

ʿAm Construed as Singular and Plural in Hebrew Biblical Texts: Diachronic and Textual Perspectives*

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It has long been realized in Biblical Hebrew grammar that collective nouns¹ such as ʿam „people“, gôy „nation“, or hayil „army“, are regularly construed with verbs as both singular and plural.² It has also for a long time been remarked that in Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH = post-exilic) books, especially Chronicles, there is a tendency for this variation to give way to an almost exceptionless construction of the collective nouns as plural. Thus, compare I Chronicles 11:13 *wēhaʿām nāsû* (plural verb) „and the people fled“ with its parallel in 2 Samuel 23:11 *wēhāʿām nās* (singular verb)³. This is thus put forward as a generally accepted feature of LBH.⁴

The plan in the current study is to focus on the word ʿam „people“ as a particularly prominent member of the class of collective nouns, and to investigate not only the Masoretic text (MT) but other Hebrew texts. Such a study raises questions about the relationship between textual study of the Hebrew Bible and the writing of a historical grammar of Hebrew.

* Many thanks are due to Professors Avi Hurvitz and Victor Sasson who read earlier drafts of this article and by their stimulating comments greatly improved it. Any faults which still remain are naturally my own responsibility.

¹ On collectives in general see B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, 1990), p.113-114.

² E.g. GKC 145 b-g, p.462-463; Brockelmann - VG, vol.II, p.178-179; Joüon, 150e, p.459; reproduced with additional comments in P. Joüon-T.Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome, 1991), II, p.553.

³ A. Kropat, *Die Syntax des Autors der Chronik verglichen mit der seiner Quellen* (BZAW 16; Giessen, 1909), p.28-30; G. Gerleman, *Synoptic Studies in the Old Testament* (Lund, 1948), p.16-17; R. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew Toward An Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Missoula, 1976), p.40-42; A. Bendavid, *Leshon Miqra u-Lshon Hakamim* (Tel Aviv, 1967), volume I, p.70.

⁴ M. F. Rooper, *Biblical Hebrew in Transition The Language of the Book of Ezekiel* (JSOT/SS 90; Sheffield, 1990), p.94-96.

(1) The MT (According to Leningrad Codex B19^A).

(a) With Verbs

(i) Introduction to Table 1

The starting point for this study of the MT is the Leningrad Codex as printed in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Following is a table of the numbers of times ‘am as subject is construed with singular or plural verbs. The specific verbs are third person perfect and imperfect, and participles. The first column records the number of times a singular or plural verb was the first verb construed with ‘am. The second column shows the total number of verbs construed with ‘am. The basic criterion for this initial survey was simply that the word ‘am was the unambiguous subject of the verb. It was felt to be premature to make distinctions already at this point. Thus no distinction is made in the table between main clause verbs („the people fled,“ see above) and those in a subordinate clause (e.g. Ex 5:1: „let my people go in order that they might hold a feast ...“) Further distinctions based on word order will be attempted later, in table two.

It was decided to include phrases where ‘am is the governing noun in a construct chain, like „the people of Judah“ (e.g. II Kgs 14:21)⁵, but to exclude cases of double subjects (e.g. „all the people ... and the commanders of the forces,“ II Kgs 25:26), and appositional phrases such as „my people, Egypt“ (Isa 19:25). Thus also, once a pronoun related to ‘am which could be taken as the subject of the verb intervened between ‘am and a verb, the counting in column two was stopped. We discuss pronouns and the more general patterns beyond these particular types of verbs below.

It should be noted that assembling such a list sometimes involves choices in difficult contexts. Thus in some cases where it was decided to leave out an example because it was judged that the relationship between a verb and ‘am was too problematic or *vice versa* other scholars may feel more confident in their understanding. Nevertheless, the intention is not so much to provide exact figures, but rather an impression of the general trend of the evidence. In this context it should also be remarked that the numbers are simply too small for any meaningful statistical analysis. It is a matter rather for scholarly assessment of probabilities. The figures in brackets express the percentage of singular verbs in relation to the total number of verbs in each book, but these again are intended as mere guides helping comparison of the various books, not as in any way prescriptive.

⁵ As does also e.g. Kropat, *Syntax der Chronik* (note 3), p.29.

(ii) Table 1: 'am as subject of verbs, overall figures.

Book ⁶	First Verb		(% singular)	Total Verbs		(% singular)
	Singular	Plural		Singular	Plural	
Genesis ⁷	2	0	(100)	2	0	(100)
Exodus ⁸	35	23	(60)	36	43	(46)
Leviticus ⁹	1	2	(33)	1	4	(20)
Numbers ¹⁰	17	8	(68)	23	23	(50)
Deuteronomy ¹¹	5	5	(50)	7	13	(35)
Joshua ¹²	7	12	(37)	8	20	(28)
Judges ¹³	9	10	(47)	9	18	(33)
Samuel ¹⁴	40	36	(53)	41	49	(46)
Kings ¹⁵	15	30	(33)	16	47	(25)

⁶ Books with no examples do not appear.

⁷ Gen 41: 40, 55.

⁸ Initial verb singular: Ex 1:20; 4:31; 5:12; 8:18; 12:27, 34; 13:17; 14:5; 15:16, 16; 16:4; 17:2, 3, 3, 6; 18:13, 14, 15; 19:9, 16, 23; 20:18-19, 21; 24:3; 32:1, 1, 6, 7-8, 21, 31; 33:4, 10, 10; 34:10; 36:6.

Initial verb plural: Ex 5:1; 7:16, 26; 8:4, 16; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 14:31; 15:24; 16:30; 17:4; 19:8, 14, 17, 21; 20:18; 24:2, 7; 32:3, 35; 33:8; 36:5.

⁹ Initial verb singular: Lev 9:24. Plural: Lev 20:2, 4.

¹⁰ Initial verb singular: Num 11:1, 2, 10, 32; 12:15; 20:1, 3; 21:5, 6, 7; 22:5, 11; 23:9, 24; 24:14; 25:1, 2.

Initial verb plural: Num 11:8, 13, 35; 12:16; 14:1, 11, 39-40; 31:32

¹¹ Initial verb singular: Deut 4:33; 9:12; 27:16-26; 28:33; 31:16.

Initial verb plural: Deut 5:28 (25); 10:11; 17:13; 20:11; 27:15.

Normally parallel expressions were counted as separate occurrences since, as shown below, they have the potential to vary from each other. Nevertheless, it was decided to count Deuteronomy 27:16-26 as one occurrence, so as not to give a completely unbalanced picture of the book. On this passage and its importance, see below.

¹² Initial verb singular: Josh 4:11; 6:20, 20-21; 7:3; 8:20; 24:16, 21.

Initial verb plural: Josh 3:16; 4:10, 19; 5:5; 6:5, 5, 20; 8:11, 13, 16; 10:21; 24:24.

¹³ Initial verb singular: Judg 5:13 (vs MT accent), 18; 9:36, 42, 43; 20:8; 21:2, 9, 15.

Initial verb plural: Judg 2:4, 7; 5:11; 7:7, 8; 9:37, 49; 10:18; 11:11; 16:24; 21:4.

¹⁴ Initial verb singular: I Sam 4:3, 4; 9:13; 10:11; 11:12; 12:18; 13:6, 8, 11; 14:3, 24, 26, 26, 28, 30, 31, 32, 32, 45; 15:15, 21; 17:27. II Sam 1:4; 2:27; 3:35; 6:19; 15:12; 17:2, 3; 18:3, 6, 16; 19:3, 4, 4, 9, 10, 40; 20:12; 23:11.

Initial verb plural: I Sam 2:24; 6:19; 8:7, 19; 10:24; 11:4, 5, 7, 15; 12:19; 13:4, 6, 7; 14:33, 34, 40, 41, 45; 17:30; 26:5; 30:6. II Sam 2:28; 3:32, 34, 36; 13:34; 14:15; 15:23, 23, 30; 18: 4, 5, 7; 20:15; 22:44; 23:10.

¹⁵ Initial verb singular: I Kgs 3:8; 8:44; 12:27; 16:16, 22; 18:24, 39. II Kgs 6:30; 7:16; 8:21; 11:14 (see below, note 26), 20; 21:24; 23:3, 30.

Initial verb plural: I Kgs 1:39, 40, 40; 3:2; 8:50, 66; 12:5, 9, 10, 16, 30; 16:15; 18:21, 30, 37; 19:21; 22:44. II Kgs 4:41, 42, 43; 7:17, 20; 11:18; 12:4; 14:4, 21; 15:4, 35; 18:36; 21:24.

Isaiah ¹⁶	13	8	(62)	13	8	(62)
Jeremiah ¹⁷	9	20	(31)	9	28	(24)
Ezekiel ¹⁸	1	9	(10)	1	14	(7)
Hosea	2	2		2	2	
Joel	0	2		0	2	
Amos	0	2		0	2	
Micah	1	0		1	0	
Nahum	0	1		0	1	
Habakkuk	1	0		1	0	
Zephaniah	1	1		1	1	
Haggai	0	2		0	2	
(Total XII) ¹⁹	5	10	(33)	5	10	(33)
Psalms ²⁰	5	5	(50)	5	8	(38)
Job ²¹	0	1	(0)	0	2	(0)
Proverbs ²²	4	0	(100)	4	0	(100)
Lamentations ²³	0	1	(0)	0	3	(0)
Daniel ²⁴	2	0	(100)	2	0	(100)
Ezra-	2	13	(13)	2	20	(9)
Nehemiah ²⁵						
Chronicles ²⁶	3	25	(11)	3	31	(9)

¹⁶ Initial verb singular: Isa 1:3; 3:5; 5:13; 8:6, 12; 9:12, 18; 29:13; 30:19; 32:18; 52:4, 5, 6.

Initial verb plural: Isa 9:1, 8; 25:3; 30:5, 6; 43:21; 63:18; 65:10.

¹⁷ Initial verb singular: Jer 2:11, 13; 6:22; 23:33; 26:9; 31:2; 48:46; 49:1; 50:41.

Initial verb plural: Jer 2:31, 32; 4:22; 5:23-24, 31; 6:21; 8:7; 14:10, 11-12; 15:1-2, 20; 16:10; 18:15; 31:14; 33:24; 35:16; 36:9; 41:13, 14; 50:6 (*Qere*; *Ketib* is singular!).

¹⁸ Initial verb singular: Ezek 33:6.

Initial verb plural: Ezek 13:21; 22:29; 24:19; 33:2, 31; 39:13; 45:16; 46:3, 18.

¹⁹ Initial verb singular: Hos 4:14; 10:5; Mic 2:8; Hab 3:16; Zeph 1:11.

Initial verb plural: Hos 4:6; 11:7; Joel 2:26, 27; Am 1:5; 3:6; Nah 3:18; Zeph 3:12; Hag 1: 2, 12.

²⁰ Initial verb singular: Ps 73:10; 81:12, 14; 102: 19; 106:48.

Initial verb plural: Ps 18:44-45; 59:12; 74:18; 85:7; 89:16-17.

²¹ Job 34:20.

²² Prov 11: 14; 29:2, 2, 18.

²³ Lam 1:11.

²⁴ Dan 9:26; 12:1.

²⁵ Initial verb singular: Ezra 4:4-5; Neh 5:13.

