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The Old Aramaic “Feminine” Suffix *-t* as an Accusative Case Marker*

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Summary: A small number of Old Aramaic words attest a spelling of the inherited “feminine” suffixes as *-t*. Strikingly, all of these words occur in syntactic contexts where Proto-Semitic would use the accusative case. Wherever the nominative or genitive case is expected instead, the “feminine” suffix is not spelled with *-t*. This includes several forms that are here argued to showcase a development of the “feminine” plural ending **-āt-* into **-ā*, spelled *-h* in the Sefire inscriptions and left unspelled in the Tell Fekheriye inscription. This identification of *-h* and zero as spelling the “feminine” plural suffix provides us with enough evidence to establish the syntactic conditioning of *-t* in accusative contexts vs. *-h* or zero in other contexts. The retention of *t* in the accusative follows naturally from the longer retention of word-final **-a* in Proto-Aramaic compared to **-u* and **-i*, which is supported by morphological developments in the verb. Together with the plene spelling of the “masculine” plural ending as *-wn* in nominative contexts and as *-yn* elsewhere in the Tell Fekheriye inscription, the identification of a separate accusative form of the “feminine” suffixes shows that Old Aramaic retained a partial contrast between the three Proto-Semitic cases. Later on, this case distinction was lost, while accusative forms in *-t* became lexicalized adverbs.

Many varieties of Aramaic attest an adverbial suffix *-t*. Examples include Imperial Aramaic *rḥm-t* “gratis,” which alternates with *b-rḥm-h* and *b-rḥm-n*;¹ Biblical Aramaic *ṭwā-t* “fasting” and, with a longer suffix, *tinyān-ūt* “again, a second time”;² Nabataean *mšry-t*, probably “in Egyptian,” where the *-t* follows the nisbe suffix **-āy-*;³ and Syriac *rabb-at* “greatly” and many other instances, especially in combination with the nisbe suffix as in *šarir-ait* “truly.”⁴ This suffix is commonly associated with the shared Semitic “feminine”

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¹ FOLMER 1995, pp. 255–256.

² ROSENTHAL 2006, §§ 88.1–2.

³ JONES/HAMMOND/JOHNSON/FIEMA 1988, l. 4.

⁴ BROCKELMANN 1908, p. 493. Syriac forms are given according to the East Syriac pronunciation, following the transcription suggested by RUDOLF/WALTISBERG 2020.

suffix **(a)t-*.⁵ In Aramaic, this suffix normally loses its **t* in word-final position, e.g. **millat-* > Biblical Aramaic *millā*, Syriac (abs.) *mellā* “word, matter.” The retention of *-t* in adverbs is all the more remarkable considering that many of these adverbs historically derive from the same stems as nominal forms where **-t-* has been lost: compare **(bV-)raḥmat-* > Imperial Aramaic *rḥmt* vs. *b-rḥmh* mentioned above, or **rabbat-* > Syriac *rabbat* “greatly” vs. *rabbā* “great (f.sg.abs.)” To my knowledge, however, this seemingly irregular preservation of *-t* in adverbs vs. its loss in nouns and adjectives is seldom addressed.

In Semitic languages that retain case inflection, adverbs are often transparently formed from the accusative case of nouns and adjectives; cf. Ge‘ez *qadm-a* “previously,” *lelit-a* “at night,” *ḥəqq-a* “a little,” *bəzuh-a* “much,” etc., where *-a* is the accusative ending,⁶ or Classical Arabic *ḡidd-an* “much,” *ḡami‘-an* “altogether,” *layl-an* “at night,” *mahl-an* “slowly, easy,” with the accusative ending *-an*.⁷ In this paper, I will suggest that this is also the origin of the *-t*-marked adverbs attested from Imperial Aramaic onwards, in line with the development posited by STEPHEN KAUFMAN:

By the time that the vocalic traditions first appear, no case distinction is attested for the plural. In the singular, however, the adverbial case (others “accusative”) was apparently regularly used well into the late first millennium BCE, at least in the absolute state. Feminine nouns are spelled with final *-t* (presumably /*tā*/) instead of the *-h* (/ā/ < *at*) of the nominative case. (As in other Semitic languages, final *-a* of the adverbial was maintained somewhat longer than the *-u/i* of the other cases.) After the complete loss of case marking, the morphology of adverbials in the later dialects preserves relics of the case ending: *-ā*, *-āt*, *-āīt*, *-āūt*.⁸

KAUFMAN’s wording is ambiguous, but I will argue that the accusative is not only the diachronic origin of this adverbial ending, but that *-t* still synchronically marks the accusative case—used adverbially or in its other functions—in Old Aramaic. Something similar was already proposed by JAN-WIM WESSELIUS (1980). He also makes a case for the survival of *-t* as an accusative marker in the non-standard Imperial Aramaic of the Hermopolis Papyri, with remnants in more official Imperial Aramaic,⁹ which I find

⁵ E.g. GZELLA 2011a, p. 578. I write “feminine” in quotation marks when referring to this suffix and its plural counterpart as they may also occur on nouns that are syntactically masculine. Especially the “masculine” and “feminine” plural endings are only weakly correlated with syntactic gender.

⁶ TROPPEL 2002, §45.101.

⁷ FISCHER 1972, §§315–316.

⁸ KAUFMAN 1997, p. 123.

⁹ See the discussion in FOLMER 1995, pp. 252–257.

largely convincing but which lies beyond the scope of this article. Despite these earlier suggestions, the point bears repeating, considering the *communis opinio* that even the oldest stages of Aramaic had no case inflection, at least not demonstrably.¹⁰ WESSELIUS’s argument can be considerably strengthened by incorporating the data from the Tell Fekheriye inscription (discovered in 1979), which he does not use in his 1980 article. I will follow VERMONDO BRUGNATELLI (1991) in identifying **-ā* as the Old Aramaic reflex of the “feminine” plural suffix **-āt-* in most instances, which greatly increases the number of attestations. Without these forms, WESSELIUS does not have enough “feminine” plural forms to bolster his argument for an accusative/non-accusative distinction, while BRUGNATELLI does not explain the forms where **-āt-* retains its *-t*, which I will argue are limited to the accusative. Each of these suggestions thus strengthens the other. In this way, I hope the renewed identification of case inflection in Aramaic may play a role in the ongoing debate over the history of nominal inflection in Semitic.¹¹

This article will consist of two main parts. In the following section, I will analyze the distribution of the “feminine” suffixes in the Old Aramaic inscriptions from Sefire (KAI 222–224) and Tell Fekheriye (KAI 309), which contain all secure examples of these morphemes (excepting personal and place names, which do not necessarily follow ordinary grammatical rules), as well as one word from the highly fragmentary Tell Halaf inscription (KAI 231). Supporting evidence will be adduced from the Bukan inscription (KAI 320) where relevant, although the main argument will not depend on it; since this inscription hails from a somewhat later date than the rest of the Old Aramaic corpus and an area where Aramaic was probably not spoken,¹² it should not be afforded the same weight as the other inscriptions. Primarily basing ourselves on KAI 222–224 and 309, then, we will see that the “feminine” suffix is written as *-t* in syntactic environments where an accusative is expected and as *-h* or zero in environments where a nominative or genitive is expected. The next section argues that **-a* was retained in Proto-Aramaic at

