ʿEdah and *Qahal* as Collective Nouns in Hebrew Biblical Texts

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I. Introduction

At the same time as our earlier study on *ʿam* was in press,[1] a PhD thesis by Keith Massey was being completed, entitled *The Concord of Collective Nouns and Verbs in Biblical Hebrew: A Controlled Study*.[2]

Massey has worked on collective nouns in general in the Deuteronomic history (Dtr). Our study looked at one item, *ʿam* (עַם) "people" across the entire Hebrew Bible.[3] Massey's study was focussed on attempting to explain the behaviour of verbs with collective nouns in Dtr. As the title indicates, our study had a strong focus on the diachronic and textual issues arising out of the study of *ʿam*.

Nevertheless, there is important overlap in specific areas. Both studies are, we believe, taking the study of collective nouns in Biblical Hebrew in a similar direction. Very importantly, both studies recognize that the distribution of singular and plural verbs with collective nouns is not simply random but is subject to a large degree to certain rules. Among the important factors identified in the study on *ʿam* were the influence of *kol* "all", and of word order.[4] Massey has identified a number of other factors such as co-ordination of multiple verbs, objects intervening between the verb and subject, and speech register.[5] By focussing on the Dtr history, he was able to reach a greater level of sophistication than was achieved in "*ʿAm*". Massey shows that Dtr has certain rules which do not seem to apply in the same way to other parts

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[1]   Young, I.: "*ʿAm* Construed as Singular and Plural in Hebrew Biblical Texts: Diachronic and Textual Perspectives," ZAH 12 (1999), p.48-82. Henceforth: "*ʿAm*".

[2]   PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998: UMI Microform 9825726, 1998. Henceforth: Massey.

[3]   In actual fact, the majority of Massey's examples deal with *ʿam*: 108/197 in Massey's index: Massey, p.140-149.

[4]   "*ʿAm*," p.52-54. This work, as well as that of Massey, tends to look to "mechanical" factors-synchronic as well as diachronic and textual- to explain the distribution of singular and plural forms with collective nouns. This is at variance with the "expressive" usage as suggested by Revell, E.J.: *The Designation of the Individual Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (Kampen, 1996), p.221-229. Revell suggests, for example that "If the clause presents an important feature of the intended communication, the verb is plural" (p.221). On Revell and "expressive" usage see Massey, p.8-9, 124-126; and cf. "*ʿAm*", p.56-57.

[5]   Verbal co-ordination: Massey, p.33-36; intervening objects: Massey, p.37-38; speech register: Massey, p.81-94. Verbal co-ordination and intervening objects tend to influence the verb to be plural, while speech register favours singular verbs.

of the Bible.[6] A challenge for future research is to discover rules applicable to non-Dtr sources. Massey, further, only deals with verbal concord with collective nouns. Another challenge for future research is to attempt an explanation of the interesting, but different, patterns of other grammatical elements, especially third person pronominal suffixes, identified in "ʿAm."[7]

Massey is confident that the factors he identifies can explain the majority of occurrences of singular or plural verbal concord with collective nouns in Dtr. Admittedly some of the explanations he presents seem *ad hoc* since they arise from only small numbers of examples. Nevertheless, the general contours of his approach seem sound, and the basis for further work. Despite all this, however, Massey admits there is a residue of forms which defy analysis. Here he shows a commendable grasp of the textual problems involved, outlined in detail in "ʿAm."[8]

Massey, like previous, less sophisticated discussions of collective nouns, treats all collective nouns as an undifferentiated group in his main study.[9] He does, it should be noted, mention that some items, for example "Judah", are always singular in his corpus.[10] He also discusses the idea that "Israel" might behave differently than "ʿam", but finds no evidence for this in Dtr.[11] The purpose of the current article is to argue that as part of the new sophistication in discussing collective nouns, one cannot assume that all collective nouns will behave similarly. To demonstrate this point, we will here argue that both of the words translatable as "congregation, assembly," *ʿēdāh* (עֵדָה; henceforth *ʿedah*) and *qāhāl* (קָהָל; henceforth *qahal*), display different features both when compared to *ʿam* "people", and to each other.[12] The presentation of the material will generally follow the format of "ʿAm."

