אֲחֹת and עֵדוֹת 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 וֹת-, 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 חָכְמוֹת is a plural or singular form, and sometimes only the context can make the determination possible: פִּי יְדַבֵּר חָכְמוֹת וְהָגוּת לִבִּי תְבוּנוֹת "My mouth utters wisdom, my speech is full of insight" (Ps 49:4), as against: חָכְמוֹת בָּנְתָה בֵיתָהּ "Wisdom has built her house" (Prov 9:1).[2] The word בְּהֵמוֹת, besides being the plural of בהמה,[3] is also the name of a certain animal: הִנֵּה נָא בְהֵמוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמָּךְ חָצִיר כַּבָּקָר יֹאכֵל "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 בָּקָר (2 Sam 17:29) is singular or plural? In Biblical Hebrew (BH), אֲשֶׁפּ(וֹ)ת is a singular form, the *taw* apparently being one of the radicals.[4] According to the masoretic text (MT), the plural form is אשפתות, as in Lam 4:5.[5] It seems that Rabbinic Hebrew (RH) perceived אשפות as plural (cf. ד' אשפות "four dung heaps", Exod Rab 10:7), and has produced from אשפות the singular form: אשפה, as back-formation: אשפה מועלין בה ובזבלה "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 וֹת-, namely, אָחוֹת and עֵדוֹת.

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[1] The question may also be relevant for nouns in singular ending in יִם-, such as קָדִים in the Bible or ליסטים in Rabbinic literature.

[2] Even if the affirmative וֹת- 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 בְהֵמוֹת וְחָיְתוֹ שָׂדַי שָׁאַל־נָא (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. אשפה.

[5] Also at Qumran: אשפוחות, 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 אשפה is frequent in the Tosefta, as well as in the printed editions of the Mishna (in Kaufmann Ms. to Mishna Ketub 7:5 אשפות was corrected to אשפה).

אָחוֹת meaning "sisters"

In the small group of nouns ending in וֹת- the form of אָחוֹת (and probably also that of חָמוֹת, "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 וֹת- ending in that the third radical is *waw/yod*.[7]

There are two plural forms of אָחוֹת 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 -אַחְוֹת; the other is אֲחָיוֹת*, which its pronominal state is -אַחְיוֹת. This second form (whose absolute form is אֲחָיוֹת* or אֲחָיוֹת*),[8] occurs in the later biblical books: in the prose framework of Job: אַחְיֹתֵהֶם (1:4), אַחְיֹתָיו (42:11), and in 1 Chron 2:16: וַאֲחֹיתֵיהֶם,[9] besides one occurrence in Ezekiel: אֲחֹיותֵךְ (Ezek 16:52; with a singular pronominal suffix). Another occurrence is the *qere* form אַחְיוֹתַי 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 אָחוֹת, -אָחֹות in the pronominal state (the absolute form was presumably אֲחָוֹת* or אֲחֹות*), occurs in the *ketiv* of Josh 2:13: אחותי, as well as in Hos 2:3: וְלַאֲחֹותֵיכֶם and in Ezek 16:45, 52: אֲחֹותֵךְ. This is probably the intention in several verses in the same chapter: אחותך (*ketiv* in v. 51),[10] and אֲחֹותַיִךְ (*qere* in v. 51, *ketiv* in vv. 55 and 61).

Clearly, the written form of the plural pronominal state -אָחֹות, 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

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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 וֹת-. Thus, for example, עֲנוֹת (Exod 32:18) is read in the Samaritan Pentateuch as עֲנוּוֹת (and similarly in the Peshitta).

8   To my mind, the absolute form אֲחָיוֹת 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 עֶגְלָה, "cart", in colloquial Hebrew is attracted by the construct and pronominal states: עֶגְלוֹת 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 -אַחְיֹת as the *ketiv*, with accompanying *qere* -אַחְיוֹת; 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: אַחְיֹת.

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-Ḥayyim, *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, ‑אֲחוֹת, 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 ‑אֲחוֹת or perhaps ‑אֲחֹיוֹת? In other words, when Rahab referred to her sisters in Josh 2:13 (as per the *ketiv*), how did she pronounce the word: אֲחוֹתַי or אַחְיוֹתַי?

