The problem this project addresses is that operative modes for interpreting the Greek New Testament (NT) rely upon critical editions, not manuscripts. NT editions are scholarly abstractions that focus on reconstructing an “original” text, and that fail to account for a rich manuscript tradition that preserves evidence for key disciplinary questions. Instead of asking how manuscripts help reconstruct a text, this project examines what manuscripts say about the ways the NT was interpreted by the communities that produced them. This is accomplished by comprehensively analysing the forms and wordings of the title preserved in all non-lectionary NT manuscripts (c. 3500). Titles are malleable paratexts that provide a substantive vector to rethink approaches to the NT by seriously considering contexts of production and interpretation ranging from 2nd century Egypt to modern Mt. Athos,
moving beyond the 1st century Roman world. Titles demonstrate that material and paratextual variance in form and design are constitutive aspects of the NT. Adopting New Philology as a methodology, the project critiques dominant approaches by taking each manuscript seriously as evidence for specific reading events, using titles as primary evidence. Titular analysis informs a range of topics, including authorship, locales of production, contexts of use, bibliography, and literary interpretation. The NT is best understood as an omnibus of manuscripts that constitute specific reading events, reflecting the interpretations of the communities that used them. The NT has never been a single reconstructed text, but a collection of texts in specific material and paratextual contexts. Despite the value inherent in the manuscripts, scholarship has focused almost exclusively on the NT’s original context of composition. Resisting this trend, the project argues that titles are a rich resource for mapping the interpretation of the NT in contexts overlooked by critical scholarship: its own manuscript matrix.
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