Initial verb plural: Ezra 3:1, 11, 13, 13; 10:1, 9; Neh 8:1, 5, 6, 9, 12, 16; 11:2.

For Ezra-Nehemiah as a unity see H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco, 1985), p.xxi-xxii. For a contrary position see G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London, 1988), p.157-158. In either case, both books present quite a similar treatment of ‘am. Therefore, we have generally treated them as a unity. On Polzin’s source division of Nehemiah see below, with note 81.

²⁶ Initial verb singular: II Chron 6:34; 10:5; 23:13.

It is clear that of those books with ten or more examples, three stand out as having a conspicuously lower proportion of singular verbs than plural: Ezekiel, Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. The evidence from Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah is the basis of the belief that collective nouns such as *‘am* were almost always construed as plurals in Late Biblical Hebrew. Rooker has recently argued that the evidence from Ezekiel should be understood in the context of Ezekiel’s language being transitional from Early Biblical Hebrew to LBH.²⁷

(iii) Influence of *Kol* „all“

Firstly, before proceeding, we must ask the question whether the patterns of singular and plural verbs in various books in the MT are conditioned by other linguistic factors which arise from the context of each occurrence. Thus it should be noted that included within the figures given above are those instances which involve the word *kol* „all“ as in „and all the people answered“ (Ex 24:3). It is possible that this decision may change the proportions of initial verbs slightly in favour of plurals. The book most affected, Samuel, has by our count 24 examples of initial verbs with *kol*, of which 15 are plural and only 9 singular (=38% singular), which is somewhat lower than the overall ratio of singular to plural in Samuel.²⁸ The other books which have a number of examples show less of a deviation from their proportions. Thus Exodus has 6/10 singular, which is exactly its overall proportion of singular to plural in the first column of the table, above. Nevertheless, overall it seems to be the case that were we to remove all the examples with *kol* the proportion of singulars would increase somewhat.²⁹ However, this would not significantly affect the *overall* patterns which are the focus of this study.

Initial verb plural: I Chron 11:13; 16:36, 43; 29:9; II Chron 6:39; 7:14; 10:9, 10, 16; 12:3; 20:33; 21:19; 23:6, 17, 21; 26:1; 27:2; 30:3, 13; 32:4, 8; 33:17, 25, 25; 36:1.

II Chron 23:13 (par. II Kgs 11: 14) has a singular participle, following a singular verbal adjective acting as a participle (cf. BDB, p.970b). We have treated the verbal adjective neutrally i.e. neither counting it as a verb, nor seeing it as grounds not to count the following participle.

²⁷ Rooker, *Ezekiel*, (note 4), p.94-96.

²⁸ *Kol* with singular: I Sam 12:18; 14:24. II Sam 3:35; 6:19; 17:2, 3; 19:9, 40; 20:12.

With plural: I Sam 10:24; 11:4, 15; 12:19; 13:7; 14:34. II Sam 2:28; 3:32, 34, 36; 15:23, 23, 30; 18:4, 5.

²⁹ GKC 146c, p.467 notes that usually *kol* is treated as an attribute of the noun, so that the predicate usually agrees in number and gender with the noun. Nevertheless, as in this case, there is evidently a residual influence from *kol* towards pluralisation of the predicate.

(iv) Influence of Word Order

The second column of the table above („Total Verbs“) shows a much higher proportion of plurals to singulars than the first column. This reflects the fact long observed that „[n]ot infrequently the construction begins in the singular (especially when the predicate precedes...), but is carried on, after the collective subject has been mentioned, in the plural.“³⁰ Thus the possible patterns in MT include most prominently, an initial singular or plural verb, followed by a string of other plural verbs. Having two singular verbs in a row, as in Exodus 17:3b³¹, is quite unusual. No example was found which began with a plural verb, then switched to a singular verb.³²

The tendency to construe as plural the further away from the subject one moves is a possible factor affecting the profiles in certain books. Thus there is an observable tendency to construe the first verb as plural when the subject ‘am appears before the verb. This is shown below in Table Two.

Table 2: ‘am as subject following and preceding first verb.

Book	(1) Verb-Subject			(2) Subject-Verb		
	First Verb		(% singular)	First Verb		(% singular)
	Singular	Plural		Singular	Plural	
Genesis	2	0	(100)	-	-	-
Exodus	33	6	(85)	2	17	(11)
Leviticus	1	1	(50)	0	1	(0)
Numbers	11	7	(61)	6	1	(86)
Deuteronomy	5	1	(83)	0	4	(0)
Joshua	6	9	(40)	1	3	(25)
Judges	4	8	(33)	5	2	(71)
Samuel	36	19	(65)	4	17	(19)
Kings	13	14	(48)	2	16	(11)
Isaiah	10	3	(77)	3	5	(38)

³⁰ GKC 145g, p.463.

³¹ On this verse in the Samaritan Pentateuch, see below. Other examples of two singular verbs include Josh 24:16 (the combination „answered and said“), II Sam 19:10 (*wyhy* + Niph‘al participle); I Kgs 3:8 (parallel Niph‘al verbs).

³² Note, however, Exodus 16:46 (RSV) „and the people (*hā‘ām*) shall go out (singular verb) and gather (plural verb) a day’s portion every day, that I may prove them (singular pronominal suffix on verb), whether they will walk (singular verb) ...“. The pronoun, however, clearly intervenes and influences the following verb, thus the final verb is not one of those counted in the table. Note that this verb also is plural in the Samaritan Pentateuch.

Jeremiah	5	5	(50)	4	15	(21)
Ezekiel	0	6	(0)	1	3	(25)
Total XII	2	6	(25)	3	4	(43)
Psalms	4	3	(57)	1	2	(33)
Job	0	1	(0)	-	-	-
Proverbs	4	0	(100)	-	-	-
Lamentations	-	-	-	0	1	(0)
Daniel	2	0	(100)	-	-	-
Ezra-Nehemiah	2	10	(17)	0	3	(0)
Chronicles	2	15	(12)	1	10	(9)

From this table we see how significant word order can be. Focussing only on those sentences where the verb precedes *‘am*, most of the books achieved a higher proportion of singular verbs. Thus Exodus, already high in singular verbs, reaches 85% in this category. In contrast, in Subject-Verb sentences, Exodus’ proportion of singulars is very low indeed. We note that the Book of Jeremiah is peculiar in that the overwhelming word order in its *‘am* sentences is subject-verb, and this is revealed to have drastically affected its profile in table one. Nevertheless, it is clear that the results from table two are not uniformly different from those of table one. Interestingly, certain books actually show a decline in singular verbs when the verb precedes *‘am*. Note that Numbers as a whole prefers singular verbs overwhelmingly in Subject-Verb sentences, and has a corresponding drop in its proportion of singular verbs compared to table one when only Verb-Subject sentences are counted. A similar tendency is prominent also in Judges. Finally, we should note that even when the evidence is viewed this way, there is still a gap, albeit not so wide, separating Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Ezekiel from those other books with a significant number of examples. There is still considerable individuality in the profiles of the various books.

(v) Participles

Participles functioning as predicates have been included (after some hesitation) in the above figures. This is on the basis that they seem to appear in similar syntactical contexts to the perfect and imperfect verbs whose subject is *‘am*. Indeed there is some textual evidence that finite verbs could shift to become participles and *vice versa*.³³ Note, however, that even were we to remove the participles from the above tables, the figures would not change significantly. Indeed, it must be admitted that

³³ Thus compare II Sam 18:5 in MT (perfect) and 4QSam^a (participle). Also note the variant noted in Kennicott (below, note 51) in Isa 30:19 (MT imperfect, variant = participle). BHS recommends reading the participle in Isaiah, comparing the Syriac version and the Targum. Furthermore, participles have always figured in the discussion, see e.g. Kropat (note 3.).

due to the small numbers of participles in ‘am sentences it is difficult to give any definite answer to the question of whether participles do in fact behave similarly to the perfect and imperfect verbs in their corresponding books. It might be expected, for example, that since there is a tendency to Subject-Verb word order in sentences where the verb is a participle that an unusually high proportion of participles might be plural. This is observable in Samuel, where of eight participles attested as the initial verb in ‘am sentences, only one is singular.³⁴ However, it should be emphasized that the solution here is probably not that Samuel treats *participles* differently to the other verbs. Instead, note that it is the case that six of the seven plural participles in Samuel are found following the subject. Samuel has a strong tendency to put *any* verb which follows the subject into the plural. There is no clear evidence that participles are being treated differently to the other verbs for any other reason than that they are almost always found in subject-verb sentences with the normal consequences of this word order on the number of the verb in each book.³⁵ There thus seems no unambiguous evidence at this stage to indicate that it is wrong to include participles in our discussion along with the other sorts of verbs. In any case we must emphasize again that, even were participles ultimately shown to behave differently to perfect and imperfect verbs, none of the books has a particularly noticeable proportion of participles in ‘am sentences, so this factor is unlikely to work as an overall solution to the differing proportions of singular and plural verbs in ‘am sentences.

(vi) Niph‘al verbs

Finally, another „mechanical“ factor which might be considered is whether a verb in a stem such as the Niph‘al might behave differently in an ‘am sentence. This is worth bearing in mind, since there certainly seems to be a preponderance of singulars in the examples found, but the evidence is too meagre to base firm conclusions on it.³⁶

³⁴ Plural participles: I Sam 2:24; 14:33; 26:5; II Sam 13:34; 15:23, 23; 20:15.

Singular participle: II Sam 15:12.

³⁵ Total participles in the Pentateuch come out at three singular - two plural, and the Bible overall, excluding Samuel, at 8-13.

Plural participles: Ex 20:18; 36:5; Jdg 9:37; I Kgs 1:40; 3:2; 16:15; 22:44 (par. II Kgs 12:4; 14:4; 15:4, 35); II Chron 27:2; 33:17; Ez 3:13, 13; Neh 8:9; Lam 1:11 (Ex 36:5 and Neh 8:9 in Verb-Subject sentences).

Singular participles: Ex 8:18; 18:14; Num 11:10; Jdg 9:36, 43; II Kgs 11:14; II Chron 23:13; Ps 81:14 (all in subject-verb sentences).

³⁶ Niph‘al verbs in this survey included: Ex 18:14; Josh 8:20; II Sam 2:27; 18:7 (the only plural); 19:10 (not initial); I Kgs 3:8 (two verbs); Jer 26:9; Ezek 33:6 (Ezekiel's only singular verb at all!).

(vii) A Discernable Principle Behind Choice of Singular or Plural?

We have thus found so far that while some contextual factors are relevant to the proportions of singular and plural verbs in ^c*am* sentences, they do not seem able to provide a general explanation for the choice of singular or plural verbs in these contexts. It seems correct to say that the overriding factor in most cases, especially those involving initial verbs, was a choice by the writer or a scribe as to which way to construe the collective noun ^c*am*. This is especially clear in a case like Judges 9:36-37. Verse 36 has Ga'al saying „Behold, there come people down“ (RV) *hinnēh-^cām yôrēd*. In verse 37 Ga'al repeats his comment, but this time the verb is in the plural *hinnēh-^cām yôrēdīm*.

