Dual Pronouns in Semitics and an Evaluation of the Evidence for their Existence in Biblical Hebrew

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Abstract

In the context of establishing the pronominal dual forms of proto-Semitic, philologists sought for vestiges of such forms in different non-related branches of the Semitic family of languages. This paper starts with an updated reconstruction of the Proto-Semitic's dual pronouns based on all the information at our hands, and consequently examines the evidence proposed in the literature for vestiges of these forms in the biblical consonantal text, especially the most recent support made by Rendsburg. In a list of publications Rendsburg proposed to strengthen this hypothesis by using statistical considerations. This paper will reject his conclusions and will refute his arguments by demonstrating that merely counting examples can be very misleading; either separately counting examples found in the same biblical context with some unique dialectical features falsely increases the number or, far worse, some examples should not even be considered at all since there are other motivations for the use of their peculiar forms.*

Introduction

It is well known that special dual forms or their vestiges are rarely found among the Semitic languages outside of the noun realm. Consequently, one

should ask whether those languages with dual forms in the pronoun and the verbal system reflect the original stage of Proto-Semitic.[1]

Clearly, the more similar dual forms we find in different, non-related branches of the Semitic family of languages, with the ability to reconstruct a pro-Semitic form, the higher the chances that they are a reflection of the original stage. Therefore, adherents of the theory that Proto-Semitic had dual forms in nouns, pronouns, and verbs try to provide evidence that, in fact, more languages had these forms. Thus, we should mention that, besides Classical Arabic, cognate forms are found also in Ugratic,[2] Akkadian,[3] Ebla,[4] Ancient North Arabian[5] and Ancient[6] and Modern South Arabian.[7] In addition, in the larger Afroasiatic realm, Egyptian also had such forms.

This is the context in which our discussion is taking place, and in this paper I wish to examine whether there are forms in Biblical Hebrew that can attest to vestiges of old dual pronouns and verbal forms.

As there is no consensus regarding the proto-forms, and in fact all the updated material about this was not gathered together[8] I will start by taking this task (section 1) and only then will move to the question regarding the evidence from Biblical Hebrew (sections 2–3).

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[1] An answer in the affirmative would necessitate the assumption that these forms were lost later in most of the other languages, (see, for example, Ewald 1870, §180, p. 475; the addition in the 2nd edition of the English translation of Gesenius and Kautzsch 1910, §88g, pp. 246–247 and Beer and Meyer 1952, §43, 2, p. 114) whereas an answer in the negative would entail that those few languages with these forms display a later development generated by the force of different analogies (this was the common idea among most of the earlier Semitic philologists. See *inter alia* Ewald 1827, §178, 3, p. 364 who believed that the dual in general, even in the noun, is a late development in the Semitic languages; Bauer and Leander 1922, §63, p. 513). For a survey of the different opinions, see Fontinoy 1969, pp. 191–192. Another common tool in the literature for this type of discussion is a typological cross-linguistic comparison. In this context it is worth mentioning Renan 1928, pp. 423–425, who argued against the comparison regarding this topic, since each family of languages has a different nature. Although Renan's view and justifications are obviously not accepted today, however, the option of alternative courses of developments should always be kept in mind, as there is nothing that necessitates parallel developments, especially in this type of discussion.

[2] Gordon 1947, 6.6, 6.12, 6.21, 6.22, 6.35 (pp. 25–32); 9.4, 9.11 (pp. 58–64).

[3] Whiting 1972 and 1977; Moran 1973; for the form in Sargonic Akkadian, see Hasselbach 2005, p. 149.

[4] Fronzaroli 1990.

[5] Macdonald 2004, pp. 506–507; However due to lack of vocalization definite evidence can be found only in the Dadanitic dialect.

[6] Beeston 1962, §21:2–3, p. 23; §37: 3–7; §38:1, pp. 46–47, and also Nebes and Stein 2004, pp. 462–464.

[7] Johnstone 1970, p. 511.

[8] Fontinoy 1969, collected most of the material known to us, however, more information has been revealed since then.

1. Vestiges of Independent and Suffix Pronouns in the Different Semitic Languages and a Reconstruction of the Proto-Semitic Forms

Before surveying the data we should note that only Ugaritic and some modern dialects of south Arabian have dual pronouns for 1st common dual,[9] and there is a general consensus among scholars that this is probably a later innovation.[10] In addition in all the Semitic languages, dual pronouns are not marked in terms of gender.[11] Let us begin then by collecting the data we have on the dual pronouns:

See tabel next page

Based on this information, it is plausible to assume the following paradigm for the pronouns of Proto-Semitic:

	Nominative Independent	Gen (-acc)
2mp	*ʔantum[±ū]*	*-kumū*
2fp	*ʔantin[±ā/n ̆ā]*	*-kinā*
2cd	*ʔantumā*	*-kumī *or –kumay*
3mp	*sum[±ū]*	*-sumū*
3fp	*sin[±ā/n ̆ā]*	*-sinā*
3cd	*sumā*	*-sumī *or –sumay*

* This is an exclusive "or".