The reading handed down by the masoretes in Hos 2:3, וְלַאֲחוֹתֵיכֶם, and in Ezek 16 (with the exception of אַחְיוֹתֵךְ in v. 52) implies that the pronunciation of the *ketiv* in Josh 2:13 was אֲחוֹתַי, that is, the pronominal state and construct of the plural were both ‑אֲחוֹת rather than ‑אֲחֹיוֹת.

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, *awō/ayō > ō*, so that, for example, שְׁדָווֹת* > שָׂדוֹת. In his view, the masoretes reconstructed the forms קְצֹות, ‑אֲרֹות, קְשֹׁות and נֹת by analogy, their actual pronunciation being קָצֹות*, ‑אֲרֹות*, קָשֹׁות* and נֹות*.[13] If this rule was indeed valid in regard to the pronunciation of אֲחוֹת as well, then the absolute form in the singular differed from the plural in the vowel of the *alef* (אָחוֹת vs. אֲחוֹת), and the construct/pronominal state ‑אֲחוֹת was common to both singular and plural, while the distinction depending on the pronominal suffix (e.g., אֲחוֹתִי vs. אֲחוֹתַי).

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 success‑fully, is problematic (e.g. if the pronunciation in their time was קָצֹות, how did they know how to turn the clock back and vocalize קְצֹות?). 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 (*awōt > ōt*) 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 auxi‑lary 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 קְצֹות conceals the pronunciation קָצֹות. The available evidence, however, does not really support his argument. In addition to the absolute form according to the MT: קְצֹות, 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 אֲרֹות, קְצֹווֹתוֹ, נְדֹיוֹתָיו 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 נֹות‑ reflect the influence of the Aramaic plural form נְוָתָא; 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 Deed 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.

קְצוּותוֹ (Exod 37:8; 39:4). The other biblical forms, both construct and pronominal state, are always -קְצוֹת. On the other hand, there are several occurrences in 1QIsa[a] of the construct (!) form with double *waw*: קצוות הארץ (Isa 40:28; 41:9). In Isa 41:5 there is even evidence of the *ṣade* being pronounced with a vowel: קצאוות הארץ.[16] *Pesher Habakkuk* IX, 14 cites the verse Hab 2:10: קצוות עמי[ם], but the same combination is spelled in the next column, X, 2, as in the MT: קצוֹת עמים. Add to it קצוות חבל in the War Scroll, I, 8. It follows, therefore, that קצוֹת was pronounced in the Hebrew of First and Second Temple times with a double long vowel (*qəṣāwōt, qəṣā'ōt* or *qəṣāōt*), though there were indeed alternative pronunciation traditions.

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

It seems likely that Bergsträsser's phonetic rule (elision of the *waw* with its vowel before another vowel, $vwv_1 > v_1$, or, at any rate, elision of the voweled *waw*, $wv_1 > v_1$) 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 הַפַּחוֹת וְהַסְּגָנִים "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: פחוות, it was vocalized in accordance with the original pronunciation wherever the text presented two consecutive *waw*s.

Accordingly, one might suggest that the usual plural form מָנוֹת also conceals the pronunciation מניות/מנאות as in Nehemiah. There are six occurrences of מָנוֹת 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 *mənāōt*,[18] as reflected by the forms מניות/מנאות, but the

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[16] Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, *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: הַפַּחוֹת וְהַסְּגָנִים והזברים יוצאים לקראתם – but the officials leading the people were called פחות 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] מָנָה is apparently the original form (the construct is always written with *qameṣ*; cf. *manātu* in Akkadian), while מָנָה could be a back-formation from the plural; just as קָצָה is a back-formation from קָצוֹת (which itself evolved from קְצווֹת), which is the plural of קָצֶה/קְצָה.

