

Did It Really Happen? The Stories Behind High Holiday Prayers

Week 1: Unetaneh Tokef

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1. **Who By Fire, Who By Water – Un'taneh Tokef**, edited by Lawrence Hoffman (<https://bit.ly/2kRNRBN>)
2. **Nissan Mindel, Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, The Gallery of our Great, Chabad.org** (<https://bit.ly/2koP2II>)

More than eight hundred years ago there lived a great man in the city of Mayence (Maintz). His name was Rabbi Amnon. A great scholar and a very pious man, Rabbi Amnon was loved and respected by Jews and non-Jews alike, and his name was known far and wide. Even the Duke of Hessen, the ruler of the land, admired and respected Rabbi Amnon for his wisdom, learning, and piety. Many a time the Duke invited the Rabbi to his palace and consulted him on matters of State. Rabbi Amnon never accepted any reward for his services to the Duke or to the State. From time to time, however, Rabbi Amnon would ask the Duke to ease the position of the Jews in his land, to abolish some of the decrees and restrictions which existed against the Jews at the time, and generally to enable them to live in peace and security. This was the only favor that Rabbi Amnon ever requested from the Duke, and the Duke never turned down his request. Thus, Rabbi Amnon and his brethren lived peacefully for many years. Now the other statesmen of the Duke grew envious of Rabbi Amnon. Most envious of them all was the Duke's secretary, who could not bear to see the honor and respect which Rabbi Amnon enjoyed with his master, which was rapidly developing into a great friendship between the Duke and the Rabbi. The secretary began to seek ways and means to discredit Rabbi Amnon in the eyes of the Duke. One day, the secretary said to the Duke: "Your Highness, why should you not persuade Rabbi Amnon to become a Christian, like ourselves? I am sure that considering the honor and many favors he has enjoyed at your generous hand, he will gladly abandon his faith and accept ours. The Duke thought it was not a bad idea. When Rabbi Amnon came to his palace the next day, the Duke said to him: "My good friend, Rabbi Amnon, I know you have been loyal and devoted to me for many years. Now I wish to ask you a personal favor. Abandon your faith, and become a good Christian like me. If you do, I shall make you the greatest man in the whole of my State; you shall have honor and riches like no other man, and next to me, you shall be the most powerful man in my land." Rabbi Amnon grew very pale. For a moment he could find no words to reply to the Duke, but after a while he said: "O, illustrious Monarch! For many years I have served you faithfully, and my being a Jew in no way lessened my loyalty to you or to the State. On the contrary, my faith bids me to be loyal and faithful to the land of my sojourn. I am ready and willing to sacrifice everything I possess, even my very life, for you as well as for the State. There is one thing, however, that I can never part with - this is my faith. I am bound by an unbreakable covenant to my faith, the faith of my forefathers. Do you want me to betray my people, my G-d! Would you want a man to serve you that has no respect for his religion, for the bonds and ties he holds most sacred! If I betray my G-d, could you ever trust me never to betray you! Surely, the Duke cannot mean it. The Duke is jesting!" "No, no," the Duke said, though he sounded a little uncertain, for inwardly the Duke was pleased with Rabbi Amnon's reply. Rabbi Amnon hoped the matter was settled, but when he arrived at the palace the next day, the Duke repeated his request. Rabbi Amnon became very unhappy, and began to avoid visiting the palace, unless it was absolutely necessary. One day, the Duke, impatient at Rabbi Amnon's obstinacy, put it very bluntly to him; he must either become a Christian or suffer the consequences. Pressed to give his answer immediately, Rabbi Amnon begged the Duke to allow him three days in which to consider the matter. This, the Duke granted him. No sooner did Rabbi Amnon leave the Duke, than he realized his grave sin. "My G-d!" he thought. "What have I done?! Am I lacking in faith and courage that I requested three days for consideration! Can there be any but one answer! How could I show such weakness even for one moment! O, gracious G-d, forgive me . . ." Rabbi Amnon arrived home brokenhearted. He secluded himself in his room and spent the next three days in prayer and supplication, begging G-d's forgiveness. When Rabbi Amnon did not arrive at the palace on the third day, the Duke became very angry, and ordered his men to bring Rabbi Amnon in chains. The Duke hardly recognized Rabbi Amnon; so much did the venerable man change in the course of the last three days. However, the Duke quickly brushed aside whatever feeling of sympathy he might have felt for his erstwhile friend, and said to him sternly: "How dare you disregard my command! Why did you not appear before, in time to give me your answer! For your sake, I trust you have decided to do as I tell you. It will be bad for you otherwise." Although Rabbi Amnon was now a broken man physically, his spirit was stronger than ever. "Your Highness," Rabbi Amnon answered him fearlessly, "There can be but one answer: I shall remain a loyal Jew as long as I breathe!" The Duke was beside himself with wrath. "It is now more than the question of your becoming Christian. You have disobeyed me by not coming voluntarily to give me your answer. For this you must be punished..." "Your Highness," Rabbi Amnon said, "By requesting three days for consideration, I have sinned gravely against my G-d." These brave words enraged the Duke even more. "For sinning against your G-d," the Duke

