

Jewish Heresies – Towards a Historical Definition of *Minut*

על המינים ואופיים בתלמודם שלתנאים

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1) Early Uses of the Term “Heresy”

Josephus, <i>Life</i> 10, 12 (c. 95 CE)	Acts 15.5 (late 1 st c. CE)	Acts 24.14-15
And when I was about sixteen years old, I had a mind to comprehend the several αἰρέσεων that were among us. These [<i>hairseseis</i>] are three: The first is that of the Pharisees, the second that Sadducees, and the third that of the Essenes, as we have frequently told you; for I thought that by this means I might choose the best, if I were once acquainted with them all... So when I had accomplished my desires, I returned back to the city, being now nineteen years old, and began to conduct myself according to the rules of the [<i>hairesis</i>] of the Pharisees, which is like that of the Stoics, as the Greeks call them.	5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the αἰρέσεως of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”	14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a ἄρεσιν. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

2) Later Uses of “Heresy”

Irenaeus (c. 130 – 200 CE; Gaul) , <i>Against Heresies</i> , Pref. 2
I do this, in order that thou, obtaining an acquaintance with these things, mayest in turn explain them to all those with whom thou art connected, and exhort them to avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ. I intend, then, to the best of my ability, with brevity and clearness to set forth the opinions of those who are now promulgating heresy. I refer especially to the disciples of Ptolemaeus, whose school may be described as a bud from that of Valentinus. I shall also endeavour, according to my moderate ability, to furnish the means of overthrowing them, by showing how absurd and inconsistent with the truth are their statements.

3) “Minut” in Tannaitic Literature

Mishnah, <i>Sanhedrin</i> 4.5 (early 3 rd century CE)	
לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי בעולם... ושלא יאמרו המינים, רשייות הרבה בשמיים	Therefore man was created alone in the world...so that the <i>minim</i> shall not say that there are many powers in heaven.
Mishnah, <i>Megillah</i> 4.8 [according to MS Kaufmann A 50]	
העושה תפילתו עגולה סכנה, [מפני] שאין בה מצוה. נתנה על מצחו, או על פס ידו הרי זו דרך המינות; ציפה זהב, ונתנה על בית יד שלינוקלו <נקלו?> הרי זו דרך החיצונים	If one makes his phylactery round, it is a danger since he has not fulfilled the commandment with it. If he puts it on his forehead or the palm of his hand, this is the way of <i>minut</i> . If he overlaid it with gold or placed it on the sleeve of his cloak, this is the way of the outsiders.

Tosefta, <i>Berakhot</i> 3.25 (mid-late 3 rd century CE)	
שמונה עשרה ברכות שאמרו חכמים כנגד שמונה עשרה אזכרות שבהבו לה' בני אלים כולל של מינים בשל פרושין ושל גרים בשל זקנים ושל דוד בבונה ירושלם אם אמר אלו לעצמן ואילו לעצמן יצא	The Eighteen Benedictions that the sages prescribed correspond to the eighteen mentions [of the Divine Name] in [Psalm 29]. One includes the benediction concerning <i>minim</i> in the one about separatists, and the benediction concerning proselytes in the one about the elders, and the benediction concerning David in the one about the Builder of Jerusalem. If he said them individually he has fulfilled his obligation.

4) Talmudic Postscript: Yavneh

Bavli, <i>Berachot</i> 28b-29a (ca. 6 th - 7 th centuries CE)	
ת"ר שמעון הפקולי הסדיר שמונה עשרה ברכות לפני רבן גמליאל על הסדר ביבנה אמר להם ר"ג לחכמים כלום יש אדם שיודע לתקן ברכת <הצדוקים> {המינים} עמד שמואל הקטן ותקנה לשנה אחרת שכחה (כט,א) והשקיף בה שתיים ושלוש שעות ולא העלוהו	Our rabbis taught: Shimon ha-Paqli arranged the eighteen benedictions before Rabban Gamaliel, according to their arrangement, at Yavneh. R. Gamaliel said to the sages: is there no one who knows how to enact the blessing of the <i>minim</i> ? Shmuel the Little arose and enacted it. The next year he forgot it, and he contemplated it for two or three hours, but they did not remove him [as prayer leader].
Yerushalmi, <i>Yevamot</i> 1.6 (ca. late 4 th – early 5 th centuries CE)	
תני יצאתה בת קול ואמרה אילו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הם אבל הלכה כבית הלל לעולם. באיכן יצאת בת קול. רב ביבי בשם רבי יוחנן אמר ביבנה יצאת בת קול	It was taught: a heavenly voice emerged and said: Both these and these are the words of the living God, but the law is forever in accordance with the House of Hillel. Where did the heavenly voice emerge? R. Bibi said in the name of R. Yohanan: the heavenly voice emerged at Yavneh.