conservative spelling used only one *waw* (as in the case of מִצְוֹת). At a later stage, around the time of Rabbinic literature, the final vowels underwent monophthongization, the way it appears in the Mishna: מְנֹות, as in אֵין מְשַׁלְחִים בְּיוֹם טוֹב אֶלָא מָנוֹת "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 (מְנָאוֹת, מְנִיּוֹת) 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 אָחוֹת does not occur in the Bible, but it would presumably have been אֲחָיוֹת* or אֲחָוֹת*, judging from the two alternatives used in Tannaitic Hebrew: אֲחָיוֹת and אֲחָוֹת.[19] The only plural forms occurring in the biblical text are in the pronominal state; as already noted, these are אַחְוֹת (אַחֲוֹת־/אַחְוֹת־) in classical Hebrew and אַחְיוֹת־ in LBH (Late Biblical Hebrew). If the vocalized consonantal *waw* was indeed elided in the biblical period, the plural form of אָחוֹת was pronounced in both absolute and construct forms as אָחוֹת, so that the distinction between the plural and singular of אָחוֹת 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 פֵּחוֹת and קְצֻוֹת were pronounced with a diphthong or a longer vowel than usual (־פֵּחֲוֹת, ־קְצֻוֹת), and the pronominal state of עֵדֻוֹת was pronounced with a final diphthong ־עֵדְוֹת (*ʿedəwōt-*) 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 *ʾăḥāwōt*, or *ʾaḥ(ă)wōt*.[20] It was only because of the masoretic practice not to write

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[19] The *šəwa* under the *ḥet* was originally a *šəwa mobile* (pronounced before *yod* as quiescent *šəwa* [*šəwa 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 אָחוֹת in the absolute state could not have been אֲחָיוֹת, but must have been אֲחָיוֹת, with a quiescent *šəwa*, as in the pronominal state, and as attested consistently by Ms. Kaufmann. In his view, if this were a *šəwa medium*, one should expect that *ḥet* to be vocalized with *ḥatef patah*. On the other hand, the vocalization אֲחָיוֹת 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 *ʾaḥawāt* is an exact parallel of אֲחָיוֹת. (ii) The vocalized text of the Bible contains instances of *šəwa medium* realized as *šəwa*, rather than as *ḥatef*, under a guttural: בַּעֲלֵיהֶן, וְעָרִים, מִתְיַחֲשִׂים ; for some reason, this is particularly common before *yod*: וְהָיָה, יְשַׁעְיָה, וְעָרִים, 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: אֲחָיוֹת 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 אֲחָיוֹת.

[20] There are only a few occurrences of two consecutive *waw*s in the middle of a word. Since it is impossible to vocalize one letter (*waw*) with two different vowel signs, both *waw*s are written in such cases: עֲשֻׂוֹת [*qere*: עֲשֻׂוֹת] (1 Sam 25:18); עֲשֻׂוֹם (2 Sam 23:4); נְטֻוֹת [*qere*: נְטֻוֹת] (Isa 3:16, and in the Qumran Isaiah Scroll: נטוא[ה]); מְנֻוֹת [*qere*: מְנִיוֹת] (1 Sam 20:1). Rarely, one finds double *waw* denoting a consonantal *waw*: קַצְוֹתוֹ [*qere*: קַצְוֹתָיו] (Exod 37:8; 39:4). The word עָווֹן occurs only four times with two *waws*, out of 233 occurrences in the Bible. The word הֹוֹת 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 masoretes' 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 -אֲחוֹת is therefore -אֲחֹות and not necessarily -אֲחֹות;[21] that is to say, the original reading concealed by אֲחֹותֵיכֶם in Hos 2:3 is אֲחֹותֵיכֶם.

The advantage of this thesis is that it postulates a definite (and quite plausible) phonetic distinction between the construct form in singular (אֲחֹות-) and in plural (אַחֲוֹת-). The shift from the absolute form אֲחָוֹות* to אֲחָיֹות*, 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 אֲחָוֹות*[22] became אֲחָיֹות, just as נֹוח (*ketiv* in 1 Sam 20:1) became נָיֹוח; the parallel of אֲרֹות סוּסִים (1 Kgs 5:6) is אֲרָיֹות סוּסִים (2 Chron 9:25); as against the MT's גְּדֹתָיו (Isa 8:7, and elsewhere), the 1QIsaᵃ has גדוותיו,[23] while the spelling in 1 Chron 12:16 is גדייתיו.[24]

The problem of distinguishing the singular and plural forms of אָחות 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: *aḫuātu* >*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): *nᶜmt bn aḫt bᶜl*, "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.

