

by BEN-ZION BINYAMIN*

Dedicated to my friend, Dr. Moshe W. Prausnitz, with thanks and gratitude

An inscription found on the mosaic floor of the ancient synagogue at Ein Gedi¹ has intrigued numerous scholars who have attempted, each in his own way, to understand its "secret."² The unique feature of this inscription is the negative and biting text at its center, which has led scholars to interpret it in different ways. In light of a number of recently published studies, explaining inscriptions found in

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1. On the discovery of the Ein Gedi synagogue and its inscriptions, see: D. Barag and J. Porat, "The Ein Gedi Synagogue" [Heb.], *Qadmoniot* iii (1970), 97-100; D. Barag, J. Porat, and A. Netzer, "The Second Season of Excavation of the Ein Gedi Synagogue" [Heb.], *Qadmoniot* v (1972), 52-54; idem, "Ein-Gedi," *RB* lxxix (1972), 581-83.

2. The principal relevant discussions of the inscription are: B. Mazar, "An Inscription on the Floor of the Ein Gedi Synagogue" [Heb.], *Tarbiz* xl (1971), 18-23; S. Lieberman, "An Early Note on the Ein Gedi Inscription" [Heb.], *ibid.*, 24-26; E.E. Urbach, "The Secret in the Ein Gedi Inscription and its Text" [Heb.], *ibid.*, 27-30; B. Lifshitz, "The Hamat-Tiberias Synagogue, its Floor and its Inscriptions" [Heb.], *Mehqarim be-Toldot 'Am Yisrael* iii (1975), 107-109; D. Barag, "The Meaning of the term *Karta* in the Ein Gedi Synagogue Inscriptions" [Heb.], *Tarbiz* xli (1972), 453-454; Y. Naveh, *'Al Pesifas va-Even* (Tel-Aviv, 1978), 105-109; A. Dothan, "The Mystery of the Inscription in the Ein Gedi Synagogue" [Heb.], *Leshonenu* xxxv (1971), 211-217; Yael Yisraeli and others, *Ketivot Mesaprot* (Jerusalem, 1973), 188-191; G. Foerster, "Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues and their Connections with Versions of Blessings and Prayers" [Heb.], *Cathedra* xix (1981), 12-40; M. Weinfeld, "The Secret of the Ein Gedi Community" [Heb.], *Tarbiz* li (1982), 125-129 [in English in his *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect* [NTOA. 2. (Freiburg, 1986)], Appendix.]

ancient synagogues generally in light of Jewish liturgy,³ it seems to this writer that the Ein Gedi inscription is likewise a version of one of the prayers offered in these synagogues — synagogues which served as the workshops in which the prayers were created, their mosaic floors being the physical material on which they were given form. Texts which have left an indelible impression on the prayers of the following generations, up to and including the forms we know today, have been found in these synagogues. The text of the inscription follows:⁴

May Yose 'Ezron and Hizikiyo the sons of Halfi be remembered for good.

Whoever causes dissension between a man and his fellow, or speaks

Slander of his fellow to the Gentiles, or steals

A possession of his fellow, or whoever reveals the secret of the town

To the Gentiles: May He whose eyes wander over the whole earth

And who sees hidden things, turn his countenance

On that man and his seed, and uproot him from under the heaven.

And all the people shall say: Amen and Amen Selah.

דכירין לטב יוסה ועזרון וחזיקיו בנוה דחלפי
 כל מן דיהיב פלגי בן גבר לחבריה הי אמר
 לשן ביש על חבריה לעממיה הי גניב
 צבותיה דחבריה הי מן דגלי רזה דקרתא
 לעממיה. דין דעיננה משוטטין בכל ארעה
 וחמי סתירתה הוא יתן אפיה בגברה
 ההו ובזרעיה ויעקור יתיה מן תחות שומיה
 וימרון כל עמה אמן ואמן סלה

