

עֲרוֹת and אָחוֹת in Ancient Hebrew*

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Number is an indispensable component of the noun in Hebrew – and in Semitic languages in general – and consequently a noun's plural and singular forms are usually distinct. However, there are a few feminine nouns in Hebrew whose singular form has ending ת־, distinct from the usual plural suffix of feminine nouns, so that identifying number for such nouns may involve some difficulty.¹ For example, it is difficult to determine, on morphological grounds alone, whether the noun חֲכָמוֹת is a plural or singular form, and sometimes only the context can make the determination possible: "My mouth utters wisdom, my speech is full of insight" (Ps 49:4), as against: "Wisdom has built her house" (Prov 9:1).² The word בְּהֵמוֹת, besides being the plural of בְּהֵמָה,³ is also the name of a certain animal: "Take now behemoth, whom I made as I did you; He eats grass, like the cattle" (Job 40:15). How can one tell if שְׁפוֹת בְּקָר (2 Sam 17:29) is singular or plural? In Biblical Hebrew (BH), אִשְׁפָּה(וֹ) is a singular form, the *taw* apparently being one of the radicals.⁴ According to the masoretic text (MT), the plural form is אִשְׁפּוֹת, as in Lam 4:5.⁵ It seems that Rabbinic Hebrew (RH) perceived אִשְׁפּוֹת as plural (cf. רִי אִשְׁפּוֹת "four dung heaps", Exod Rab 10:7), and has produced from אִשְׁפּוֹת the singular form: אִשְׁפָּה, as back-formation: "A dung heap – the laws of sacrilege apply to it and to the dung on it", Tos. Me'ila 1:19.⁶ This article will examine the plural forms of two commonly used nouns ending in ת־, namely, אָחוֹת and עֲרוֹת.

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¹ The question may also be relevant for nouns in singular ending in ים־, such as קָרִיִּים in the Bible or לִיטְשִׁים in Rabbinic literature.

² Even if the affirmative ת־ denotes here *pluralis majestatis*. See for instance: *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford 1910, §124; Joüon-Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome, 1993), §88Mk; B.K. Waltke, M.O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Winona Lake 1990, 120–124.

³ As well as a collective noun, as in שְׂאֵל־נָא בְּהֵמוֹת וְחֲרָךְ (Job 12:7).

⁴ Thus, e.g., W. Baumgartner, J.J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Leiden 1994, s.v. אִשְׁפָּה.

⁵ Also at Qumran: אִשְׁפּוֹתוֹת, 4Q179, fr. 1b, line 9.

⁶ E.Y. Kutscher, *From the Work on the Historical Dictionary*, Lešonenu 27–28, 1963–64, 283–4 (Heb.), suggested that this form reflects Amoraic Hebrew, but אִשְׁפָּה is frequent in the Tosefta, as well as in the printed editions of the Mishna (in Kaufmann Ms. to Mishna Ketub 7:5 אִשְׁפּוֹת was corrected to אִשְׁפָּה).

אָחוּת meaning “sisters”

In the small group of nouns ending in -וּת the form of אָחוּת (and probably also that of הַמְלוּת, “mother-in-law”) is to be included. This noun meaning “sister,” is of course very common in the living language; it differs from the aforementioned feminine nouns with -וּת ending in that the third radical is *waw/yod*.⁷

There are two plural forms of אָחוּת in the biblical text. One, in the classical books, is אָחוּת, which its pronominal state (that is, the base form that the pronominal suffixes affix to it) is אָחוּת-; the other is אָחוּת*, which its pronominal state is אָחוּת-. This second form (whose absolute form is אָחוּת* or אָחוּת*),⁸ occurs in the later biblical books: in the prose framework of Job: אָחוּתֵיהֶם (1:4), אָחוּתָיו (42:11), and in 1 Chron 2:16: וְאָחוּתֵיהֶם,⁹ besides one occurrence in Ezekiel: אָחוּתֶךָ (Ezek 16:52; with a singular pronominal suffix). Another occurrence is the *qere* form אָחוּתֵי in Josh 2:13, reflecting the pronunciation tradition of the Rabbinic period (of which see more below).

On the other hand, the ancient plural form אָחוּת-, אָחוּת- in the pronominal state (the absolute form was presumably אָחוּת* or אָחוּת*), occurs in the *ketiv* of Josh 2:13: אָחוּתֵי, as well as in Hos 2:3: וְלֹא אָחוּתֵיכֶם and in Ezek 16:45, 52: אָחוּתֶךָ. This is probably the intention in several verses in the same chapter: אָחוּתֶךָ (*ketiv* in v. 51),¹⁰ and אָחוּתֶיךָ (*qere* in v. 51, *ketiv* in vv. 55 and 61).

Clearly, the written form of the plural pronominal state -אָחוּת-, as attested in the earlier books of the Bible, is the ancient Hebrew form, and its similarity to the singular form might make it difficult to distinguish between singular and plural. In most cases, the unvocalized text reflects the ancient form;¹¹ undoubtedly, the *ketiv* of

⁷ See, e.g., D. Cohen, *Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques*, Paris 1970, 15. Note that the infinitive of the ל"י verb type may sometimes be considered a plural form, since it ends in -וּת. Thus, for example, עָנָה (Exod 32:18) is read in the Samaritan Pentateuch as עָנָוָה (and similarly in the Peshitta).

⁸ To my mind, the absolute form אָחוּת is a secondary form in the western branch of Tannaitic Hebrew. This is the normal form of the construct and the pronominal state, which supplanted the absolute (just as the plural of עֲגָלָה, “cart,” in colloquial Hebrew is attracted by the construct and pronominal states: עֲגָלוֹת instead of עֲגָלוֹת). See also E. Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, Jerusalem-Berlin year, I, 146–147 (Heb.). See further below.

⁹ The Aleppo and Leningrad Mss. differ in their notation of the forms in the late books of the Bible (the framework story of Job and Chronicles). The Leningrad Ms. reads the pronominal state -אָחוּת- as the *ketiv*, with accompanying *qere* אָחוּת-; it is difficult to see what the *ketiv* form represents if it is to differ from the *qere*. It seems, as Dr. Y. Ofer suggested to me, that the copyist of Leningrad Ms copied absent-mindedly the *qere* forms into the text. In the Aleppo Codex, however, as might be expected, there is only one form – the plural in defective spelling: אָחוּתֵי.

¹⁰ If this is indeed to be understood as plural rather than singular.

¹¹ Grammatical analysis indicates that the tradition reflected by *ketiv* forms in the Bible is generally earlier than that reflected by the *qere*; nevertheless, at times the *qere* may preserve an earlier reading. See, e.g., M. Cohen, *Linguistic Analysis as a Key to Understanding the Kethiv and Qeri System in the Biblical Text*, Ph.D. dissertation, Jerusalem 1998, 301–2 (Heb.). Aramaic *ketiv* forms in the Bible reflect earlier readings. See, e.g., Z. Ben-Hayyim, *Third Person Feminine Plural in Ancient Aramaic*, Eretz-Israel 1, 1951, 135–9 (Heb.); S.E. Fassberg, *The Origin of the Ketib/Qere in the Aramaic Portions of Ezra and Daniel*, VT 29, 1989, 1–12.

the fem. plural pronominal form, אַחֹות־, in Josh 2:13 and Ezek 16:51, is earlier than the parallel *qere* forms. However, since the *ketiv* forms are not vocalized, one may question the pronunciation: was it אַחֹות־ or perhaps אַחֹות־? In other words, when Rahab referred to her sisters in Josh 2:13 (as per the *ketiv*), how did she pronounce the word: אַחֹותַי or אַחֹותַי?