The plural forms are based on what is accepted in the comparative Semitic literature.[12] Following the evidence from all the different languages it is clear that the dual forms and the masculine plural forms constitute a minimal pair either with a distinction in the existence or absence of a final vowel or in its quality. But, what was the quality of the final vowel of the dual form? In Arabic the final vowel is clearly /ā/, and the forms in Ugaritic and in most of the dialects of Ancient North Arabian [=ANA],[13] and in

[9] Regarding these forms, see Appleyard 1996, n. 8. It is possible that there is evidence for such forms in Ebla as well, see Fronzaroli 1990, pp. 119–120, 123–123.

[10] Wagner 1952, p. 232. It should be noted that from a typological point of view this distribution is less regular as Siewierska 2004, pp. 95–96 noted that more often languages have dual forms only for the 1st person, and not in the "Semitic" distribution.

[11] This is another aspect in which the Semitic languages behave in a non-typical way. Since cross-linguistically gender distinction is marked in the restricted number category. See, Siewierska 2004, pp. 107–110.

[12] For a full account, see *inter alia* Huehnergard 2002, pp. 56–67.

[13] As Macdonald 2004, p. 507 noted, it is impossible to confirm whether the forms –*hm* represent the pronoun –*humā* in Arabic, or a syncretism with the plural masculine pronoun.

	Ancient North Arabian			Classical Arabic		Ugaritic	South Arabian — Modern		South Arabian — Ancient				Ebla	Akkadian
	Safaitic	Dadanitic	Thamudic B				Mehri	Soqotri	Hadramatic	Qatabanian	Minaean	Sabaean		Babylonian / Sargonic Akk.
	Suff.	Suff.	Suff.	Indp.	Suff.	Suffixes	Suffixes			Indp.	Suff.	Indp.		Indp. Nom. — Suffixes Gen.
3rd cd	-hm	-hmy / -hm	ʔ-hm	humā	- humā	-hm	həyli	yhi	-smn yhi / -smyn	-smy	-smn	-hmy (ind. hmy)	-su-ma	šunī(ti) — -šunī; Acc -šunīšim — Dat -šunī(ti); Sarg. Akk.
2nd cd	-km			ʾantumā	-kumā	-km	ʃɛyli	ty	ty				-gu-ma-a[n]	sunēti or sunīti / kunī
1st cd						-ny	əkəyli	ki	ki				-na-a (ne-a)	

Ebla[14] are compatible with such reconstructions as well. In Ancient South Arabian [=ASA] and in one of the dialect of ANA we have the letter Y and in Akkadian it ends with a vowel, either /ī/ or /ē/ (as the sign NI can be read as either *ni* or *ne*). In the Modern South Arabian dialects (which are not the decedents of the ancient dialects!) we find both variations. Thus, we should start by addressing the question of what the forms in ASA, NSA and Akkadian represent.

In fact for all these languages it is possible to consider the two options: either an original *ī or an original diphthong *ay for the following reasons. Regarding Akkadian it is a phonological consideration since an /ī/ in Akkadian can reflect both options.[15] Concerning ASA it is an orthographic question since it is not clear as to how the letter Y should be read, as a consonant or as a vowel;[16] and similarly concerning ANA.[17] Therefore it seems impossible to conclude with the information at our hands between the two options, and this is the reason for leaving both options in the above chart.

Following Hetzron's principle of "archaic heterogeneity", I assume that the fact that we get different group of evidence in the various languages indicates that probably the final vowel of the independent pronoun and that of the genitive suffixes were not the same,[18] and therefore I suggest that the nominative pronoun had /u/ and the genitive had either /i/ or /ay/. In fact, nothing prevents us from suggesting the opposite distribution, as there is no language that 'kept' this proposed distinction. One positive reason reconstruct an /ā/ as the final vowel for the nominative is the fact that in the independent nominative 3rd person pronouns of the other number the final

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[14] See Fronzaroli 1990, who suggested that the final *a-a* can in fact indicate a final diphthong.