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times with two *waw*s, perhaps to differentiate it from the singular. There are a few further occurrences of two consecutive *waw*s in the late books of the Bible: Esther 4:8: וליצוות (in the other five times the spelling is defective); Neh 9:14: ומצוות (the other 183 occurrences with defective spelling); and also פחוות as mentioned above (Ezra 8:36; Neh 2:7, 9; the more usual form is פחות). It is because of the system of defective spelling that ושמרתם את המצות in Exod 12:17 could be interpreted as either מצות ("unleavened bread") or מצוות ("commandments") in Targum Neophiti (the Septuagint and the Samaritan read המצוה in the singular); this ambiguity is the basis for the exposition in the Mekhilta, Tractate Pisḥa 9, Lauterbach, I: 74: ושמרתם את המצות. R. Josiah says: Do not read it so but ושמרתם את המצוות. 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 אחותי, i.e., אחיותי (in Josh 2:13), as the plural of אחה, which is attested in Official Aramaic. However, there is no evidence whatever of אחה in Hebrew.

22 Whether it was pronounced *ʾăḫāōt* or *ʾăḫāwōt*; cf. the changes in the construct state of the plural נאות/נוות (Zeph 2:6).

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

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

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 [ה]אחתי, that is, "his sisters," perhaps indicating that the plural form was not אַ(י)חון, with suffix -ין, but אַ(י)חן (*'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 אחה, not אחת.[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 אחון appears in Nabatean documents from El-Ḥejra, northern Saudi Arabia, dated to the beginning of the first millennium CE: אחותה (= "his sisters") and אחותהם (= "their sisters"),[31] and from Maḥoz ʿEglatain south of the Dead Sea, dating to the end of the first century CE: אחותה ("his sisters").[32]

In Late Aramaic, both Western and Eastern, אחו(ו)ן and אחו(ו)תא employ as the plural of (א)חה(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, אחותה should be emended (אופסחה). 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: -אֲחָת vs. -אֲחָת; 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 שפה, which is of the same pattern as אחה, was שפן (e.g, שפותה in the Sefire Inscription, III, line 16), which, beginning with Official Aramaic, became שפון (e.g., שפותה 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 Madaʾin 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 אחותה גנב, instead of חדרא גנבא. See the book mentioned in the beginning of this note: 80.] Interestingly, a Nabatean document from Ḥegra (J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen* I, Paris 1930, 86) contains the word אחתה, 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 אחן.

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 *šelaḥ* Torah portion) in the Taj has אֲחָיתִי. However, this form is "contaminated" by Hebrew influence (and in fact does not appear in all editions of the Taj). Neither is the form אחייתהון, occurring in two manuscripts of the Targum to Job 1:4, native Aramaic; it is surely a corruption of אחוותהון. On the other hand, the double translation of that verse has the plural אחתיהון, 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: אֲחָיוֹת/אֲחָיוֹת.
Common to most of the Semitic languages is that they found a way to designate the plural form of אָחוֹת, 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 מוֹמָאָ, "oath," in Eastern Aramaic. The original form was probably מוֹמָאָה (> מוֹמָה), 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 מומה (ספר מומה) = "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 מוֹמָתָא was used to designate "oath" (in Syriac, Mandaic, Babylonian Aramaic; and even in Onqelos Targum, e.g., בְּמוֹמָתָא דִלְוָטָא as the translation of בשבעת האלה in Num 5:21). The suffix תָּא- generally designates the plural, but since the *mem* has a *qameṣ* (a vestige of the disappeared *alef*), it is no longer possible to distinguish between "oath" and "oaths," both being designated by מוֹמָתָא.[36]

עֵדוּת vs. עֵדוֹת

The BH עֵדוֹת 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: אלה העדת "These are the decrees" (Deut 4:45); פקודיך ועדתיך "Your precepts and decrees" (Ps 119:168).
On the basis of both grammatical considerations (preservation of the *ṣere* in declension) and the similar meaning of the Hebrew word תעודה (parallel to תורה in Isa 8:16, 20, in the sense of "law") and the word עִיָדָא = "custom" in Palmyrene and Syriac – the root of עֵדוֹת might be עו"ד.[39]