The reading handed down by the masoretes in Hos 2:3, וְלִאֲחֹותֶיכֶם, and in Ezek 16 (with the exception of אַחֹותֶיךָ in v. 52) implies that the pronunciation of the *ketiv* in Josh 2:13 was אַחֹותַי, that is, the pronominal state and construct of the plural were both אַחֹות־ rather than אַחֹות־.

Indeed, Bergsträsser, in his Hebrew grammar,¹² suggests that half-vowel [w] (as well as [y]) when following a short vowel and preceding a long one is omitted together with the preceding vowel, $aw\bar{o}/ay\bar{o} > \bar{o}$, so that, for example, שְׁרוּת > שְׁרוּת*. In his view, the masoretes reconstructed the forms קָצוּת, אַרְוּת, קָשׁוּת and נֹוּת by analogy, their actual pronunciation being קָצוּת*, אַרְוּת*, קָשׁוּת* and נֹוּת*.¹³ If this rule was indeed valid in regard to the pronunciation of אַחֹות as well, then the absolute form in the singular differed from the plural in the vowel of the *alef* (אַחֹות vs. אַחֹות), and the construct/pronominal state אַחֹות־ was common to both singular and plural, while the distinction depending on the pronominal suffix (e.g., אַחֹותַי vs. אַחֹותַי).

In general, the thesis that the masoretes, working at a late stage in the development of Hebrew, took the trouble to reconstruct the original form, and indeed so successfully, is problematic (e.g. if the pronunciation in their time was קָצוּת, how did they know how to turn the clock back and vocalize קָצוּת?). Indeed, we now possess more information about the Hebrew language, particularly of the Second Temple period, and it is quite clear that, even if the above-mentioned rule ($aw\bar{o}t > \bar{o}t$) was active in ancient Hebrew, it was only partially active, and many forms with a vowel before a consonantal *waw* with vowel, preserved the [w], or were pronounced without auxiliary vowel, as suggested by Gumpertz.¹⁴ At any rate, in the Second Temple period the consonantal *waw* left its imprint on such forms.¹⁵

As noted, Bergsträsser argues that the vocalization קָצוּת conceals the pronunciation קָצוּת. The available evidence, however, does not really support his argument. In addition to the absolute form according to the MT: קָצוּת, which occurs twice (Exod 38:5 and Ps 65:9), there are two cases in the MT preserving the ancient *ketiv* form:

¹² G. Bergsträsser, *Wilhelm Gesenius' Hebräische Grammatik*, Leipzig 1918, I, §17m.

¹³ *Ibid.*, §17o. However, Bergsträsser remarks that if the forms אַרְוּת, קָצוּת, קָשׁוּת, גְּרוּת are not reconstructed, the law must have been operative at a later date. E.Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll*, Leiden 1974, 207, following Nöldeke, suggests that the plural forms ending in וּת־ reflect the influence of the Aramaic plural form וּתַי; nevertheless, most of the forms in this category do not occur in Aramaic.

¹⁴ Y.F. Gumpertz, *Mivta'e Sefatenu; Studies in Historical Phonetics of the Hebrew Language*, Jerusalem 1953, 85 (Heb.). For a thorough treatment see E. Qimron, *Diphthongs and Glides in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Language Studies* 2–3, 1987, 269–70 (Heb.); and idem, *Waw Denoting a Glide*, in: *Homage to Shmuel; Studies in the World of the Bible*, ed. by Z. Talshir et al., Beer Sheva, Jerusalem 2001, 362–75 (Heb.).

¹⁵ Another possibility is that the law was effective in certain regions, or in certain periods, as a dialectal variant.

קִצְרוּחַ (Exod 37:8; 39:4). The other biblical forms, both construct and pronominal state, are always קִצְרוּחַ. On the other hand, there are several occurrences in IQIsa^a of the construct (!) form with double *waw*: קִצְרוּחַ הָאָרֶץ (Isa 40:28; 41:9). In Isa 41:5 there is even evidence of the *šade* being pronounced with a vowel: קִצְאוּרוּחַ הָאָרֶץ.¹⁶ *Pesher Habakkuk* IX, 14 cites the verse Hab 2:10: [קִצְרוּחַ עֲמִים], but the same combination is spelled in the next column, X, 2, as in the MT: קִצְרוּחַ עֲמִים. Add to it קִצְרוּחַ חָבַל in the War Scroll, I, 8. It follows, therefore, that קִצְרוּחַ was pronounced in the Hebrew of First and Second Temple times with a double long vowel (*qasāwōt*, *qasā^oḏt* or *qasāōt*), though there were indeed alternative pronunciation traditions.

Some corroboration of this statement comes from the plural form of the word פְּחָהּ. The usual plural of this noun in the MT is פְּחֻחֹת, in both construct and absolute states (13 times, including the book of Nehemiah); but we have three occurrences in Ezra and Nehemiah of פְּחֻחֹת, with consonantal *waw*, as a construct, in the phrase פְּחֻחֹת עֵבֶר הַנְּהָרָה. This might seem to imply that both forms, long and short, were used interchangeably. It is more probable, however, that the spelling פְּחֻחֹת, with two *waws*, also reveals the pronunciation of the form פְּחֻחֹת. During the biblical period, in both First and Second Temple times, the word פְּחֻחֹת was pronounced with a diphthong, פְּחֻחֹת, but usually spelled with one *waw*, as per the scribal usage: פְּחֻחֹת.

It seems likely that Bergsträsser's phonetic rule (elision of the *waw* with its vowel before another vowel, *wv₁ > v₁*, or, at any rate, elision of the vowelized *waw*, *wv₁ > v₁*) was valid in the Rabbinic period. This being surely the case as regards a shift of accent in the construct and pronominal states. Thus, for example, the biblical phrase הַפְּחֻחֹת וְהַסְּנָנִים "the governors and the prefects" is attested in an early Mishna Bik. 3:3 (Kaufmann Ms.).¹⁷ The masoretic text reflects the Rabbinic pronunciation tradition. Only where this would contradict the transmitted text were they forced to adapt the vocalization. Since the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are characterized by a more *plene* spelling, and the word was spelled with a double *waw* as well: פְּחֻחֹת, it was vocalized in accordance with the original pronunciation wherever the text presented two consecutive *waws*.

Accordingly, one might suggest that the usual plural form מְנוּחַת also conceals the pronunciation מְנוּחַת/מְנוּחַת as in Nehemiah. There are six occurrences of מְנוּחַת in the late books of the Bible (Esther, Nehemiah and Chronicles), and only one in 1 Sam 1:4. Perhaps the pronunciation in biblical times, up to the end of the first millennium BCE, was something like *manāōt*,¹⁸ as reflected by the forms מְנוּחַת/מְנוּחַת, but the

¹⁶ Z. Ben-Hayyim, *The Samaritan Tradition and its Relationship with the Language of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic Hebrew*, Lešonenu 22, 1958, 227 (Heb.).

¹⁷ Various scholars have discussed the influence of BH in the early strata of the Mishna. In regard to our subject see H. Albeck, *Introduction to the Mishna*, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv 1959, 129 (Heb.). An interesting remark in this context was made by I.H. Weiss, *Studien über die Sprache der Mischna*, Vienna 1867, 4 (Heb.): "I would like to comment on the Mishna in Bikkurim 3:3: הַפְּחֻחֹת וְהַסְּנָנִים – but the officials leading the people were called פְּחֻחֹת only during the time that Judea was under Persian rule, and I do not know of this noun from the Mishna; we may therefore suppose that this Mishna in its essence is very old."