I. Identification of the Passage as a Benediction, on the Basis of Stylistic and Formal Components

Examination of the wording of the inscription reveals a number of formal and stylistic components which appear in different versions of prayers:⁵

1) The opening, "...*dekhrin le-tav* (may there be remembered for good)", is a common formula of blessing. It appears at the beginning of the Ein Gedi inscription, as it does in other ancient synagogues, in the version: "may Yose,

3. M. Weinfeld, "The Synagogue Inscriptions and the Jewish Liturgy" [Heb.], *Shenaton le-Miqra ule-Heqer ha-Mizrah ha-Qadum* iv (1981), 288-295; Foerster, op. cit.; A. Horowitz, "The Synagogue Inscriptions and their Connection to the Jewish Liturgy; the Aspect of Language" [Heb.], *Cathedra* xix (1981), 41-43; Y. Yahalom, "Public Prayer in the Synagogue Inscriptions" [Heb.], *ibid.*, 44-46; N. Wieder, "The Jericho Inscription and the Jewish Liturgy" [Heb.], *Tarbiz* liii (1983), 558-561.

4. The text is taken from Naveh, *'Al Pesifas va-Even*, 107.

5. Points 1-3 are discussed in one or another form in Foerster's article, op. cit. Their repetition here is intended to present a complete picture of what he wrote, and to ease understanding of my arguments.

‘Ezron and Hizikiyo the sons of Ḥalfi be remembered for good.’ The same opening also appears also at the beginning of prayers from Kafa, Cochin, China, and Aleppo, in Northern Syria.⁶

2) The structure of the passage: “May He whose eyes wander over the whole earth and who sees hidden things set His face upon that man and on his seed.” This sentence is constructed according to the stylistic pattern of the blessings and curses found in Talmudic sources.⁷ The first part of the sentence appears in the participial (present tense) form, and describes God euphemistically, using one of his appellations or referring to one of his past deeds. God (described in this way in the first sentence) will in the future perform the following actions, which are expressions of the desires and wishes of the worshiper.⁸

3) The Response *Amen*. Foerster has already shown that the inscription’s invitation to respond *Amen* indicates a context of public prayer.⁹

4) It has been argued by Dothan and others that the inscription under discussion combines biblical and ancient texts in Aramaic translation.¹⁰ Biblical and archaic language and early linguistic forms are used to give a formal character of holiness and transcendence to the prayer, as required by the mood of the worshiper in the synagogue. The use of biblical language and the inclusion of archaic forms of words

6. Foerster, 18-28; Horowitz, 42-43; Wieder, 558-560. It is probable that the agreement of one of the leading citizens of the city, of important contributors, or of the entire community, to central and well-known passages of blessing and prayer could have been a way of granting respect and privilege to a person whom the community wished to honor, and may even at times be an indication of privileges within the community itself. Our passage also has a special frame within the mosaic, which separates it from the other parts of the inscription.

7. Joseph Heinemann discusses this extensively. See his *Tefilah bi-Tequfat ha-Tannaim vaha-Ammoraim* (Jerusalem, 1984 [4]), 69-72; Foerster, 13. Here I expand Foerster’s discussion.

8. For purposes of comparison with the structure of the passage from the Ein Gedi inscription, see the following examples of blessing and curse among those cited by Heinemann, *op. cit.*, p. 72:

“עושה שלום במרמינו הוא ברחמיו יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל.”
“מחיה מתים יתן לך חיים ארוכים וטובים ומתוקנין...”
“מי שענה לאברהם הוא יענה אתכם.”
“מי שפרע מאנשי דור המבול עתיד להפרע ממי שאינו עומד בדיבורו.”
“דידע שמהתין ודבניהון ודאנשי בתיהון, יכתוב יתהון בספר חייה...”
(כתובת יריחו)

9. Foerster, pp. 35-36.

10. See especially Dothan, 215-217; as well as Foerster, 3; M. Shashar, “The Heretic’s Secret in Ein Gedi” [Heb.], *ha-Zofeh*, 23.4.86, p. 5. Examples of such a combination of whole biblical verses, in particular from Psalms and Isaiah, appear in versions of *Birkat ha-Minim* found in the Cairo Genizah. See also A. Marmorstein, “The ‘Amidah of the Public Fast Days,” *JQR* xv (N.S.) (1925), 414-416.

and verses in prayers, maxims, and sayings has been shown to be common practice in both Mishnaic¹¹ and Talmudic¹² language forms.