¹⁰ E.g. KAUFMAN 1997, p. 123; SEGERT 2007, p. 126; FALES 2011, p. 567; FOLMER 2011, pp. 136–137; GZELLA 2015, p. 27; STADEL 2020, p. 329. This does not go for Sam’alian, which is generally recognized as retaining case inflection but should probably be seen as a separate language, whether closely related to Aramaic (thus TROPPEL 1993 and, tentatively, NOORLANDER 2012) or forming its own branch within Northwest Semitic (thus PAT-EL/WILSON-WRIGHT 2019 and, with some reservation, HUEHNERGARD 1995). Phoenician also retained traces of case inflection in the first person singular possessive suffix, which is *-y* (representing **-y* or **-ya*) on genitive nouns but **-ī*, spelled defectively, on nominative and accusative nouns (GZELLA 2011b, p. 61). Hence, the identification of case marking in one more Iron Age Northwest Semitic language, Old Aramaic, is perhaps less outlandish than it seems.

¹¹ Cf. AL-JALLAD/VAN PUTTEN 2017; EDZARD/SARTORI/CASSUTO 2018; SUCHARD 2020.

¹² Cf. GZELLA 2015, pp. 91–93.

a time when **-i* and **-u* were lost, explaining the preservation of **-t-* in the accusative, while the conclusion gives an overview of the reconstructed Old Aramaic case system and summarizes its development in the later dialects.

Old Aramaic *-t* as an accusative marker

We will consider the attestations of nouns and adjectives reflecting the “feminine” suffix **(a)t-* in their syntactic context. Derived stem infinitives will be excluded, as it is not entirely clear how they should be reconstructed. Based on comparison with languages that are recognized as maintaining a case distinction, especially Classical Arabic, Akkadian, and Ge‘ez, the syntactic environments where the accusative is expected to occur are as the direct object of a verb, in adverbial usage, and as the complement of the verb “to be.”¹³ The nominative is expected to occur as the subject of a verb and as the subject and predicate of a non-verbal clause. The genitive is expected to occur following prepositions and in construct chains (i. e. following a noun in the construct state).

Singular nouns and adjectives

Two singular nouns occur with *-t*; see Table 1. These are the only singulars without pronominal suffixes to occur in a context where an accusative is expected.

Table 1: Singular nouns in accusative contexts

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
[...] šʾt wʾl thry	“[and let seven rams cover] a ewe , but let it not conceive”	KAI 222A: 21	direct object
Note: context reconstructed based on the following lines.			
[whn t]ʿbd mrmt ʿly	“[and if you] act deceitfully against me” or “[and if you] practice deceit against me”	KAI 224: 22	adverb or direct object

One word ending in *-h* occurs in a context where an accusative is expected: *qtlw mrʾkm whwy ḥlpḥ* “kill (pl.) your lord and be(come) (sg.) **ḤLPH**”

¹³ This is the most frequent context of feminine adjectives ending in *-t* in the Hermopolis Papyri, e. g. *ḥwy šlḥt* “do send (f.sg.),” literally “be sending.” KUTSCHER (1954, p. 236) already cautiously suggested that *-t* marks the accusative here.

(KAI 224: 21–22). If *hlpḥ* is a feminine noun meaning “replacement,” this is an example of *-h* occurring instead of *-t* in an accusative context, since it is the complement of *ḥwy* “to be.” However, the *-h* may simply be the third person masculine singular pronominal suffix: *ḥwy hlp-h* then means “and become his replacement,” which fits the context better.

KAI 320: 9 attests a feminine singular adjective in an accusative context following the verb “to be,” but frustratingly, the letter spelling the feminine suffix is illegible: *wʾrqḥ ḥwy mmlḥ[.]* “and let his land become **salted**.”

The singular nouns and adjectives in Table 2 occur in contexts where a nominative is expected (for the “collective” nouns referring to animals in KAI 222, see the section on the plural):

Table 2: Singular nouns and adjectives in nominative contexts

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
<i>kl mb lḥyb</i>	“all that is bad ”	KAI 222A: 26	non-verbal predicate
<i>wšbʿ šnn tʾkl tʾwlʿḥ</i>	“and for seven years, the worm will eat”	KAI 222A: 27	verbal subject
<i>wʾl tštq ḥdb mn mly sprʾ zn[h]</i>	“and may not one of the words of this document be silent”	KAI 222B: 8	verbal subject
<i>ptḥḥ ly ʾrḥʾ</i>	“let the road be open for me”	KAI 224: 8–9	non-verbal predicate
<i>whn qryb ḥʾ</i>	“and if it is a town ”	KAI 224: 12	non-verbal predicate
<i>zy tšlwth tḥḥ</i>	“whose prayer is good ”	KAI 309: 5	non-verbal predicate
<i>wmʾḥ sʾwn lhynqn ʾmr</i>	“and may one hundred ewes suckle a lamb”	KAI 309: 20	verbal subject
<i>wmʾḥ swr lhynqn ʾgl</i>	“and may one hundred cows suckle a calf”	KAI 309: 20–21	verbal subject
<i>wmʾḥ nšwn lhynqn ʾlym</i>	“and may one hundred women nurse an infant”	KAI 309: 21	verbal subject
<i>wmʾḥ nšwn lʾpn btnwr lḥm</i>	“and may one hundred women bake bread in an oven”	KAI 309: 22	verbal subject

All these words are written with *-h*, as are most of those that occur in contexts where a genitive is expected; see Table 3:

Table 3: Singular nouns in genitive contexts

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
<i>wbm[l š]qb wyllb</i>	“and the sound of outcry and lamentation ”	KAI 222A: 29–30	construct chain
<i>[p]m ḥwb</i>	“the snake’s mouth”	KAI 222A: 30–31	construct chain
<i>wpm dbhb</i>	“and the bee’s(?) mouth”	KAI 222A: 31	construct chain
<i>wpm nmlb</i>	“and the ant’s(?) mouth”	KAI 222A: 31	construct chain
<i>wthwy ṛpd tl l[...] ... wšdb ... wqb</i>	“and let Arpad become a ruin-heap for ... and the owl(?) ... and the magpie(?) ”	KAI 222A: 32–33	prepositional complement
Note: the preceding masculine singulars show that these words are probably also singular and used generically.			
<i>wntn r’y wmsqy lmt kln</i>	“and giver of pasture and drinking to all lands”	KAI 309: 2–3	construct chain
Note: cf. the unambiguous construct chain and genitive case in the Akkadian parallel, <i>na-din ri-i-ti u maš-qi-te</i> . The Aramaic spellings in -y reflect the loss of *-t in the ending *-īt > *-ī.			
<i>wntn šlb w’dqwr l’lhyn klm ḥwb</i>	“and giver of offering-basket(?) ¹⁴ and water-vessel to all the gods, his brothers”	KAI 309: 3–4	construct chain
Note: the meaning is uncertain but the syntax again points towards a construct chain.			

