NUMBERS VI 27

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The uniformity in the tradition of the Hebrew text of Numb. vi 27, "wēšāmū 'et-šēmī 'al-bēnē yisrā'ēl wa'ñośi 'rāḇārāḵēm," is in contradiction with the enigmatic meaning of the verse. Textual studies are kept within bounds by scantiness of evidence, for non-masoretic witnesses are rare. In a number of cases the ancient versions give some solace, but textual research is very quickly played out and exegetical considerations begin. Hypotheses are inevitable and arguments to make them acceptable must be derived from comparable texts in and outside ancient Hebrew literature and from grammatical theories and cognate languages, and need also ingenious imagination.

In a number of manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch 1), wēšāmū of the masoretic text is handed down as wēšāmū, probably a plural imperative. The reading is, I think, an attempt to connect vs. 27 with the command that Moses was ordered to give to the priests, "you shall bless the Israelites" (vs. 23). The Greek version transposes the line to the introduction of the Blessing as a continuation of vs. 23 2). The transposition proves acquaintance with the problem of deciding of which sentence vs. 27 is the continuation. Transposition, however, is evidently no solution. wēšāmū etc., rendered by xαλ ἐπὶ θησαυρὸς etc., cannot belong to the command given in the second person, "you shall bless". Moreover, a distinction between the pronouncing of the Blessing by the priests and the blessing by the deity, wa'ñośi 'rāḇārāḵēm, would be a new element in the introductory passage, vss. 22, 23. The Greek version further has an explanatory addition

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2) The line is repeated in some manuscripts in minuscule script, recorded in the apparatus of A. E. Brooke-N. McLean’s edition of Numbers, The Old Testament in Greek (Cambridge, 1911), p. 433.
to wa'antī: κύριος. The Aramaic version reads birkat śemī, an explanatory allusion to the tetragrammaton used in each of the three lines of the Blessing, vss. 24-26. The Old Latin version renders the first verb of vs. 27 with inponentes (in filios) 3). The rendering of šim ... 'al in the other ancient versions is ἐπιτίθημι ... ἐπὶ (LXX); śym ... ἥ (Peshitta); šwy ... ἥ (Targum); only the Vulgate differs from the others by translating invocare ... super.

The difficulties we meet do not appear to be new. R. Yishma'el taught, we read in the Talmud 4), that the Israelites were blessed by the priests but their blessing did not include themselves. Vs. 27 teaches, according to him, that the priests after blessing the people were blessed by the Holy One, wa'antī 'ābārakēm. Yishma'el realized that vs. 27 is a new element in the pericope. R. 'Aqiba, on the contrary, held that the second part of vs. 27 teaches no more than that God gives his approval to the blessing of the people by the priests. The same tradition is recorded in Midrash Rabbi (Numbers XI, 8), where it is further said that vs. 27b teaches that the blessing includes proselytes, women, and slaves.

The introduction to the Blessing (vss. 22, 23) follows the usual pattern: Yhwh orders his servant Moses to instruct the priestly family of Aaron to bless the Israelites. The Blessing itself, the core of the pericope, possesses a direct divine character: these are words commanded by Yhwh and not intercessory prayers to be addressed to him. If vs. 27 were the closing sentence of the pericope, Yhwh would be repeating in the first part of the sentence his command to the priests, although now speaking of them in the third person, and approving the priestly act of blessing in the second part. This line of thought with but small variations can be observed, I think, in the majority of modern translations. I quote a number of them:

(a) “So shall they put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them”—H. Holzinger, in Kautzsch-Bertholet (1922); Revised Version (1885); Revised Standard Version (1952); Dutch Bible Society translation (1951); E. Dhorme, Pléiade (1956); H. Cazelles, Bible de Jerusalem (1956); A. Drimmel’s commentary (1963); M. Noth’s commentary (1966; E.tr. 1968).

(b) “Zoo zult gij mijn naam op de Israëlieten leggen; en ik zal hen zegenen”—Leiden translation (1899). The alteration of the third per-

3) Recorded in Brooke-McLean, p. 433.
4) B. Hulin 49a. Cf. Rashi’s comment: “I will agree with the priests”.

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