said angrily, "let Him avenge Himself. I shall punish you for disobeying my orders. Your legs sinned against me, for they refused to come to me; therefore your legs shall be cut off! With very faint signs of life, the legless body of Rabbi Amnon was sent back to his home, to his grief-stricken family. It was the day before Rosh Hashanah. The news about Rabbi Amnon's dreadful fate spread throughout the whole city. Everyone was horrified and distressed. It was a very tragic Day of Judgment for the Jews of Maintz, who assembled in synagogue the following morning. Despite his terrible suffering, Rabbi Amnon remembered that it was Rosh Hashanah, and he requested to be taken to synagogue. At his request, he was placed in front of the Holy Ark. All the worshippers, men, women and children, wept terribly seeing their beloved Rabbi in such agony, and never were any more heart-rending prayers offered than on that day of Rosh Hashanah. When the cantor began to recite the Musaf prayer, Rabbi Amnon motioned that there be made an interval while he offered a special prayer to G-d. Silence fell upon the worshippers, and Rabbi Amnon began to recite Unetanneh Tokef ("Let us express the mighty holiness of this day"). The congregation repeated every word, and their hearts went out to G-d in prayer and tears. "Kedusha" was then recited, followed by the prayer of "Oleinu". When the words "He is our G-d, and no other" were reached, Rabbi Amnon cried them out with his last remaining strength, and passed away...

3. Yitzchak b. Moshe of Vienna, Sefer Or Zaru'a, Volume 2, Hilchot Rosh Hashanah, Siman 276 (Ivan Marcus translation, accessed at <https://bit.ly/2kQudWF>, also cited in <https://bit.ly/2klDPZj>)