One might of course argue that the choice of singular or plural verb is explicable by some semantic distinction such as whether the author conceived of the people acting as a whole or as many individuals. However, we discarded this as a productive theory due to a number of factors. Firstly, we might wonder why, in the case of an initial singular verb, if the singular idea is so strong, the next verb is almost always plural. Secondly, the impression gained by comparing different books, e.g. Exodus with Judges, was that verbs in very similar contexts were treated more according to the tendency of the book than according to some clear semantic principle. Thirdly, even within the same book, parallel or near parallel passages show variability in the number of the verb with ^c*am*. We have already referred to Judges 9:36-37. Another example in the MT is found when Exodus 15:24 is compared with 17:3. The context in both verses is the same: the people have no water „and the people murmured against Moses.“ However in Exodus 15 the MT has a singular verb, while in chapter 17, the verb is plural. Fourthly, the amount of ingenuity required to find some semantic distinction implied by the use of a different number of verb with ^c*am* renders a large proportion of such explanations unconvincing due to their subjectivity. Thus, one could perhaps suggest in Judges 9:36-37 that the first verb is singular since Ga'al sees the people as a group, while in the following verse he sees them as many individuals, hence the verb is plural. It is possible that such considerations played some part in the choosing process, but we believe it impossible to discover any hard and fast rules that the authors must have followed. Even in regard to influential „mechanical“ factors such as word order, authorial/scrival choice is still evident in the distribution of the singular and plural forms.

It is clear also in the many passages in the Chronicler which are parallel with Samuel or Kings that a set of „rules“ for construing the verb with ^c*am* was not being followed throughout the Biblical literature. These parallel passages are commonly cited as evidence of the Chronicler updating the language of his sources in favour of the general LBH tendency to construe collectives (almost) exclusively as plurals, since most cases of variation in the parallel passages involve a singular verb in Samuel or Kings appearing as a plural in Chronicles.³⁷ As an aside, note that this is

³⁷ See the examples cited by Kropat, Gerleman, Polzin and Rooker (notes 3 and 4).

not always the case. II Chronicles 10:5 is one of the rare singular verbs in ʿam sentences in Chronicles, whereas in the parallel in I Kings 12:5 the verb is plural. It has long been realized, of course, that it was not the *MT* version of Samuel and Kings which formed the Chronicler's sources.³⁸

Variability, such as we have detailed, within the same genre of literature, even between virtually identical sentences, would seem to rule out any convincing linkage of the grammatical treatment of ʿam with the type of literature in which it is found, e.g. poetry vs. prose.³⁹ Rather, variability is the norm within most books and most passages in the Biblical texts, an issue to which we shall return in section 4(c).

(b) Pronouns and other features

We have chosen participles, and third person perfect and imperfect verbs as the initial focus of this study because they have been seen as showing a pattern of usage which could be taken as reflecting a chronological progression from early to late Hebrew. The usage of other linguistic forms - most notably pronouns with ʿam - shows interesting patterns, but these are somewhat different to those of the verbs.

(i) First and Second Person Forms, Adjectives

Not all linguistic forms that can be construed with ʿam show an equal variability of number. Thus, while third person verbs, pronouns, pronominal suffixes etc. are the most variable, second and first person forms are much less variable. In regard to first person forms, Exodus 17:3 and Deuteronomy 31:16-18 were the only examples found in *MT* where the ʿam speaks and refers to itself in the first person singular (Exodus 17:3: me - my children - my cattle). Otherwise an ʿam refers to itself as „we“.

The second person forms are more variable, especially in the Pentateuch and Isaiah, but again the overwhelming tendency throughout the Biblical books is to prefer the

³⁸ Gerleman (note 3); W. E. Lemke, „The Synoptic Problem in the Chronicler's History“, *HTR* 58 (1968), p.349-363. This observation, of course, does not absolve us from having to explain the linguistic features of the actual texts in our possession cf. A. Hurvitz, „Terms and Epithets Relating to the Jerusalem Temple Compound in the Book of Chronicles: The Linguistic Aspect,“ in: D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, A. Hurvitz (eds), *Pomegranates and Golden Bells Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (Winona Lake, 1995), p.181 n. 61.

³⁹ The only poetic examples worth special note are the unusual number of singular verbs in Num 23:9 (two in a row), and Num 23:24 (five - but influenced by the word „lion“?). Both are, furthermore, in subject-verb sentences. As noted, however, this preference for singular in subject-verb sentences is typical of the Book of Numbers in general. I thank Prof. Sasson for bringing this issue to my attention.

plural. Thus for example I Samuel 12:6-7: „And Samuel said to the people (*hā^cām*): The Lord, who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought up your fathers (*ʿābōtēkem*) from the land of Egypt - now therefore stand still (*hityaššēbū*; imperative) and I will enter into judgement with you (*ʿittēkem*) before the Lord...“. Imperative verbs are mostly overwhelmingly plural, although a number of singular forms are found in Isaiah, the Minor Prophets, and Psalms.⁴⁰ Attributive adjectives such as *rab* „great“ are almost always singular.⁴¹ Participles used as attributives show variation, but these are quite rare.⁴² This leaves us with the third person forms as the most variable element represented by a significant number of examples in Biblical Hebrew in relation to *ʿam*, and therefore this section of the study will continue to concentrate upon them.

(ii) Third Person Forms, especially Pronominal Suffixes

If we start with Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Ezekiel, our three books which both have a number of usages of *ʿam* and heavily prefer to use plural verbs with it, we encounter few surprises. Each of these books uses overwhelmingly plural forms of pronouns etc. with *ʿam*. Ezra-Nehemiah actually has no singular forms at all and Ezekiel's example is in a difficult context.⁴³ Chronicles, on the contrary, does have a few examples. In the case of third person pronominal suffixes on nouns, verbs and prepositions, we found 34 examples relating to *ʿam*. Of these only 2 were singular (or 6% for the sake of giving an easily comparable figure). Of these, interestingly, one (II Chron 1:11) is in a passage unparalleled in the MT of Kings.⁴⁴

It is not possible, however, to say that this low number of singular forms is related to the corresponding low number of third person singular verbs with *ʿam* in Chronicles tabulated above. When one surveys the other books, we find no exact correspondence between the treatment of the verbs and the number of other singular forms in those books. Thus Jeremiah has 67 third person suffixes, but only three (at most) of these are singular (or 4.5%).⁴⁵ It is not possible to argue that Jeremiah is unique, due

⁴⁰ Isaiah 26:20; Micah 6:3,5; Psalms 50:7; 78:1; 81:9. Note that the examples from Psalms 50 and 78 have the suffix *-āh* („emphatic“ imperative). Could this perhaps have impeded any scribal tendencies to levelling?

⁴¹ An exception is Ezek 3:5. An example of a predicative adjective in the plural is Ex 5:5.

⁴² The impression given is that the distribution of singular and plural participles used as attributive adjectives corresponds to the distribution of the third person pronominal suffixes discussed below, i.e. singular prominent in Pentateuch and Isaiah, plural the norm elsewhere.

⁴³ Ezek 13:10: *hūʿ*.

⁴⁴ The other example is II Chron 6:34/I Kgs 8:44. Passages such as II Chron 6:34ff present a problem in that one may have an extended speech which discusses a once introduced subject *ʿam*. For the statistics quoted in this section, counting was limited in such passages to the occurrences in the first two verses after the occurrence of *ʿam*. They are thus intended to be indicative, not precise.

⁴⁵ Jer 2:11 (a *Tiqqun Sopherim*); 15:8, 8 (both textually and contextually difficult; the latter feminine = Jerusalem?).

perhaps to its high number of Subject-Verb sentences. When we move on to Samuel and Kings, the two books used in most demonstrations of the differences between Early Biblical Hebrew and the LBH of Chronicles, we find a similar picture. Again using third person suffixes we find that out of 16 examples in Samuel, only 2 are singular (12.5%).⁴⁶ Out of 25 examples in Kings, again only 2 are singular (8%).⁴⁷ Thus it does not seem possible to make out a convincing case that the Chronicler's preference for plurals in these aspects of his language is due to the date of his composition. Except for the verbs with which we began this study, the Chronicler's treatment of ʿam is not clearly different to that in other Biblical books.⁴⁸

This said, it should be pointed out that there are some biblical books which show a striking difference to the pattern just described. Thus the three Pentateuch books with significant numbers of ʿam sentences have a much higher proportion of singular forms. This is not only in third person forms but in second person forms as well. Thus, for example, Exodus 33:5: „You (NB: ʾattem) are a stiff-necked people (ʿam). If for a single moment I should go up among you (*beqirbēkā*) then I would consume you (*wēkillitīkā*). And now - put off your ornaments (ʿedyēkā) from upon you (*mēʿālekā*) that I may know what to do with you (*lāk*).“ To give a comparison with the other books we will again concentrate on third person suffix forms. In Exodus we counted 19/59 singular forms (32%), in Numbers 14/32 (44%), and in Deuteronomy 7/35 (20%). It should be noted that one encounters mixtures of singular and plural forms even within the same verses. Thus Deuteronomy 9:13-14: „The Lord said to me: I have seen this people and it (*hūʾ* - sing.) is a stiff-necked people. Let me alone and I will destroy them (pl.), and blot out their (pl.) name from under heaven, and I will make you into a nation mightier and greater than him (sing).“

Probably the most interesting book of all is Isaiah. It will be noted in the tables of verbs above, that Isaiah is one of the books with a significant leaning toward singular forms of the verb with ʿam, in fact preferring singular forms for the initial verb nearly two-thirds of the time overall (table 1) and over three-quarters of the time in verb-subject sentences (table 2). As we have seen, however, the situation with the verbs does not necessarily have a correlation with other grammatical forms. Thus, we have seen that although Samuel has more singular forms for the initial verb than plural, it has a very low number of, for instance, third person singular pronominal suffixes. Exodus and Numbers, while also having over a 50% preference for singular verbs in the initial position showed a 30-45% proportion of singular third person suffixes. Isaiah, however, which shares a similar proportion of singular verbs, actually has a significantly different profile in regard to the other grammatical forms. Choosing third person suffixes again, Isaiah has 41 of these and 27 of these

⁴⁶ I Sam 9:16; 14:20.

⁴⁷ I Kgs 8:44. II Kgs 8:21.

⁴⁸ We think it would be dangerous at present to argue that Ezra-Nehemiah's lack of any singular forms is significant, given the very small numbers even in the much larger books like Jeremiah. This sort of argument should be based on a broader data base.

are singular (66%). Interestingly, if one divides the book in two, nine of the plural forms and only two singular are found in the second half of the book, making the profile of the two halves of the book quite different and increasing the proportion of singular forms in the first half of the book to 25/30 (83%)! One could explain this dichotomy in the book of Isaiah as related to the chronological difference between First and Second Isaiah, or equally it may be related to the fact that Isaiah seems to have been copied in two halves, i.e. the book has two separate scribal histories.⁴⁹

Thus in relation to the Masoretic Text as presented in BHS we can say the following: 1. In regard to participles, and third person perfect and imperfect verbs, three books stand out by having a significant preference for construing ^ʿam as plural - Ezekiel, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah. 2. In regards to the other grammatical forms, exemplified by third person pronominal suffixes on nouns, verbs, and prepositions, these three books are merely part of a wider number of books with an extreme preference for plural forms with ^ʿam. 3. In contrast to these books, other books, most notably Isaiah, have a strong preference for singular forms, not only in verbal forms but also in the suffixes.

