

I have started giving some instances of what appear to be “intentional” changes made by scribes, as opposed to simple, accidental, slips of the pen. In my previous post I pointed to an example in Mark 1:2, in which scribes appear to have altered a text because it seems to embody an error. If I’m wrong that this is the direction of the change – that is, if the text that I’m arguing is the “corruption” is in fact the original text – then there is still almost certainly an intentional change still involved, but made for some other reason. But either way, the change does not appear to have been made simply by inattention to detail.

Here I’ll give a second instance from Mark of what appears to be an intentional change. I stress that these alterations “appear” to be intentional since, technically speaking, we can never know what a scribe intended to do. I use the term I simply to mean an alteration to the text that a scribe appears to have made on purpose because he wanted to change it for one reason or another. Part of the historical task is trying to reconstruct what might have been a plausible reason.

One of the most intriguing variations in Mark’s Gospel comes in the Passion narrative, in the final words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel. Jesus is being crucified, and he says nothing on the cross until he cries out his final words, which Mark records in Aramaic: “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” Mark then translates the words into Greek: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus then utters a loud cry and dies.

What is striking is that in one early Greek manuscript...

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