II. Identification of the Passage as *Birkat ha-Minim*

The above points suffice to indicate that the passage under discussion was constructed according to the form and model of a prayer of the Mishnaic and Talmudic period. On this basis, it seems to this writer that a great and surprising kinship exists between the Ein-Gedi inscription and *Birkat ha-Minim* of the *Amidah* prayer – that benediction (or better, malediction) in which curses are called down upon heretics and assorted enemies of the Jewish people.

The following table, comparing the passage under discussion with various versions of *Birkat ha-Minim*, may be instructive:

11. G. Haneman, "Biblical Borrowings in the Mishnah" [Heb.], *Proceedings of the Fourth World Congress for Judaic Studies X* (Jerusalem, 1969), 95-96.

12. Y. Kutscher, entries in *ha-Milon he-Ḥadash le-Sifrut Ḥazal I* (Ramat Gan, 1972), 53-54, Adler ENA 23, with introduction and notes by Sh. Tal (Jerusalem, 1981), 84.

למלשינים ולמינים אל
תהי תקווה, וכל הזדים
כרגע יאבדו וכל אויביך
וכל שונאיך מהרה
יכרתו ומלכות הרשעה
תעקר ותשבר ותכלם.
ברוך אתה ה' שובר
אויבים ומכניע מינים
(זדים).

למשומדים אל תהי
תקווה, כל המינים
והמוסרים כרגע יאבדו
ומלכות זדון תעקור
ותשבור מהרה בימינו.
ברוך אתה ה' שובר
אויבים ומכניע זדים.

למשומדים ולמינים
ולזדים ולמוסרים אל
תהי להם תקווה
ותאוה, ומלכות זדון
במהרה תעקר ותשבר
ותכניע ותאבד. וכל
אויבי עמך ישראל
וצוריהם במהרה
יכרתו וישמדו ויאבדו
ואל תתן תקומה לכל
אויבי נפשינו. ברוך
אתה ה' שובר אויבים
ומכניע זדים.

כל מן... דין דעינוה
משוטטין בכל ארעה
וחמי סתירתה הוא יתן
אפה בגברה
ההו ובזרעיה ויעקור
יתיה מן תחות שומיה
וימרון כל עמה אמן
ואמן סלה

For the informers and
the *minim* may there
be no hope, and may
all the arrogant be
destroyed in a mo-
ment, and all your
enemies and all those
who hate you swiftly
be cut off, and the
evil kingdom be up-
rooted, broken and
obliterated, swiftly
cut off, uprooted and
broken. Blessed are
you, our Lord, who
breaks off enemies and
humbles the *minim*
(malicious).

For the apostates may
there be no hope, and
all the heretics and
informers destroy in a
moment, and the evil
kingdom cut off and
break speedily in our
days. Blessed are you,
our Lord, who breaks
enemies and humbles
the malicious.

For the apostates and
the *minim* and the
arrogant and the col-
laborators may there
be no hope and desire,
and the evil kingdom
swiftly uproot and
break, humiliate and
destroy. And all the
enemies of your people
Israel, and their perse-
cutors, swiftly cut off
and obliterate and
make to disappear,
and let not any of the
enemies of our soul
rise again. Blessed are
you, our Lord, who
breaks off enemies
humbles the arrogant.

Whoever... May He
whose eyes wander
over the whole earth
And who sees hidden
things, May he turn
his countenance
On that man and his
seed, and uproot him
from under the
heaven.
And all the people
shall say: Amen and
Amen Selah.