מצאתי מכתב ידו של ה"ר אפרים מבונא בר יעקב. שר' אמנון ממגנצא יסד ונתנה תוקף על מקרה הרע שאירע לו וז"ל:
מעשה בר' אמנון ממגנצא שהיה גדול הדור ועשיר ומיוחס ויפה תואר ויפה מראה והחלו השרים וההגמון לבקש ממנו שיהפך לדתם וימאן לשמוע להם ויהי כדברם אליו יום יום ולא שמע להם ויפצר בו ההגמון ויהי כהיום בהחזיקם עליו ויאמר חפץ אני להועץ ולחשוב על הדבר עד שלשה ימים וכדי לדחותם מעליי אמר כן ויהי אך יצא מאת פני ההגמון שם הדבר ללבו על אשר ככה יצא מפיו לשון ספק שהיה צריך שום עצה ומחשבה לכפור באלקים חיים ויבוא אל ביתו ולא אבה לאכול ולשתות ונחלה ויבואו כל קרוביו ואהביו לנחמו וימאן להתנחם כי אמר ארד אל ניבי אבל שאולה ויבך ויתעצב אל לבו ויהי ביום השלישי בהיותו כואב ודואג וישלח ההגמון אחריו ויאמר לא אלק ויוסף עוד הצר שלוח שרים רבים ונכבדים מאלה וימאן ללכת אליו ויאמר ההגמון מהרו את אמנון להביאו בעל כרחו וימהרו ויביאו אותו ויאמר לו מה זאת אמנון למה לא באת אלי למועד אשר יעדתי לי להועץ ולהשיב לי דבר ולעשות את בקשתי ויען ויאמר אמנון אני את משפטי אחרון כי הלשון אשר דבר ותכזב לך דינה לחתכה כי חפץ היה ר' אמנון לקדש את ה' על אשר דבר ככה ויען ההגמון ויאמר לא כי הלשון לא אחתוך כי היטב דברה אלא הרגלים אשר לא באו למועד אשר דברתי אלי אקצץ ואת יתר הגוף איסר ויצו הצורר ויקצצו את פרקי אצבעות ידיו ורגליו ועל כל פרק ופרק היו שואלין לו התחפץ עוד אמנון להפך לאמונתו ויאמר לא ויהי ככלותם לקצץ צוה הרשע להשכיב את ר' אמנון במגן אחד וכל פרקי אצבעותיו בצידו וישלחו לביתו הכי נקרא שמו ר' אמנון כי האמין בקל חי וסבל על אמונתו יסורין קשין מאהבה רק על הדבר שיצא מפיו. אחר הדברים האלו קרב מועד והגיע ר"ה בקש מקרוביו לשאת אותו לבית הכנסת עם כל פרקי אצבעותיו המלוחים ולהשכיבו אצל ש"צ. ויעשו כן ויהי כאשר הגיע ש"צ לומר הקדושה וחיות אשר הנה א"ל ר' אמנון אמתן מעט ואקדש את השם הגדול ויען בקול רם ובכן לך תעלה קדושה כלומר שקדשתי את שמך על מלכותך ויחודך ואח"כ אמר ונתנה תוקף קדושת היום ואמר אמת כי אתה דיין ומוכיח כדי להצדיק עליו את הדין שיעלו לפניו אותן פרקי ידיו ורגליו וכן כל הענין והזכיר וחזקתם יד כל אדם בו ותפקוד נפש כל חי שכך נגזר עליו בר"ה. וכשגמר כל הסילוק נסתלק ונעלם מן העולם לעין כל ואיננו כי לקח אותו אלקים ועליו נאמר מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך וגו'. אחר הדברים והאמת אשר הועלה ר' אמנון ונתבקש בישיבה של מעלה ביום השלישי לטהרתו נראה במראות הלילה לרבנא קלונימוס בן רבנא משולם בן רבנא קלונימוס בן רבנא משה בן רבנא קלונימוס ולימד לו את הפיוט ההוא ונתנה תוקף קדושת היום ויצו עליו לשלוח אותו בכל התפוצות הגולה להיות לו עד וזכרון ויעש הגאון כן: סליקו להו הלכות ראש השנה

I found in the handwriting of Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn bar Jacob that Rabbi Amnon of Mainz wrote (the liturgical poem beginning) "And let us affirm (the holiness of the day)": unetaneh toqef qedushat hayom because of a wicked incident that happened to him and these are his words: An incident involving Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, the greatest figure of his generation (gedol ha-dor) and (a man of) wealth and family lineage, (who was also) "Well built and handsome" (Genesis 39:6). It happened that the ruler and (his) officials tried to persuade him to convert to their error. "He refused" (Genesis 39:8) to listen to them. "It happened as" they "would talk to him about this, day in and day out, that he would ignore" them (from Genesis 39:10). But the ruler pressed him and "one such day" (Genesis 39:11) (the ruler) forced (the officers) on Amnon so much that he said to them, "I want to consult (with others) and think it over for three days." He said that only to get them off his back, but as he left the ruler, he remembered that [he had answered the ruler the way he had – by saying the obscenity (nibbul hapeh) to the ruler, that he would take counsel concerning this and (he realized) that it sounded as though he actually were uncertain. Did he really need any advice or further thought about denying the living G-d? He returned home and could not eat or drink. He grew ill and relatives and friends came by "to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, saying, 'No, I will go down mourning over my words in Sheol.' And he wept" (Genesis 37:35) and grew despondent. On the third day, as he was writhing in agony, the ruler sent for him, but he said, "I will not go." The enemy sent many more dignitaries to him, each one more distinguished than the other, but he still refused to go to him. The ruler (finally) said, "Bring Amnon to me, right now, even against his will!" They rushed out and got him. He said to him, "What is the matter, Amnon? Why did not you come on the day that you said you would, after getting advice, and answer me in obedience to my demand?" Amnon answered him, "I will determine my punishment. The tongue that lied to you should be cut out." Rabbi Amnon wanted to