(c) Variants Within the Masoretic Tradition

Masoretic manuscripts from the Middle Ages generally represent a state of almost complete textual unity.⁵⁰ The differences between these various manuscripts, collected in such a work as that of Kennicott,⁵¹ are overwhelmingly involved with minute details such as the presence or absence of medial vowel-letters. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a number of variants involve plural vs. singular verbs in the ^ʿam sentences discussed in this article. Thus, for instance, while the BHS text at Joshua 24:24 reads *wayyōʾmērû hāʿām*, Kennicott notes five manuscripts which have the verb in the singular. To give an idea of the extent of these variants, one should note that there are six verbs so affected each in Exodus and Numbers, according to Kennicott.⁵² Very interestingly, participles are almost never involved in variation in number according to Kennicott.⁵³

⁴⁹ See J. Cook, „The Dichotomy of 1QIsa^a“, in Z. J. Kapera (ed), *Intertestamental Essays in Honour Of Józef Tadeusz Milik* (Krakow, 1992), p.7-24, with references to earlier literature. Note that dividing the initial verbs listed in table 1 into the two halves of the book, one arrives at 10-5 (67%) for the first half and 3-3 (50%) for the second, a significant, if not as striking a difference. If one divides the verbs as in table 2, in verb-subject sentences, the proportions are almost identical 7-2 (78%) and 3-1 (75%), but different in subject-verb sentences 3-3 (50%) to 0-2 (0%). One must always remember, however, how small the numbers of examples are.

⁵⁰ The phrase is from E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis/Assen/Maastricht, 1992), p.35.

⁵¹ B. Kennicott, *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum Cum Variis Lectionibus* (2 volumes; Oxford, 1776-1780).

⁵² Ex 14:31; 17:2; 20:18; 24:3, 7; 32:1. Num 11:8, 13; 14:39-40; 21:5, 7; 25:2. Note that there is no consistent movement singular to plural or plural to singular, although the latter seems more numerous.

In evaluating such variants one must be cautious. Firstly, it is doubted by many textual scholars whether one could make a compelling case that any of these variants reflects an ancient tradition, rather than being merely variants created by normal scribal processes during the Middle Ages themselves.⁵⁴ Secondly, many of the variants are attested by only a small number of manuscripts. Of course, number of manuscripts itself may be an illusion, since many manuscripts could have been copied from one source.⁵⁵ Thirdly, it should be noted that the problem of variations between singular and plural verbs is not absolutely limited to cases involving collective nouns.⁵⁶ Such variations, which are orthographically quite minor - in the case of perfect and imperfect verbs involving only the consonant *waw* - were not uncommon in the scribal tradition. Of course they were not anywhere near as common as the variability, even in medieval manuscripts, in spelling of medial vowel letters. Nevertheless, the final vowel on verbs, since the word was complete both with or without it, was also subject to a certain amount of variability which was generally held in check by awareness of the grammatical context. However, in cases like collective nouns where the tradition had long accepted *both* singular and plural verbs construed with them the grammatical context would not have formed such a barrier. Thus the endings on such verbs seem to have formed a category whose potential for variability lay somewhere between the medial vowel letters and the rest of the consonantal text.

In contrast to these verbs, the other grammatical elements construed with ^cam show much less variability. When they do vary, interestingly, it is not usually between singular and plural, but rather changes of person. Thus for example, Ex 13:5 „to your fathers“; variant: „our fathers“.

The claim in this section is not that these variations in medieval manuscripts necessarily reflect ancient variations in the Biblical texts. Rather we wish to emphasise what such variations may tell us about scribal techniques.⁵⁷ It is well accepted that by the medieval period scribes copying Biblical texts were extremely

⁵³ An exception is I Sam 26:5 in one manuscript. The shift from predicative to attributive participle is also attested, see Jdg 9:43, and cf. note 33 above for a variation involving an imperfect and a participle.

⁵⁴ See M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, „Hebrew Biblical Manuscripts Their History and Their Place in the HUBP Edition,“ *Bibl* 48 (1967), p.243-290; F. M. Cross, „Problems of Method in the Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible,“ in W. D. O’Flaherty (ed.), *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, Berkeley, 1979, p.38-39; Tov, *Textual* (note 50), p.39.

⁵⁵ Tov, *Textual* (note 50), p.39.

⁵⁶ Sometimes the reading seems influenced by the immediate context e.g. at I Sam 14:33 where the immediate context is ambiguous: the singular verb „and he said“ (referring to Saul) is plural in one manuscript.

⁵⁷ Cf. Goshen-Gottstein, „Hebrew manuscripts“ (note 54), p.249-250: „[T]hese witnesses provide an excellent illustration of textual dynamics, and they deepen our knowledge of the development of the Bible in the technical sense.“

scrupulous in copying the text that lay before them, in theory, down to the last letter. Nevertheless, it is clear that psychologically, even for these medieval scribes, there was a difference between the status of medial vowel letters and the rest of the consonants, so that either consciously or unconsciously such vowel letters could occasionally be added (or subtracted) without drastic consequences. Similarly, we would suggest that the same process can be observed, albeit to a lesser extent, with final vowel letters on verbs, especially those in contexts (such as with collective nouns) which were ambiguous as to which was the appropriate number for the verbs.

One may thus suggest a hierarchy of variability in the normal processes of scribal transmission. The most variable elements were medial vowel letters. Next in order of variability come final vowel letters in ambiguous contexts, i.e. for our purposes especially including the presence or absence of the plural marker *waw* on perfect and imperfect verbs in *ʿam* sentences. Much more stable than this category in the Medieval texts are the person, number and gender of pronouns and participles in ambiguous contexts. As we have mentioned, these rarely change in our Medieval texts, and in the pronominal suffixes, for example, person seems more variable than number. Finally, the rest of the consonantal text shows almost complete invariability in the Medieval period. It should be noted that the main processes leading to the creation of these variants, at least by the Medieval period, were seemingly unconscious, rather than, say, a conscious aim to revise the text.

(2) The Samaritan Pentateuch

(a) Comparison with MT

The Samaritan Pentateuch shows a strong distinction between the two sets of evidence we have discussed. The verbs which are the subject of the tables above show a fair degree of variability from MT and even within the Samaritan tradition. The pronouns etc with *ʿam* are almost invariant. The only exception to this that was found is Exodus 1:11 where the Samaritan has *ʿnwtm* (with third person plural masculine suffix) for MT *ʿannōtō* (singular suffix).⁵⁸

In contrast to this almost complete agreement between the MT and Samaritan Pentateuch, the construction of perfect and imperfect verbs shows a good deal of variability in number. No example of variation was found involving a participle, however. Since there is some variability within the Samaritan tradition itself in regard to these verbs, we shall use as our starting point the text recently published by Tal.⁵⁹ In Exodus we find that the number of the *initial* verb with *ʿam* varies ten

⁵⁸ Note, however, that the subject (1:9) is „the people of the children of Israel“, so this verse may be contaminated by these other elements from being a pure *ʿam*-sentence.

⁵⁹ A. Tal, *The Samaritan Pentateuch Edited According to Ms 6(c) of the Shekhem Synagogue* (Tel Aviv, 1994).

times, consisting of seven cases where MT is singular and Samaritan plural, and three cases of the opposite.⁶⁰ This excludes Exodus 20:18 where the Samaritan has an extra, singular verb before the plural participle shared by MT. Among other (non-initial) cases in Exodus we notice that the unusual phenomenon of two singular verbs in a row in Exodus 17:3 is resolved into the more common singular-plural order in Tal’s Samaritan text.⁶¹

In Leviticus, the only singular form of any description related to ‘am, the verb in Lev. 9:24, is also plural in Samaritan Pentateuch. Numbers has two differences in initial verbs, one being singular in MT and plural in Samaritan Pentateuch, the other being the opposite.⁶² Deuteronomy has eleven consecutive cases where Samaritan Pentateuch has the repeated formula „and the people shall say ‘Amen’“ in Deut 27:16-26 in plural, whereas MT has them all singular. It should be noted that the Samaritan text thus achieves consistency in this passage since both it and MT have two plural verbs in verse 15 - „and the people shall answer and say ‘Amen’“. If one thinks of this passage as having been written by an „original“ author who originally construed ‘am as singular or plural or both, then one must concede that somewhere in the textual transmission of either the MT or the Samaritan Text a thorough revision was undertaken, changing plural to singular or singular to plural. We shall return to this point later.

Excursus: The Samaritan Pentateuch as a Source for Ancient Hebrew

It is important in this context to discuss the place of the language of the Samaritan Pentateuch as a source for ancient Hebrew. This is because it has been common in much recent scholarship to treat the variations of the Samaritan Pentateuch solely as evidence of a late form of Hebrew.⁶³ Indeed it must be admitted that a prominent characteristic of the Samaritan Pentateuch is that it often has standard language features in places where the MT Pentateuch has archaic or otherwise unusual or difficult linguistic items.⁶⁴ It has been suggested that the Samaritan text is aiming for the consistency of language which is so obviously lacking in the MT.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, one should not allow these prominent features to completely eliminate

⁶⁰ Singular to plural: Ex 1:20; 4:31; 12:27; 20:18-19; 24:3; 33:10, 10. Plural to singular: Ex 15:24; 16:30; 24:2.

⁶¹ Note the variant reading noted in A. von Gall, *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* (Giessen, 1918) for this verse.

⁶² Num 12:15; 14:1.

⁶³ E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll IQIsa^a* (Leiden, 1974), p.15, 73-74.

⁶⁴ B. K. Waltke, „The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Text of the Old Testament,“ in: J. B. Payne (ed), *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (Waco, 1970), p.213-220; Cf. idem, *Prolegomena to the Samaritan Pentateuch* (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1965), p.285-300.

⁶⁵ S. Talmon, „The Samaritan Pentateuch,“ *JJS* 2 (1951), p.146-148.

all evidence from the Samaritan text as testimony to Early Biblical Hebrew. In this it would be well to heed recent work in the field of textual criticism. The language of the Samaritan Pentateuch is only part of a wider phenomenon of updating in the Samaritan text. Thus in general in textual criticism there has been a tendency to discount the variant Samaritan readings as evidence for the „original“ text of the Bible because it is clear that the Samaritan text contains many secondary readings when compared to the MT Pentateuch. However, „many“ does not equal „all“. Even if it be admitted that the Samaritan Pentateuch more often has the inferior reading (linguistically or otherwise) compared with the MT, this does not automatically mean that all Samaritan variants are necessarily inferior. Every single variant in the Samaritan text needs to be evaluated, not instantly assumed to be due to late editing of the text.⁶⁶ As is clear from the Qumran scrolls, the Samaritan text is in almost every detail a very ancient text.⁶⁷ Finally, it is of course the case that even a reading which is decided to be a later element in the text, still is of interest, since it provides evidence for the way the Biblical text and language were transmitted by ancient scribes.

(b) A Consistent Tendency in the Samaritan Text?