13. The line division is mine (B.Z. Binyamin).

14. *Birkat ha-Minim*, from the 'Amidah from the Yemenite Order (*Tiklal*).

15. From Sh. Tal, "Prayer Texts of Persian Jewry" [Heb.], a photocopied version of MS. Adler ENA 23, with introduction and notes by S. Tal (Jerusalem, 1981), 84.

16. The text is taken from Naveh, 107.

In addition to the similarity of subject matter revealed in the above, we also note several components common to the Ein Gedi passage and to *Birkat ha-Minim*: 1) Both passages appear within the context of the synagogue; 2) Both are striking for their negative spirit and their stinging language: the Ein Gedi passage stands out among the inscriptions discovered in other early synagogues, while *Birkat ha-Minim* stands out among the other blessings in the 'Amidah prayer, and among other prayers in general. 3) In both, enemies of society and/or God are defined and cited. These enemies are varied, and the different types are enumerated. 4) Punishment is prescribed for these same transgressors. 5) This punishment is to be carried out by God.

Prima facie, the two passages seem very different. Their languages – Hebrew and Aramaic – are different, and the style differs, the short line of *Birkat ha-Minim* contrasting with the long lines in the Ein Gedi inscription. The manner of presenting the subject, as well as the structure and the place in which it appears, are also different. Nevertheless, one can discern obvious parallels, and conclude that they are fundamentally related to one another. In light of this, it is possible to make the following assumptions:

1) The two passages are so similar that they probably came from the same source, which served as an inspiration for both of them.

2) *Birkat ha-Minim* as we know it today is the final version of a prayer which passed through many incarnations and changes over the course of the generations, until it reached its present form. The Ein Gedi passage is one of the earliest links in this series of versions.

3) The Ein Gedi inscription may well be an Aramaic translation of the original Hebrew version of *Birkat ha-Minim*, translated according to the needs, styles, and texts known to the worshiper in the Ein Gedi synagogue.¹⁷

These assumptions fit in well with scholarly opinion, which argues that *Birkat ha-Minim* went through many incarnations. This is summarized in the words of Elbogen: “No blessing has undergone so many changes as *Birkat ha-Minim*.”¹⁸ The various styles in the Genizah version are further evidence of the great variation in the text of this blessing.¹⁹

17. See on this Dothan, p. 217, who concludes from the language of the inscription that it has outstanding signs of Aramaic, indicating close relations with Judea.

18. M. Avi-Yonah, *Bi-yemei Roma u-Byzantion* (Jerusalem, 1970), 122; Heinemann, p. 142, notes 20 and 23; Ismar Elbogen, *ha-Tefillah be-Yisra'el be-hitpathutah ha-historit* (Tel Aviv, 1972)[3], p. 40.

19. Marmorstein, pp. 414-417.

One ought to add to what has been said thus far that the earliest extant versions of *Birkat ha-Minim* – i.e., those from the Cairo genizah, from Persia and Yemen – do not contain any reference to “slanderers” (*malshinim*) or “slandering,” such as appear in the Ein-Gedi Inscription. On the other hand, it is present in contemporary texts of *Birkat ha-Minim*. This may be explained, in my opinion, in light of an historical phenomenon found elsewhere – namely, that in which a given name or other phenomenon seemingly disappears for a certain period of time, only to reemerge in a later period. During this “missing” period, the phenomenon is preserved in a hidden manner.

III. Historical Background

Are there aspects of the development of *Birkat ha-Minim* which can assist us in the identification proposed in this article? Horbury has already shown that *Birkat ha-Minim* has been in continuous use from its beginnings to the present day,²⁰ and he accepts the opinion of Jocz²¹ that it originated in the period following the destruction of Jerusalem and the suppression of the Jewish rebellion by the Romans in 70 C.E. Until recently, when Flusser attempted to establish that the blessing actually originated in the Hasmonean period,²² this was the accepted scholarly opinion.