¹⁸ מְנוּחַת is apparently the original form (the construct is always written with *qames*; cf. *manātu* in Akkadian), while מְנוּחַת could be a back-formation from the plural; just as קִצְרוּחַ is a back-formation from קִצְרוּחַ (which itself evolved from קִצְרוּחַ), which is the plural of קִצְרוּחַ/קִצְרוּחַ.

conservative spelling used only one *waw* (as in the case of מְצוֹת). At a later stage, around the time of Rabbinic literature, the final vowels underwent monophthongization, the way it appears in the Mishna: מְנוּחַת, as in אֵין מְשַׁלְחִים בְּיוֹם טוֹב אֶלֶּא מְנוּחַת “They send on the festival day only [prepared] portions of [food]” (Bik 1:9). The biblical vocalization reflects this pronunciation wherever there was no need to change the spelling; traces of the original pronunciation (מְנוּחַת, מְנַאֲחַת) were preserved only in the book of Nehemiah, where the text would not permit adaptation of the vocalization to the current written word.

The absolute plural form of אָחוּת does not occur in the Bible, but it would presumably have been אָחֻיּוֹת* or אָחֻוֹת*, judging from the two alternatives used in Tannaitic Hebrew: אָחֻיּוֹת and אָחֻוֹת.¹⁹ The only plural forms occurring in the biblical text are in the pronominal state; as already noted, these are אַחֻוֹת- (אַחֻוֹת- / אַחֻוֹת-) in classical Hebrew and אַחֻיּוֹת- in LBH (Late Biblical Hebrew). If the vocalized consonantal *waw* was indeed elided in the biblical period, the plural form of אָחוּת was pronounced in both absolute and construct forms as אַחֻוֹת, so that the distinction between the plural and singular of אָחוּת was obscured. It was surely necessary to ensure distinction between these forms in such a widely used word. Just as we have evidence that the plural forms in construct/pronominal state of פָּחוּת and קָצוּת were pronounced with a diphthong or a longer vowel than usual (פָּחֻוֹת-, קָצֻוֹת-), and the pronominal state of עָרוּת was pronounced with a final diphthong (עָרוּוֹת- (⁵*edawōt*-) to emphasize the plural, we may surmise that in this case too the consonantal *waw* was not elided in the pronunciation of the plural, and the word being pronounced ⁵*āḥāwōt*, or ⁵*aḥ(ā)wōt*.²⁰ It was only because of the masoretic practice not to write

¹⁹ The *šawa* under the *het* was originally a *šawa mobile* (pronounced before *yod* as quiescent *šawa* [*šawa medium*]); hence the vocalization should probably be *ḥatef*. I. Ben-David, *The Absolute Form of Some Nouns in the Singular and the Plural*, Lešonenu 41, 1977, 237–40 (Heb.), argues that the plural of אָחוּת in the absolute state could not have been אָחֻיּוֹת, but must have been אָחֻוֹת, with a quiescent *šawa*, as in the pronominal state, and as attested consistently by Ms. Kaufmann. In his view, if this were a *šawa medium*, one should expect that *het* to be vocalized with *ḥatef pataḥ*. On the other hand, the vocalization אָחֻיּוֹת has been defended by J. Blau, On the Reconstruction of Absolute Forms, *ibid.*: 304 (Heb.); M. Bar-Asher, *The Plural Forms of āḥōt*, in: *The Tradition of Mishnaic Hebrew in the Communities of Italy* [= *Eda ve-Lašon* 6], Jerusalem 1980, 121–5 (Heb.). The arguments are as follows: (i) The Arabic parallel ⁵*aḥawāt* is an exact parallel of אָחֻיּוֹת. (ii) The vocalized text of the Bible contains instances of *šawa medium* realized as *šawa*, rather than as *ḥatef*, under a guttural: בְּעֵלֵיהֶן, נְעָרִים, מְתַנְחָשִׁים; for some reason, this is particularly common before *yod*: נְעָרִים, נְעָרִים, נְעָרִים, etc. Bar-Asher, in a later article, *The Different Traditions of Mishnaic Hebrew*, in: *Working with No Data: Semitic and Egyptian Studies Presented to Th. O. Lambdin*, 20–1, rightly proposes to distinguish between eastern and western branches: אָחֻיּוֹת was the pronunciation in the eastern tradition, that is, in Babylonia and its sphere of influence (Yemenite manuscripts of the Mishna), while in the western tradition, that is, in the Land of Israel and its sphere of influence, the pronunciation was אָחֻוֹת.

²⁰ There are only a few occurrences of two consecutive *waws* in the middle of a word. Since it is impossible to vocalize one letter (*waw*) with two different vowel signs, both *waws* are written in such cases: עֲשׂוּחַ [qere: עֲשׂוּיּוּחַ] (1 Sam 25:18); עֲשׂוּחַ (2 Sam 23:4); נְשׂוּחַ [qere: נְשׂוּיּוּחַ] (Isa 3:16, and in the Qumran Isaiah Scroll: נְשׂוּחַ [qere: נְשׂוּיּוּחַ]) (1 Sam 20:1). Rarely, one finds double *waw* denoting a consonantal *waw*: קָצוּוֹתוּ [qere: קָצוּוּוֹתוּ] (Exod 37:8; 39:4). The word עוּוֹת occurs only four times with two *waws*, out of 233 occurrences in the Bible. The word הוּוֹת occurs eight

double *waw*. Even in the middle of a word, the word was spelled with a single *waw*. And since the pronunciation of final diphthong at the time of the masorettes' activities was simplified (*wō > ō*), they treated it as a *mater lectionis*. It follows that the form behind the spelling of the plural pronominal state אָחוֹת- is therefore אָחוֹת- and not necessarily אָחוֹת-;²¹ that is to say, the original reading concealed by אָחוֹתֵיכֶם in Hos 2:3 is אָחוֹתֵיכֶם.

The advantage of this thesis is that it postulates a definite (and quite plausible) phonetic distinction between the construct form in singular (אָחוֹת-) and in plural (אָחוֹת-). The shift from the absolute form אָחוֹת* to אָחוֹת*, which may crop up in LBH by way of dissimilation is almost indispensable for distinction between singular and plural. There are some instances to such dissimilation. The plural form אָחוֹת*²² became אָחוֹת, just as נוֹת (ketiv in 1 Sam 20:1) became נִיֹּת; the parallel of אָרוֹת סוֹסִים (1 Kgs 5:6) is אָרִיֹּת סוֹסִים (2 Chron 9:25); as against the MT's גְּרוֹתָיו (Isa 8:7, and elsewhere), the IQIsa^a has גְּרוֹתָיו,²³ while the spelling in 1 Chron 12:16 is גְּרִיתָיו.²⁴

The problem of distinguishing the singular and plural forms of אָחוֹת was not unique to Hebrew. In Old Babylonian *aḫātu* designates "sister," while *aḫḫātu* is "sisters"; at a later stage of Babylonian, *aḫātu* became the plural form as well.²⁵ It would seem that there, too, the rule of the elision of consonantal *waw* with vowel was effective: *aḫūātu > aḫātu*, and a way was surely found to distinguish the two forms.

In Ugaritic, the plural of *aḫt*, "sister," is also *aḫt* (in the construct state): *n^cmt bn aḫt b^cl*, "the most beautiful among Baal's sisters."²⁶ It may be supposed that there was some vowel-based distinction between the singular and the plural, but there was a spelling problem there too.

times with two *waws*, perhaps to differentiate it from the singular. There are a few further occurrences of two consecutive *waws* in the late books of the Bible: Esther 4:8: וּלְצוּרוֹת (in the other five times the spelling is defective); Neh 9:14: וּמְצוּרוֹת (the other 183 occurrences with defective spelling); and also פְּחוֹרוֹת as mentioned above (Ezra 8:36; Neh 2:7, 9; the more usual form is פְּחוֹרוֹת). It is because of the system of defective spelling that אַחַת הַמְצוּרוֹת in Exod 12:17 could be interpreted as either מְצוּרוֹת ("unleavened bread") or מְצוּרוֹת ("commandments") in Targum Neophiti (the Septuagint and the Samaritan read הַמְצוּרוֹת in the singular); this ambiguity is the basis for the exposition in the Mekhilta, Tractate Pisha 9, Lauterbach, I: 74: "וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם אֶת הַמְצוּרוֹת". R. Josiah says: Do not read it so but אַחַת הַמְצוּרוֹת. Just as one should not be slow when making the *mazzah*, lest it leaven, so one should not be slow to perform a religious duty." See also M. Zippor, *On Transmission and Tradition*, Tel Aviv 2001, 173.178 (Heb.).