[15] Regarding Akkadian, Whiting 1972, p. 32 n. 11, following the assumption that it was originally *ay, suggests that in Assyrian the form would be: *šunēti*, but he does not have evidence for this; Hasselbach 2005, p. 149, n. 8, argues similarly that the dual form in Sargonic Akkadian *su₄-ni-tu* should be normalised as /*sunēti*/. Her normalization relies on the assumption that the original form had a final diphthong *ay, but since the sign NI itself can be read as both /ni/ or /ne/, (as Hasselbach 2005, p. 106, herself noted) the facts are not conclusive in favor of one of the options.

[16] This is a long debate whether the letter Y should always be read as a consonant (Höfner 1943, §4: 10), or whether it may serves as *mater lectionis* (Leslau 1949, p. 98), and see also Nebes and Stein 2004, pp. 458–459). In fact it should be mentioned that Robin 2001, pp. 552–556, suggested evidence that a Y in these dialects can represent a long /a:/ as well. However Michael Macdonald has informed me (p.c) that this hypothesis has not received general acceptance.

[17] Macdonals 2004, p. 495. Dadanitic is the only dialect in ANA that shows some indication of *mater lectionis*. However, so far the evidence for the use of Y as an /i/ vowel are not definite see Drewes 1985, pp. 167–170) and in fact the results of the current discussion are crucial for this question.

[18] See also Tropper 2000, p. 228.

vowel is similar to the vowel of the verbal suffix conjugation (which originally was a suffix nominative pronoun), and in the languages with attestations of the final vowel of the dual form of the 3rd person in the suffix conjugation, this vowel is always /ā/.

If this is the case, Professor John Huehnergard (p.c.)[19] believes that there is an advantage to assume that the original ending for the oblique pronoun was *ay, as in this case there will be a parallel between the case-endings of the nouns and the pronouns [/ā/ for nominative and /ay/ for the oblique case]. In addition it should be mentioned that the dual pronouns in Earlier Egyptian are ended with *J*, which probably indicates the consonant /y/.

Returning to the question that was posed at the beginning of this paper, I believe that the ability to reconstruct such forms based on forms from different branches of the Semitic family of languages strengthens the opinion that indeed there were proto-Semitic forms of the grammatical category of dual pronouns. If indeed these forms reflect the proto-Semitic distribution, it should be highlighted, for the purpose of our next discussion, that the difference between the dual and the plural forms are mostly marked by the vowels (quality or existence). As we will see, this is a crucial fact for the next discussion about the evidence for these forms in Biblical Hebrew.

2. Is there Evidence for these Forms in Biblical Hebrew?

The simple answer to this question is clearly negative. However, one should consider the option that these forms existed in Biblical Hebrew, but were not represented in the *Masoraic* vocalisation.[20] This can be expected in our case, since as we learned in the previous discussion in many of the forms the dual and the plural masculine forms were a minimal pair with a single distinction in the final vowel, and, in turn, if this distinction was still kept in Biblical Hebrew then this vowel in some forms should have been later apocopated, and consequently the distinction between the forms has been lost. In light of this possible syncretism, there was no way to distinguish later between the plural masculine forms and the dual forms. Therefore, it might be the case that forms that seem to be plural were originally dual. Clearly, the best support for this suggestion would be examples in which the difference should have been preserved, and only subsequently to explain the other forms by the above explanation.

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[19] See also Huehnergard 2004, p. 150.
[20] Ginsberg 1934 is a classical work on how the consonantal text of the bible preserves earlier stage of the language.

Since 1952 the idea that vestiges of these forms are attested in the Bible has been repeatedly suggested, often first accepted, and in most cases later rejected.[21] The proposal is that in the early stage in the case of feminine forms the original distinction between the plural and the dual forms was not merely vocalic, but also indicated by the consonants (/n/ for plural and /m/ for the dual,) and that these are the forms often found in the Bible. Accordingly in numerous biblical occurrences when there are pairs of feminine nouns in the text and there is a lack of agreement — a feminine plural nominal antecedent is co-indexed with a masculine pronoun referring to it or a feminine plural subject has a masculine verb — these should not be regarded as plural with lack of agreement, but rather as representations of the older dual forms agreeing with their dual antecedent.

For examples in Genesis 31:9 we find such forms when Jacob is speaking with his two wives, Lea and Rachel:

”וַיַּצֵּל אֱלֹהִים אֶת־מִקְנֵה אֲבִיכֶם וַיִּתֶּן־לִי“

"So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me."

In this context we encounter **אֲבִיכֶם** instead of the expected grammatical form **אֲבִיכֶן**.

Similar forms can be found in many places through the Bible *inter alia*:

”וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה: ׳זַעֲקַת **סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה** כִּי רָבָּה, **וְחַטָּאתָם** כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד׳ “

"Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous" (Gen 18:20).

As cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, are referred to as feminine, and, therefore, the plural suffix pronoun at the end of **וְחַטָּאתָם** is explained, accordingly, by the fact that these are a pair of cities.

”וַיְהִי, כִּי־יָרְאוּ **הַמְיַלְּדֹת** אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים, וַיַּעַשׂ **לָהֶם** בָּתִּים“

"And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own" (Ex 1:21)

In Exodus 1:15 we are introduced to these two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah, thereby explaining the use of the masculine pronoun **לָהֶם**.

”הִנֵּה **בִתִּי הַבְּתוּלָה** וּפִילַגְשֵׁהוּ, אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא אוֹתָם וְעַנּוּ אוֹתָם, וַעֲשׂוּ **לָהֶם**, הַטּוֹב **בְּעֵינֵיכֶם**“

21 Couprie 1952, p. 153; Christian 1953, p. 40, explained the ending ימו in biblical Hebrew as a dual pronoun; Campbell 1975, p. 65; Fontinoy 1969, pp. 59–60 Cohen 1982.

Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish." (Judges 19:24)

In this example the two characters of the story, the virgin daughter and the concubine, are taken to be the reason for the pronouns אוֹתָם and לָהֶם.

וְעַתָּה, קְחוּ וַעֲשׂוּ עֲגָלָה חֲדָשָׁה אֶחָת, וּשְׁתֵּי פָרוֹת עָלוֹת, אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָלָה עֲלֵיהֶם עֹל, וַאֲסַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַפָּרוֹת בָּעֲגָלָה, וַהֲשֵׁיבֹתֶם בְּנֵיהֶם מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם הַבָּיְתָה"

"Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up" (I Sam 6:7)

The suffix pronouns in עֲלֵיהֶם, בְּנֵיהֶם and מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם refer back to the pair of cows mentioned earlier.

According to this proposal, all of these examples are not cases of a lack of agreement, as assumed in the literature, but, in fact, are preservations of original forms lost elsewhere in the Bible. This might be a crucial question for Biblical scholarship — as it might be a significant tool for the dating of the certain texts. If we assume that a lack of agreement reflects a later stage (a problematic assumption by itself), then it becomes crucial to determine whether these are distorted forms, or rather vestiges of old dual forms, in which case they may even be an indication of an earlier date of the writing of the text.[22]

More recently this suggestion has been developed by Rendsburg in several papers,[23] but despite its appeal, as it will become clear, there are a few methodological problems with this theory.

First, aforementioned forms appear next to other forms in which the alleged dual forms do not occur.[24] For example, we encounter next to the example from Genesis 31:9 the following regular feminine forms:

"וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן: ׳רֹאֶה אָנֹכִי אֶת־פְּנֵי אֲבִיכֶן כִּי אֵינֶנּוּ אֵלַי כִּתְמֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם וֵאלֹהֵי אָבִי הָיָה עִמָּדִי וְאַתֵּנָה יְדַעְתֶּן כִּי בְּכָל־כֹּחִי עָבַדְתִּי אֶת־אֲבִיכֶן וַאֲבִיכֶן הֵתֶל בִּי וְהֶחֱלִף אֶת־מַשְׂכֻּרְתִּי עֲשֶׂרֶת מֹנִים וְלֹא נְתָנוֹ אֱלֹהִים לְהָרַע עִמָּדִי"

"He said to them, 'I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me' " (Gen 31:5–7).

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[22] See, for example, the discussion in Campbell 1975, pp. 23–26
[23] Rendsburg 1980, 1982 and 2001.
[24] For a similar criticism, see Bush 1996, pp. 75–76.

Similarly in Zechariah 5:9–10 we find the alleged dual forms:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הַמַּלְאָךְ ...״וָאֶשָּׂא עֵינַי וָאֵרֶא וְהִנֵּה שְׁתַּיִם נָשִׁים יוֹצְאוֹת וְרוּחַ בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם
הַדֹּבֵר בִּי אָנָה הֵמָּה מוֹלִכוֹת אֶת־הָאֵיפָה״

"Then I looked up—and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings... "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me" (Zec 5:9–10).

But these are placed next to the expected fenimine independent pronoun:

״וְלָהֵנָּה כְנָפַיִם כְּכַנְפֵי הַחֲסִידָה״

"They had wings like those of a stork" (Zec 9)

However, this criticism can easily be dismissed by arguing that the so-called "regular forms" are results of a later change. This later amendments would have involved the text being 'mistakenly' corrected according to the regular paradigms, which probably had become the accepted grammatical forms at the time of the alleged change.