In every generation the blessing was directed against a new and concrete target, depending upon contemporary circumstances and events. The groups to which the term *minim* was applied changed, and in each instance it was used to name a different enemy blocking the progress of Judaism.²³ In keeping with this principle,

20. W. Horbury, “The Benediction of Minim and the Early Jewish-Christian Controversy,” *JTS* xxxiii (N.S.), (1982), 19-61.

21. J. Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London, 1949), 36-57.

22. D. Flusser, “Jerusalem in Second Temple Literature” [Heb.], in *Ve-im bi-Gevurot* [R. Mass Festschrift] (Jerusalem, 1974), 264-273; idem., “The Jewish-Christian Schism (Part Two),” *Immanuel* xvii (1983-1984), 32-38.

23. See, for example, the opinions of G. Allon, *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Erez Yisra'el bi-tequfat ha-Mishnah voha-Talmud* (Tel Aviv, 1976), II: 180-182; idem, *Mehqarim be-toldot Yisra'el I* (Tel Aviv, 1967), 203-205; Hayim Gevaryahu, “The Benediction of *Minim*; The Struggle with the *Minim* in Light of Tractate Berakhot” [Heb.], *Sinai* xlv (1959), 367-375; Flusser, “The Jewish-Christian Schism,” 31-32; M. Avi Yonah, 117-125; L. Schiffman, *Who was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken, N.J., 1985), 58-61; R. Kimmelman, “*Birkat ha-Minim* and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,” in E.P. Sanders, et al, eds., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, II (London, 1981), 226-244; and, especially, P. Schäfer, “Die Sogenannte Synode von Jabne zur Trennung von Juden und Christen in Ersten/Zweiten Jh.n.chr.,” *Judaica* xxxi (1975), 58-59. Schäfer shows that there was a general text which constituted an outline of the blessing, to which additions and appellations of *minim* were added according to the needs of each generation, and in order to make it conform to contemporary developments. The above-mentioned scholars and others suggest different possibilities for the identity of the *minim*, each according to his own method.

the text of the blessing changed in each period in accordance with the new application of the term.²⁴

During the first generations of its existence (until the second century), it would seem that the blessing offered in the synagogue was directed at groups outside of Judaism and in conflict with it, such as the Samaritans (*kutim*), the early Christians (during the days when the Roman Empire and its rulers were pagans), the Ebionites, the Gnostics, and so on.²⁵

From the second century onward, the blessing was directed toward groups within Judaism which endangered its image and which the Jewish sages wished to condemn: "...the heretics, the morally corrupt, and Epicureans," etc. (Tosefta Sanhedrin 3), or "R. Yohanan said: For what reason was Israel not exiled until 24 sects of *minim* came into being? 'Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to the rebellious nations which rebelled against me' [Ezek. 2:3]. It is not written here, 'to the rebellious nation' [i.e., in the singular], but 'to the rebellious nations which rebelled against me to this very day.'" [i.e., that the people of Israel became a plurality of nations through the division into numerous sects] (Jerusalem Talmud. Sanhedrin 10:5).²⁶

Until the fourth century, both Judaism and Christianity were subject to the persecution of the pagan Roman empire²⁷; thereafter, a common interest formed between the Christian church and the Roman Empire, whose rulers Constantine (324-337 C.E.) and Constantius (337-361 C.E.) accepted the Christian religion. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and from then onwards the attitude of the Empire to Jews and Judaism became more severe. There was increased Christian influence in the Land of Israel, turning it into a battleground for the two religions.²⁸ Against this background, it is reasonable that *Birkat ha-Minim* would be directed against the new reality, in which Judaism was threatened by the Christians. The Christians are, on the one hand, the "informers"

24. See above, p. 5, notes 16 and 17.

25. Allon, *History*, 191; Schiffman, 51-53. Echoes of this may be found in the New Testament: John 2:42, 16:1, 9:22; Matthew 12:2 ff., 15:1 ff.; Luke 6:22; Acts 5, 6, 7.