KAI 320 provides the additional examples *blḥmb ṛw bšlm* “in **war** or in peace” (l. 2), where *lḥmb* is a prepositional complement, and *tnn ṛšb wql rḥyn* “the smoke of **fire** and the sound of millstones” (ll. 8–9), where *ṛšb* is the second part of a construct chain.

Plural nouns and adjectives

Grammatical sketches of Aramaic normally give the absolute state ending of the “feminine” plural as *-ān*. This form is well attested for later dialects of Aramaic. For Old Aramaic, however, we find remarkably few attestations

¹⁴ Cf. GROPP/LEWIS 1985, p. 48.

of this ending, if any. Two prime candidates are *nšwn* “women” (KAI 309: 21, 22) and *sʿwn/sʿn* (KAI 309: 20 and KAI 222A: 23) “ewes,” which are syntactically feminine, as their meanings suggest and as is confirmed by the feminine agreement they trigger on their associated verbs (*lhynqn* and *yhy-nqn* “let them [f.] suckle”; *lʿpn* “let them [f.] bake”). Morphologically, however, it is clear that “women” is formed with the “masculine” plural ending; cf. Syriac (abs.) *neššīn* and the construct form *nšy* in KAI 222A: 41 (thrice), as well as the Biblical Hebrew cognate *nāšīm*. While we could thus explain KAI 309’s *nšwn* as reflecting the “feminine” ending **-ān* with a third radical *w* added to the stem,¹⁵ this requires special pleading. More likely, *nšwn* contains the “masculine” ending that is attested for this word in later dialects of Aramaic, in the roughly contemporaneous inscriptions from Sefire, and in closely related Hebrew. The spelling of this ending as *-wn* is remarkable, and we will return to this point in the final section of this paper. Based on the same spelling in *sʿwn*, however, it is also preferable to interpret this word as reflecting the “masculine” plural ending, both in KAI 309 and in its alternative spelling in KAI 222, *šʿn*. If “ewes” was formed with the “masculine” plural, this explains why only this word is spelled with *-n* while the surrounding animal names in KAI 222A: 22–23 are spelled with *-b*, forms which I will presently argue to also reflect plurals.

Syntactically, the forms ending in *-b* (Sefire) or zero (Tell Fekheriye) that we will discuss below are plural: they trigger plural agreement on the associated verbs (e.g. *lhynqn*, *yhy-nqn* “let them [f.] suckle”) and pronouns (*-m*, *-n*). Since they do not contain the textbook “feminine” plural ending **-ān*, scholars have sought to explain them as collectives¹⁶ or even as broken plurals.¹⁷ These suggestions require interpreting them as forms that are completely unattested in Aramaic with a plural or collective meaning and that do not follow any regular processes of word formation in that language, e.g. interpreting *šwrh/swr* “cows” as **θawrā* (attested meaning is “cow,” singular), **θawr* (attested meaning is “bovine,” singular and masculine), or **θūr*, **θuwar*, or **θawar* (otherwise unattested). They also require that the very similar curse formulae in KAI 222A: 21–24 and 309: 18–22 use quite different forms to express the same meanings of “cows” and “ewes,” as well

¹⁵ Thus e.g. GZELLA 2014, pp. 88–89.

¹⁶ E.g. FASSBERG 2007.

¹⁷ LIPIŃSKI 2008; considered but not endorsed by KAUFMAN 1982, pp. 148–149; GROPP/LEWIS 1985, p. 53. BLAU (1972, pp. 57–58) posits yet another alternative: that the numerals from three to ten originally took singular agreement in Semitic. He mainly bases this on the forms like *šbʿ šwrh* attested in KAI 222, however, which makes it partially ad hoc; his other argument is the use of singular reflexes of **miʿat-* “hundred” after these numerals, on which see the conclusion of the present paper.

as unpredictably switching between plurals and collectives or sound and broken plurals.¹⁸

A more plausible suggestion, to my mind, was put forward by VERMONDO BRUGNATELLI (1991). He suggests that these forms reflect the inherited Semitic “feminine” plural ending **-āt-*, which regularly lost its word-final **-t* after a stressed vowel.¹⁹ This would show the broader application of the already recognized loss of **-t* after stressed high vowels (as in **taksīt-* > **taksī* “garment,” cf. Syriac [abs.] *takṣi*; **malVkūt-* > **malVkū* “kingdom,” cf. Biblical Aramaic *malḵū*), diphthongs (as in **bayt-* > **bay* “house,” cf. Old Aramaic *by*), and mid vowels (as in **šalōt-* > **šalō* “prayer,” cf. Syriac [abs.] *šlo*). The loss of word-final **-t* after stressed **ā* also affected the absolute state of “sister,” **’ahāt-* > **’ahā*, frequently attested in the Imperial Aramaic formula *’h w-’hh* “a brother or sister,”²⁰ and probably also the feminine singular demonstrative pronoun **ḏāt-* > **ḏā* (see below). Thus, forms like **ḥawar-āt-*, the expected Northwest Semitic plural form of **ḥawar-at-* “cow,”²¹ developed into forms like **ḥawar-ā*. The final vowel was not written in the orthographically unique Tell Fekheriye inscription, yielding spellings like *swr*,²² while the same form appears in Sefire as *šwrh*. This means that the great majority of “feminine” plural forms in Old Aramaic reflect the inherited **-āt-* ending. The sole remaining example of the innovative Aramaic ending **-ān* is then *[mby]nqn* “nursing women” (KAI 222A: 21). BRUGNATELLI suggests that this word reflects the “masculine” ending as its feminine meaning was already unambiguous, much like Classical Arabic *ḥāmil-* “pregnant” and *murḏi^c-* “nursing,” not **ḥāmil-at-* or **murḏi^c-at-*. This adjective would then have to be vocalized as

¹⁸ Cf. KAUFMAN 1982, pp. 148–149.

¹⁹ Followed by SIMA 2002, pp. 119–120. SIMA’s remark in p. 120 n. 26 that the plural and singular “feminine” endings would still have been contrastive after the loss of **-t* because the singular was unstressed, *contra* BRUGNATELLI, does not seem to be based on any Aramaic evidence but rather reflects an Arabic stress system.

²⁰ Cf. HOFTIJZER/JONGELING 1995 s.v. *’h*. The form *’ht* in Targum Jonathan to Ezek 44:25 adduced by BEYER (1985, p. 97) is exceptional, as is the absolute state *brt* “a daughter” (for normal *brh*) occurring in the same verse. These may be back formations based on the suffixed forms of the paradigm, motivated by a desire to stay close to the Hebrew wording (*’āḥōt*, *bat*) despite the rarity or even obsolescence of the absolute state of these nouns in later Aramaic (cf. NÖLDEKE 1880, § 146).

²¹ On the **a* insertion in the plural stem, now see SUCHARD/GROEN 2021.

²² Since this vowel was presumably stressed (based on evidence from vocalized varieties of Aramaic), this would seem to be a more extreme case of the defective spelling of unstressed word-final vowels identified for Old Aramaic more generally by COOK 1990. In the spelling conventions of KAI 309, long vowels would then appear to be written the same way both word-internally (although plene spelling remained optional there) and word-finally, with *y* and *w* representing /ī/ and /ū/, respectively, and /ā/ remaining unwritten. Defective spelling of even stressed word-final vowels is paralleled in Phoenician, e.g. *bn* for **banō* “he built” (GZELLA 2011b, p. 58).