²¹ Contra Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, *The Gleanings of Ephraim*, in: *Hebrew and Arabic Studies in Honour of J. Blau*, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem 1993, 110, who suggests explaining the spelling אָחוֹתֵי, i.e., אָחוֹתֵי (in Josh 2:13), as the plural of אָחוֹת, which is attested in Official Aramaic. However, there is no evidence whatever of אָחוֹת in Hebrew.

²² Whether it was pronounced ³*āḫāwōt* or ³*āḫāwōt*; cf. the changes in the construct state of the plural אָחוֹת/נוֹת (Zeph 2:6).

²³ In my mind, the vocalization of גְּרוֹתָיו conceals the original pronunciation גְּרוֹתָיו.

²⁴ However, there is also a reverse process: as against Ishmael's son נְבִיֹּת, so called in MT to Gen 25:13; 28:9; 36:3, the Samaritan version consistently reads נְבִאוֹת.

²⁵ See, e.g., CAD, vol. I, Chicago, 1964, 171–2.

²⁶ KTU 1.10 II, line 16. The Rins rightly conclude from the word *bn* that *aḫt* is a plural; S. & Sh. Rin, *Acts of the Gods*, Philadelphia 1996³, 359.

A similar problem is evident in Hebrew's sister language, Aramaic. The plural form is not attested in Ancient Aramaic; however, in the Sam'al dialect of the Hadad inscription, lines 28 and 31, we read אִיחַתְתַּן [ה], that is, "his sisters," perhaps indicating that the plural form was not אִיחַתְתַּן (א), with suffix אַן-, but אִיחַתְתַּן (א) (**iḥān*).²⁷ Indirect support for this conjecture comes from Official Aramaic. While there is no attestation in this dialect for the plural, the absolute form of the singular is אַחַה, not אַחַת.²⁸ The difference between the singular and plural forms was probably very slight,²⁹ which ultimately must have motivated the establishment of a more distinct plural form.³⁰

The earliest evidence of the usual Aramaic plural אַחַתְתַּן appears in Nabatean documents from El-Ḥeġra, northern Saudi Arabia, dated to the beginning of the first millennium CE: אַחַתְתַּת (= "his sisters") and אַחַתְתַּתְתַּם (= "their sisters"),³¹ and from Maḥoz 'Eglātain south of the Dead Sea, dating to the end of the first century CE: אַחַתְתַּת ("his sisters").³²

In Late Aramaic, both Western and Eastern, אַחַתְתַּן (א) and אַחַתְתַּתְתַּם employ אַחַתְתַּת (א) as the plural of אַחַתְתַּת (א).³³ Perhaps two of the Eastern dialects are worthy of special mention. Since Syriac carefully preserves pronunciation through vocalization signs, it is important to be sure that this word was pronounced *ʾaḥwātā*.

²⁷ See J.C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. II, Oxford 1975, 75.

²⁸ The reading in Cowley no. 75, line 8, אַחַתְתַּת should be emended (אִיחַתְתַּת). See B. Porten, A. Yardeni, *Anthology of Documents from Ancient Egypt*, vol. I, Jerusalem 1986, 244 (Heb.). See also T. Muraoka, B. Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, Leiden 1998, 75.

²⁹ For example, in the construct state: אַחַתְתַּת vs. אַחַתְתַּתְתַּת; but it should be remembered that the pronominal suffixes in Aramaic are the same for singular and plural.

³⁰ Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, loc. cit., rightly note that in Ancient Aramaic the plural of שַׁפַּח, which is of the same pattern as אַחַה, was שַׁפַּחַת (e.g. שַׁפַּחַת in the Sefire Inscription, III, line 16), which, beginning with Official Aramaic, became שַׁפַּחַת (e.g., שַׁפַּחַת in *Proverbs of Ahiqar*, line 132).

³¹ See, e.g., G.A. Cooke, *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions*, Oxford 1903, 224.228; J. Hoftijzer, K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. I, Leiden 1995, 31; J.F. Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*, Oxford 1993, 72.

³² Naḥal Ḥever no. 2 line 2. See Y. Yadin et al, *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*, Jerusalem 2002, 208; [K. Beyer, *Die aramäische Texte vom Toten Meer*, vol. II, Göttingen 1994, 168, read mistakenly אַחַתְתַּת גַּת, instead of אַחַתְתַּת גַּת. See the book mentioned in the beginning of this note: 80.] Interestingly, a Nabatean document from Ḥeġra (J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen I*, Paris 1930, 86) contains the word אַחַתְתַּת, that is, "his [the maker of the tomb's] sisters." The omission of the *waw* was an error, and this form presents no trace of the ancient plural אַחַתְתַּת.

³³ See, e.g., Th. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, London 1904, §146. True, Bar-Asher, in his article cited in n. 19, *ʿEda ve-Lašon* 6, 61, points out that the Aramaic translation of Josh 2:13 (which is part of the Haftarah for the *šelah* Torah portion) in the *Taj* has אַחַתְתַּת. However, this form is "contaminated" by Hebrew influence (and in fact does not appear in all editions of the *Taj*). Neither is the form אַחַתְתַּתְתַּת, occurring in two manuscripts of the Targum to Job 1:4, native Aramaic; it is surely a corruption of אַחַתְתַּתְתַּת. On the other hand, the double translation of that verse has the plural אַחַתְתַּתְתַּת, which is not distinguished from the singular. See D. Stec, *The Text of the Targum of Job*, Leiden 1994, 2*.

The other dialect is Mandaic, which has two plural forms: *ahuata* and (less common) *ahauata*.³⁴ This alternation of plural forms has its parallel in RH: אַחִיוּת/אַחִיוֹת. Common to most of the Semitic languages is that they found a way to designate the plural form of אַחִיוּת, using an ending in which a half-consonant (*w/y*) has a long vowel (-*wāt*, -*wān*, -*yōt*),³⁵ in order clearly to differentiate it from the singular. In principle, there may be a parallel in the word מוֹמְחָא, “oath,” in Eastern Aramaic. The original form was probably מוֹמְחָא (> מוֹמְחָא), from the root ימ״א. This form was used in Egyptian Aramaic (e.g., Cowley no.14, lines 4, 9). However, even in this dialect one also finds מוֹמְחָא = סִפְר מוֹמְחָא (מוֹמְחָא) = “deed of oath” in Cowley no. 59, line 1), with the glottal plosive elided between the vowels. Since determination disappeared in Eastern Aramaic dialects, the definite form מוֹמְחָא was used to designate “oath” (in Syriac, Mandaic, Babylonian Aramaic; and even in Onqelos Targum, e.g., בְּמוֹמְחָא דְלְקִטָּא as the translation of בְּשִׁבְעַת הָאֱלֹהִים in Num 5:21). The suffix חָא generally designates the plural, but since the *mem* has a *games* (a vestige of the disappeared *alef*), it is no longer possible to distinguish between “oath” and “oaths,” both being designated by מוֹמְחָא.³⁶

עֲרוּת vs. עֲרוּת

The BH עֲרוּת is a *pluralis tantum*. Within the semantic field reserved for the basic tenets of the Jewish religion,³⁷ it belongs to the domain of religious obligations. While it originally had the meaning of “admonishments,” it evolved in Hebrew as a designation for “divine commands or decrees;”³⁸ thus: אֱלֹהֵי הָעֲרוּת “These are the decrees” (Deut 4:45); פְּקוּדֵיךָ וְעֲרוּתֶיךָ “Your precepts and decrees” (Ps 119:168). On the basis of both grammatical considerations (preservation of the *šere* in declension) and the similar meaning of the Hebrew word תְּעוּדָה (parallel to חוֹרָה in Isa 8:16, 20, in the sense of “law”) and the word עֲדָא = “custom” in Palmyrene and Syriac – the root of עֲרוּת might be ע״ד.³⁹

³⁴ See E.S. Drower, R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, Oxford 1963, s.v. “*ahata*.”