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[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 מוֹמָתָא in the singular, "oath," but in order to distinguish the singular from the plural the forms מוֹמָתָא and מוֹמְיָתָא evolved for "oath," with מַוְמָתָא as the plural; see C. Brockelmann, *Syrische Grammatik*, Leipzig 1955[7], 58. In Mandaic, מומאאחא 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 *adû* 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 פֻּלָה 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 עו"ד, citing the Arabic *ġdw* ("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 עֶדֶן, עֶדֵי, עֶדַיָּא[41] 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 עֵדוּת.

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 בְּרִית וְעֵדֻת is of a *hendiadys*,[45] this is reflected in the verse לְנֹצְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְעֵדֹתָיו "for those who keep his covenant and decrees" (Ps 25:10),[46] and in בְּרִיתִי וְעֵדֹתִי "My covenant and My decrees"(Ps 132:12). The MT reading understands the word עֵדֹת as singular.[47]

Teʿudah. 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 1QIsaᵃ version for Isa 33:8: הֻפַר בְּרִית מָאַס עָרִים (instead of עָרִים in the MT), given the parallel בְּרִית. 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., Hoftijzer/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: לְנֹצְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְעֵדֹתָיו, "those who keep his covenant and His decrees" and נצר עדיא 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 קְיָם as the equivalent of both בְּרִית and חֻקִּים, 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 עֵדוּת, "covenant," and עוּ"ד, "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, עֵדִים* denoted "admonishments" in Num 23:18: הַאֲזִינָה עָדַי בְּנוֹ צִפֹּר = "Give ear to my admonishments, son of Zippor!" If so, perhaps עֵדוּת was originally pronounced עָדוּת, with *qameṣ* rather than *ṣere*.

[45] E.Z. Melammed, *Two Which are One in the Bible*, Tarbiz 16, 1945, 173–89 (Heb.).

[46] Cf. also בְּרִיתוֹ ... חֻקָּיו ... וְעֵדְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר הֵעִיד בָּם "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-ʿAm 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 עֵדוֹת in two opposite directions, in a sort of double polarization.[49] On the one hand, the form עֵדוֹת 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*, עֵדוֹת > עֵדוּת.

Contrary to RH, in which the meaning of עֵדוּת is "testimony,"[50] the meanings of עֵדוּת 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 עֵדוֹת ("the body of divine commands as a whole").[52] Examples of the first meaning ("covenant"): אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת (Exod 26:33), parallel to אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית as in Josh 3:6[53] – the Ark in which the divine precepts are deposited;[54] לֻחֹת הָעֵדֻת (Exod 31:18), parallel to לוּחֹת הַבְּרִית of Deut 9:9.[55] Example of the second meaning ("laws"), in which תורה // עדות: תורת יהוה תמימה ... עדות יהוה נאמנה... "The teaching of the Lord is perfect... the decrees of the Lord are enduring..." (Ps 19:8). In Ps 122:4 עדות means "habit".

It would seem, therefore, that in these and other verses the original form was עֵדוֹת (*עֵדוֹת יהוה נאמנה, ארון *הָעֵדוֹת), and only at a later stage in the evolution of Hebrew was עֵדוֹת changed to עֵדוּת in order to adapt it to singular usage. Clear evidence for that[56] is the Qumran formulation of ארון העדות (Exod 26:33) in 4Q364 fr. 17,

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[48] If the form in *pluralis tantum* has only one meaning, it is not difficult to adapt the appropriate syntactic usage, such as רחמים גדולים; 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 עֵד may also denote "testimony," as in Exod 20:16: לא תענה ברעך עד שקר "you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor"; see Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, *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 עדות in the late meaning of "testimony" is the main philological proof that Joash Inscription is a forgery. See D. Talshir, Is Joash Inscription Forgery?, Aqaddem 23, 2003, 6-7 (Heb.).