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6   See, for example, the remarks on the P source (Massey, p.169-170), "the Southern Document" (Massey, p.118-119), and Late Biblical Hebrew (Massey, p.108, 199). It is to be noted that Massey, p.29-30 views *kol* as a more significant factor than does "ʿAm", p.52, presumably because the Book of Samuel, which is a major component of Massey's corpus, displays a clear preference for *kol* + *ʿam* with plural concord.

7   "ʿAm," p.57-60.

8   E.g. Massey, p.79-80, p.125-126. As Massey, p.62,136,138 etc correctly states, there is room here for Revell's "expressive" usage (see above, note 4). This would not be the main explanation for variation of verb number with collective nouns, but it is a possible and plausible explanation for items that defy expectations.

9   See, for example, Kropat, A.: *Die Syntax des Autors der Chronik verglichen mit der seiner Quellen* (BZAW 16; Giessen, 1909), p.28-30; Polzin, R.: *Late Biblical Hebrew Toward An Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Missoula, 1976), p.40-42; Rooker, M.F.: *Biblical Hebrew in Transition The Language of the Book of Ezekiel* (JSOT/SS 90; Sheffield, 1990), p.94-96.

10 Massey, p.17.

11 Massey, p.67-68.

12 For the different nuances of *qahal* and *ʿedah* see Müller, H.-P.: "קהל *qahal* assembly," in: Jenni, E.; Westermann, C. (eds): *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trs. M. E. Biddle; Peabody, 1997), p.1118-1126.

II. ʿ*Edah*

(1) The MT (According to Leningrad Codex B19A)

(a) With Third Person Perfect and Imperfect Verbs and Participles[13]

(i) Table 1: ʿEdah as subject of verbs, overall figures

Book[14]	First Verb		% Singular	% Singular (ʿam)[15]
	Singular	Plural		
Exodus	0	3	(0)	(60)
Leviticus	1	4	(20)	(33)
Numbers	3	11	(21)	(68)
Joshua	0	2	(0)	(37)
Judges	1	2	(33)	(47)
Jeremiah	1	0	(100)	(31)
Psalms	1	2	(33)	(50)

It is clear from the above table that there are many fewer examples of ʿ*edah* than of ʿ*am*.[16] Therefore, one must be even more cautious when interpreting this data. The percentages are presented merely to make comparison easier.

This aside, however, it is also noticeable from the above table that the proportion of singular verbs with ʿ*edah* is considerably less than with ʿ*am*. This is best seen when viewing the book with the largest number of examples of ʿ*edah*, Numbers, where the percentage is 21% as opposed to 68% with ʿ*am*.[17]

In "ʿAm" it was discovered that word order was a significant factor in influencing whether a verb with ʿ*am* was singular or plural.[18] Generally when the subject precedes the verb the trend is strongly toward plural verbs. Numbers, actually, was an exception to this, with singular even more prominent in its subject-verb sentences.

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13   For further information on the items included in this table see "ʿAm," p.49. In addition to what is said there, the common expression *kol ʿădat běnē yiśrāʾēl* (כל עדת בני ישראל) "all the congregation of the sons of Israel" is excluded here. Presumably because of the plural element "sons", this expression is invariably construed as plural.

14   The references are: Exod 12:3, 6, 47; Lev 4:13; 8:4 (sing.); 9:5; 24:14, 16; Num 1:18; 10:3; 14:1 (sing.), 2, 10; 15:24, 36; 20:2, 11 (sing.), 29; 27:17 (sing.); 35:24, 25, 25; Josh 9:18; 22:16; Jdg 20:1 (sing.); 21:10, 13; Jer 30:20 (sing.); Ps 7:8 (sing.); 22:17; 86:14.

15   I.e. the comparable figure for ʿ*am* for those books - see "ʿAm," p.50-51.

16   Whereas table 1 mentions only 31 examples, the comparable table for ʿ*am* mentions 393.

17   Numbers has 14 examples of ʿ*edah*, compared with 25 of ʿ*am*.

18   "ʿAm", p.53-54.