**mVhayniq-īn* or, more likely, **mVhayniq-ūn* (see below for **-ūn* as the nominative of the “masculine” plural ending). But since this non-agreement of semantically feminine adjectives is not otherwise attested in Northwest Semitic, it seems more likely to me that we are indeed dealing with the “feminine” **-ān* ending. We can understand its occurrence here by positing that it first spread to participles like **mVhayniq-ān* “nursing (f.pl.)” based on their similarity to Imperfect forms like **yVhayniq-ān* “they (f.) nurse” and the analogy of masculine forms like **mVhaqtil-ūn* (nominative masculine plural participle) and **yVhaqtil-ūn* (third person masculine plural Imperfect). The extension of this ending to non-participial nouns and adjectives, which is not yet attested in Old Aramaic, would then have taken place at a later time.

FASSBERG²³ rightly objects that **-āt-* should not have yielded **-ā* in Old Aramaic as it is already attested as *-t*, i. e. **-āt*. As we shall see, however, the distribution of *-t* and *-h/zero* may well be syntactically conditioned. Only two plurals are attested with *-t*; both of them are occurrences of the same adjective, *lḥyt* “bad.” One occurrence, in KAI 222C: 20, is found as *[l]lḥyt* in the editions, i. e. with the preposition **lV-* preceding. Based on a comparison with a parallel phrase in KAI 309, however, I find the restoration of *[l]* unlikely, as a direct object is called for:

Table 4: Parallel warnings against tampering with the text in KAI 309 and 222

KAI 309: 11–12	<i>yld</i>	<i>šmy</i>	<i>mnh</i>	<i>wyšym</i>	<i>šmh</i>
	“he will remove my name from it and put down his name”				
KAI 222C: 18–20	<i>ḥpk</i>	<i>ṭbtʾ</i>		<i>wʾšm</i>	<i>lḥyt</i>
	“I will change the good [words] and put down bad ones”				

The *editio princeps* of KAI 221 and 222²⁴ adduces a number of parallels from Biblical Hebrew (Deut 23:6; Jer 31:13; Amos 5:7, 6:12, 8:10; Ps 30:12), but these are all examples of *hpk* NP *l*-NP for “to change NP to NP,” not of *hpk* NP *wšm* (*l*-)NP, the construction that we find here; as in Aramaic, the verb *šām* is transitive in Hebrew. The photograph and tracing²⁵ do show that there is room for another letter at the beginning of line 20, where the editors have restored *[l]*, but since the letters of line 20 are not precisely aligned with those of line 19, perhaps line 20 started with a slight indentation and no line-initial letter should be restored at all. This leaves us with an accusative context for both attestations of this word; see Table 5:

²³ FASSBERG 2007, p. 432.

²⁴ DUPONT-SOMMER 1958, p. 93.

²⁵ DUPONT-SOMMER 1958, plates xv–xvi.

Table 5: Plural adjectives in accusative contexts

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
<i>ʿhld mn mlwb ʿw ʿhpk tbt ʿw ʿšin lhyt</i>	“I will remove some of his words, or I will change the good ones and put down bad ones ”	KAI 222C: 18–20	direct object
<i>wymll mln lhyt</i>	“and he speaks bad words ”	KAI 224: 2	direct object

The attestations in nominative contexts occur in the curse formulae that we have already discussed; see Table 6:

Table 6: Plural nouns in nominative contexts

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
<i>wšb ʿssyb ybhnqn ʿl</i>	“and seven mares may suckle a foal”	KAI 222A: 22	verbal subject
Note: BRUGNATELLI (1991, p. 173) remarks that the Syriac paradigm of sg. <i>sustā</i> , pl. <i>susyātā</i> supports the interpretation of <i>ssyb</i> as plural.			
<i>[wšb ʿ] šwrh ybhnqn ʿgl</i>	“and seven cows may suckle a calf”	KAI 222A: 22–23	verbal subject
<i>wšb ʿbkth yhkn bšt lhm</i>	unclear ²⁶	KAI 222A: 24	verbal subject
<i>wm ʿh swr lhynqn ʿgl</i>	“and may one hundred cows suckle a calf”	KAI 309: 20–21	verbal subject

²⁶ See BRUGNATELLI 1995 for an overview of suggested readings made up to that point. In combination with the reading of *yhkn* as *yʿpn* suggested by KAUFMAN 1982, pp. 170–172, BRUGNATELLI’s suggestion to connect *bkth* with Eastern Neo-Aramaic *baxta* etc. “woman” yields *wšb ʿbkth yʿpn b** lhm* “and seven women may bake bread in an [oven],” completely parallel to KAI 309: 22’s *wm ʿh nšwn lʿpn btrwr lhm* “and one hundred women may bake bread in an oven” and mostly parallel to KAI 320: 6–7’s *wšb ʿnšn yʿpw btrr ḥd* “and seven women may bake in one oven.” The often-proposed reading as *bnth* “his daughters” takes the *-h* as a pronominal suffix rather than the feminine suffix, but given the generic nature of the preceding curses, a reference to the cursed person’s concrete daughters, who just happen to be seven in number, is unexpected (it is true that the last curse in KAI 309 concerns *ʿnšwh* “his men,” but this forms a clear break with the numerical curses up to that point and can still be seen as a generic curse).

A parallel phrase occurs in KAI 320: 5–6, where the ending is also spelled with *-b*: *wšb' šwrh ybrynqn gl ḥd* “and seven **cows** may suckle one calf,” where *šwrh* is the verbal subject.

Similarly, only forms without *-t* are attested in context where a genitive is expected; see Table 7:

Table 7: Plural nouns in genitive contexts

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
<i>wqdm šmy[n w'rq wqdm mš] lb wm'yinn</i>	“and before Heav[en and Earth and before] Depths and Springs”	KAI 222A: 12	prepositional complement
Note: the parallelism with <i>m'yinn</i> “springs” suggests that <i>mšlb</i> is also plural, although it could also be singular (cf. Biblical Hebrew <i>ma'yānōt</i> [pl.] <i>təḥōm</i> [sg.] “the springs of the Deep” in Gen 7:11, 8:2), which would be spelled the same. ²⁷			
<i>wntn r'y wmšqy lmt kln</i>	“and giver of pasture and drinking to all lands ”	KAI 309: 2–3	prepositional complement
<i>gwgł nbr klm</i>	“irrigation controller of all rivers ”	KAI 309: 4	construct chain
Note: later varieties of Aramaic attest <i>nabrāwātā</i> etc. as the plural, whereas this form is more similar to Biblical Hebrew <i>nəḥārōt</i> and Akkadian <i>nārātu</i> . Despite the “feminine” plural ending, this word is syntactically masculine in Aramaic, as confirmed by the suffixed <i>-m</i> in <i>klm</i> “all of them.”			
<i>m'dn mt kln</i>	“fertilizer of all lands ”	KAI 309: 4–5	construct chain

A possible example with an **-ūt- > *-ū* suffix occurs in *wmn qlqlt' llqtw nšwh š'rn l'klw* “and may his men gather barley from the garbage heaps for **sustenance**” (KAI 309: 22), but *l'klw* can also be analyzed as a jussive, “may they eat,” “to eat.”