[51] Morag's distinction (*Studies on Biblical Hebrew*, 138) between the secondary meanings of ברית and עֵדוֹת 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: ועדותיו ומשפטיו "his decrees and laws" (45:5); תן עדות למראש מעשיך "give commitment (as in Akkadian) to those whom you created in the beginning" (36:20). And as in RH: עדות טובו נאמנה "the testimony to his generosity is trustworthy" (31:23).

[53] The more common expression in the Bible is ארון ברית יהוה. The meaning of עֵדוֹת may have been specialized relative to the meaning of ברית, as suggested by Knohl, *ibid*. 136–8.

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

[55] Again, in abbreviated form, הָעֵדֻת in Exod 25:15.

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

line 3: הארון העדוות.[57] It is thus clear that the form עֵדוּת is an alternate of the plural form עֵד(וֹ)ת, used to denote a singular, not an independent word derived from עֵד.[58] Contrary to what we find in biblical dictionaries, the rules of Hebrew grammar do not admit a suffix ־וּת which becomes ־וֹת or ־וֹות in the plural.[59] The plurals of nouns that end in ־וּת have the suffix ־יוֹת or ־יוֹת: עֵדְיוֹת,[60] or עֵדִיוֹת.[61]

Although this change in the original vowel of the word (ō > ū) is exceptional in Hebrew,[62] the form עֵדוּת is clearly well rooted in an ancient tradition and by no means the creation of the masoretes; indeed, the ancient translations (Greek, Aramaic and Latin) translate the word accordingly (μαρτύριον, סָהֲדוּתָא, testimonium, respectively). In fact, however, these translations, unlike the MT, did not differentiate between עֵדוּת and עֵדוֹת/עֵדֹות-, interpreting the very numerous forms עֵדֹת, עֵדַת, עֵדוֹת (about 80) as the singular עֵדוּת[63] (rarely reflecting the plural of עֵדוּת, μαρτύρια).[64] The Samaritan Pentateuch, too, does not distinguish between עֵדוּת and עֵדוֹת (ídot); consequently, the same is true of their Aramaic translation (the reliable J Ms.), which renders every עֵדוּת and עֵדֹת in the Pentateuch as a plural: סערואתה, that is, "testimonies" (but שהדותא in Gen 31:47 is translated correctly as a singular: סערותה).[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 הָעֵדוֹת

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[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 העדיות 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 העדת is typical of an ō vowel but not of ū, which is generally spelled *plene*.

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

[60] As in חָנִיּוֹת (Jer 37:15); מַלְכִיּוֹת (Dan 8:22), but with no *dageš* in the *yod*!

[61] The Hexaplaric tradition of the Septuagint to Jer 37:15 transcribes the aforementioned חָנִיּוֹת as α(ε)νιωθ. This is the usual plural in the Mishna. For example, Kaufmann Ms., Bava Matz. 3:4, reads עֵדִיוֹת.

[62] There are indeed a few forms with suffix ־וּת which take the plural pronominal suffixes when declined: זנותיכם (Num 14:33); אלמנותיך (Isa 54:4); כריתחיה (Jer 3:8); חזנותיך (Ezek 16:15); שבותיכם (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 ū vowel, as witness such examples as שְׁבִיתִיךְ, עֶצָתָיךְ. See Gesenius, §91[1]; Bauer-Leander: §253b.

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

[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-Ḥayyim, *LOT*, vol. IV, Jerusalem 1977, 202 (Heb.); A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, Leiden 2000, 570–2.

rather than הָעֵדוּת of the MT;[66] עֵדוּת פִּיךְ in Ps 119:88 becomes עדוות פיכה in the Psalms Scroll from Qumran Cave 11.[67] The MT seems to represent a complementary (and rather strange!) distribution between עֵדָה/עֵדוּת and עֵדֹת/*עֵדוֹת. The undeclined form (absolute or construct) is עֵדָה/עֵדוּת, which becomes עֵדֹת/*עֵדוֹת in declension (depending on the spelling in the MT).[68]

There may be another example in the Bible of suffix ־וֹ changing into ־וּ, to emphasize the singular usage. The form הוֹלֵלוֹת occurs four times in Ecclesiastes, of which two occur as one constituent of a *hendiadys*: הוֹלֵלוֹת וְסִכְלוּת/שִׂכְלוּת (1:17; 2:12). Only once does the MT read הוֹלֵלוּת (with *šūreq*), in the phrase הוֹלֵלוּת רעה (10:13). Perhaps the adjective induced an unambiguous singular form.