sanctify G-d for having said what he said. But the ruler replied, "No, I will not cut off the tongue, because it spoke well. Rather, I will cut off the feet which did not come when you said they would, and I will torture the rest of (your) body." The enemy then ordered that his fingers, hands, and feet be cut off, joint by joint. At each stage they asked him, "Do you want to convert to our faith?" And he said, "No." When they had finished cutting them off, the wicked one commanded that Rabbi Amnon be laid out on a shield, his severed fingers next to him, and he sent him home. Now the reason he is called Rabbi Amnon is because he believed (he'emin) in the Living G-d and suffered severe tortures out of the love for his faith, all because of what he had said. Afterwards, the time of Rosh Hashanah was approaching. He asked his relatives to carry him to the synagogue with the preserved parts of his fingers and to place him near the cantor. They did so. When the cantor was about to recite the Qedushah, (and the liturgical poem that begins,) "And the beasts which are," Rabbi Amnon said to him, "Wait a moment, and I will sanctify the Great Name. And he replied in a loud voice, "And so, may Holiness rise up to You," meaning, I have sanctified Your Name on account of Your Kingdom and Unity. Afterwards he said, "And let us affirm (unetaneh toqef) the Holiness of the day," and he said, "It is true that You are a judge and a rebuker" in order to justify G-d, that all his finger and foot parts should rise before Him as well as the entire episode. And he said, "everyone's seal is on (his sinful deed)"; "and You will remember (to reward or punish) every living being," for one's (future) is decided on Rosh Hashanah. When he had finished the whole silluq (prayer), he vanished (nistaleq) and disappeared from the notice of everyone in the world; "then he was no more, for G-d took him" (Genesis 5:24). About him is written, "How abundant is the good that You have in store for those who fear you, etc." (Psalms 31:20). After all this happened, and the truth (was realized?) that Rabbi Amnon had been elevated and requested at the Court on High on the third day of his purification, he appeared in a night vision to Rabbenu Qalonimos ben Rabbi Meshullam ben Rabbi Qalonimos ben Rabbi Moshe ben Rabbi Qalonimos. He taught him that piyyut (that begins), "And let us affirm the holiness of the day" (unetaneh toqef), and (Amnon) commanded that (Rabbenu Qalonimos) disseminate it throughout the Exile as a memorial to him, and the Gaon did so.

4. Gotthard Deutsch, Amnon of Mayence (Mentz), 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia (<https://bit.ly/2kpqgrW>)

The oldest mention of this story seems to be found in the notes on Asheri, written by Israel of Krems or Kremsier, about 1400 (R. H. i. § 4, in the Wilna edition of the Talmud, folio 36a). Israel of Krems merely says: The "U-netanneh Tokef" was written by Amnon of Mayence with reference to his own history. He gives Isaac of Vienna's work, "Or Zaru'a," as his source. The story, as given above, is found in the Maḥzor of the Roman rite for the New-year's day, published 1541. From it Gedaliah ibn Yaḥya took it; and the other historians followed him. The Maḥzor editions reprinted it; and so the story became very popular. The Russian poet S. Frug took it as the subject of an epic; and Schakschansky wove it into a drama in Judæo-German.

5. Josef Bamberger, Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Encyclopedia of Jewish Stories, Volume 4, English Abstracts, pages xxvi – xxvii (<http://www.biupress.co.il/files/202562.pdf>, pages 20-21)

At the beginning of the story, the author notes that he found the legend in a manuscript by Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn (one of the sages of Ashkenaz in the second half of the twelfth century). A stylistic comparison of the narrative text to the known style of R. Ephraim corroborates the authenticity of this note. Until the nineteenth century, when the first edited literary version appeared (published by Leopold Stein in 1834), most of the versions followed the original, with little or no changes to the language and style. The attribution of this legend to Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn appears only in Or Zarua and is absent in almost all the other medieval versions. The stylistic connection of all the medieval versions to Or Zarua's version is evident in the biblical style and in the juxtaposition of the story to u-Netane Tokef. This clear and concise text was canonized shortly after its initial publication, and this may also be due to its attribution to a manuscript by an authoritative figure such as R. Ephraim of Bonn.

