however, the word bardapa as well as šeroši became subject to different interpretations according to the forensic usage of the time 1). Jerusalem (Isr.) Z. W. Falk

THE COPTOS DECREE AND 2 SAM XII 14

2 Sam xii 1-14 is the story of the accusation of David by the prophet Nathan because of his behaviour in the case of Bath-sheba and Uriah. David confesses his sin and Nathan absolves him of capital punishment. Yet, we are told in verse 14, he will not escape unpunished:

Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast greatly blasphemed the enemies of the Lord, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

The Targum, the Vulgate, Luther and the Authorized Version all take mi’ēs ni’āsta as causative, that is they render “thou hast caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme”, hast given them occasion to do so. This interpretation, postulating for mi’ēs a meaning not evidenced elsewhere, is rejected not only by modern scholars; already the traditional Jewish exegesis, while quoting the Targum, prefers to regard the phrase “the enemies of the Lord” as what it indeed is, as a euphemism.

Ever since Geiger 2) it has been unhesitatingly accepted by scholars in introductions 3) and in commentaries on the Book of Samuel 4), that the word ’oyebbe “the enemies of” is a late emendation, a Sopheric alteration of the text. It is submitted that this equation, euphemism = emendation, is unwarranted. No proof has been offered for the assumption underlying it, that euphemisms of this kind reflect the religious apprehensions of a later time, alien to the thought of the man who first wrote down the verse.

Better than abstract argument, there is actual evidence for a similar usage preceding the Book of Samuel by many centuries. The Coptos Decree 5), of the 13th dynasty (18th century B.C.), deals with the punishment meted out to a rebellious feudal lord, Teti son of Min-hotep, count of Coptos. Line 6f. of the inscription reads:

His name shall not be remembered in this temple, according as it is done toward one like him, who is hostile toward the enemies of his god.

With regard to "who is hostile toward the enemies of his god" BREASTED remarks in a footnote that "there are no difficulties of lexicon or grammar in this clause, but the meaning when rendered is uncertain."

The eminent Egyptologist's difficulty is of course resolved by comparison with the Biblical text. More interesting here are the conclusions to be drawn in the Biblical sphere. A more conservative approach to the question of editorial changes seems to be indicated. Interference must not be taken for granted merely on the ground that a text is not as blunt and straightforward as it might have been. What is to be proved in each case is that the word or words criticized cannot possibly be, or at least very probably are not, from the hand of the author.

Similarly there is no proof for the assumption that the euphemistic substitution of berekh—"to bless" for expressions meaning "to curse" or "to blaspheme" is due to subsequent emendation. Such substitution occurs on two occasions: once in the story of Ahab and Naboth (1 K xxi 10, 13), the other time in the introductory part of the Book of Job (i 5, 11; ii 5, 9). The apprehension against uttering an express blasphemy may go back to very early times. It is in no way incongruous within the story of Naboth, and fits well indeed into the popular story about the righteous Job.

GEIGER, and following him GINSBURG and PFEIFFER, attach much weight to a third alleged instance of berekh for "to curse", in Ps. x 3. There "the original text ('he despises') and the euphemism ('he blesses') are both preserved in the text, showing perhaps that the correction was written originally between the lines over the objectionable word" 1). However, the genuineness of berekh is supported by the synonymous hillel in the parallel verse 3a. The pair berekh-billel occurs also in other texts 2). Hence GEIGER is led to suggest that billel also, in verse 3a, is an emendation of an original hillel or qillel, but he is not followed by commentators of the Psalms. Whatever the correct interpretation of the difficult verse 3b, the solution is apparently not to be sought in the omission of berekh.

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1) PFEIFFER, Introduction, p. 86.
2) Jer. iv 2, Ps. cxiii 1-3, cxv 17-18, cxlv 2.