This complementary distribution, associating each form with its specific vowel (עדוּת in the absolute state; עֵדֹת 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 עֵדֻוֹת > עֵדֻוֹת: ־וֹת,[70] in analogy with the above-mentioned relationship between אֲחוֹת and אֲחָוֹת/אֲחָיוֹת.

The form *עֵדוֹת is not attested in the MT. The plural is attested twice in the Pentateuch in the absolute state, in defective spelling: עֵדֹת (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 עֵדֹתֶיךָ/תָיו in defective spelling (the *dalet* with *holem*)[71] and עֵדְוֹתֶיךָ/תָיו with consonantal *waw*. The masoretic reading was presumably עֵדֹת in the absolute state and עֵדֹת- in the pronominal state;[72] only where the transmitted text did not permit this vocalization were the masoretes forced to transmit the short form: עֵדֹת. The scribes of the Judean Desert Scrolls generally use the form with a double *waw*. For example: ועדוותי in

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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 הָעֵדֹת (undeclined) in Deut 4:45; 6:20, perhaps because עֵדוֹת in these verses is part of a compound phrase whose other constituents are plurals, העדת והחקים והמשפטים. There is no other sentence in the Bible that opens with אֵלֶּה and continues with a singular noun, as if the text were אלה הָעֵדָת והחקים והמשפטים. 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 ינשוף/ינשוף, are rare. Joüon listed the following pairs in his *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §88Ln: מפוח/מַפֻּחַ (RH); מַקְצֻעוֹת/מַקְצֻעוֹת (RH); מַבּוּעַ/מַבּוּעָא (Syriac); מָבוּל/מְמוּלָא (Syriac). One can compare such an alternation of *ū/ō* in final closed stressed sylable of ע"ו verbs, binyan *qal*, in consruct infinitive (excluding verbal noun): כְּמוּט (Ps 38:17; 46:3), כְּנוֹחַ (Num 11:25; Josh 3:13), כָּנוֹעַ (Isa 7:2), כְּמוֹח (2 Kgs 3:5); as against מָחוּר (Num 13:23), בְּקוּם (Ps 76:10; Prov. 28:12), בָּשׁוּב (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 sylable in the participle of binyan *hof'al*: מָרְאֶה (Exod 25:40), מָשְׁזָר (e.g. Exod 26:1), מָפְנֶה (Ezek 9:2), מָשְׁחָת (Prov. 25:26); as against מָשְׁלָךְ (2 Sam 20:21), מָשְׁכָּב (2 Kgs 4:32), מָרְבָּק (Ps 22:16), מָצְהָב (Ezra 8:27).

70 Cf. קָצוֹת/אָרְחֹת, קְשׂוֹת.

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

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

1Q22, fr. 1, col. V, line 1; צדקו ועדוות אמחו [צדיקו ומשפטי] חקי קרשו in CD XX, 30–31; etc.[73]

According to Bauer & Leander,[74] as well as Meyer,[75] the form עֵדְוֹתֶיךָ with consonantal *waw* as the plural of עֵדוּת was created under the influence of the Aramaic plural suffix ־וָן, which was used in plurals of nouns ending in ־וּ. Morag offers the interesting proposal that עֵדְווֹת "was born by attraction to מִצְווֹת."[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 עֵדוּת may also denote "covenant," the need was felt for an unambiguous form, not merely the *pluralis tantum*, to designate the plural (מִצְווֹת). Accordingly, the plural ending of nouns derived from roots in which the third radical is *yod* (־ווֹת) was superimposed on a noun of a different type, to indicate that the plural was genuine.[77]

Conclusion

1. The two forms considered above, עֵדוּת and אָחוֹת, 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 אֲחָוֹת/אֲחוֹת was used as the plural of אָחוֹת. In contrast, עֵדוּת 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 אָחוֹת resembled the singular form (אָחוֹת > אֲחָוֹת/אֲחוֹת), and so dissimilation gave rise to an unambiguous alternative: אֲחָיוֹת > אֲחָווֹת*. 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 עֵדוּת and עֵדְווֹת– was עֵדֹת, 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*): עֵדָוֹת*.