6. Chronicles of Jerahmeel, Wikipedia

The Chronicles of Jerahmeel is a voluminous work that draws largely on Pseudo-Philo's earlier history of Biblical events and is of special interest because it includes Hebrew and Aramaic versions of certain deuterocanonical books in the Septuagint. The Chronicles were published in English as The Chronicles of Jerahmeel Or, the Hebrew Bible Historiale by the Royal Asiatic Society, translated by Moses Gaster, 1899. Gaster stated in his extensive preface his view (p. xx) that the Chronicles were compiled from several Hebrew sources, some quite ancient and

others more recent. The actual compiler of the chronicles identifies himself as "Eleasar ben Asher the Levite" who, according to Gaster, lived in the Rhineland in the 14th century. The most recent events depicted in the Chronicles refer to the time of the Crusades, but the entire rest of it pertains to the period before AD 70. Among the early sources quoted in the work is the 1st century Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. Gaster explained that he chose to title it "Chronicles of Jerahmeel" instead of "Chronicles of Eleasar" because of his analysis that Eleasar was merely a compiler, while the enigmatic "Jerahmeel" is the source most extensively reproduced, following the Yosippon which is otherwise extant. This 'Jerahmeel' has since been identified as Jerahmeel ben Solomon, thought to have flourished in Italy around 1150. After a thorough discussion of all the textual evidence, Gaster further concluded that, like the closely related Sefer haYashar, it relies on sources ultimately dependent on Isidore of Seville, particularly evident in its mention of "Franks" and "Lombards" among the Sons of Noah.

7. Eli Yasif, Sefer Hazichronot (Divrei Hayamim LeYerachme'el), page 53

אחד הפרקים הגדולים והמרשימים ביותר בסה"ז הוא זה שאלעזר הלוי מכנה "ספר הגזירות"; שבאות בו העתקות מקיפות משני חיבורים בעיקר - מן הכרוניקה של אלעזר בר נתן על מסע הצלב הראשון, וספר זכירה לר אפרים מבון; כן בא כאן בין שני החיבורים מעשה אמנון ממגנצה שאלעזר רואה אותו כשייך לאותו מעגל מרטרולוגי של מסעי הצלב. אך מעניינת במיוחד העובדה שהפרק כולו פותח ב"עשרת הרוגי מלכות" השייך מבחינה כרונולוגית לפרקים מוקדמים בהרבה. החלטת אלעזר לכלול את החיבור בתוך "ספר הגזירות" ולא על פי שייכותו הכרונולוגית לתקופת חז"ל, מצביעה על העדיפות הנושאת, האידיאלית, על פני זו הכרונולוגית: כך מוצגים מקדשי השם של גזירות תתנ"ו כממשיכי עשרת הרוגי המלכות.

8. Left – Cairo Genizah MS Cambridge T-S H8.6 (from blog.nli.org.il/unetanneh_tokef, slightly modified for printing). Right – Unnamed Cairo Genizah Manuscript (from Kenneth Brander, U'Netaneh Tokef: Will the Real Author Please Stand Up, Yeshiva University Tishrei To-Go 5774, page 14)



9. Eliezer Segal, Legend and Liturgy: The Elusive Tale of the Untanneh Tokef (<https://bit.ly/2klOpzD>)

It is in fact questionable whether there ever was a rabbi named Amnon from Mainz. The name Amnon was not in use among the Jews of central Europe--and never achieved widespread popularity, even after the proliferation of this tale. The author of the Untanneh Tokef legend had to make a special point of explaining that the protagonist was called Amnon on account of his deep religious faith (emunah in Hebrew). This detail probably had to be introduced because his readers were not familiar with Jews in their own lands who bore that name. On the other hand, Amnon was a relatively common name among Italian Jews, and an individual bearing that name appears in a group of ten Jews who were martyred in southern Italy in 925.

10. David Golinkin, Do "Repentance, Prayer and Tzedakah Avert the Severe Decree"? (<https://bit.ly/2klDPZj>)

However, as many scholars have pointed out, the Rabbi Amnon narrative is fiction, not history, for the following reasons:

- Rabbi Amnon, who is described as "the great one of his generation and wealthy and of good lineage", is not mentioned in any other source in all of medieval Jewish literature.