(ii) Table 2: ʿEdah as subject following and preceding first verb

(a) Verb-Subject Sentences

Book	First Verb		% Sing.	% Sing. (ʿam)
	Sing.	Plural		
Exodus	0	1	(0)	(85)
Leviticus	1	3	(25)	(50)
Numbers	3	9	(25)	(61)
Joshua	0	2	(0)	(40)
Judges	1	2	(33)	(33)
Jeremiah	-	-	-	(50)
Psalms	-	-	-	(57)

(b) Subject-Verb Sentences

Book	First Verb		% Sing.	% Sing. (ʿam)
	Sing.	Plural		
Exodus	0	2	(0)	(11)
Leviticus	0	1	(0)	(0)
Numbers	0	2	(0)	(86)
Joshua	-	-	-	(25)
Judges	-	-	-	(71)
Jeremiah	1	0	(100)	(21)
Psalms	1	2	(33)	(33)

Even more so in the case of this table than in table 1, we are dealing with small figures here. The trend, looking again especially at Numbers, is for the proportion of singular verbs to be noticeably lower than for *ʿam*. Whereas in Numbers there was a high percentage of singular verbs in subject-verb sentences with *ʿam*, both of the examples relating to *ʿedah* are plural.

(iii) Some Possible Explanations

Why do the verbs with *ʿedah* show a consistent tendency toward greater pluralisation than those with *ʿam*? Dividing the Pentateuch into sources has surprising results. The important linguistic work of Polzin defines the generally accepted contents of the P document of the Pentateuch.[19] His P corpus actually contains almost all of the singular verbs with *ʿedah* in the Pentateuch. It contains 3 singular to 9 plural verbs (25% singular), leaving the rest of the Pentateuch with only 1 singular to 9 plural verbs (10% singular).[20] Another way of looking at the evidence, however, is

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[19] Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew* (note 8), p.88-90, 101-102.
[20] Pg (the groundwork of P): Exod 12:3, 6; Lev 9:5; Num 1:18; 14:1 (sing.), 2, 10, 35; 20:2, 11 (sing.), 29. Ps (secondary additions to P): Lev 8:4 (sing.).

to suggest that the P proportion of singulars is not different to the total proportion for the Pentateuch taken as a whole.[21] This raises the doubt which we mentioned in "ʿAm", whether the statistics for P in this case reflect the sources of the Biblical books or just simply the overall ratios of the books being sampled?[22] Our working hypothesis remains that the book is the basic unit of study.[23]

Does ʿedah obey different rules to those outlined in "ʿAm", and especially by Massey? Or do those rules simply apply differently to ʿedah than ʿam? One important factor influencing pluralisation identified by both Massey and us is the presence of the word kol "all" before the noun i.e. kol hāʿēdāh (כָּל־הָעֵדָה) "all the congregation".[24] It is noticeable that out of the 32 examples cited in the tables above, 17 have kol (53%). In comparison, the same books as contain ʿedah have ʿam with a verb 163 times, of which only 26 have kol (16%). Significantly, while Numbers has a roughly similar proportion of kol with ʿedah (7/15 = 47%), it does not contain a single example of kol with ʿam.

In addition to the much greater prevalence of kol with ʿedah, it should be noted that ʿedah + kol seems to behave differently than ʿam + kol. Of the 17 occurrences of ʿedah + kol, in only one is the verb singular (6%). On the contrary, we noted in our previous study that ʿam + kol behaves differently in different books e.g. creating a somewhat greater pluralisation in Samuel, but not in Exodus.[25] For those books containing ʿedah, ʿam + kol is found 26 times, and 12 of the corresponding verbs are singular (46%).

This factor alone seems to go a long way toward explaining the much higher pluralisation of ʿedah than ʿam. That kol can lead to pluralisation is not a new discovery, but the prevalence of kol with ʿedah, coupled with that noun's greater sensitivity to that factor, mark ʿedah out as different to ʿam.[26] That this is a true observation rather than perhaps a mere fluke due to the much smaller sample of ʿedah sentences than ʿam, is confirmed when we investigate other details of the behaviour and treatment of ʿedah.

(b) Pronouns and other features

(i) Second Person Forms and Adjectives

Generally, second person forms (imperative and pronouns) were plural with ʿam. However, exceptions occurred, and indeed Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and

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[21] Total Pentateuch: 4 singular - 18 plural = 18%. Pg alone = 2 singular - 9 plural = 18%.