³⁵ E.g., P.R. Bennett, *Comparative Semitic Linguistics*, Winona Lake, 1998, 129.

³⁶ The Peshiṭta has מוֹמְחָא in the singular, “oath,” but in order to distinguish the singular from the plural the forms מוֹמְחָא and מוֹמְחָא evolved for “oath,” with מוֹמְחָא as the plural; see C. Brockelmann, *Syrische Grammatik*, Leipzig 1957, 58. In Mandaic, מוֹמְחָא is common to plural and singular, but the authors of the standard Mandaic dictionary mistakenly understand it as plural only (s.v. “*mumata*”).

³⁷ Commenting on how the Hebrew language reflects Jewish culture, Morag writes: “The cultural-religious identity of Hebrew speakers brought about the creation of new lexemes, and the introduction of new – or different – content in existing lexemes... This is particularly true with regard to the areas of cult, law and spirit.” Sh. Morag, *The Beginning of Hebrew and the Distinctive Character of Hebrew*, in: idem, *Studies in Biblical Hebrew*, Jerusalem 1995, 18 (Heb.).

³⁸ Sh. Morag, *The Study of Biblical Hebrew. Etymology and Semantics*, *ibid.*: 136–42 (Heb.).

³⁹ Akkadian *adū* does not support this etymology, but the word is apparently not native to Akkadian. See E.Y. Kutscher, *Samaritan Aramaic*, *Tarbiz* 37, 1968, 410 (Heb.); M. Weinfeld, *Bond and Grace*, *Lešonenu* 36, 1972, 86 (Heb.). The noun pattern פִּלְאָה is rare in Hebrew. See I. Avineri, *Heical Hammishqalim; a Thesaurus of the Hebrew Radical Nouns*, Tel Aviv 1976, 438–9 (Heb.). Ch. Rabin, *Linguistic Studies*, Jerusalem 1999, 74–5 (Heb.), proposes an etymology from the root ע״ד, citing the Arabic *gdw* (“feeding”). This proposal is however dubious. See also C. Werman,

In (Middle and Neo-) Akkadian a similar plural, *adû*, *adê* was used in the sense of “covenant, treaty” (between a suzerain and a vassal) or “sworn obligation” (in the singular),⁴⁰ in Ancient Aramaic as well the plural forms ערן, ערי, עריא⁴¹ occur in the sense of “covenant” (in the singular).⁴² Even if these forms are not native to their languages, they tell us something of the form (*pluralis tantum*) and meaning (“covenant, treaty”) of ערות.

The original meaning of “admonishments” evolved, through “decrees,” to assume a further meaning: “covenant, treaty,” particularly a unilateral covenant or covenant with God,⁴³ since divine decrees provide the basis for the existence of the Divine covenant.⁴⁴ If the status of ברית וערות is of a *hendiadys*,⁴⁵ this is reflected in the verse לנצרי בריחו וערתיו “for those who keep his covenant and decrees” (Ps 25:10),⁴⁶ and in בריתי וערתי “My covenant and My decrees” (Ps 132:12). The MT reading understands the word ערת as singular.⁴⁷

Te'udah. On the Meaning of the Term, in: *Fifty Years of Dead Sea Scrolls Research*, ed. by G. Brin, B. Nitzan, Jerusalem 2001, 231–43 (Heb.).

- 40 Probably only in *pluralis tantum*. See, e.g., J. Black (et al.), *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, Wiesbaden 2000, 5.
- 41 The plural suffix here parallels the “masculine” plural suffix in Hebrew. Some scholars have expressed preference for the Qumran IQIsa^a version for Isa 33:8: הפר ברית מאס ערים (instead of ערים in the MT), given the parallel ברית. If so, we have yet another plural form not necessarily denoting a plural. See H.R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic*, Ann Arbor, 1975, 42–4.
- 42 See, e.g., Hoflijzer/Jongeling, *Dictionary* (above, n. 31), 824–5. J.C. Greenfield, *Linguistic Criteria in the Sefire Inscription*, Lešonenu 27–28, 1964, 308 (Heb.), points out the similarity of Ps 25:10: לנצרי בריחו וערתיו, “those who keep his covenant and His decrees” and נצר עריא in the Sefire Inscription I, 7–8.
- 43 In accord with the attractive proposal of M. Parnas, *ēdūt, ēdōt, ēdwōt in the Bible, against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Documents*, *Shnaton* 1, 1975, 235–46 (Heb.). He rightly notes that the Aramaic Targums treat קים as the equivalent of both ברית and חוקים, and that the same verbs are associated with these nouns. I. Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, Jerusalem 1992, 136 (Heb.), stresses the unilateral obligations of the covenant. See also C. Werman, op. cit. (n. 39).
- 44 Morag explains the semantic relationship between ערות, “covenant,” and עירד “to admonish, warn,” as follows: “It would seem that the connotation of “admonishment” and that of “covenant, pact” are interconnected, the link being one of metonymy. The background of the metonymy: By the nature of things, covenants and pacts involved admonishments and warnings, implying that the connotation of admonishment came first. The semantic development would thus have been: ‘admonishments’ > ‘pact containing admonishments’ > ‘pact.’” Sh. Morag, *Layers of Antiquity – Some Linguistic Observations on the Oracles of Balaam*, Studies on Biblical Hebrew, Jerusalem 1995, 56 (Heb.). In Morag’s view, ערים* denoted “admonishments” in Num 23:18: ערו ערי בני צפור = “Give ear to my admonishments, son of Zippor!” If so, perhaps ערות was originally pronounced ערות, with *qames* rather than *šere*.
- 45 E.Z. Melammed, *Two Which are One in the Bible*, Tarbiz 16, 1945, 173–89 (Heb.).
- 46 Cf. also ערותיו אשר העיר בהם חקיו ... בריתו ... חקיו “His laws.. the covenant.. the warnings He had given them,” 2 Kgs 17:15
- 47 Perhaps reflecting a phenomenon of depluralization. See M. Altbauer, *On Tavlin, Ḥamin and... Eskimosim*, Lešonenu la-^cAm 4.1 (fasc. 33), 1953, 24–28 (Heb.).

This tension between form (plural) and denotation (singular)⁴⁸ brought about a deviation from the original form עֲרוּחַ in two opposite directions, in a sort of double polarization.⁴⁹ On the one hand, the form עֲרוּחַ in the sense of “unilateral covenant” became a genuine singular, while on the other, in the sense of “precepts, decrees,” it became a genuine plural.

I. The word became an unambiguous, genuine singular by means of a slight (but exceptional) change of ending: *ōt* was changed to *ūt*, עֲרוּחַ > עֲרוּחַ.

Contrary to RH, in which the meaning of עֲרוּחַ is “testimony,”⁵⁰ the meanings of עֲרוּחַ in BH are (1) “the covenant with God”⁵¹ and (2) “the divine precepts as a whole, the laws”; these are in fact the meanings of עֲרוּחַ (“the body of divine commands as a whole”).⁵² Examples of the first meaning (“covenant”): אֲרוֹן הָעֲדוּת (Exod 26:33), parallel to אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית as in Josh 3:6⁵³ – the Ark in which the divine precepts are deposited;⁵⁴ לַחַת הָעֲדוּת (Exod 31:18), parallel to לַחַת הַבְּרִית of Deut 9:9.⁵⁵ Example of the second meaning (“laws”), in which תּוֹרַת יְהוָה // עֲדוּת: תּוֹרַת יְהוָה יְהוּהּ נֹאמָנָה... “The teaching of the Lord is perfect... the decrees of the Lord are enduring...” (Ps 19:8). In Ps 122:4 עֲדוּת means “habit”.