- The name, in any case, sounds like an etiological name derived from the narrative i.e. he was called Amnon "kee heemeen b'kel hai", because he believed in the living G-d.
- The introduction says that he "yassad" = founded or composed Unetane Tokef, but the end of the story says that he "amar" = said it, which seems to imply that it was an already existing poem.
- Unetane tokef is a type of poem called a "silluk" which leads into the kedushah, (See Kieval (above, note 4), p. 186). but the story says that Rabbi Amnon recited it as the cantor was about to recite the poem "V'hayot asher heinah" which is in the middle of the kedushah! (Daniel Goldschmidt, Mahzor Layamim Hanora'im, Vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1970, p. 216 and cf. Frankel, p. 134).
- Rabbi Amnon says to the cantor: "Wait a bit and I will sanctify G-d's great name, and he said in a loud voice: 'May our kedushah ascend unto You'". In other words, according to the story, he said the introductory sentence to the poem as a lead-in to dying al kiddush hashem, for the sanctification of G-d's name. This sentence, however, is not necessarily connected with dying for the sanctification of G-d's name since it is recited at the beginning of every silluk!
- The story concludes: "When he finished the silluk, nistalek (he died) and disappeared from the world in front of all". This is a clever play-on-words, but does not need to be taken literally.
- The gruesome punishment of dismemberment described did not exist in Germany at that time.
- There was a medieval Ashkenazic rabbi who asked to think for a day about converting to Christianity; he was none other than Rabbi Kalonymos son of Meshulam who is mentioned at the end of the story (A. M. Haberman, Sefer Gezeirot Ashkenaz V'zorefat, Jerusalem, 1945, p. 41).
- Amnon is not an Ashkenazic Jewish name; it is an Italian name mentioned once ca. 925 c.e. by Rabbi Shabetai Donolo (Hakmoni, Florence, 1881, p. 4).

11. Gotthard Deutsch, Amnon of Mayence (Mentz), 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia (<https://bit.ly/2kpqgrW>)

The story is a legend without any historical value, based on the reminiscences of the persecutions during the Crusades, and inspired by the veneration for the "U-netanneh Tokef," which, in vivid colors, pictures the divine judgment on New-year's day. The material of the story is taken partly from the legend of St. Emmeram of Regensburg (see Amram of Mayence), who, having been accused by Uta, daughter of Thedo, Duke of Bavaria, of being her seducer, was tied to a ladder, where his limbs were cut off, one by one. He was then brought to the castle of Aschheim, where he expired praying and blessing his murderers ("Acta Sanctorum," September series, vi. 474).

12. Eliyahu Munk, Olam Hatefillot Volume 2, page 226

ואולם יש סוברים שר' קלונימוס בן משולם ממגנצא המאה ה-יא הוא מחברו של פיוט זה (ראה S. Zunz, Literaturgeschichte) עמ' (107)

13. Pini Dunner, The Legend of Rabbi Amnon Reconsidered (<https://bit.ly/2mmITxj>)

What is certain is that it has nothing whatsoever to do with the composition of Unetaneh Tokef, a fact that was proven beyond any doubt when the very same prayer was found in an eleventh century middle-eastern Cairo Genizah fragment. But while I will leave it to others to speculate on the origins of both the prayer and the strange legend of Rabbi Amnon, rather than finding this iconoclastic myth-busting revision disturbing, I actually find it quite liberating. As it turns out, Yamim Noraim were never meant to be associated with stories and legends. Unlike other festivals where stories evoke the mood of the day, on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur they would be nothing but a distraction. On these Days of Awe, we reflect on our lives and future unencumbered by literary gimmicks and narrative crutches. Rather we consider simple questions – "Are we connected to G-d?" "Will we live?" "Will we die?" Hopefully, we will merit answers that bode well for us, our families and our communities, and we can look forward to a wonderful year ahead.

14. Kenneth Brander, U'Netaneh Tokef: Will the Real Author Please Stand Up, Yeshiva University Tishrei To-Go 5774

One critical question remains: If R. Ephraim of Bonn was an expert in the liturgy of Yannai, why would he attribute Yannai's U'Netaneh Tokef to R. Amnon?

U'Netaneh Tokef was placed in our Rosh Hashana prayers as part of the introduction to Kedusha. The piyut (prayer) that introduces Kedusha contained four sections. Prior to the First Crusade, a piyut of Rabbi Eleazer HaKalir was recited. The last section of the introduction, known as the siluk, narrates a conversation between the angels and G-d. The angels approach G-d and ask, "Why do the Jewish people continue to be in Your good grace? They don't treat You properly or listen to Your words. You should not forgive them!" Hashem defends us and the angels continue, "Why do You defend the Jewish people? They don't listen to You and are sinners." Once again Hashem responds and settles the questions. The angels then praise Hashem with the "Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh..." Sometime after the First Crusade, this siluk was removed and replaced with Yannai's U'Netaneh Tokef; for how could the Rhineland communities tolerate such an introduction to Kedusha? They witnessed unprecedented acts of martyrdom within the Jewish Community, acts of resistance against forced baptism by the Catholic Church, which included the taking of their own lives and the lives of their family. It did not seem appropriate to introduce Kedusha with a critique of the Jewish people by the angels when Jews were sacrificing their lives and the lives of their families in order to observe the Torah. The ideals found in Yannai's U'Netaneh Tokef seem much more apropos to the circumstances of the Rhineland community and this is why it replaced the original siluk...