The demonstrative pronoun

The feminine singular near demonstrative pronoun is attested several times. We find different forms in the different inscriptions, which suggests that we

²⁷ Based on the “feminine” plural of **mašyan-* attested in both Hebrew and Aramaic, *mšynn* could be taken as an example of the later Aramaic “feminine” absolute plural ending, *-ān*, but both languages also attest a “masculine” plural; **mašyanīm* is thus the more conservative interpretation of this word in KAI 222A: 12.

are dealing with dialectal variants. But the distribution of these forms also matches the syntactic patterns seen above. The form with *-t* occurs in an accusative context; see Table 8:

Table 8: The demonstrative pronoun in an accusative context

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
<i>dmwt'z't'bd</i>	“he made this statue”	KAI 309: 15	direct object

The forms without *-t* occur in both nominative and genitive contexts; see Table 9:

Table 9: The demonstrative pronoun in nominative and genitive contexts

word in context	translation	occurrence	syntactic function
<i>tqd š'wt'z'bš</i>	“ this wax burns in the fire”	KAI 222A: 35, 37	verbal subject
<i>lmsl by bz'</i>	“you will not rule over me in this ”	KAI 224: 9	prepositional complement
<i>zdm</i>	“ this is the image of ...”	KAI 231	non-verbal subject

This pronoun is most easily connected with Classical Arabic *dāt-* and Ge'ez *zāt-ti* < **ḏāt-*, in which case the ' seen in the spellings *z'* and *z't* is a *mater lectionis*. The same kind of variation between zero (as in *z-*) and ' is seen with **lā* “not” (cf. Ugaritic *l*, Classical Arabic *lā*), which is written as *l-* in Old Aramaic but as *l'* from Imperial Aramaic onwards; perhaps we should also compare the Sam'alian spelling of **pa* “so” as both *p-* and *p'*. The spelling of **ḏāt(a)* as *z't* in KAI 309 is then partially morphological, reflecting an analysis as *z'-t*, **ḏāt-t(a)*, since word-internal **ā* is not otherwise spelled in this inscription.²⁸

Summary and discussion

Based on the foregoing examination, the inscriptions from Sefire, Tell Fekheriye, and Tell Halaf attest the following reflexes of the “feminine” suffixes **-(a)t-* (singular) and **-āt-* (plural) and the demonstrative pronoun **ḏāt-*:

²⁸ For an alternative reconstruction of these forms, cf. PAT-EL/WILSON-WRIGHT 2018, pp. 790–791.

Table 10: Reflexes of the “feminine” suffixes in KAI 222–224, 309

	singular *-(a)t-		plural * <i>-āt-</i>		demonstrative * <i>ḏāt-</i>		combined	
	-h/ zero	-t	-h/ zero	-t	z(ʿ)	zʿt	-h/ zero	-t
non-accusative contexts	20	0	8	0	4	0	32	0
accusative contexts	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	5

Despite the limited number of examples, the correlation between an accusative context and the spelling with *-t* is highly statistically significant. FISHER’s exact test, which is designed to work with small samples like this one,²⁹ gives a two-tailed *p* value of less than three in a million. To put it plainly, if the *-h/zero* and *-t* endings alternated freely, it would be too great a coincidence that all the forms in accusative contexts, and no others, just happened to end in *-t*. Still, with only five forms with *-t*, we should address the possibility that some other factor or factors govern(s) their occurrence.

As mentioned above, the form of the demonstrative pronoun corresponds with the corpus in which it appears, so *z(ʿ)* vs. *zʿt* may reflect a dialectal distinction rather than a morphosyntactic one. As for the two plural attestations, they are both of the adjective *lḥyt* “bad,” once in apposition to *mln* “words” and once referring back to *mlwh* “his words.” This has led GZELLA³⁰ to suggest that “evil words” formed a fixed expression where the old plural ending **-āt* was retained. While this is possible, it is hard to substantiate. One may also wonder whether the attested variation in the expression—*mln lḥyt* “evil words” as a collocation vs. just *lḥyt* “evil ones” with ellipsis of *mln* “words”—does not speak against its formulaic nature.

Even if we leave the demonstrative pronoun and the plural forms out of consideration, the singular forms provide strong evidence for the accusative function of *-t*. *Mrrmt* “deceit(fully)” can be analyzed as an adverb, although the retention of *-t* in adverbs must then still be explained, sending us back to square one. *Ṣʿt* “ewe” in KAI 222A: 21, however, must be a direct object. This coincides with the realization of its feminine suffix as *-t*, for which no other plausible explanation has been put forward. DEGEN³¹ suggests that *ṣʿt* (as well as *mrrmt*) may be a “segolized” form, by which he may mean that

²⁹ SPRENT 2011.

³⁰ GZELLA 2014, p. 88, n. 46.

³¹ DEGEN 1969, p. 54, n. 24.

the short allomorph of the feminine suffix, **-t*, occurs here, or an archaism. The suggestion of archaism is unfalsifiable and, frankly, baseless, while the short feminine suffix **-t* following consonants does not normally occur in the absolute state in Aramaic.³² It strains credulity that the attestation of the short suffix or the archaic retention of **-t* was limited to precisely those words which occur in an accusative context. Limiting ourselves to *šʔt* as an unassailable example of *-t* marking a direct object, then, the distribution of twenty *-h/zero* forms in non-accusative contexts vs. one *-t* form in an accusative context is still statistically significant: there is a less than one in twenty chance that this distribution arose by chance ($p < 0.048$). Hence, analyzing *-t* as a marker of the accusative best accounts for the data. The occurrence of *šʔt* “ewe” in an accusative context together with the total absence of *-h/zero* forms in accusative contexts practically demands it, while it also accounts for the final *-t* in *mrmt* “deceit” whether this is a direct object or an adverb, for the *-t* spellings of *lhyt* “bad (f.pl.),” and for the distribution of *z(ʔ)* and *zʔ* “this (f.)” All of these forms with *-t* would otherwise require additional, more or less plausible assumptions: the unexplained retention of **-t* in adverbs, the ad hoc identification of *mln lhyt* as a formulaic phrase despite its attested variability, and, most plausibly, a dialectal distribution of two byforms of the demonstrative pronoun. Having established, then, that the feminine suffix *-t* is most easily explained as an accusative marker, let us now consider how this *-t* came to be preserved in the accusative but was lost in the nominative and genitive.