Our specific case of the grammatical number of ^c*am* with verbs cannot be treated in terms of any „general tendencies“ of the Samaritan text. Thus one could get the impression from the scholarly literature that the Samaritan Pentateuch generally pursues a policy of construing the verb with ^c*am* as plural.⁶⁸ In actual fact, while this could be said to be the case in Deut 27, the rest of the Samaritan evidence certainly does not point in this direction. Outside of Deuteronomy, of the 13 differences between the Samaritan text and MT Pentateuch, it is certainly true that the majority - nine - are MT singular to Samaritan plural. However, looking at these cases alone obscures the fact that the Samaritan Pentateuch maintains virtually the same proportions of singular to plural verbs in its ^c*am* sentences. Thus, Exodus, the book most affected, changes from having 60% singular verbs in initial position in table 1 to 53%. There seems to be no patterning in the variations linked, for example, to the question of word order dealt with in table 2. We do not in any case end up with a consistent text. Nor do we have a text whose proportions are in any way similar to Chronicles. Whatever may be the significance of the two to one ratio of the shift of singular to plural verbs in the Samaritan text, we should not lose sight of the fact that every third case represents a situation where the MT verb is plural to Samaritan's singular. It is not some presumed consistent tendency of the Samaritan Pentateuch

⁶⁶ Cf. E. Tov, „Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings: The Limitations of Textual Rules,“ *HThR* 75 (1982), p.435; Cross, „Problems“ (note 54), p.54; Tov, *Textual* (note 50), p.298-299.

⁶⁷ Tov, *Textual* (note 50), p.80-100.

⁶⁸ Gerleman, *Synoptic* (note 3), p.16-17 (he explicitly makes a comparison with Chronicles); Talmon „Samaritan Pentateuch“ (note 65), p.147-148; Waltke „Samaritan Pentateuch“ (note 64), p.219, cf. *Prolegomena* (note 64), p.297-298; Kutscher, *Isaiah Scroll* (note 63), p.398.

which is important, but the realization of how inconsistently our texts have transmitted the number of the verbs with ʿam, to the extent that one time out of every six MT and Samaritan Pentateuch disagree on this feature.

(c) Variants Within the Samaritan Tradition

It should be noted that just as with the Masoretic tradition, so too the Samaritan tradition preserves variants within itself as to the number of ʿam. Using Von Gall's edition,⁶⁹ note again that these variants are not concerned with pronouns and such like, but once again solely with the perfect and imperfect verbs we have been discussing. The trend of the variants in Von Gall is that they are mostly singular verbs, in place of plural.⁷⁰ Thus the Samaritan evidence supports the hierarchy of variability discovered in the Medieval MT manuscripts, to a large extent. We again find that the final vowel letter used to mark the plural on perfect and imperfect verbs has a level of variability somewhere between that of the medial vowel letters, and that of the rest of the consonantal text. However, comparison with MT would seem to indicate that the pronouns and participles are nearly as invariant as the rest of the consonantal text.

(3) Qumran Biblical Manuscripts

While large in number, the vast majority of the Qumran Biblical manuscripts which have been published are extremely fragmentary. Therefore the amount of data coming from them is quite small, and the following judgements are likely to be impressionistic.

As might be expected by now, there is evidence of variation in the grammatical number of verbs in ʿam sentences. Again, changes in number in pronouns/pronominal suffixes are rarer than the verbs. Nevertheless, there seems more variation in this category than was found in the Medieval MT or Samaritan tradition. One of the few examples in my survey is interestingly the same passage as provided the only Samaritan Pentateuch example - Exodus 1:9-12. In 2QExod^a verse 12 reads ʾwtm ... y[r]bw ... yšršw for MT ʾtw ... yrbh ... yprš. In contrast to most of the textual evidence discussed so far, participles⁷¹ and second person forms⁷² are involved in

⁶⁹ See note 61.
⁷⁰ E.g. Ex 17:2 variants have two singular verbs, rather than a singular-plural pattern. Note that this is also a variant registered by Kennicott for the MT tradition.
⁷¹ For participles see note 33.
⁷² Examples of variations involving second person forms are found at Deut. 4:33 in 4QDeut^m: MT šmʿt „you (m.s.) heard“, 4QDeut^m šmʿtm „you (m.pl.) heard“, and the shift of person at Deut 31:17 in 4QDeut^c: MT wʿzbtym „and I will abandon them (m.pl.)“, 4QDeut^c „... you (m.s.)“. Note also ʾt[h] for MT ʾtm at Ex 13:4 in the text called 4QD^t. Note that the intention in this section

some variation at this stage of the tradition. Nevertheless, as might be expected by now, the largest proportion of examples of variation are found to involve third person perfect and imperfect verbs. Thus e.g. 4QNum^b at Num 11:35 has singular *ns*^c for MT plural.⁷³ The impression given by the relatively few legible contexts is that the general proportion of disagreements from MT *versus* agreements with MT would be similar to that found in the Samaritan Pentateuch, i.e. about one in six. Of course, with more complete manuscripts one could perhaps clearly discern tendencies in individual texts. In this regard the almost complete IQIsa^a, although according to Kutscher its „linguistic anomalies ... reflect the Hebrew and Aramaic currently spoken in Palestine towards the end of the Second Commonwealth“⁷⁴, provides us with no clear evidence in regard to ^c*am* sentences. Thus although in the much quoted example in Isaiah 9:18 the verb is plural to MT singular, the reverse is the case in Isaiah 63:18. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the other two examples (not initial verbs) in the scroll are plural to MT singular.⁷⁵

The evidence from the Qumran scrolls, therefore, fits in with our suggested hierarchy of variability. Final vowel letters in ambiguous contexts are found to exhibit variability only second to medial vowel letters. The difference is that the other categories of evidence, participles, pronouns and the like exhibit a much higher degree of variability than was the case in either the MT or Samaritan traditions.

is to deal with the actual Biblical scrolls, rather than Biblical texts used in other genres. 4QDtⁱ has actually recently been argued to be not a biblical manuscript, but a selected or excerpted text. Texts of this genre may share specific textual characteristics different to the Biblical scrolls. See J. A. Duncan, „Considerations of 4QDtⁱ in Light of the 'All Souls Deuteronomy' and Cave 4 Phylactery Texts,“ in J. Trebelle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner, *The Madrid Qumran Congress* (Leiden, 1992), vol. I, p.199-215, esp. p.203, 206. However, with such fragmentary texts, and at such an early stage of investigation, there are many uncertainties in this sort of judgement. We have thus decided to classify everything on the list of E. Ulrich, „An Index of the Passages in the Biblical Manuscripts from the Judean Desert“ *DSD* 1 (1994), p.113-129; *DSD* 2 (1995), p.86-107 as „Biblical manuscripts.“

73 This reading is paralleled neither in the MT nor Samaritan Pentateuch. Other variants include two verbs in 2QExod^a 1:12; three in 4QDeut^c 31:16-17; and Josh 6:5b in 4QJosh^a. This last example is a little more complicated than normal since it is a III-*He* verb form and hence involves the change of one vowel letter for another, not merely the presence or absence of the *waw*, thus MT *w^chw*, 4QJosh^a *w^clh*.

74 Kutscher, (note 63), p.3.

75 Isa 6:10 has one plural verb in a cluster of singulars; Kutscher, *Isaiah* (note 63), p.399: „it would seem that the scribe erred here.“ In Isa 30:19, both MT and the scroll have a third person singular verb as the first verb after ^c*am*. In the MT the following verb is second person singular, but in the scroll it is plural. The text consulted was M. Burrows (ed), *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery Volume I The Isaiah Manuscript and the Habakkuk Commentary* (New Haven, 1950).

Note that the variations come from a wide variety of text „types“ from Qumran. Thus e.g. 4QNum^b is classed as „pre-Samaritan“, 4QSam^a as „non-aligned“ yet related to the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint, and IQIsa^a as „Qumran practice“ according to Tov's classification: Tov, *Textual* (note 50), p.99, 109, 116.

(4) General Discussion

(a) Summary of the Evidence

Many scholars have noted the peculiarities of Chronicles' treatment of collective nouns such as 'am, and this has usually been attributed to Chronicles' chronological position. In our survey we found sufficient evidence to agree with those scholars who see Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Ezekiel as unusual in the fact that these books in the overwhelming number of cases use plural verbs with 'am as subject.

What has less often been noted by scholars is that other peculiar patterns of usage emerge when one surveys the use of other grammatical categories with 'am. The most variable category of these we found to be third person pronominal suffixes attached to prepositions, nouns, and verbs. Here we discovered that Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Ezekiel fit in with a much larger group of other books in having practically no singular third person suffixes construed with 'am. In this aspect, for instance, Chronicles' sources Samuel and Kings are very similar to the usage of language of Chronicles. Nevertheless, we found that other books had a sharply different pattern of usage. Thus, while the Pentateuch generally has a much higher proportion of third person singular pronominal suffixes, the most unusual book is, without doubt, Isaiah, and especially the first half of the book, with an overwhelming preference for singular forms.

(b) A Chronological Interpretation

Having discovered these patterns in the Masoretic text, the question becomes one of interpretation. As mentioned, the dominant explanation of the peculiarities as regards the treatment of the verb with 'am in Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Ezekiel has been chronological. That is, Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, if not by the same author,⁷⁶ are at least both representative of Late i.e. post-exilic Biblical Hebrew. Ezekiel's language reflects the shift during the exile from pre-exilic to post-exilic Hebrew.

(i) Collective Nouns in Daniel and Esther

As a preliminary remark, it must be stated that the specific usage of the word 'am does not allow one to confidently state that other books, whose content presupposes a post-exilic dating, like Daniel and Esther, share the habit of Chronicles in

⁷⁶ See the discussion in H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge, 1977), p.5-70.

construing collectives like *ʿam* consistently as plural. Thus in Daniel the two verbs used in 9:26 and 12:1 with *ʿam* are both singular. Also, even though in 11:32 we have three plural elements with *ʿam*,⁷⁷ we also find a third person singular suffix in the form *ʾēlōhāw*. In Esther, singular grammatical elements also slightly outnumber plurals.⁷⁸ If such a pattern were found to be general in these books it would undermine confidence that the tendency to take collectives almost exclusively as plurals was a general feature of Late Biblical Hebrew, and could support a position like Rendsburg's that this was a feature of the Chronicler's idiolect (i.e. his individual dialect).⁷⁹

Unfortunately, it is difficult to achieve more certainty on this question due to the lack of the same volume of information which Chronicles provides. Thus, for instance, a collective like *qāhāl* „congregation“ is not attested at all in either Daniel or Esther. The attested collectives in the Hebrew of these books are very meagre and their testimony is ambiguous.⁸⁰ Thus we find *hēlō* „his army“ in Daniel 11:26 construed with a singular verb. However, Chronicles itself construes „army“ with an initial singular verb twice (2 Chron 16:7; 24:23) as opposed to once with a plural verb (2 Chron 24:24). Or, in Daniel 9:11 we find the expression „all Israel“ with a plural verb, but this is the solitary occurrence. Therefore, the evidence is too meagre to be compelling. Nevertheless, the number of times collectives are construed as singular in Daniel and Esther certainly does not allow one any degree of confidence to state that these books treated collectives in the same way as did Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. It should be noted that Polzin, in fact, never claimed that the treatment of collectives was uniform throughout all the Late Biblical Hebrew books. He mentions both the „Nehemiah's Memoirs“ section of the book of Nehemiah, and Esther as differing from Chronicles in this regard.⁸¹

(ii) Chronological Development Within Samuel and Kings?