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: אחותי, was used in Ancient Hebrew to designate the plural "my sisters," and should probably be pointed אַחְוֹתַי.

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[73] See, e.g., Qimron, *ibid.*, 269–70. However, in 4Q372, fr. 1, line 28: עֵדְוֹתֶיךָ occurs in parallel with תורֹ[תֶךָ].

[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 ־וָתָא–was also grafted onto nouns not derived from ל"י roots, such as נַהֲרְוָתָא or אַתְרְוָתָא, so the suffix ־וֹת was added in Hebrew to nouns not derived from ל"י roots, since it was understood by Hebrew speakers as a plural morpheme.

4. The *qere* forms of the masoretes reflect a later stage in the evolution of Hebrew, compared with the unvocalized written forms. Thus, the *qere* in Josh 2:13, אַחְיוֹתַי, 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 masoretes' language):

(i) *waw* consecutive + a verb in past tense was originally *waw* + an infinitive designating an ongoing action, such as: וְהֶאֱמִן (=וְהַאֲמֵן) 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 ויברך אלהים (Gen 1:31); ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי את יום השביעי (Gen 2:3). Since the masoretes' 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 יִשָּׂרֵף, which was probably pronounced יִשָּׂרֵף, as the passive of the *qal*; that is to say, biblical occurrences of the verb שר"ף are limited to binyan *qal* alone.

(iv) Ginsberg made another important observation:[83] When the second letter of the radical is one of בגדכפ"ת, it receives a *dageš* in ל + infinitive *qal*, but not in the forms בְּפֹעַל, כְּפֹעַל (e.g., לִלְבֹּשׁ as against בִּלְבֹּשׁ, כִּלְבֹּשׁ). This difference reflects the predominant period of RH, when the biblical forms כְּפֹעַל, בְּפֹעַל disappeared, while the infinitive form, לִפְעֹל, conformed to the imperfect (חִפְעֹל, יִפְעֹל, etc.), including the *dageš* when the second radical was one of בגדכפ"ת.

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[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 *piʿel* 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 לגרש. This verb, meaning "to drive out, expel," occurs 45 times in the Bible. In RH it is used in *piʿel*, while it is vocalized in the Bible with *piʿel* wherever the vocalization does not cause changes in the text. Only in participles, גרש (Exod 34:11), גרושה (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) Qimron[87] has shown that the gentilic suffix in an abbreviated plural (e.g., עִבְרִים) conceals the original pronunciation עִבְרִיִּים, and this haplology (*iyyī > ī*), as represented by the *qere* forms, is late.

(vii) We may therefore add the plural form of אָחוֹת (other than אחיות): אֲחָוֹת/אֲחוֹת to the list of ancient forms disguised as the newer forms that supplanted them. Perhaps the pronunciation of עֵדוּת also conceals the original pronunciation in ancient Hebrew: עֵדֹוֹת, like the plural form מָנוֹת conceals the older pronunciation מְנָוֹת.

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[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 'aḥōt and 'ēdōt formed?

1. The plural of 'aḥōt in Hebrew of the First Temple period was 'aḥawōt. 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* 'ḥwty in Josh 2:13, which stands for the plural 'my sisters,' should have been vocalized as אַחְוֹתַי ('aḥwōtay); while wl'ḥwtykm in Josh 2:3 should have been vocalized וּלְאַחְוֹתֵיכֶם (ul'aḥwōtēkem).

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: 'aḥawōt > 'aḥōt. To distinguish between singular and plural, an unambiguous alternative plural took shape via dissimilation: 'aḥawōt > 'aḥayōt. 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, 'aḥyōtay, also dates to the Second Temple period.

2. The original, ancient pronunciation both of 'ēdūt and of 'ēdwōt- was 'ēdōt. This was a singular form (though orignaly *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 'ēdōt itself was replaced by another form: in the plural, the suffix -ōt was replaced by -āwōt ('ēdōt > *'ēdāwōt), while in the singular the suffix -ōt was replaced by -ūt ('ēdōt >'ēdūt).

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