Split apocope and the retention of *-t*

The absolute case endings of the singular noun and adjective can be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic as nominative **-um*, genitive **-im*, and accusative **-am*, based in particular on the reflexes in Akkadian (*-um*, *-im*, *-am*) and Classical Arabic (*-un*, *-in*, *-an*) and with supporting evidence from languages such as Geʿez, Sabaic, and Ugaritic (as was once again argued at length by AL-JALLAD/VAN PUTTEN 2017). The final **-m* was lost in a precursor of Aramaic, as it is not reflected anywhere (except in the word *pūm* etc. “mouth,” where it was reanalyzed as part of the stem). As the vocalized forms of Aramaic attest, the case vowels **-u*, **-i*, and **-a* that remained after

³² Tellingly, the examples cited by BEYER (1985, pp. 96–97) nearly all concern forms argued by WESSELIUS 1980 to be accusatives; the remaining examples are *ʔrt* “letter,” an Akkadian loanword also discussed by WESSELIUS, and one attestation of *brt* “daughter,” on which see note 19 above.

this loss of **-m* were also lost at some point. Moreover, the spellings of reflexes of the “feminine” suffix **(a)t-* and, as I have argued above, also of the plural **-āt-* as *-h* and zero show that once **-t* had come to be in word-final position, it was lost after stressed vowels at a certain point in time.³³ BRUGNATELLI³⁴ notes that the spelling in KAI 309 of the reflex of **-at* as *h* (e.g. **ṭāb-at- > ṭbh* “good [f. sg.]” l. 5) vs. the reflex of **-āt* as zero (e.g. **māt-āt- > mt*, *ibid.*) suggests that **-at* first shifted to **-ah* before yielding the attested form *-ā*, much as in Arabic (where the classical language has *-ah* in pausa while most spoken varieties as well as Modern Standard Arabic have further reduced this suffix to *-a* and similar forms). As was concisely expressed in the quote from KAUFMAN (1997) cited in the introduction, **-t* would have been preserved in the accusative if these developments took place in the following chronological order:

0. (Loss of **-m*: case endings become **-u*, **-i*, **-a*.)
1. Loss of **-u*, **-i*: e.g. **ḏātu*, **ḏāti*, **ḏāta* becomes **ḏāt*, **ḏāt*, **ḏāta*.
2. Loss of word-final **-t* after stressed vowels, yielding e.g. **ḏā*, **ḏā*, **ḏāta*; **-at > *-ah > *-ā* as in **miʾat > Tell Fekheriye mʾh *miʾah*.
3. Loss of **-a*, yielding e.g. **ḏā*, **ḏā*, **ḏāt*.

The loss of final short vowels, or apocope, would then have taken place in two waves: **-u* and **-i* were lost before the loss of **-t*, while **-a* was lost after it. It makes good phonetic sense for **a* to have been preserved longer, as it is the most sonorous vowel and thus more resistant to shortening and reduction. Compare the syncope of short vowels in Syriac: **u* and **i* were lost before the spirantization of unemphatic plosives, while **a* was only lost after spirantization took place, producing minimal pairs like **garibā > garbā* “leprous” vs. **garabā > *garabā > garbā* “leprosy.”³⁵ Similarly, in Geʿez, the nominative and genitive case endings which had merged in *-ə* were lost word-finally while the accusative ending *-a* was preserved.³⁶ In a parallel development, this split apocope in Proto-Aramaic seems to have yielded a case system much like that of Geʿez, with the singular having no ending in the nominative and genitive and **-a* in the accusative. Interestingly, the case endings on the “feminine” plural are reconstructed as **-um*,

³³ **t* was preserved word-finally after originally unstressed vowels, notably in the third person feminine singular of the Perfect, **qatálat*. Penultimate stress is still reflected in Biblical Aramaic forms like *ʾáméret* “she said” (Dan 5:10), while forms like *nēḫqat* “it went out” (Dan 2:13) and Syriac *qeḫlat* reflect a later stress shift to the ultimate (cf. BIRKELAND 1940, pp. 1–4).

³⁴ BRUGNATELLI 1991, p. 181.

³⁵ RUDOLF/WALTISBERG 2020, p. 25.

³⁶ TROPPEL 2002, §42.42.

*-im, *-im (not *-am; cf. Akkadian -um, -im, -im, Classical Arabic -un, -in, -in). Based on sound laws alone, *-āt- should therefore have lost its *t in all cases. As in Ge‘ez, however, the accusative ending *-a can easily have been extended to the “feminine” plural suffix based on analogy with the singular, with the resulting paradigm of *-āt, *-āt, *-āta yielding the attested Old Aramaic forms, nominative and genitive *-ā vs. accusative *-āt. It is hard to say whether the last development, loss of *-a, had already taken place by the time our texts were written, although the form *gdh* “a kid” (KAI 223A: 2) in an accusative context strongly suggests that it had occurred in the dialect of the Sefire inscriptions: this form then spells the outcome of the development **gadya* > **gady* > **gade* or similar.

So far, we have considered the longer preservation of *-a compared to *-u and *-i as an ad hoc hypothesis: the accusative remained distinct because *-a was retained longer, and we know *-a was retained longer because the accusative remained distinct. But at least two other developments point to the longer preservation of *-a. These are the reflexes of the first person vs. second person masculine singular Perfect endings and the reflexes of contracted triphthongs in III-wy verbs.

Based on forms like Classical Arabic *qatalta*, *qataltu* and with support from forms like Ge‘ez *qatalka*, *qatalku*, the second person masculine singular and first person singular Perfect forms can be reconstructed as **qatalta* and **qataltu*, respectively, for Proto-Central-Semitic. In Biblical Aramaic, the most common form of the second person masculine ending is -tā, as in *yāḏā’tā* “you (m.sg.) knew” (Dan 5:22), *rəšāmā* “you (m.sg.) issued” (Dan 6:13, 14), with what appears to be a secondarily lengthened vowel; such a form could also account for Syriac *qalt*, as even long unstressed vowels were lost in final position in this language.³⁷ Biblical Aramaic also attests a short form -t, however, as in *yəhəbət* “you (m.sg.) have given” (Dan 2:23) and *‘əbədət* “you (m.sg.) have done” (Dan 4:32), which seems to go back directly to the older form of this ending, *-ta, with loss of the word-final short vowel. Thus, **yahabta* > **yahabt* > *yəhəbət* and **abadta* > **‘abadt* > *‘əbədət*. The first person singular ending, on the other hand is -ēt in Biblical Aramaic, as in *‘əbḏēt* “I have made” (Dan 3:15) and -et in Syriac, with similar forms occurring in other dialects. The vowel occurring in this suffix is epenthetic in origin, inserted to break up the word-final consonant cluster: **‘abadtu* > **‘abadt* > **‘abadət* > *‘əbḏēt*. Note the lack of epenthesis in roots where diphthong contraction prevented a cluster from forming, e.g. **hawaytu* > **hawayt* > *hāwēṭ* “I was” (Dan 4:1 et passim) or in suffixed forms like **banaytu*

³⁷ *ā is preserved before suffixes, as in *qaltā-n* “you killed me.”

> **banayt* + *-ah* > *bēnaytah* “I built it” (Dan 4:27). That this epenthesis took place in clusters formed by the loss of **-u* but not in those formed by the loss of **-a* implies that the latter was retained longer:

1. Loss of **-u*: **abadtu* > **abadt* “I made”; **abadta* “you made” unchanged.
2. Epenthesis: **abadt* > **abadət* “I made”; **abadta* “you made” unchanged.
3. Loss of **-a*: **abadət* “I made” now contrasts with **abadta* > **abadt* “you made.”
4. Biblical Aramaic reflexes: **abadət* > *ʿabdēt* “I made”; **abadt* > *ʿabdət* “you made.”