It should also be noted that a more minute investigation of two of the books with a significant number of occurrences, Samuel and Kings, does not achieve any remarkably different results than are presented for the books as a whole. Thus I and II Samuel display almost equal proportions of initial singular and plural verbs to

⁷⁷ A construct ending and two verbs.

⁷⁸ Five third person masculine singular suffixes, four plural; two plural participles, two singular.

⁷⁹ G. Rendsburg, „Late Biblical Hebrew and the Date of 'P'“, *JANES* 12 (1980), p.67.

⁸⁰ Note that there are many collectives construed as singular in the Aramaic section of Daniel, see e.g. „the beasts of the field“ and „all flesh“ in Dan 4:9. However, the Aramaic evidence is not seen as relevant in this case, cf. Kropat, *Syntax der Chronik* (note 3), p.74; Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew* (note 3), p.42.

⁸¹ Polzin separates „Nehemiah's Memoirs“ (Neh 1:1-7:5 and 12:27-13:31) from the rest of the book of Nehemiah. On collectives see Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew* (note 3), p.73 (Nehemiah's Memoirs), 74 (Esther).

each other.⁸² I and II Kings do differ slightly more from each other, but there seems no significance in this variation if one wished to argue for a chronological development in the language of the book as the subject matter moves toward the exile. Note that II Kings has the higher proportion of singular verbs over I Kings.⁸³ Narrowing the focus even further, we see that although the first half of II Kings has a higher proportion of singular over plural verbs than the second half of II Kings, those specific chapters dealing with the period from Josiah's reign to the exile actually have more singular than plural verbs used with ‘am. Thus there seems no clear evidence of a chronological development within Kings in this matter.⁸⁴ Instead, when a significant number of examples is found, the proportions of singular and plural verbs with ‘am in the various parts of these books seem generally to conform to the overall proportions of the book in which they are found. This is reminiscent of the opinion of James Barr that the meaningful unit for the study of variable Hebrew spelling patterns in the Bible is the book and not the purported sources that make up the book.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, one should not forget what was discovered about the two halves of the book of Isaiah (above, with note 49).

(iii) Polzin's Treatment of Collectives

While on the subject of sources within books, this is also a convenient place to discuss R. Polzin's use of the treatment of collectives as part of his attempt to date the language of the Priestly Document in the Pentateuch. Although very few of the ‘am sentences fall within Polzin's corpus of P,⁸⁶ nevertheless, we wish to make a few general remarks. Polzin differentiates two parts of the P-document: P^g (the groundwork of P) and P^s (secondary additions to P).⁸⁷ One of the features which Polzin finds uniting both P^g and P^s against Polzin's samples of earlier classical Hebrew is the increasing tendency to treat collective nouns as grammatically plural. Polzin firstly finds that P^s construes collectives as plurals 10/19 times.⁸⁸ Investigating his examples, one wonders whether a construction like „all the congregation of the sons (pl.) of Israel“ (Ex 16:1, 2) is really strictly a collective and not simply a plural? One also wonders whether every singular collective which

⁸² I Samuel 22 singular - 21 plural (51%); II Samuel 18-15 (55%).

⁸³ I Kings 7-17 (29%); II Kings 8-13 (38%). Note that II Kings' proportion of plurals is boosted by the repetition of the formula „the people still sacrificed and burned incense“, which is used at I Kgs 22:44; II Kgs 12:4; 14:4; 15:4, 35.

⁸⁴ II Kings chapters 1-13:5-7 (42%); chs. 14-21:1-6 (14%) including three uses of the formula noted in the previous note; chs. 22-25: 2-0(100%). I wish to thank Prof. Avi Hurvitz for bringing this issue to my attention.

⁸⁵ J. Barr, *The Variable Spellings of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1989), p.21. On the relevance of Barr's work see further below.

⁸⁶ Only Ex 36:5, 6; Lev 9:24. Ex 36:5 has a plural verb, the other two are singular (with Leviticus following up with two plural verbs).

⁸⁷ Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew* (note 3), p.87.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.98.

Polzin cites displays the same pattern and proportion of variation as ^c*am*. Note that although Polzin's examples happen to be mostly verbs in verb-subject relationship, this is not always the case (e.g. Gen. 48:6). In any event, a proportion of 9 singular - 10 plural verbs, even strictly in verb-subject relationship, would not be particularly remarkable in the context of the first column of table two, above. It is a higher proportion (47%) than, for example, the Books of Joshua and Judges, and comparable with Kings or Jeremiah. Polzin is not dealing with books of course, but rather their presumed sources. Thus, Polzin's „JE“ sample, made up of passages from Exodus and Numbers has a 7:2 ratio of singular to plural elements with collectives (78%).⁸⁹ This is much higher than any proportion for ^c*am* achieved in this study, except for the proportions derived from focussing on verb-subject sentences alone. Interestingly, if one combines the figures for the Books of Exodus and Numbers from table 2, above, one arrives at a 77% proportion of singular to plural verbs. This raises the question whether Polzin's statistics reflect the sources of the Biblical books or just simply the overall ratios of the books he is sampling? We will return to this point later. Even granting Polzin's statistics, there is still of course the problem that a *typologically* later form of language need not be chronologically later.⁹⁰

Similar comments apply to Polzin's finding that P^s construes singular collectives as plurals 15/21 times.⁹¹ Since Polzin is effectively arguing that the relative proportions reflect a chronological progression, it is important to note that they are potentially quite misleading. The clearest example of this is the realization that six of his examples of plural verbs relate to the use of the Hiph'il of *bw*⁷ in an almost identical context within the space of six verses in Exodus 35: 21-25. Indeed, the majority of Polzin's examples in general come from Exodus 35-36. They overwhelmingly relate to phrases such as „every man who ...“. Again one wonders whether these sorts of collectives behave in the same way as do the words like ^c*am* „people“, and *qāhāl* „congregation“ which make up the majority of Polzin's examples in Chronicles. Note also that even taking Polzin's raw figures, the proportion of singular to plural is not much different to e.g. Jeremiah in table one. When one notes also that 17 out of his 21 examples involve *kol* „all“ and 13 are subject-verb word order sentences, we must seriously doubt whether chronology is the overriding factor at work in these verses.

(iv) Non-Biblical Qumran Documents

In favour of the chronological interpretation of the evidence relating to verbs with ^c*am* presented in the table above might be the tendency observed in important non-

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.98.

⁹⁰ P. R. Davies, *In Search of „Ancient Israel“* (JSOT/SS 148; Sheffield, 1992), p.103. On Polzin's over-precise use of statistics see Rooker, *Ezekiel* (note 4), p.39.

⁹¹ Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew* (note 3), p.103.

Biblical Qumran documents to treat *ʿam* as plural. Qimron provides an enumeration for *ʿam*, relating that it is construed 21 times as plural and only 4 times as singular.⁹² However, it should be noted here that Qimron seems to have included in this count not only verbal forms, but all possible grammatical forms together, i.e. including pronominal suffixes. Counting in this way would lead even to a book like Samuel coming out with a heavy preponderance of plural forms, since it is only the verbs in many books, both „early“ and „late“, which provide a significant number of singular forms. The majority of his examples come from the Community Rule, War Scroll and Temple Scroll. Checking up these references, although one would concur that there seems a strong preference for plural verbs with *ʿam*, one should note both that there are much fewer of these than a superficial reading of Qimron would indicate, and the syntax of these occurrences is limited to but one possible type of Biblical usage. Note that there are actually only seven initial verbs that would be allowed in this study in these three Scrolls. A number of Qimron’s references are unacceptable, for instance War Scroll 8:9; 16:7; and 17:13, where the subject of the verb is not just the people, but the Levites as well. Also, Temple Scroll 29:7 and 59:13 contain variations on the formula „I will be their God and they shall be my people“, which is made up invariably of plural grammatical elements throughout the Biblical tradition.

Of the seven initial verbs in the three Scrolls, the Community Rule has two plural, the War Scroll three plural, while the Temple Scroll has one plural and one singular. While one may be impressed that all the (small) number of grammatical elements construed with *ʿam* in the first two scrolls are plural, a few observations need to be made. Firstly, in every occurrence but one of „people“ in these three scrolls according to Qimron’s listing, the word order is subject-verb. The one time that the verb precedes the subject, the verb is used in the singular (11QT 58:6). Furthermore, each of the occurrences of „people“ before plural verb involves the word *kol* „all“. This fits in with the tendencies of the Masoretic Biblical text discussed above to favour plural verbs both when the subject „people“ precedes the verb, and when the word *kol* is involved. In fact, the combination of *kol* with a subject-verb sentence occurs twenty times in the *ʿam* sentences dealt with in the tables above, and of these only two of the verbs are in the singular.⁹³ Thus, one might say that the Qumran Hebrew usage is not very different to what might be expected even of Early Biblical Hebrew under such circumstances.

One must certainly admit that if it indicates anything the evidence at least from the Community Rule and War Scroll indicates a preference for taking *ʿam* as plural. Nevertheless, the points noted above make the testimony of these scrolls more ambiguous than it would at first seem. It is perhaps well to bear in mind that although Qumran Hebrew can be safely included within the broad category of Classical Hebrew, the link between Qumran Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew is not

⁹² E. Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta, 1986), p.83. For the limits of the corpus covered by his investigation see page 15.

⁹³ Ex 18:14 (Niph’al participle), II Sam 17:3.

uncomplicatedly direct.⁹⁴ The construction of *ʿam* as plural in certain Qumran texts may be better explained in terms of a preference for a particular syntactical construction which led almost inevitably to *ʿam* being construed as plural. Thus, the evidence from these Qumran texts is only strictly comparable to a small sub-section of the Biblical evidence.

(v) The Mishnah

The chronological interpretation of the evidence may also be strengthened by appeal to the overwhelming tendency of the Mishnah to treat *ʿam* as plural. Treatment of *ʿam* as singular in the printed text of the Mishnah is almost non-existent.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, note that despite this almost total lack of optionality in the number of *ʿam*, the medieval Mishnah manuscripts still reflect some variation in this matter.⁹⁶ One could argue from the Mishnah (c.200 C.E.) and the Qumran Scrolls evidence that post-Biblical Hebrew took *ʿam* as plural almost exclusively. Ezekiel, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah would thus reflect that this process was well underway in the exilic/post-exilic period, in distinction to earlier Biblical Hebrew which treated *ʿam* as optionally singular or plural.

As with the Qumran evidence, however, one must note a few points which make the evidence of the Mishnah a little more ambiguous. Most important is the question of the relationship of the language of the Mishnah to the Biblical Hebrew tradition. It is widely accepted in recent scholarship that Mishnaic Hebrew is not simply a genetic descendant of Biblical Hebrew, in the sense that Late Biblical Hebrew eventually mutated into Mishnaic Hebrew. Rather, Mishnaic Hebrew is taken as a form of language that co-existed with Biblical Hebrew for some period of time.⁹⁷ It is thus true to say that the late *attestation* of Mishnaic Hebrew does not mean that a form of language with (many of) those characteristics did not exist much earlier in time. Therefore the specific characteristics of Mishnaic Hebrew are not necessarily late. Even if one wished to directly connect Chronicles etc. with Mishnaic Hebrew in their treatment of *ʿam*, this need not be expressed in purely chronological terms.

⁹⁴ S. Morag, „Qumran Hebrew: Some Typological Observations“, *VT* 38 (1988), p.148-164.