[22] "ʿAm," p.70.

[23] "ʿAm," p.69, and cf. Barr, J.: *The Variable Spellings of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1989), p.21.

[24] "ʿAm," p.52; Massey, p.29-30.

[25] "ʿAm,", p.52. Samuel had 38% singular verbs (vs 53% overall) in its ʿam + kol sentences, still in strong contrast to ʿedah + kol.

[26] Most of the singular items have features identified by Massey or myself as influencing the choice of the singular. Thus, three are Niphal verbs (Lev 8:4; Jdg 20:1; Jer 30:20) - see "ʿAm," p.55; Massey, p.56-57, and one is a form of *hayah* "to be" - see Massey p.56.

Isaiah showed variability in the pronouns.[27] With *ʿedah* we find a singular impera-
tive in Jeremiah 6:18, but otherwise the few examples are plural.[28]
As with *ʿam*, attributive adjectives with *ʿedah* are singular.[29] Whereas some varia-
tion was found with participles used as attributives with *ʿam*, only plural is attested
with *ʿedah*.[30]

(ii) Third Person Pronominal Suffixes

The study on *ʿam* focussed on the third person pronominal suffixes referring to the
noun to demonstrate that these linguistic features exhibit different patterns to those
of the verbs already discussed. Thus, while most books, regardless of their treatment
of the verb, evidenced overwhelmingly plural forms, certain books, especially Exo-
dus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Isaiah, deviated from this by having a significant
proportion of singular forms. To focus on the books that also use *ʿedah*, Exodus had
32% singular forms and Numbers 44%.[31]
Third person pronominal suffixes with *ʿedah* behave quite differently. Only one
singular form was found in the entire Hebrew Bible, in Psalm 7:8.[32] As mentioned,
with *ʿam* Numbers had 44% singular forms. In relation to *ʿedah*, however, 17 third
person pronominal suffixes were found, but not one of them was singular. Once
again, therefore, the evidence suggests that *ʿedah* as a collective noun behaves dif-
ferently to *ʿam*.

(c) Variants Within the Masoretic Tradition

The combination of a low percentage of singular verbs with *ʿedah*, alongside the
almost complete absence of other singular grammatical elements means that *ʿedah* is
overwhelmingly associated with plural grammatical elements in the Hebrew Bible.
In addition, *ʿedah* varies from *ʿam* in that the difference between singular and plural
also involves a shift of gender i.e. feminine singular to masculine plural. These
elements combined mean that *ʿedah* is treated quite differently in the various textual
traditions than is *ʿam*.
Given the almost complete textual unity in Masoretic manuscripts from the Middle
Ages, the number of times variations between singular and plural verbs with *ʿam*
were attested in the collection by Kennicott[33] is quite high. Thus in Exodus and

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27 "ʿAm," p.57-59.
28 Note the Kennicott variation in Jer 6:18 discussed below. Plural imperatives are found at Num 16:24, 26. Second person imperfect verbs are found at Num 16:26 and Lev 9:5. No second person independant pronouns are attested.
29 "ʿAm," p.58. E.g. Num 14:35 *hāʿēdāh hārāʿāh hazōʾt* "this evil congregation."
30 "ʿAm," p.58. See Num 14:35; 16:11; 27:3; I Kgs 8:5; 2 Chron 5:6.
31 "ʿAm," p.58-60.
32 Psalm 7:8 is a little surprising in that while the subject is "the assembly of the peoples (*lěʾummîm*)" i.e. with a plural element, this is followed (i.e. a subject-verb sentence) by a singular verb and the sole singular third person suffix relating to *ʿedah* in the Bible: *ʿālehāh* "over it (her)." I take the masculine singular suffix in the problematic Jer 30:20 (see note 39, below) to refer to Jacob, not the *ʿedah*.
33 Kennicott, B.: *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum Cum Variis Lectionibus* (2 volumes; Oxford, 1776-1780).

Numbers alone, 12 cases were so affected.[34] In contrast to *edah*, of course, the difference between singular and plural perfect and imperfect verbs with *am* is the mere presence or absence of the final *waw*.