Nevertheless, the question that needs to be asked is: Why is U'Netaneh Tokeh proactively attributed to Rav Amnon of Mainz?

There are times when the authors of a prayer are not those who originally composed the text but those who did something more important—lived the message of the text. An example includes a statement by the Tanna Shmuel haKatan. Shmuel haKatan is quoted (Avot 4:19) as having said, "in the downfall of your enemy, do not rejoice." However, this saying is found in a verse in Mishlei (24:17) that was written by King Solomon. Why is it attributed to Shmuel haKatan? It is because several times in Talmud we see that Shmuel haKatan exemplified this concept in his own life.

15. Otzar Hamidrashim, Midrash Asarah Harugei Malchut page 442 (Abe Katz translation, in Beurei Hatefila Newsletter 9:38, <https://bit.ly/2kRg6Ap>)

ואחריו הוציאו את ר' יהודה בן דמאי, אותו היום ערב שבועות היה. א"ל ר' יהודה לקיסר בחיך המתין לי מעט עד שאקיים מצות עצרת ואקדשו כדי לשבח להקב"ה שנתן לנו התורה, א"ל הקיסר ועדיין אתה בוטח בתורה ובאלקים שנתנה? א"ל הן, א"ל קיסר מה שכרה של תורתך, א"ל עליה אמר דוד ע"ה מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך, א"ל הקיסר אין שוטים בעולם כמו אתם שסוברים שיש עולם אחר, א"ל אין שוטים בעולם כמו אתם שכופרים באלקים חיים, ואוי לך אוי לבשתך ואוי להרפתך כשתראה אותנו עם ה' באור החיים, ואתה תשב בשאול תחתית במדרגה התחתונה. מיד חרה אפו של הקיסר עליו וצוה לקשרו בשעירות ראשו בזנב הסוס ולמושכו בכל רוחב של רומי. ואח"כ צוה לחתכו אברים אברים. ובא אליהו ז"ל ולקח האברים וקברם במערה אחת הסמוכה לנהר היורד לפני רומי, ושמעו כל רומיים קול נהי ובכי כל שלשים יום מתוך אותה מערה ובאו והגידו לקיסר, אמר להם אם היה העולם נהפך לתוהו ובהו לא אשקוט עד שאמלא רצוני באותן עשרה זקנים כאשר נשבעתי.

The next to be brought out was Rabbi Yehudah son of Dama. The day was Erev Shavuot. Rabbi Yehuda said to the Emperor: May it please the Emperor if the Emperor would allow me a moment to recite Kiddish Ha'Yom, the sanctification of the day, the Mitzvah that opens the holiday of Shavuot, so that I may heap praise on G-d who gave the Jewish people the Torah. The Emperor responded: You still believe in the Torah and the G-d who gave it to the Jewish People? Rabbi Yehudah answered: Yes. The Emperor then asked: what is the reward that you expect to receive for keeping the laws of the Torah? Rabbi Yehudah responded: About the Torah King David wrote (Tehillim 31, 20): Oh how great is Your goodness, which You have prepared for those who fear You; which You have done for those who trust in You, in the sight of the sons of men! And so the Emperor retorted: There are no greater fools than you in this world if you believe that an afterlife exists. Rabbi Yehudah responded: No, there are no greater fools than you in the world if you deny the existence of a living G-d. Woe unto you. How great will be your embarrassment and humiliation when one day you will see us seated next to G-d surrounded by the light of life while you will be sitting in the lowest level of Hell. Hearing this, the Emperor became enraged and immediately ordered that Rabbi Yehudah's hair be tied to the tail of a horse and that he be dragged through the streets of Rome. As a sign of his continued anger, the Emperor ordered that Rabbi Yehudah's body be cut bone by bone. Eliyahu Ha'Navi then came and gathered the bones and buried them in a cave next to a river that flowed into Rome. For thirty days, the Romans heard the sound of crying and weeping emanating from that cave. They went and reported the noise to the Emperor. The Emperor responded: even if what I do causes the world to be destroyed, I will not rest until I fulfill my wish to murder all ten Rabbinic scholars as I vowed to do.