These forms thus also require **-u* to have been lost before **-a*.³⁸

Further support comes from the III-weak verbs, which are to be reconstructed with a consonantal third radical **w* or **y*.³⁹ The contraction of **-aya* to **-ā* that took place in the third person masculine singular Perfect, e.g. **anaya* > **anā* > Biblical Aramaic *ʿanā*, Syriac *ʿnā* “he answered,” must have taken place before the apocope of **-a*. The same contraction takes place in the third person feminine singular: **anayat* > **anāt* > Biblical Aramaic *ʿanāt*, Syriac *ʿnāt*. Note the preservation of **-t* in this form, unlike in the nouns and adjectives with the “feminine” suffix. This different outcome is best explained by positing that the loss of **-t* after a stressed vowel and the shift of **-āt* to **-āh* took place at a time when the triphthongs had not yet contracted and this form was still **anáyat*, which did not qualify for either sound change. Yet we also know that the **-u* and **-i* of the nominative and genitive must have been lost before the “feminine” **-t* suffix was lost in word-final position. These developments can again be represented in a relative chronology as follows:

1. Loss of **-u*, **-i*, e.g. nominative **θawrátu* > **θawrát* “cow,” **θawarātu* > **θawarāt* “cows.”

³⁸ It seems likely to me that the same epenthesis seen in **abadət* “I made” was responsible for the vowel inserted in originally monosyllabic noun stems such as **šalm* > **šaləm* > Biblical Aramaic *šalēm*, Syriac (abs.) *šlem* “statue.” This implies that for a while at least, these nouns contrasted nominative and genitive forms like **šalm* > **šaləm* with accusative forms like **šalma* > **šalm*. One might wonder whether this underlies the variation between forms with Aramaic-style epenthesis like *šalēm* and those with Hebrew-style segolization like *šélem* seen in Biblical Aramaic and other Jewish varieties of Aramaic. If it does, this conditioning has been completely lost in the Biblical Aramaic reading tradition, where forms like *šalēm* may occur in accusative contexts (e.g. Dan 3:1) and forms like *šélem* may occur in non-accusative contexts (e.g. *kol mélek* “any king” in a construct chain in Dan 2:10). For a more detailed discussion of segolization in Biblical Aramaic, see SUCHARD 2019, pp. 56–57.

³⁹ Cf. SUCHARD 2017.

2. $*-t$ shifts to $*-h$ after stressed $*a$ and is lost after other stressed vowels, e.g. nominative $*\theta awr\acute{a}t > *\theta awr\acute{a}h$ “cow,” $*\theta awar\acute{a}t > *\theta awar\acute{a}$ “cows”; $*\acute{a}n\acute{a}yat$ “she answered” unchanged.
3. Contraction of $*-awa-$, $*-aya-$ to $*-\bar{a}-$: $*\acute{a}n\acute{a}yat > *\acute{a}n\acute{a}t$ “she answered,” $*\acute{a}n\acute{a}ya > *\acute{a}n\acute{a}$ “he answered.”
4. Loss of $*-a$, e.g. $*qat\acute{a}la > *qat\acute{a}l$ “he killed,” accusative $*\theta awr\acute{a}ta > *\theta awr\acute{a}t$ “cow,” $*\theta awar\acute{a}ta > *\theta awar\acute{a}t$ “cows”; $*\acute{a}n\acute{a}$ “he answered” unchanged because contraction has already taken place.

Thus, we should reconstruct an earlier Proto-Aramaic apocope of $*-u$ and $*-i$ compared to that of $*-a$ based both on the outcome of the Perfect endings $*-tu$ and $*-ta$ and of the III-weak third person singular endings $*-aya > *-\bar{a}$ and $*-ayat > *-\bar{a}t$. The longer retention of the accusative ending and the preservation of the $*t$ of the “feminine” suffix in accusative contexts both regularly follow from this split apocope.

Hiding in plene sight: The Old Aramaic case system

I have argued that in the Old Aramaic of Sefire, Tell Fekheriye, and possibly Tell Halaf—i.e. in the only Old Aramaic inscriptions which attest reflexes of the “feminine” suffixes $*-(a)t-$ and $*-\bar{a}t$, excluding the supporting evidence from the Bukan inscription—the “feminine” suffix was still actively inflected for case, with $-h$ or zero marking the nominative and genitive and $-t$ marking the accusative. In the Sefire inscriptions at least, the accusative ending $*-a$ appears to have been lost, making it unlikely that singulars that did not end in the “feminine” suffix still inflected for case. The dual is not attested well enough to say anything about case inflection. What about the remaining category, that of the “masculine” plurals?

We have already encountered the forms $nšwn$ “women” and $s'wn$ “ewes” from KAI 309. Both of these nouns refer to biologically female entities and most scholars have accordingly taken their final $-n$ as reflecting the later Aramaic “feminine” plural suffix, $-\bar{a}n$. Their $-w-$ must then be seen as an extra radical that was added in the plural,⁴⁰ familiar from such words as Syriac $h\acute{a}t\acute{a}$ “sister,” pl. $ahw\acute{a}t\acute{a}$ and $nahr\acute{a}$ “river,” pl. $nahr\acute{a}w\acute{a}t\acute{a}$.⁴¹ As was mentioned above, however, this goes against the well-attested fact that the Northwest Semitic word for “women” takes a “masculine” plural ending, as well as complicating the relationship to the forms $s'n$ “ewes” and $nšy$ “wives (construct)” attested in the Sefire inscriptions and $nšn$ “women” attested in

⁴⁰ Thus e.g. GROPP/LEWIS 1985, p. 53; GZELLA 2014, pp. 88–89.

⁴¹ This w is etymological in $ahw\acute{a}t\acute{a}$, cf. WILSON-WRIGHT 2016, but not in $nahr\acute{a}w\acute{a}t\acute{a}$.

the Bukan inscription. The “masculine” plural ending is reconstructed as nominative **-ūna*, genitive and accusative **-īna* (preserved thus in Classical Arabic), and to reiterate, it is not rare at all for feminine nouns to take this “masculine” plural ending; cf. the feminine agreement (*tbt*⁴², *lḥyt*) with morphologically “masculine” *mlwb* “his words” in KAI 222C: 18–20, the use of the feminine numeral *šb*⁴³ “seven” with morphologically “masculine” *šnn* “years” in KAI 222A: 27 (twice or thrice), and many other examples. Given the nominative context of *nšwn* and *sʷwn* and the clear attestation of word-internal plene spelling of high vowels in the Tell Fekheriye inscription (e. g. *wyšym* **wa-yašim* “and he puts,” KAI 309: 12; *btnwr* **bV-tannūr* “in an oven,” l. 22), WESSELIUS⁴², ISRAEL⁴³, and BRUGNATELLI⁴⁴ suggest that *-wn* here simply spells the inherited nominative form of the “masculine” ending, **-ūn(a)*.⁴⁵ This explains the ending without any special pleading and unites the Tell Fekheriye spelling *sʷwn* and the Sefire spelling *šʷn*, which can now both be seen to represent **θVʷūn(a)*. Similarly, the Tell Fekheriye spelling *nšwn* and the Bukan inscription’s *nšn* (KAI 320: 7) then simply represent **nVšūn(a)* “women” in two different ways. The main reason why this solution has not been widely accepted seems to be that Aramaic is not supposed to have case inflection, an idea that is in need of revision based on the evidence from the “feminine” suffix forms. The genitive and accusative ending **-īn(a)* is attested plene in a genitive context in *lʷlḥyn* “to **the gods**” (KAI 309: 4; prepositional complement) and in an accusative context in *wʷlp šʷryn lzr*⁴⁶ “and let him sow one thousand **measures**” (KAI 309: 19; direct object).⁴⁶ The “masculine” plural thus contrasts nominative *-wn* **-ūn(a)* with oblique *-yn* **-īn(a)* in the Tell Fekheriye inscription, a contrast that is obscured by the consistent defective spelling of these endings as *-n* in all other Old Aramaic inscriptions.⁴⁷