Surveying all the examples of *edah* in the Hebrew Bible, only one example of variation was found in Kennicott relating to the verbs in table one, above. This is the strange case of a masculine singular verb in two manuscripts with the verb "send" in Judges 21:13. The only other variation in relation to the number of *edah* relates to the feminine singular imperative *dĕʿî* (רעי) "know!" in Jer 6:18, which 6 manuscripts bring into line with the normal pluralising tendency with this noun, hence *dĕʿû*. Noticeably, these two examples relate to the minimal type of orthographic variations which characterise *am*'s textual variations in that they involve only one letter, and that a *mater lectionis*.

In another feature, therefore, *edah* is found to be different to *am*. The amount of textual variation in relation to the number of perfect and imperfect verbs with *am* led to the proposal of a hierarchy of variability. The amount of variability of the final vowel letter in such an ambiguous context was considered to be closer in scale to the variability of medial vowel letters in manuscripts than to the almost complete invariability of the rest of the consonantal text.[35] In strong contrast, various factors make variation of number with *edah* in the medieval manuscripts very rare. One factor is that *edah* is much more commonly plural than *am*, hence scribes would be less used to seeing *edah* related to singular grammatical elements. Second, most contexts require a far more drastic orthographic change to alter singular feminine to masculine plural.

(2) The Samaritan Pentateuch

One out of every six initial perfect and imperfect verbs with *am* shows a variant number in the Samaritan Pentateuch when compared to the MT.[36] In agreement with the situation detailed above in relation to the Medieval MT manuscripts, however, *edah* shows virtually no variation between these sources. The only variant to be mentioned is in Numbers 15:35, where the Samaritan reads a plural imperative in place of the MT's infinitive absolute. This shift away from using the infinitive absolute is a feature of the Samaritan Pentateuch.[37] Once again, therefore, we find *edah* to be different to *am*.

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34 "'Am," p.60.

35 "'Am," p.62.

36 "'Am," p.62-65. As a base text we use Tal, A.: *The Samaritan Pentateuch Edited According to Ms 6(c) of the Shekhem Synagogue* (Tel Aviv, 1994), with reference to the variants recorded in von Gall, A.: *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* (Giessen, 1918).

37 Waltke, B.K.: "The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Text of the Old Testament," in: J. B. Payne (ed), *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (Waco, 1970), p.215-216; cf. idem, *Prolegomena to the Samaritan Pentateuch* (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1965), p.289-291.

(3) Qumran Biblical Manuscripts

In regard to the concord of perfect and imperfect verbs with *'am*, Qumran Biblical texts seemed to vary from MT at a similar rate to the Samaritan Pentateuch.[38] In contrast to this, however, not a single example was found where a text from the Judean Desert disagrees with the MT in respect to concord with *'edah*.[39]

(4) Summary

'Edah was therefore found to strongly differ from *'am* in a number of ways. First, it tends to prefer plural elements with it to a much higher degree than *'am*. One important factor in this seems to be the tendency to attach *kol* "all" to it more frequently, and the fact that *kol* + *'edah* much more strongly demands the plural in agreement with it than does *'am* + *kol*. Second, the treatment of *'edah* in the various Hebrew textual traditions is in strong contrast to that of *'am*. Whereas *'am* shows a high degree of variability in the textual tradition, *'edah* is relatively very stable.

III. *Qahal*

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

(a) With Third Person Perfect and Imperfect Verbs and Participles

(i) Table 3: Qahal as subject of verbs, overall figures

Book[40]	First Verb	
	Singular	Plural
Exodus	0	1
Leviticus	0	1
Numbers	0	1
Samuel	0	1
Kings	1	0
Jeremiah	0	1
Ezekiel	1	1
Ezra	0	2
Nehemiah	0	2
Chronicles	2	6
(Total)	4	16

(% singular = 20%)

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38 "'Am," p.65-66.

39 See 4QpaleoGen-Exod^l Exod 12:3; 4QExod^c 12:47; 4QLev^c 4:13; MasLev^b 10:17; 4QNum^b 16:3; 26:9; 35:25; X Hev/SeNum^b 27:3; 4QJudg^b 21:13. 4QJer^c seems to agree with the LXX in understanding Jer 30:20 as referring to "testimony" (feminine), not "congregation", which might cast suspicion on the rare use of the feminine singular in the MT of this verse.