⁹⁵ In the edition of the text by Philip Blackman (second edition, N.Y, 1990) the only singular grammatical element discovered was the third person singular suffix on the word *ûbaʿaqēbô* in Sotah 8:6. It should be noted that one would actually expect a situation more like the variability of the Biblical evidence in view of the general remarks on collective nouns by M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford, 1927), p.215.

⁹⁶ Thus note that the well-regarded manuscripts Kaufman A50 and Parma De Rossi 138 have a singular, rather than plural verb with *ʿam* in Tamid 7:3.

⁹⁷ See e.g. G. A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* (New Haven, 1990); I. Young, *Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew* (Tübingen, 1993), p.79-81. For convenient summaries of recent scholarship, with bibliography, see: R. C. Steiner, „A Colloquialism in Jer 5:13 from the Ancestor of Mishnaic Hebrew“, *JSS* 37 (1992), p.11-26; A. Saenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Cambridge, 1993), p.166-173.

Chronicles, Ezekiel, and Ezra-Nehemiah (and many Qumran Scrolls?) may have simply been those books written in a geographical/social milieu which was heavily influenced by proto-Mishnaic Hebrew, as opposed to other contemporary writings.

(vi) The Samaritan Pentateuch

The evidence from the Samaritan Pentateuch is often tied in with the evidence from Mishnah and Qumran Scrolls as indicating a general tendency of Post-Biblical Hebrew to construe collective nouns as plural. As we have already seen, however, the impression sometimes given, that the situation in the Samaritan Pentateuch is comparable with that in Chronicles, is simply erroneous.⁹⁸ One could perhaps see it as significant that when the Samaritan Pentateuch differs from MT in respect to singular or plural verbs with ‘am, it deviates in favour of plural twice as often as singular. However, as we have already argued, the Samaritan Pentateuch cannot be treated as if its deviations are all simply later than the MT. Also, the cases where the Samaritan Pentateuch has a singular verb where MT has plural do not seem to point to any clear pluralising tendency. Thus the Samaritan Pentateuch can only provide very weak support for the chronological interpretation of the evidence.

(vii) Third Person Pronominal Suffixes

A chronological interpretation of the distribution of third person pronominal suffixes in ‘am sentences is also possible, if more problematic. One would have to try and justify why Isaiah is so far different to the other Biblical books. One could explain the Pentateuch's intermediate position as due to the mixing of early and late sources.⁹⁹ One could also explain the Deuteronomistic history books as having been redacted around the same period as Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Thus one would have a shift in usage during the course of the seventh century from a strong preference for singular forms (the first half of Isaiah, the early Pentateuchal sources) to a strong preference for plural ([most of] the rest of the Bible). This theory would perhaps run into problems when dealing with the Psalms, and Minor Prophets. Both of these books have a proportionately significant minority of singular forms, often clustered in chapters or sections generally considered late by scholars. Note for instance the string of singular grammatical forms in Obadiah 13-14, Zechariah 13:9, or Psalm 144:15.¹⁰⁰ These objections could be overcome, however, by suggesting that

⁹⁸ See above, with note 68.

⁹⁹ Of the limited examples which fall within Polzin's corpus of P texts, all examples found were plural: Ex 6:7-8; Lev 9:7, 22, 24; Num 13:32.

¹⁰⁰ For the second part (vs. 12-15) of Psalm 144 as late see A. Hurvitz, *Bein Lashon Le-Lashon* (Jerusalem, 1972), p.164-169.

occasional clusterings such as these in late books are due to the influence of the earlier style on late authors.

(c) A Textual Interpretation

(i) Methodological Issues

A basic methodological issue which must be raised is how confident we can be that the patterns we observe in our current Biblical text are due to the original authors of those works, rather than being a result of the scribal transmission of those books? A number of the arguments for the chronological interpretation of the evidence are vulnerable to this approach. In particular, the evidence from Qumran and the Mishnah can be interpreted in more than one way. One may, for instance, accept that the non-Biblical Qumran scrolls and the Mishnah evidence that in the Second Temple period and later there were in existence non-Biblical texts which displayed a similar pluralising tendency to the received text of Chronicles etc. However, rather than taking these texts as adding to the case that Late Classical Hebrew in general construed *am* consistently as plural, one could argue that these texts simply indicate that there were circles of *scribes* in existence in the later period who could have been inclined to update the language of Biblical texts in this way. With Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah one wonders whether their lateness of composition made them achieve „canonical“ status later than other Biblical books, which meant that their text and hence their language was in general more available for updating than the older, more authoritative books?¹⁰¹ Whether this possibility has any validity or not, it is clear that a case can be made that at least some scribes in the Second Temple Period took it upon themselves to update the language of their texts, Biblical or not. We once again quote the famous words of Kutscher regarding IQIsa^a that its „linguistic anomalies ... reflect the Hebrew and Aramaic currently spoken in Palestine towards the end of the Second Commonwealth.“¹⁰² That is, Kutscher considered that this version of Isaiah had been linguistically revised and updated, in comparison with the MT of Isaiah.

Unfortunately, there is very much that is unknown about the history of the Biblical text. The Qumran Biblical texts, for instance, while much older than texts previously known are still very far removed from the time of the original authors.¹⁰³ The scribal

¹⁰¹ A similar suggestion is in Gerleman, *Synoptic Studies* (note 3), p.6-7, although he believes that it was the more prestigious texts which were subject to greater scribal activity - in his opinion, to make them look more archaic.

¹⁰² See note 63. On linguistic updating see further: M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985), p.56-60; Tov, *Textual* (note 50), p.259-260; Waltke, „Samaritan Pentateuch“ (note 64), p.213-220.

¹⁰³ The Daniel manuscripts might perhaps be the closest in time. Cf E. Tov, „Hebrew Biblical Manuscripts from the Judaean Desert: Their Contribution to Textual Criticism“, *JJS* 39 (1988), p.8.

processes we see evidenced in the Qumran texts need not have been the rule in preceding centuries, especially as the Biblical text's status changed in the various communities. We do not know how representative the Qumran texts are of the state of the Biblical text in their own time, not to speak of the preceding centuries. The numerical preponderance of the proto-MT in the latter Second Temple Period¹⁰⁴ probably tells us more about the socio-religious background of the time than the value of the MT as a witness to any „original“ form of the text. We are still stuck somewhere on the chain of scribal transmission of texts, left with only clues as to what might have transpired before this time.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that recent work by textual scholars has had much to say on the question of whether the MT is to be considered „the“ text of the Bible, in the sense that it represents in some direct way the „original“ text of the Bible. Their answer is that the MT is by no means uncomplicatedly the „best“ text of the Bible. One may refer to the recent standard work by Tov.¹⁰⁵ A common idea among modern text-critics is the „decentralizing“ of the MT.¹⁰⁶ The MT is now seen as merely „a“ text of the Bible, rather than „the“ text. The Qumran Biblical texts, in particular, have indicated a great diversity in the forms of the Biblical books in the later Second Temple period. The preservation of the MT has been seen as more likely due to its link with the surviving authoritative group in Judaism i.e. Rabbinic Judaism. Similar things might be said about the preservation of the Samaritan text by the Samaritans, or indeed about the Greek Septuagint by the Church.¹⁰⁷ The fact that these texts managed to survive, while others did not, was unlikely to have been because they were necessarily superior witnesses to an original form of the Bible. They are considered most likely to have been chosen for religious-political reasons, rather than on the basis of some rational method of text evaluation.¹⁰⁸

Thus when discussing Biblical Hebrew, one must be careful to keep clearly in mind the nature of the sources. It is no longer possible to assume that MT simply represents the original Biblical texts, and that the other Hebrew Biblical texts simply represent later perversions of the original. Kutscher's great study of IQIsa^a has done a disservice to Hebrew language scholarship, by influencing many scholars consciously or unconsciously to think in this way. For those engaged in the linguistic study of the Hebrew Bible, therefore, we must always bear in mind an alternative explanation for the patterns we discover in MT. That is, a textual, rather

¹⁰⁴ Tov, *Textual* (note 50), p.115.

¹⁰⁵ See note 50.

¹⁰⁶ The phrase is from E. Ulrich, „The Biblical Scrolls from Qumran Cave 4: An Overview and a Progress Report on their Publication“, *RQu* 14 (1989), p.223. Cf. also A. S. van der Woude, „The Dead Sea Scrolls: Some Issues“, *SEA* 57 (1992), p.87-93.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the references cited in notes 50 and 106, see E. Tov, „A Modern Textual Outlook Based on the Qumran Scrolls“, *HUCA* 53 (1982), p.11-27, esp. p.19.

¹⁰⁸ B. Albrektson, „Reflections on the Emergence of a Standard Text of the Hebrew Bible“, *VTS* 29 (1978), p.49-65. Professor Sasson has raised the question of whether these two factors need to be seen as mutually exclusive.

than linguistic explanation. One cannot, in view of the opinions of the textual scholars, simply without discussion treat the MT - although it is convenient, and the only complete witness to the Hebrew text of the entire Jewish scriptures - as if it represents the very words of the original authors. This it may be, but merely to assume this would be very dangerous indeed.

Recent scholars working on this history of Biblical Hebrew have based themselves quite naturally on the MT. Hurvitz, one of the leading scholars, has stated the methodological dilemma clearly. He is quite aware that the language of the texts he is investigating could reflect a late scribal updating of much earlier works. He is also aware that the MT is subject to mistakes and corruptions. Nevertheless, he correctly states that linguistic investigation must base itself on actual texts, not reconstructed or hypothetical ones. Therefore he considers the burden of proof is upon anyone who wishes to deal with another text than the MT.¹⁰⁹ This is undoubtedly a well considered point of view, and probably reflects the best approach where no textual evidence is available. Nevertheless, one must beware of letting this position become an excuse for simply ignoring the long history behind the text. Investigators of the language of the Hebrew Bible must always bear in mind the textual perspective when interpreting their findings.

(ii) A Scribal Interpretation of the Evidence Regarding the Verbs

In line with what has been said, we must therefore now pose the question whether there are any grounds which would lead us to seriously entertain a textual explanation of our findings relating to the grammatical number of *‘am*. The evidence we have described above relating to the Medieval Masoretic manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Qumran Biblical texts showed us that the distinction between plural and singular in perfect and imperfect verbs was fairly volatile in the various scribal traditions. This is much more the case than say, the third person pronominal suffixes. It would be possible, therefore, to argue from this evidence that at least the differences in proportions of singular versus plural verbs in various Biblical books in the MT are due to the processes of scribal transmission, rather than reflecting the original shape of the book. Thus we could even consider that the seemingly random mixture of singular and plural verbs with *‘am* reflects the steady but haphazard accumulation of the judgements (or mistakes) of many scribes as to the grammatical number of *‘am*. Against this, however, it must be remarked that there is no reason to expect grammatical consistency from the Biblical authors, if the present texts have indeed granted us any contact with their original style. It is clear that it is not only in our specific case that all the texts we currently have display a remarkable variety. On the contrary, all areas of Biblical grammar are marked by a

¹⁰⁹ A. Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel A New Approach to an Old Problem*, (Paris, 1982), p.19. Quoted with approval by Rendsburg, *Diglossia* (note 97), p.31-32. See also Hurvitz, *Bein Lashon* (note 100), p.182-184.

lack of uniformity in usage.¹¹⁰ Therefore, while the details of the distribution of forms will have changed, we have no reason, according to our current knowledge of the texts, to *a priori* suppose that our texts must have started out being grammatically consistent.