26. On this, see Elbogen, 190-191; Allon, *History*, 180-183; Gevanyahu, 368-375; Schiffman, 59-61.

27. For a detailed discussion of this, and on the Roman persecution of both the Jews and the Christians, see Y. Baer, "The People of Israel, the Christian Church, and the Roman Empire from the Days of Septimus Severus to the Edict of Toleration of 313" [Heb.], *Zion* xxi (1956), 1-48; also Avi-Yonah, 136-137.

28. Avi-Yonah, p. 137; A; Linder, "Jerusalem as a Focus of Conflict between Judaism and Christianity: Anti-Jewish Aspects of the Jerusalem Church from the Fourth Century" [Heb.], in *Peraqim be-toldot Yerushalayim be-yemei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem, 1979), 5-25.

(*malshinim*), the *minim*, and the “collaborators” (*mosrim*) and, on the other, the allies of the Roman Empire, the “evil kingdom” (*malkhut ha-rish'ah*, *malkhut zaddon*). This dual trend was strengthened by the pressure to which the Jewish nation was subject, and is expressed in a passage of anger: “He exclaimed: Akiba, you have reminded me... that is why I was arrested for apostacy; for thereby I transgressed the scriptural words, ‘Remove thy way far from her’ (Proverbs 5:8) – referring to *minut*, and ‘Do not approach the door of her house’ – referring to the ruling power” (Babylonian Talmud, Avoda Zara 17a). This indicates that the rabbis associated *minut* with the Roman authorities, whom they saw both as proscribed and as dangerous to those who approached or form relations with them.²⁹

The Christians were hurt and outraged by the use of *Birkat ha-Minim*, in which they were cursed three times a day in the synagogues (in the morning, afternoon, and evening prayers). This was expressed in the protests of the Christian writers Epiphanius (315-403 C.E.)³⁰ and Jerome (342-429 C.E.).³¹ The harsh reactions of the Christian writers of the fourth century and those of the previous generations, Origenes (185-254 C.E.)³² and Justinus (middle of the second century C.E.),³³ as well as certain traces which may perhaps be discerned in the New Testament with regard to this Jewish practice, clearly proves that the goal, which was also one of propaganda, was achieved and hit its target.³⁴

The fifth century was a period during which the number of Christian communities in the Land of Israel grew and intensive missionary activity took place, including the southern part of the country. Pilgrims flowed into the area and its holiness to the Christians increased tremendously. The severe anti-Jewish legislation of this period was directed at the synagogue, because of its role as a focus of Jewish communal life. An outstanding example of this is Novela Number 146 of Justinianus

29. Avi-Yonah, 183-189; Schiffman, 61.

30. A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden, 1973), 44-52, 174-175, 220-224.

31. Klijn and Reinink, pp. 219, 221, 224, 225.

32. Hom. II in PS. 37 (XXXVII-XXXVI) [P.G. XII, 1387]; Homil. in Jerem. – XIX12 (GCS, 6 p. 168); In Isaiah, 5 18/19 (P.L. XXIV C. 87), b, XII, 7 (C. 484, *ibid.*)

33. Justinus, Dial. C. Tryph 16 (P.G. VI, C. 512, (*ibid.*, C. 577).

34. It is possible to add the following extreme language to the evidence presented in the text: “Come to see how strange [they are] in their commandments from all other nations: [once] every seven days they have an orgy and call it a Sabbath, when they gather in their synagogues and read things that it is impossible to hear and curse us by saying: ‘thy enemies shall submit themselves to thee,’ (Deut. 33:29) and many things which cannot be told.” (Midrash Hagadol to Esther 3:8, in *Aggadat Esther*, according to a Yemenite manuscript edited by S. Baber from Lvov, printed in Israel).

from 557 C.E.,³⁵ from which it would seem that Judaism was displaced gradually, while Christianity, which had in the past been of equal status with Judaism with regard to the Roman Empire's attitude towards it, now became its enemy.