40 The references are: Exod 12:6; Lev 4:14; Num 22:4; 1 Sam 17:47; 1 Kgs 8:14 (sing.,); Jer 50:9; Ezek 23:47; 32:23 (sing.); Ezra 10:1, 12; Neh 5:13; 8:17; 1 Chron 13:4; 29:20b, 2 Chron 6:3 (sing.); 23:3 (sing.); 29:28, 31, 32; 30:23.

It will be seen that most books have very few examples of *qahal* with verbs. Examples are most common in the Late Biblical Hebrew books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. Since it has provided a significant number of examples in discussions of the treatment of collective nouns in those books, it is important to ask whether its behaviour is similar to the most significant contributor, *ʿam*.

From the above table, it can be seen that *qahal* with verbs is treated as overwhelmingly plural. Word order is not a factor. Only three references, involving all of the non-attributive participles, are subject-verb sentences. Two of them provide half of the cases of singular verbs with *qahal*, which goes against what might have been expected on the basis of *ʿam* where subject-verb sentences, especially involving participles, tended to favour plural concord.[41]

As with *ʿedah*, *qahal* occurs much more often with *kol* "all", than *ʿam*, i.e. 11 out of 20 times (55%). However, unlike *ʿedah*, *kol* + *qahal* is not overwhelmingly plural. Instead, there are 3 singulars and 8 plurals (27%) which is close to, albeit higher than, the overall proportions of singular vs plural verbs (20%). *Kol* + *qahal* is the favoured construction in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles, being found in 8 out of the 10 occurrences.

As was mentioned above, over half of the occurrences of *qahal* with verb are found in Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) books. Ezekiel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles in particular were the books most conspicuous because of their low proportion of singular verbs with *ʿam*.[42] Previous scholarship concluded that it is a feature of LBH to construe collective nouns in general as plural (almost) consistently. It could therefore be suggested that the profile of *qahal* in preferring mostly plural elements is due to the fact that it occurs mostly in books that take collectives as plural anyway. However, there is a danger that this argument is based on circular reasoning. In fact, contrary to expectations, 3 of the 4 singular forms are found in the LBH books. Only 1 singular verb (a participle) is found in Early Biblical Hebrew sources. The numbers of examples are very small, but the possibility must be raised that *qahal*, throughout *all* of Biblical Hebrew, normally occurred with plural grammatical elements.

We thus have two possible interpretations of the meagre data. The first is that *qahal* behaves like *ʿam* and the low proportion of singular verbs with *qahal* in Early Biblical Hebrew sources is pure chance. The proportion of singulars in the Late Biblical Hebrew sources is not too far different from the figures for the same books in relation to *ʿam*. The second interpretation is that *qahal* behaves differently to *ʿam* in that throughout Biblical Hebrew only very occasionally did it deviate from its normal connection with plural grammatical elements.

(b) Pronouns and Other Features

Attributive adjectives with *qahal*, as with *ʿam* and *ʿedah*, are found in the singular.[43] Apart from these and apart from the singular verbs discussed above, *qahal* is

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41 "ʿAm," p.54-55. Participles on the above list are 1 Kgs 8:14//2 Chron 6:3 (both sing.); and 2 Chron 29:28.

42 "ʿAm," p.51.

43 E.g. *qahal rab* (Ezek 38:4). Ezek 3:5 is an exception, where a plural is found with *ʿam*, see "ʿAm," p.58 n.41.

associated overwhelmingly with plural grammatical elements. This is closer to the profile of *ʿedah* than of *ʿam*. In fact there is only one of these other grammatical elements which is singular, and it is rather remarkable. In Jeremiah 50:9, the expression *qĕhal gôyīm gĕdōlîm* "a company of great nations" (with two plural grammatical elements!) is followed by a plural verb *wĕʿārkû* "and they shall array themselves", but then by a third person singular suffix *ḥiṣṣāw* "his (their) arrows".[44] The near complete preference for plural in regard to these grammatical features would seem to link *qahal* more closely with *ʿedah* than with *ʿam*. This may be relevant to the discussion above in regard to the verbs. It should be noted that we are not quite as badly off in regard to evidence for these other grammatical elements as for the verbs in table 3. Thus, whereas Numbers registered only one verb on table 3, it contains several other grammatical elements, all of them plural. Note Numbers 20:10: "Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation (*haqāhāl*) before the rock and he said to them (*lāhem*) 'Listen (*šimʿû*) Oh rebels (*hammōrîm*) - shall we bring forth water for you (*lākem*) from this rock?" These forms are especially significant in view of Numbers' relatively high proportion of singular elements in relation to *ʿam*, mentioned previously.