Nevertheless, comparison with the many other categories of linguistic variation embedded in our Biblical texts (e.g. the constant switching between synonymous words) shows us one clear difference that sets the variety in our ‘am sentences somewhat apart. This is that, at a certain stage, seemingly sometime toward the end of the Second Temple Period, it no longer became acceptable to make changes even of the scale of the substitution of a synonym, into the texts. Both the Masoretic and Samaritan traditions reached this stage of conservatism.¹¹¹ This meant the effective end of such material variants by the time of our medieval manuscripts. On the other hand, despite the ideal of letter perfect copying in the Masoretic tradition, it is clear that changes were still occurring in the texts. Even our Medieval Masoretic manuscripts have revealed to us a psychological hierarchy in the „exact“ copying of the text. At one end of the scale, the overwhelming majority of differences in the Masoretic manuscripts are to do with the presence or absence of medial vowel letters. They are thus still variable to a degree. At the other end of the scale, however, as we have just mentioned, scribal changes such as rephrasings, or substitution of parallel words, which must have been instrumental in leading to the textual variety evidenced in the Qumran scrolls, are effectively prohibited. At the same time we have noted in regard to the Medieval manuscripts, the final *waw* marking the plural of perfect and imperfect verbs in ambiguous contexts such as with collective nouns is unstable. This instability, in view of the much greater stability of the consonantal text, would seem to indicate that the scribes treated the plural ending in ‘am sentences more like the medial vowel letters than the consonantal text.

If this observation is correct we would thus be approaching the variations between singular and plural verbs with ‘am from the wrong angle if we grouped them together with other sorts of textual variations e.g. substitution of words, phrases etc.¹¹² The phenomena under discussion in the present article would have more of a relationship with the variability of the spelling of medial *matres lectionis* in the Hebrew texts than with the other aspects of textual criticism. In this connection it should be noted that the patterns of distribution of initial singular and plural verbs with ‘am are very reminiscent of the many tabulations of *plene* and defective

¹¹⁰ See Bendavid, *Leshon* (note 3), p.13-59.

¹¹¹ For these developments see J. E. Sanderson, *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran 4Qpaleo Exod^m and the Samaritan Tradition* (Atlanta, 1986), p.261-306, esp. p.303-306. For an example of variation involving synonyms, see the alternation *kap/yad* „hand“ at the end of verse one of the parallel texts II Sam 22 = Psalm 18.

¹¹² I.e. such as the presence of the verb „to hear“ in the Samaritan Pentateuch - as opposed to the MT - of Ex 20:18; or such a substitution of consonants as in 1QIsa^a 9:8 „all the people shouted (*wyr‘w*)“ vs MT „all the people knew (*wyd‘w*)“.

the previous paragraph, it should be noted that consistency of spelling of certain otherwise variable forms is attested within individual books. Thus, note the case of *hā-lôʿ* „is not?“ The Book of Samuel is an example of a book that consistently spells this expression *plene* i.e. with *waw* (34 times). On the other hand, Chronicles spells it consistently defectively (18 times).¹¹⁶

Beyond the analogy with medial *matres lectionis*, however, the observable facts from the texts show us only occasional random movement, singular to plural, and plural to singular, in the verbs. They do not for the most part give us the picture of wholesale, consistent changes in verbs within different versions of books, but only a minority of variant cases. If one were to postulate on the basis of the general textual evidence that a large number of verbal forms had been changed singular to plural in Chronicles, one would wish to see evidence of a more large scale revision of a text than the occasional shifts observable in our texts. For medial *matres lectionis*, for example, our Qumran texts clearly evidence a variety of quite different spelling styles. On the contrary, it is hard to find evidence of large scale deviation from the MT patterns of the spellings of singular and plural verbs with ʿam in our other Hebrew texts. This said, however, we have already suggested that there may be one exception to this situation. This is the cursing scene on Mt Gerizim in Deuteronomy 27, especially verses 15-26, in MT and Samaritan Pentateuch. Here, while both texts agree on plural verbs with ʿam in verse 15, the MT is thenceforth consistently singular, while the Samaritan continues consistently plural. As noted above, if one believes there was once an original text, which construed ʿam as singular or plural or both, somewhere in the textual transmission of either or both MT or Samaritan Pentateuch, a thorough revision was undertaken, making the MT and Samaritan texts consistently different at this point. It is therefore possible to argue that we have evidence which suggests a large scale revision of verbs with ʿam could have been undertaken in Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Ezekiel, giving the high preference for plural verbs observable in our current texts. A possible motivation for this could be the desire to produce a more consistent text.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, in response to this it should be noted that we have not discovered actual evidence of consistent changing of these language features in the course of scribal transmission across a whole text, rather than a short, homogenous section.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.155-158. For another example, see Barr's discussion of Chronicles' treatment of the name David (p.161, 166). Note especially Barr's comment on p.158: „... Chronicles, in particular, was capable of a strong standardization, and one strikingly contrary to the use of other books.“

¹¹⁷ Thus e.g. Talmon, „Samaritan Pentateuch“ (note 65), p.146: „[Chronicles] has long been recognized as embodying a systematised text. In this very book, more than in others, including Sam.-Kings, scholars have discovered emendations of late editors who intended to produce a linguistically and exegetically straightforward text.“

(iii) Other Grammatical Features

With the other grammatical features construed with $\text{'}am$, exemplified by the third person pronominal suffixes, the picture is again different. While very occasionally we observe these forms changing in the period of the scribal tradition for which we have evidence, they are for the most part quite stable. Even though the third person pronominal suffixes were potentially variable, we do not see any significant variation in the texts in our hands. As will always be the case unless we discover many, much older Biblical texts than we have, such an observation does not mean they could not have been much more unstable in an earlier period. Nevertheless, the available evidence points to stability, seemingly of a similar order to the rest of the consonantal text.

(5) Conclusions

We have discovered two patterns relating to the grammatical treatment of $\text{'}am$ in the Biblical texts. With participles, perfect and imperfect verbs the Books of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Ezekiel stand out by having $\text{'}am$ almost always construed with plural forms of these verbs. In regard to other language features, especially third person suffixes, it is Isaiah, and to a lesser extent the Pentateuch books, which stand out due to their high proportion of singular elements with $\text{'}am$. In regard to these two groups of evidence we have presented two possible ways of interpreting them. On the one hand, we may follow a chronological interpretation. On the other, we may argue that the evidence is explicable due to the textual history of the books in question.

We must now attempt to weigh these two explanations in the balance. It is important to remember Hurvitz's stricture at this point, that although the existence of variant Biblical texts and the influence of scribes in forming our present texts are always possible, we must deal with the actual texts in front of us, and the actual evidence we have. Thus, we must declare a textual explanation of the distribution of the „other“ grammatical elements exemplified by the third person suffixes to be unproven. Always we must bear in mind that there may be scribal processes hidden from us which caused, say, the Book of Isaiah, to favour singular suffixes. Nevertheless, on the principle of dealing with actual texts and evidence, there is simply not enough evidence for variability in these language features in the textual evidence to support the textual interpretation. One response to this might be to suspend judgement in the hope that extensive, earlier textual evidence becomes available. Or, on the current evidence one might prefer a chronological explanation or perhaps one which explained Isaiah's position as due to dialectal factors.

In regard to the third person perfect and imperfect verbs (but not, seemingly, the participles), one is on firmer ground when arguing for a textual interpretation.

Firstly, the variability in all branches of the textual tradition in regard to these forms, coupled with the analogy with the variability of the internal *matres lectionis*, would seem to argue very strongly that the specific distribution of singular and plural forms in our texts is not directly due to the original authors of those texts. Thus it is even possible that, for example, the Book of Samuel originally displayed a uniform treatment of the grammatical number of verbs referring to ʿam, and that the current inconsistency is due to a long and haphazard scribal treatment of these forms. Even if one believed that Samuel was originally written with a mixture of singular and plural verbs, due perhaps to specific nuances intended by the author to be conveyed by the different numbers, still the general variability evident in the textual evidence would tend to argue that the specific distribution of forms in the MT of Samuel is unlikely to reflect the distribution in the most ancient form of the book. Thus, for example, one might wish to declare extremely doubtful Polzin's use of fairly precise statistics to prove that the distribution of these features in the P-document reflects its date of composition.

In regard to the interpretation of the mostly consistent plural verbs with ʿam in Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Ezekiel, points may be made on both sides. In favour of the textual interpretation there is the demonstrably close relationship between the variable spelling of final *waw* on verbs in ambiguous contexts and the variable spelling of internal *matres lectionis*. For the consistent spelling of these few books we may invoke the analogy with occasional words being spelled consistently in regard to internal *matres lectionis* in individual books as opposed to a general variability in other Biblical books.¹¹⁸ We may also point to the imposition of consistency on the passage in Deuteronomy 27, in the MT and Samaritan Pentateuch. However, we must admit that at present the textual approach lacks solid evidence of this sort of consistency being imposed on larger textual units in regard to their treatment of ʿam. That is, while we actually have in our possession variant Biblical texts with significantly different spelling patterns in regard to internal *matres lectionis*, we do not have the same evidence for the final *waw* on verbs in ʿam sentences (admittedly a much more specific case). A moment's consideration of the normal understanding of the relationship between Chronicles and its sources in Samuel-Kings will of course show that scholars have usually presumed that the Chronicler was in fact engaged in just such an updating of the language. However, the specific point under debate here is whether there is any evidence which could lead one to suggest that in this case at least the updating was not actually undertaken by the Chronicler himself, but rather the later scribal tradition.

The chronological interpretation in regard to Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Ezekiel, on the contrary, has some strong, if not unassailable, evidence in its favour. Thus there is the coincidence that it is only the three exilic/post-exilic books which display this consistency in preferring the plural with ʿam. Also, despite other ways of seeing their evidence, it is a fact that the Dead Sea Scrolls and Mishnah are

¹¹⁸ See above, with note 116.

sources attested from a late period. Therefore, there is still much to be said for the chronological interpretation. Nevertheless, the limited evidence from Daniel and Esther would seem to indicate that not all Late Biblical Hebrew sources were as consistent in their preference to treat *ʿam* as plural. Therefore, one might wish to consider regional/dialectal favours (as well as chronological?) as linking the three books, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Ezekiel. It is perhaps from this angle, rather than simply as witness to chronological development, that the evidence from Mishnaic and Qumran Hebrew should be seen.

Abstract:

It has long been realized that collective nouns such as *ʿam* „people“ are regularly construed with both singular and plural verbs in Biblical Hebrew. This study investigates the syntax of *ʿam* in the MT, Samaritan Pentateuch and the Qumran Biblical scrolls not only with verbs, but also e.g. with pronominal suffixes. It investigates the opinion that certain books construe *ʿam* as plural due to the late date of their composition. Some support is found for this position. However, it is important in investigating Biblical Hebrew to bear in mind the long textual history behind the current form of the books. From this perspective a rival thesis is investigated, that the current patterns of grammatical concord with *ʿam* in our texts are the result of the scribal transmission of the texts, not the „original“ author’s intention.

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