It would seem, therefore, that in these and other verses the original form was עֲרוּחַ (עֲרוּחַ* אֲרוֹן* הָעֲדוּת), and only at a later stage in the evolution of Hebrew was עֲרוּחַ changed to עֲרוּחַ in order to adapt it to singular usage. Clear evidence for that⁵⁶ is the Qumran formulation of אֲרוֹן הָעֲדוּת (Exod 26:33) in 4Q364 fr. 17,

⁴⁸ If the form in *pluralis tantum* has only one meaning, it is not difficult to adapt the appropriate syntactic usage, such as רַחֲמִים גְּדוּלִים; however, in such cases of equivocal words, one singular (“covenant”) and the other plural (“decrees”), there may arise some ambiguity.

⁴⁹ Cf. E.A. Speiser, *The Pitfalls of Polarity*, in: idem, *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, Philadelphia 1967, 433–54.

⁵⁰ In BH עַד may also denote “testimony,” as in Exod 20:16: לֹא תַעֲנֶה בְּרַעַךְ עַד שֶׁקֶר “you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor”; see Z. Ben-Hayyim, *The Literary and Oral Tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic amongst the Samaritans* (=LOT), vol. III (2), 87, line 15. To my mind, the usage of עֲרוּחַ in the late meaning of “testimony” is the main philological proof that Joash Inscription is a forgery. See D. Talshir, *Is Joash Inscription Forgery?*, *Aqadhem* 23, 2003, 6–7 (Heb.).

⁵¹ Morag’s distinction (*Studies on Biblical Hebrew*, 138) between the secondary meanings of בְּרִית and עֲדוּת seems rather forced. He himself cites a sizable list of verbs for which both words occur as objects (pp. 139–41).

⁵² In Ben Sira, the word is used as both BH and RH; as in BH: וְעֲדוּתוֹ וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו “his decrees and laws” (45:5); תָּן עֲדוּת לְמֹרָאשׁ מֵעֲשִׂיךְ “give commitment (as in Akkadian) to those whom you created in the beginning” (36:20). And as in RH: עֲדוּת שִׁבּוֹי נֹאמָנָה “the testimony to his generosity is trustworthy” (31:23).

⁵³ The more common expression in the Bible is בְּרִית יְהוָה אֲרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה. The meaning of עֲדוּת may have been specialized relative to the meaning of בְּרִית, as suggested by Knohl, *ibid.* 136–8.

⁵⁴ Cf. 2 Chron 6:11: “And there I have set the Ark containing the Covenant (בְּרִית) that the Lord made with the Israelites.” Y.M. Grintz, *Archaic Terms in the Priestly Code*, *Lešonenu* 39, 1975, 170–2 (Heb.), explains עֲדוּת, on the basis of Ancient Egyptian, in the sense of “alliance, association.”

⁵⁵ Again, in abbreviated form, הָעֲדוּת in Exod 25:15.

⁵⁶ See Qimron, in: *Homage to Shmuel* (supra, n. 14): 370.

line 3: הארון העדות.⁵⁷ It is thus clear that the form עדות is an alternate of the plural form עד(ו)ח, used to denote a singular, not an independent word derived from עד.⁵⁸ Contrary to what we find in biblical dictionaries, the rules of Hebrew grammar do not admit a suffix וח- which becomes ויח- or ווח- in the plural.⁵⁹ The plurals of nouns that end in וח- have the suffix יוח- or יוח-: עדיות⁶⁰, or עדיות.⁶¹

Although this change in the original vowel of the word ($\delta > \bar{u}$) is exceptional in Hebrew,⁶² the form עדות is clearly well rooted in an ancient tradition and by no means the creation of the masorettes; indeed, the ancient translations (Greek, Aramaic and Latin) translate the word accordingly (μαρτύριον, סְהִדוּתָא, *testimonium*, respectively). In fact, however, these translations, unlike the MT, did not differentiate between עדות and עדות/עדות-, interpreting the very numerous forms עדת, עדת, עדות (about 80) as the singular עדות⁶³ (rarely reflecting the plural of עדות and μαρτύρια).⁶⁴ The Samaritan Pentateuch, too, does not distinguish between עדות and עדות (*idot*); consequently, the same is true of their Aramaic translation (the reliable J Ms.), which renders every עדות and עדת in the Pentateuch as a plural: סעדיותה, that is, “testimonies” (but שהדותא in Gen 31:47 is translated correctly as a singular: סעדוה).⁶⁵

This evidence is reinforced by Hebrew Bible traditions other than that of the Tiberian Masora. For example, the Babylonian tradition for 2 Chron 23:11 reads הקדוה

⁵⁷ See E. Tov, S. White, DJD 13 (Cave 4, viii), Oxford 1996, 223. The editors note evidence for erasure of the second *waw*. However, an examination of the photograph shows that the “evidence” is merely a tear in the papyrus, and their proposal to read the word as העדות is dubious. The definite article attached to the construct state is puzzling; it may attest to weakening of the pharyngeals; see E. Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Atlanta 1986, §200.11: 25–26.

⁵⁸ Qimron has in fact shown (in an appendix to his article in *Homage to Shmuel* [supra, n. 14]: 375) that the defective spelling in the phrase ארון העדה is typical of an δ vowel but not of \bar{u} , which is generally spelled *plene*.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., the Baumgartner/Stamm *Lexicon*, s.v. עדות; cf. also H. Simian-Yofre, “עד,” in: *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. Botterweck, vol. 10, 1999, 497.

⁶⁰ As in חיות (Jer 37:15); מלכיות (Dan 8:22), but with no *dageš* in the *yod*!

⁶¹ The Hexaplaric tradition of the Septuagint to Jer 37:15 transcribes the aforementioned חיות as $\alpha(\epsilon)\nu\iota\omega\theta$. This is the usual plural in the Mishna. For example, Kaufmann Ms., Bava Matz. 3:4, reads עדיות.

⁶² There are indeed a few forms with suffix וח- which take the plural pronominal suffixes when declined: זנוחיהם (Num 14:33); אלמנותיך (Isa 54:4); כריתחיה (Jer 3:8); חנוחיהך (Ezek 16:15); שבוחים (Zeph 3:20). However, these are not plural forms, but abstract nouns that do not normally have plurals. Moreover, such forms are not confined to a *u* vowel, as witness such examples as עֲבִיתֶיךָ, עֲבִיתֶיךָ. See Gesenius, §91¹; Bauer-Leander: §253b.

⁶³ The exceptions are two verses in headings of psalms: שושן(ים) עדות (Ps 60:1; 80:1). The word עדות in the verse “[Jehoiada] placed upon him the crown and the עדות” (2 Kgs 11:12) is obscure, but the ancient translations unhesitatingly rendered it as an abstract noun derived from עד. Interestingly, the MT of Gen 31:47 juxtaposes Aramaic סְהִדוּתָא to the Hebrew עד.

⁶⁴ See S.H. Blank, *The LXX Renderings of Old Testament Terms for Law*, HUCA 7, 1930, 280–81. The original meaning of the Latin *testamentum* is “testimony,” but this usage seems to be a calque from διαθήκη. See G.B. Sarfatti, *Semantic Aspects of Hebrew*, Jerusalem 2001, 28–29 (Heb.).