Interestingly, the construct state ending of the “masculine” plural does not appear to inflect for case: cf. nominative *llqtw nšwb* “let **his men** gather” (KAI 309: 22), genitive *lʷlḥyn klm ḥwb* “to all the gods, **his brothers**” (KAI 309: 4), and accusative *mrʷy hdd lḥmb wmwḥ l ylqḥ mn ydh* “let my lord

⁴² WESSELIUS 1983, p. 182.

⁴³ ISRAEL 1984, pp. 79–80, non vidi; cited in BRUGNATELLI 1991, p. 175.

⁴⁴ BRUGNATELLI 1991, p. 175.

⁴⁵ HUEHNERGARD (1995, p. 271, n. 24) also considers this possible.

⁴⁶ This last example could also be a genitive, if Old Aramaic used the genitive in all contexts following **ʷalp-* “one thousand,” like Classical Arabic. Arabic would use the singular, however, contrasting with the plural found here.

⁴⁷ This consistent defective spelling persists in Imperial Aramaic despite the increased use of word-internal *matres lectionis*; could this be a conscious compromise between scribes with inflecting dialects, who could thus read *-n* as *-ūn* or *-īn* as they saw fit, and those with non-inflecting dialects, who could read *-īn* throughout?

Hadad not accept his bread and **his water** from his hand” (KAI 309: 17–18). Nor can any evidence for inflection of the construct state ending be seen in the “masculine” singular (no ending) or “feminine” singular or plural (*-t* in all environments). While the emphatic state is relatively poorly attested, it seems likely that it did not inflect for case either, as it is based on the construct state. We may thus reconstruct the Old Aramaic nominal endings of the singular and plural as in Table 11 (I will assume loss of **-a* based on the argument from *gdb* in KAI 223A: 2 given above):

Table 11: The Old Aramaic nominal endings

state, case	“masculine” singular	“feminine” singular	“masculine” plural	“feminine” plural
absolute nominative	zero	<i>*-ab</i> , ⁴⁸ zero	<i>*-ūn</i>	<i>*-ā</i>
absolute genitive	zero	<i>*-ab</i> , ⁴⁸ zero	<i>*-īn</i>	<i>*-ā</i>
absolute accusative	zero	<i>*-at</i> , <i>*-t</i>	<i>*-īn</i>	<i>*-āt</i>
construct	zero	<i>*-at</i> , <i>*-t</i>	<i>*-ay</i> ⁴⁹	<i>*-āt</i>
emphatic	<i>*-a'</i>	<i>*-ata'</i> , <i>*-ta'</i>	<i>*-ayya'</i>	<i>*-āta'</i>

The inflectional system presented in Table 11 does not appear very robust, as many categories are not formally distinct. The collapse of the case system in later Aramaic (with the possible exception of the Hermopolis Papyri) thus does not come as a great surprise; as KAUFMAN⁵⁰ suggests, the increasing use of the emphatic state may also have played a role here. If the suggestion to take *z-*, *z'*, and *z't* as inflected members of the same demonstrative paradigm is accepted, a first indication of the loss of case inflection in the “feminine” comes from one of the Nerab steles, dated to around 700 BCE:⁵¹ *whn tnsr šlm' w'ršt' z'* “and if you guard the statue and **this** sarcophagus” (KAI 225: 11–12), with the non-accusative form *z'* serving as the direct object.

Throughout the paradigm, it was the form with the broadest attestation that was generally preserved. In the “feminine” singular, nominative-genitive **-ab* > **-ā* and zero replaced the accusative ending **-(a)t*. In the “masculine” plural, genitive-accusative **-īn* replaced nominative **-ūn*. The “feminine” plural form that should have won out, nominative-genitive **-ā*, was replaced by innovative **-ān*, probably to restore the contrast with the

⁴⁸ Shifting to later **-ā*, a change which probably already took place in the dialect of Sefire.

⁴⁹ **-aw-* before the third person masculine singular suffix **-bī*.

⁵⁰ KAUFMAN 1997, p. 123.

⁵¹ GZELLA 2015, p. 145.

“feminine” singular ending.⁵² A fossilized retention of plural **-ā* may occur in the counted hundreds like *ʿarbaʿ mǝʿā* “four hundred” (e.g. Targum Onqelos to Gen 23:15), where Hebrew, for instance, uses a plural, as in *ʿarbaʿ mēʾōt*; both of the “hundred” forms could regularly go back to Proto-Northwest-Semitic **miʾāt-*.

During the collapse of the case system, many if not all “masculine” nouns used adverbially in the accusative singular would have been indistinguishable from the nominative-genitive form of the same noun. The formal distinction between the nominative-genitive and the accusative in the “feminine” singular, however, allowed the old accusative to be preserved as a lexicalized adverb. Thus, **mirmāt* “deceit (acc.)” became “deceitfully”; **rahmat* went from “love (acc.)” to “as a favour.”⁵³ Together with the accretion of other suffixes preceding the *-t*, this gave rise to the various adverbializing suffixes attested in later stages of Aramaic such as Biblical Aramaic *-ūt* and Syriac *-ūt*. These adverbs in *-t* thus do not just partially overlap with the Proto-Semitic accusative in function, but constitute its direct continuation, with the oldest Aramaic inscriptions still attesting the intermediate step between ubiquitous case ending and derivational relic.

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⁵² As is widely recognized, the “feminine” plural ending **-ān* was created from the “masculine” nominative plural ending **-ūn* by analogy with the Imperfect third person plural endings m. **-ūn* and f. **-ān* (the latter of which is also analogical), the Perfect third person endings m. **-ū* and f. **-ā*, or both. The retention of the nominal **-ūn* ending and possible absence of nominal **-ān* in Old Aramaic means that this analogy may well have taken place during the language’s documented history, making this another example of a “pan-Aramaic” feature that does not occur in Old Aramaic and is not reconstructible for Proto-Aramaic (cf. HUEHNERGARD 1995, who does, however, express a hunch that this analogy took place “rather early in the history of Aramaic, perhaps even at the Proto-Aramaic stage” on p. 271).

⁵³ Compare the fossilized accusative ending *-a* retained in the spoken Arabic greetings like *marḥab-a* (e.g. HARVEY 1979, p. 23 for Levantine Arabic), where Modern Standard Arabic *marḥab-an* retains the Proto-Arabic form of the accusative ending.

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