(c) Variants Within the Masoretic Tradition

In regard to *ʿedah* it was suggested that two factors inhibited the sort of textual fluidity in regard to number that characterizes *ʿam*. First was the fact that *ʿedah* is much more consistently treated (as plural) throughout the Hebrew Bible than *ʿam*. Second, the shift from singular to plural was much more complex orthographically since the change from feminine singular to masculine plural (or *vice versa*) requires the interchange of graphemes not merely the presence or absence of one at the end. *Qahal* shares with *ʿedah* the characteristic of only occasionally being attested with singular grammatical elements. However, it shares with *ʿam* the fact that the move from plural to singular in the perfect or imperfect verb is very simple orthographically. In line with these factors, *qahal* is closer to *ʿam* than to *ʿedah* in its treatment by the Medieval scribes. In fact, almost the same proportion of examples of verbs are affected as with *ʿam*. However, the difference is that while sometimes several manuscripts agree on the variation in regard to *ʿam*, typically it is only one manuscript involved with *qahal*.[45]

(2) The Samaritan Pentateuch

In line with the small number of verbs used with *qahal* in the Pentateuch, only one variation is found in the Samaritan text. Thus the MT has a plural verb at Numbers 22:4 ("they will lick up") whereas the Samaritan Pentateuch has a singular. This is

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44 This seems to be an example of *qahal* used as a quantitive term, approaching the sense "multitude", which makes the singular suffix even more remarkable. On this use of *qahal* see Müller, "קהל" (note 12), p.1122.

45 The exception of 5 manuscripts with the verb "bow down" in 1 Chron 29:20 may be due to the unique features of that verb, with the singular already exhibiting a final *waw*. More typical is 2 Chron 30:23 where the initial verb is singular in one manuscript.

parallel to the number of times the Samaritan has a singular verb with *'am* corresponding to a plural verb in the MT.[46]

(3) Qumran Biblical Manuscripts

As with *'edah*, no example was found where the Qumran Biblical manuscripts evidenced a variation in relation to the number of *qahal*.[47]

(4) Summary

Qahal displays its own profile, sometimes similar to *'am*, and sometimes more similar to *'edah*. Like *'edah*, but unlike *'am*, *qahal* has a very low proportion of singular elements related to it. The possibility was raised that *qahal* is mostly plural in Late Biblical Hebrew simply because it was generally plural in any part of the Hebrew Bible. *Qahal* is treated somewhat more fluidly than *'edah* in the Masoretic textual tradition, but not as fluidly as *'am*.

IV. Concluding Remarks

It seems clear from the above discussion that *'am*, *'edah*, and *qahal* each have their own individual characteristics. In the future scholars must be careful not to talk about "collective nouns" as an undifferentiated mass.[48] This, and the important work of Massey discussed above, mean that in the future research on collective nouns, their behaviour in various parts of the Hebrew Bible, and any diachronic or other conclusions based on this, must be done at a much more sophisticated level than has previously been the case.

Abstract:

The words *'edah* and *qahal* "congregation, assembly" fall into the general category of collective nouns. Like *'am* "people" which was studied in ZAH 12 (1999), p.48-82, they show concord with both singular and plural grammatical referents. However, it is demonstrated here that beyond this general similarity, each of these three collective nouns exhibits different grammatical characteristics. Hence it is argued that collective nouns should not be discussed as a single, undifferentiated category. Instead, each has its own linguistic profile.

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[46] "'Am," p.64-65, 73 argues against seeing a consistent pluralising tendency in the Samaritan Pentateuch.

[47] See 4QLev^c 4:14; 4QNum^b 20:12; 4QEzek^a 23:47 - a small number of references, and all marked as damaged!

[48] The language of "'Am", e.g. p.48 needs to be revised in light of this, although the idea had already suggested itself that the collective nouns might have individual characteristics - see p.70.