⁶⁵ See Z. Ben-Hayyim, *LOT*, vol. IV, Jerusalem 1977, 202 (Heb.); A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, Leiden 2000, 570–2.

rather than הָעֵרוּת of the MT;⁶⁶ עֵרוּת פִּיךָ in Ps 119:88 becomes עֵרוּת פִּיכָה in the Psalms Scroll from Qumran Cave 11.⁶⁷ The MT seems to represent a complementary (and rather strange!) distribution between עֵרוּת/עָרַת and עֵרוּת*/עָרַת. The undeclined form (absolute or construct) is עֵרוּת/עָרַת, which becomes עֵרוּת*/עָרַת in declension (depending on the spelling in the MT).⁶⁸

There may be another example in the Bible of suffix -וּת changing into -וּתָה, to emphasize the singular usage. The form הוֹלִלּוּת occurs four times in Ecclesiastes, of which two occur as one constituent of a *hendiadys*: וּסְכַלּוּת/וּשְׂכַלּוּת (1:17; 2:12). Only once does the MT read הוֹלִלּוּת (with *šūreq*), in the phrase הוֹלִלּוּת רַעָה (10:13). Perhaps the adjective induced an unambiguous singular form.

This complementary distribution, associating each form with its specific vowel (עֵרוּת in the absolute state; עָרוּת when declined), is unusual, and most probably was not used in the living language.⁶⁹

II. The word becomes an unambiguous plural through expansion of the plural suffix -וּת: עֵרוּת > עֵרוּתָה,⁷⁰ in analogy with the above-mentioned relationship between אָחוּת and אָחוּתָה/אָחוּתָה.

The form עֵרוּת* is not attested in the MT. The plural is attested twice in the Pentateuch in the absolute state, in defective spelling: עָרַת (Deut 4:45; 6:20), indicating that the plural suffix did not originally contain a consonantal *waw*. The other 34 occurrences of the plural are in declined forms, divided between עָרַתְךָ/עָרַתְךָ in defective spelling (the *dalet* with *holem*)⁷¹ and עָרוּתְךָ/עָרוּתְךָ with consonantal *waw*. The masoretic reading was presumably עֵרוּת in the absolute state and עָרוּת- in the pronominal state;⁷² only where the transmitted text did not permit this vocalization were the masoretes forced to transmit the short form: עָרַת. The scribes of the Judean Desert Scrolls generally use the form with a double *waw*. For example: וּעֵרוּתָי

⁶⁶ I. Yeivin, *The Hebrew Language Tradition as Reflected in Babylonian Vocalization*, vol. II, Jerusalem 1985, 757 (Heb.).

⁶⁷ J.A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11*, Oxford, 1965, 31.

⁶⁸ An exception is the form הָעֵרַת (undeclined) in Deut 4:45; 6:20, perhaps because עֵרוּת in these verses is part of a compound phrase whose other constituents are plurals, והַמְשַׁפְּטִים, הָעֵרַת וְהַחֲקִים והַמְשַׁפְּטִים. There is no other sentence in the Bible that opens with אֱלֹהֵהוּ and continues with a singular noun, as if the text were אֱלֹהֵהוּ וְהַחֲקִים והַמְשַׁפְּטִים. The masoretes were therefore forced to use a plural (which is the original form).

⁶⁹ Words maintaining such an alternation of *ū/ō*, as in *יִנְשׁוּף/יִנְשׁוּף*, are rare. Joüon listed the following pairs in his *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §88Ln: מְפֹרָח/מְפֹרָח (RH); מְקַצְעוּת/מְקַצְעוּת (RH); מְבוּעַ/מְבוּעַ (Syriac); מְבוּל/מְבוּלָה (Syriac). One can compare such an alternation of *ū/ō* in final closed stressed syllable of עִיר verbs, binyan *qal*, in construct infinitive (excluding verbal noun): כְּמוֹשׁ (Ps 38:17; 46:3); כְּנוּחַ (Num 11:25; Josh 3:13); כְּנוּעַ (Isa 7:2); כְּמוֹת (2 Kgs 3:5); as against מְחַוֵּר (Num 13:23); בְּקִיּוֹם (Ps 76:10; Prov. 28:12); בְּשׁוּב (Ps 126:1); סוּר (Isa 7:17) [Thanks are due to R. Garr for this notice]. There is also alternation of *o/u* in closed unstressed syllable in the participle of binyan *hof'al*: מְרֹאֵה (Exod 25:40); מְשַׁר (e.g. Exod 26:1); מְפַנֵּה (Ezek 9:2); מְשַׁחַח (Prov. 25:26); as against מְשַׁלֵּךְ (2 Sam 20:21); מְשַׁקֵּב (2 Kgs 4:32); מְרַבֵּק (Ps 22:16); מְצַהֵב (Ezra 8:27).

⁷⁰ Cf. קָשׁוּחַ, קָשׁוּחַת, אָרוּחַ.

⁷¹ The only exceptional form, וְעָרוּתָי, occurs in Ps 78:56 (instead of the expected וְעָרוּתָי, because of the spelling with *waw*).

⁷² See Qimron, *Diphthongs and Glides* (supra, n. 14), 275–6.

1Q22, fr. 1, col. V, line 1; קרשו ומשפט[י] צדקו וערוות אמתו in CD XX, 30–31; etc.⁷³

According to Bauer & Leander,⁷⁴ as well as Meyer,⁷⁵ the form עֲרוּתִיךְ with consonantal *waw* as the plural of עֲרוּת was created under the influence of the Aramaic plural suffix *-n*, which was used in plurals of nouns ending in *-u*. Morag offers the interesting proposal that עֲרוּת “was born by attraction to מצוות.”⁷⁶ Perhaps, however, it might be preferable to explain this unusual phenomenon – diphthongization of the plural ending – as a particular case of lexical necessity: Since עֲרוּת may also denote “covenant,” the need was felt for an unambiguous form, not merely the *pluralis tantum*, to designate the plural (מצוות). Accordingly, the plural ending of nouns derived from roots in which the third radical is *yod* (וּת-) was superimposed on a noun of a different type, to indicate that the plural was genuine.⁷⁷

Conclusion

1. The two forms considered above, עֲרוּת and אֲחוּת, are feminine nouns ending in *-ōt*. This is also the common plural ending for feminine nouns. In Hebrew of the First Temple period, the form אֲחוּת/אֲחוֹת was used as the plural of אֲחוּת. In contrast, עֲרוּת had no need of a plural, being itself a plural form (though indeed *pluralis tantum*). This situation evolved further in the Second Temple period. Since consonantal *waw* tended to be elided between vowels, the plural form of אֲחוּת resembled the singular form (אֲחוּת/אֲחוֹת > אֲחוּת), and so dissimilation gave rise to an unambiguous alternative: אֲחוּת* > אֲחִיוּת. The latter took the place of the ancient form in the later books of the Bible – the prose framework of Job and the book of Chronicles (besides an early precursor in Ezek 16:2), and then in RH.

2. The original, ancient pronunciation, of both עֲרוּת and עֲרוּוּת– was עֲרוּת, in the sense of either “covenant” or “decrees.” On the one hand, as this is a plural form (*pluralis tantum*), the suffix *-ūt* replaced *-ōt* in order to denote the singular meaning of “covenant.” On the other hand, in order to stress the plural form in the sense of “decrees,” an unambiguous plural marker was needed, giving rise to the plural ending *-āwōt* (generally reserved for nouns derived from roots with third radical *yod* or *waw*): עֲרוּת*.

3. The unvocalized written forms, recorded by the masoretes as they found them, as against the *qere* forms, reflect an early stage in the evolution of Hebrew. One thus concludes that the spelling in Josh 2:13: אֲחוּוֹי, was used in Ancient Hebrew to designate the plural “my sisters,” and should probably be pointed אֲחוּוֹי.

⁷³ See, e.g., Qimron, *ibid.*, 269–70. However, in 4Q372, fr. 1, line 28: ערוּתִיךְ occurs in parallel with תוּרִיךְ.

