* for chapter 3 as a whole offer a detailed and transparent summary of the structure of the passage.

3:15 – the *titlos* and the section heading are similar in content (both pick up the key words “Law” and “promise”), however the *titlos* is considerably more detailed, reflecting the different segmentation of the passage 3:15-29; the second part of the *titlos* (on the preparatory function of the Law) clearly reflects the second part of this passage, which it defines more concretely than the section heading to 3:21. Once again, modern translators may wish to take into account both the difference in segmentation, and also the more precise and detailed description of the content.

4:21 – the *titlos* and the UBS section heading pick out the same key point from the pericope, but do so in different ways: the UBS section heading is brief to the point of obscurity (and some translations which follow the UBS Helps
prefer “example” to the more technical term “allegory”), while the titlos offers a succinct summary of the content of the passage which – although it may be too detailed to provide an actual section heading – is well worth considering as a possible model.

5:2 – this is a clear example of the difference between two approaches to section marking. The UBS heading is very laconic, while the titlos picks up in some detail the theme of circumcision and the Law: given Paul’s very outspoken words on this matter in verses 11-12 in particular this procedure seems well justified – as indeed does the marking of a section break and a new heading at 5:13.

6:11 – once again there is strong focus in the titlos on the content of the section – “new life in the Spirit” as a kind of summary – and a specific link to the double reference to circumcision in verse 13. The UBS section heading offers a very different generic summary in the phrase “final warning”, and concentrates on the function of the passage as a closing greeting rather than on its content.

What conclusions can we draw from our brief examination of reader’s helps in general, and of the kephalaia-titloi system in Galatians in particular?

Firstly, we must be aware of the limitations inherent in a comparison between ancient and modern approaches to editing the New Testament text. Although there is considerable overlap in the form and function of reader’s helps provided by ancient and modern editors, the systems are not identical and do not always have the same aims and function. In the case of the kephalaia-titloi system which we have considered in some more detail (at least in its application to Galatians), we have seen that although it has intrinsic value as an ancient tradition of dividing the text into segments and marking those segments, it nevertheless needs to be treated with caution because of its different presuppositions (perhaps especially the fact that the titloi are evidently more suited to be read in one sequence, rather than dispersed through the text in the manner of modern section headings). As we have seen from our study of the kephalaia-titloi system in Galatians however, careful examination of the individual kephalaia and titloi provides many valuable and thought-provoking suggestions on specific matters, which modern translators and editors would be well advised to consider.
Secondly, the *kephalaia-titloi* system as a whole – especially when read together with the *hypotheses* or book introductions in an edition like that of Euthalius – gives us many useful insights into how the ancient editors in what became the official tradition of the Church understood the structure of the text. At the very least, their understanding should be given careful consideration in comparison with the findings of modern scholars.24)

Finally, one very practical conclusion: our study of the *kephalaia-titloi* system in Galatians has shown just how valuable and important is the Discourse Segmentation Apparatus included in the UBS Greek New Testament. We may conclude by expressing the wish that future editions of the Apparatus should do more to include the data not just of the *kephalaia* divisions, but of ancient systems of text segmentation in general. And last of all, especially in an Asian context, we might make a plea to future editors of the DSA to be less Eurocentric in their choice of modern translations to register in the Apparatus!

<References>


Fry, Euan, “The Use and Value of Section Headings in Printed Scriptures”, *The Bible Translator* 34:2 (1983), 235-239.


<Abstract>

신약 성서 사본들에 담긴 독자를 돕기 위한 장치들
- 현대 번역자들을 위한 고대의 자원 -

사이먼 크리스프 박사
(세계성서공회연합회 번역 총책임자)

성서 본문에 부가적인 자료들, 즉 여러 종류의 ‘독자를 위한 도움 장치들’은, 현대의 인쇄판들이 그래왔듯이, 신약의 그리스 사본 전승의 한 중요한 부분이 되었다. 이 소논문은 일련의 이러한 현상들- 즉, 구두점들, 의미 절들과 부분들로 구분하는 것-을 조사한다. 특별히 비잔틴 사본들에 널리 퍼져있는 케팔라이아-티틀 로이(“장들과 제목들”) 체제에 관심을 갖는다. 그리고, 이 소논문의 주요 부분은 갈라디아서의 케팔라이아-티틀로이 체제와 세계성서공회에서 제공하는 일련의 현대 섹션 표제들을 자세히 비교하는데 표지를 할애한다. 그러한 비교는 성서 번역자들에게 많은 유용한 정보들을 준다고 주장된다. 즉, 어떻게 본문이 고대에서 는 분할되었는지를 제시하는 데 있어서, 그리고 섹션 표제 그 자체를 다르게 만 들어 제공하는 데에 있어서 그러하다.