It was only natural that, during this difficult time for Judaism, use would be made of the tried and efficient weapon which had proved itself in the past – *Birkat ha-Minim*.³⁶ This meant including, among other expressions of protest, new ones against the above mentioned developments.³⁷ The current role of *Birkat ha-Minim* was to serve as a moral protest against Christian dialectics and the oppression of the Roman-Christian regime³⁸ aimed, not at destroying Judaism, but rather at humbling the Jews and their religion. Synagogues continued to be built and to operate within the Land of Israel as a whole, including its southern reaches.³⁹

The evidence for this atmosphere of inter-religious enmity in the Jewish sources of the 6th and 7th centuries is exemplified in the mentioning of Christians in different versions of *Birkat ha-Minim* found in the Cairo genizah.⁴⁰ This inclusion of the Christians continued until 1426, when it appeared in the prayer book of R. Amram Gaon.⁴¹

The identification of the Ein-Gedi inscription with *Birkat ha-Minim* is thus a reasonable one against the background of the historical events during the period in

35. Avi-Yonah, pp. 189-190; Y. Dan, "The Land of Israel in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries," from *The Land of Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Moslem Conquest (Political, Social, and Cultural History)*, (Jerusalem, 1982), 293. See also the interesting testimony from the year 760 C.E. of Ben Baboi (born in the land of Israel, the student of R. Yehudai Gaon) on the anti-Jewish edicts of the period under discussion, aimed at the Jewish synagogue in the land of Israel, which were revoked only when the Moslems took control of the region and ejected Byzantine rule; see L. Ginzburg, *The Schechter Genizah; Passages from the Writings of the Geonim from the Egyptian Genizah* (New York, 1929), II: 550, 561-562.

36. Dothan has been the first and only scholar to connect Justinus' first novela and the atmosphere of the anti-Jewish edicts of the same period with the Ein Gedi inscription (Dothan, 213-215). I add to Dothan's connection, but associate it with my proposal for the interpretation of the inscription. See on this matter the interpretation by D. Barag with regard to the word *qiryah*, which indicates that Dothan's reading is in error, and thus his conclusions with regard to the meaning of the inscription; Barag, "The Meaning of the Term *Karta*," 453.

37. I will deal elsewhere with other expressions of protest and the conclusions resulting from them regarding the events in the area of the Judean Desert and the Jordan Valley.

38. On the revision of the blessing to an anti-Christian one, and on an opinion similar to the one appearing here, see the interesting remarks of Flusser, "The Jewish-Christian Schism," 33-34. See also the opinion of R. Yehuda Bar-Yaqar (Nachmanides' teacher) in his book, *Perush ha-Tefillot veha-Berakhot*, Pt. I, reprinted from the Montefiore manuscript, (Jerusalem, 1979), 49.

39. On this see Dan, 293; Linder, 14-15.

40. See Marmorstein (note 10), pp. 414-417; S. Schechter, "Genizah Specimens Liturgy," *JQR* x (1898), 657; J. Mann, "Genizah Fragments of the Palestinian Order of Service" *HUCA* ii (1925), 306.

41. D. Goldschmidt, ed., *Seder R. Amram Gaon*, (Jerusalem, 1972), 25.

which the Ein Gedi synagogue existed.