⁷⁴ In their grammar: 608h.

⁷⁵ R. Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik*, II, Berlin, 1969³, 77 (§56, 2b).

⁷⁶ *Studies in Biblical Hebrew*, 138 n. 8.

⁷⁷ Just as in Late Aramaic the suffix *-n* was also grafted onto nouns not derived from *לִי* roots, such as גִּהְרִתָּא or אֲתִרְתָּא, so the suffix *-n* was added in Hebrew to nouns not derived from *לִי* roots, since it was understood by Hebrew speakers as a plural morpheme.

4. The *qere* forms of the masorettes reflect a later stage in the evolution of Hebrew, compared with the unvocalized written forms. Thus, the *qere* in Josh 2:13, אָחויֹתַי, is common to the declined forms occurring in the biblical books of the Second Temple period.

Excursus: Through the Masoretic Text

Lambert, Ginsberg, Ben-Ḥayyim and Qimron have pointed out various grammatical features whose pronunciation has been obscured by the grammar of RH (which was the masorettes' language):

(i) *waw* consecutive + a verb in past tense was originally *waw* + an infinitive designating an ongoing action, such as: ביהוה ויחשבה לו צדקה (Gen 15:6).⁷⁸

(ii) The names for the days of the week indicate a syntactic shift in the status of the ordinal number.⁷⁹ The combination יום + *ordinal number* was originally treated as a construct-like form, as in יום הששי בקר ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום השביעי (Gen 1:31); ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי (Gen 2:3). Since the masorettes' tradition was the Rabbinic tradition, which generally considered such phrases as adjectival, e.g., היום השביעי as in RH, these phrases, when following a preposition, were vocalized as determined: וישבת ביום השביעי (Gen 2:2). Indeed, the late biblical books prefer the adjectival phrase to the construct form, so that יום הראשון is replaced by היום הראשון (Dan 10:12; Neh 8:18).⁸⁰

(iii) Lambert,⁸¹ followed by Ginsberg in an article entitled "Through the Masoretic Text,"⁸² showed that internal passive verbs were vocalized as far as possible as external passive. For example, the verb לשרוף occurs 117 times in the Bible, all in binyan *qal*, with only 14 exceptions which are in *nif'al*. Nevertheless, binyan *nif'al*, which was common in RH, occurs only in future forms such as ישרף, which was probably pronounced ישרף, as the passive of the *qal*; that is to say, biblical occurrences of the verb שרף are limited to binyan *qal* alone.

(iv) Ginsberg made another important observation:⁸³ When the second letter of the radical is one of ב,ג,ד,כפ"ח, it receives a *dageš* in ל + infinitive *qal*, but not in the forms בפעל, כפעל (e.g., ללבש as against בלבש, כפעל). This difference reflects the predominant period of RH, when the biblical forms בפעל, כפעל disappeared, while the infinitive form, לפעל, conformed to the imperfect (יפעל, תפעל, etc.), including the *dageš* when the second radical was one of ב,ג,ד,כפ"ח.

⁷⁸ M. Lambert, *Le waw conversif*, RÉJ 26, 1893, 47–62.

⁷⁹ M. Lambert, *Le mot יום suivi des nombres ordinaux*, RÉJ 31, 1895, 279–81.

⁸⁰ Alexander Borg, who has recently returned to this topic, refers to this structure as a "pseudo-construct." See A. Borg, *Some Observations on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, in: *Diggers at the Well*, ed. by T. Muraoka, J.F. Elwolde, Leiden 2000, 26–39.

⁸¹ M. Lambert, *L'emploi du nifal en hébreu*, RÉJ 41, 1900, 196–214.

⁸² H.L. Ginsberg, *Tarbiz* 5, 1934, 208–23; 6, 1935, 543.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 5, 1935, 219–21.

(v) Ben-Ḥayyim made another point:⁸⁴ “A typical feature of RH is its use of binyan *pi^cel* to a greater extent than BH, without any change in the meaning of the verb, although the latter may generally occur in the MT in *qal*.”⁸⁵ An example is the verb לַגְרֹשׁ. This verb, meaning “to drive out, expel,” occurs 45 times in the Bible. In RH it is used in *pi^cel*, while it is vocalized in the Bible with *pi^cel* wherever the vocalization does not cause changes in the text. Only in participles, גֹּרֵשׁ (Exod 34:11), גֹּרֹשֶׁה (five times), were the masoretes obliged to reveal the original (*qal*) binyan, to avoid changing the text. As Ginsberg concluded: “The grammar of RH – wherever the *ketiv* permits it – was grafted onto Scripture.”⁸⁶

(vi) Qimron⁸⁷ has shown that the gentilic suffix in an abbreviated plural (e.g., עֲבָרִים) conceals the original pronunciation עֲבָרִים, and this haplology (*iyγī > ī*), as represented by the *qere* forms, is late.

(vii) We may therefore add the plural form of אָחוּת (other than אחויות): אָחוּת/אָחוּת to the list of ancient forms disguised as the newer forms that supplanted them. Perhaps the pronunciation of עָרוּת also conceals the original pronunciation in ancient Hebrew: עָרוּת, like the plural form מְנוּת conceals the older pronunciation מְנוּת.

⁸⁴ Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, *Samaritan Tradition and its Relationship to the Language Tradition of the Dead Sea Scrolls and to Rabbinic Hebrew*, Lešonenu 22, 1958, 236–42 (Heb.).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 236.

⁸⁶ Tarbiz 6, 1935, 543.

⁸⁷ E. Qimron, *On the Language Tradition of the Biblical Authors*, in: *Hadassah Shy Jubilee Book*, ed. by Y. Bentolila, Beer Sheva 1997, 37–40 (Heb.).

Abstract:

Number (singular and plural) is an indispensable component of the noun in Hebrew and in the Semitic languages in general, and usually a noun's plural and singular forms are distinct. In a few feminine nouns in Hebrew, whose singular ends in the suffix *-ōt* – which generally denotes the feminine plural – identifying the number may involve some difficulty. How, then, were the plurals of the two very common nouns *ʾahōt* and *ʿēdōt* formed?

1. The plural of *ʾahōt* in Hebrew of the First Temple period was *ʾahawōt*. The written forms that the masoretes, following the pronunciation tradition of their time, vocalized, conceal forms that were sometimes pronounced differently at an earlier stage in the evolution of Hebrew. Thus, the *ketiv* *ʾhwtv* in Josh 2:13, which stands for the plural 'my sisters,' should have been vocalized as אָחֻוּתַי (*ʾahwōtay*); while *wlʾhwtvkm* in Josh 2:3 should have been vocalized אָחֻוּתְכֶם (ul'*ʾahwōtekem*).

A further stage in development took place in the Second Temple period. Since consonantal *waw* between two vowels tended to be elided, the plural became similar to the singular: *ʾahawōt* > *ʾahōt*. To distinguish between singular and plural, an unambiguous alternative plural took shape via dissimilation: *ʾahawōt* > *ʾahayōt*. This form supplanted the earlier form in the late biblical books: in Ezekiel, the "prose framework" of Job, and in Chronicles. The *qere* tradition in Josh 2:13, *ʾahyōtay*, also dates to the Second Temple period.

2. The original, ancient pronunciation both of *ʿēdūt* and of *ʿēdwōt* – was *ʿēdōt*. This was a singular form (though originally *pluralis tantum*), meaning 'covenant' or 'divine decrees'. At a later stage, in Second Temple times, the need was felt to differentiate between the singular ('covenant') and the plural ('decrees', 'laws'), and consequently the equivocal *ʿēdōt* itself was replaced by another form: in the plural, the suffix *-ōt* was replaced by *-āwōt* (*ʿēdōt* > **ʿēdāwōt*), while in the singular the suffix *-ōt* was replaced by *-ūt* (*ʿēdōt* > *ʿēdūt*).

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