Another point supporting the identification we have proposed may be drawn from the striking emphasis given in our inscription to informers within the community: "He who reveals the secret of reading to the Gentiles slanders his compatriots to the Gentiles..." *Birkat ha-Minim* itself includes a ringing condemnation of informers and collaborators. Despite the fact that the Ein Gedi inscription does not specifically mention the heretics and apostates (*minim/meshumadim*) by name, one may consider the following passage from the Tosefta, Berakhot 3:25: "[If] one includes the *minim* [in the benediction] for the elders, and David [in the benediction] for Jerusalem, one has fulfilled one's obligation." In the Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit 5:2, we read: "[If] one includes the *minim* and the criminals in [the benediction] 'defeat the malicious'; the elders and the converts in [the benediction] 'promised to the righteous'; and David in [the benediction] 'builder of Jerusalem,' you may suffice with any one of them." These passages indicate the existence of an option to fulfill the obligation of reciting *Birkat ha-Minim* within the context of the benediction of *Perushin* – two blessings which were originally separate, and were at a later date joined into one unified blessing. Thus, the Ein-Gedi inscription contained that portion of this blessing directed against *perushin*, recitation of which was judged sufficient to fulfill the obligation of reciting *Birkat ha-Minim*. The sectarians (*perushin*) referred to in the blessing are those who broke away from the community, those same "informers" who joined forces with Gentile elements and who, as we have noted, revealed the secrets of the town to the Gentiles and slandered their compatriots to them. According to the sages of Judaism, these traitors were viewed among the most abominable criminals whose sin cannot be forgiven and who, in joining forces with the Gentiles and the evil regime, endangered the very existence of the Jewish people.⁴²

42. I quote the words of S. Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Feshuta: Berakhot*, p. 54: "We learn that this blessing (the benediction of *perushin*) was initially a curse against sectarians and people who had the habit of removing themselves from the community in difficult times; this curse was directed at all the sects and individuals who endangered the unity of the public, and the benediction of *perushin* existed long before Shmuel Hakatan. He simply revised the blessing to mention the *minim*, in particular because they had begun to endanger the public..." See also Flusser, "Jerusalem in Second Temple Literature" (op. cit., n. 22), 269-271; idem., "The Jewish-Christian Schism," 34-39.

On the total exclusion or excommunication of those transgressors who separated themselves from the community, see Tosefta Sanhedrin 13:5; Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, Version A, p. 64; Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 116a; Rosh Hashana 16a. For a typical example, which suits well the subject discussed here, I quote the words of the *Seder Olam Raba*, chapter 3: "Jewish transgressors who violated the Torah and the commandments and whose bodies have ceased to be and have become ashes and hell ejects them and the wind disperses them under the feet of righteous men... but one who broke away from the ways of the public, such as the *minim* and the *mosrot* and the heretics and the Epicureans, who frightened the land and denied the resurrection of the dead and those who say that the Torah is not from heaven and who mock the words of the sages: hell is locked before them and they are sentenced to it for ever and ever... and not only this, but when hell fades away they will remain, etc." Quoted in *Midrash Seder Olam*, Dov Ber Ratner, ed. (New York, 1966), p. 16.

Further confirmation of my view that the passage discussed here is a prayer formula, and not one unique to the inhabitants of Ein-Gedi (as argued by other scholars⁴³), follows from the parallel between the sins included here and those listed among other sins in the Great Confession, which forms part of the Morning Service for Yom Kippur in the rite of several Oriental Jewish communities.⁴⁴ The sins confessed are arranged according to the order of the Hebrew alphabet:

“...We have revealed (*gilinu*) the secret of our fellows.”

“We have given over (*masarnu*) our fellows and their wealth into the hands of strangers...”⁴⁵

“We have pursued (*raznu*) controversy” (in other versions: “we have adhered to controversy”)

It seems to this author that the same elements were used both by the Ein-Gedi inscription and by this Yom Kippur liturgy (in part), indicating the universality of these elements, against transgressing which the worshippers in the Ein-Gedi synagogue were warned. On the other hand, the authors of the Great Confession for Yom Kippur evidently wished to encompass all possible sins in this text, including those which we encounter in the Ein-Gedi Inscription.

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43. Mazar, 22-23; Lieberman, 24-26; Urbach, 27-30; Weinfeld, 125-129 (all listed in note 2 above).

44. See, for example, *Maḥzor Shelom-Yerushalayim (ha-Shalem); Seder Tefillot le-Yom Kippur ki-minhag benei Aram-Ṣova...*, ed. Yehezkel Hai Al-Beg (New York, 1970).

45. It is clear that the term “strangers” is used here in a general sense, and does not necessarily refer to the strangers referred to in the Ein-Gedi inscription, whom we have identified with the Christians.