A second, stronger counter-argument is that these forms also occur with feminine plural forms in cases that are clearly not dual. Based on this juxtaposition of forms, the case has been made that these are examples of a different phenomenon: the tendency for a leveling of forms in the paradigm, creating a syncretism in 3rd plural forms. Thus, instead of having the expected feminine forms, the masculine forms were used.[25] For example, we encounter masculine plural pronoun forms in the case of the five daughters of Zelophehad:

״כֵּן, בְּנוֹת צְלָפְחָד דֹּבְרֹת נָתֹן תִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֲחֻזַּת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אֲחֵי אֲבִיהֶם וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ אֶת־
נַחֲלַת אֲבִיהֶן לָהֶן״

"What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and turn their father's inheritance over to them" (Num 27:7)

Rendsburg admits that such a phenomenon is relatively common in the Bible, as it is in many other Semitic languages, but in his mind it represents the colloquial language. Therefore, in a response to this criticism,[26] he emphasises the distinction between two groups of forms, which are suspected of lack of agreement:

[25] This is the major criticism of Blau 1988 against Rendsburg's proposal.
[26] Rendsburg 2001.

A) Those cases in which the feminine antecedents and subjects are plural. In this case we are dealing with gender neutralization, a feature of colloquial Hebrew (and of colloquial varieties of other Semitic languages as well, most notably Arabic);

B) Those cases in which the feminine antecedents and subjects are dual. In this case we have evidence for a vestigial usage of dual pronouns and verbs in ancient Hebrew.[27]

Following this division, the question remains as to how it can be proven that group B should be treated independently of group A, and not, in fact, just a random sub-group of A?

Rendsburg makes his claim based on the use of statistical tools. According to him, there are 52 instances of situation 'B' versus either 91 or 110 instances of situation 'A'. This is an approximate ratio of 2:1. Compared to this, the ratio between the instances of feminine plural common nouns and the instances of feminine dual common nouns is 4:1.[28] Thus, the gap between the two ratios indicates that the high number of the total instances of group 'B' must be a result of another cause, and not merely as a sub-group of group 'A'. Consequently, Rendsburg claims that by using such a mathematical tool his theory is based on strong probability and garners scientific legitimacy.

In the following section I will demonstrate how such a tool can be misleading, In doing so, I intend to give a general warning to philologists regarding the efficacy of counting examples and using them for simple calculation in statistical analysis.

3. Evaluating the Evidence

Among the instances of group 'B' a significant number are from Exodus chapters 28–30, Ruth 1, and the book of Ezekiel. I would like to demonstrate that a careful examination will indicate that there are peculiar phenomena in each of these contexts which necessitate the appearance of the apparent masculine forms without actually indicating the early existence of dual pronouns and verbs.

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[27] Rendsburg 2001, p. 29.
[28] See Rendsburg pp. 33–35 for a more accurate account of the calculation of the exact ratio.

Exodus chapters 28–30

In this unit we find numerous examples with feminine dual antecedents co-indexed by masculine plural pronouns. It should be mentioned that these examples stand at the heart of some discussions regarding the date of the Priestly source:[29]

‏"וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־שְׁתֵּי אַבְנֵי־שֹׁהַם וּפִתַּחְתָּ **עֲלֵיהֶם** שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל"

"Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel" (28:9)

‏"מַעֲשֵׂה חָרַשׁ אֶבֶן פִּתּוּחֵי חֹתָם תְּפַתַּח אֶת־שְׁתֵּי **הָאֲבָנִים** עַל־שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְסַבֹּת מִשְׁבְּצוֹת זָהָב תַּעֲשֶׂה **אֹתָם**"

"Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount them in gold filigree settings" (28:11)

‏"וְעָשִׂיתָ **שְׁתֵּי** טַבְּעוֹת זָהָב וְשַׂמְתָּ **אֹתָם** עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן"

"Make two gold rings and attach them to the other two corners of the breastpiece" (28:26)

‏"וְעָשִׂיתָ **שְׁתֵּי** טַבְּעוֹת זָהָב וְנָתַתָּה **אֹתָם**"

"Make two more gold rings and attach them" (28:27)

At first glance, these examples seem to be a strong support for Rendsburg's theory. However, a careful reading of the larger context will indicate that this is a very weak endorsement for the theory. In fact in chapters 25–30 of Exodus there is not even a single example of the object marker with the 3rd feminine plural suffix pronoun. It should be noted that these chapters are a discrete textual unit which contains the instructions of how to build the tabernacle. In this unit the pronoun **אֹתָם** is always used even for feminine objects that number more than two, as it can be seen in the following examples:

‏"וְעָשִׂיתָ קְּעָרֹתָיו וְכַפֹּתָיו וּקְשׂוֹתָיו וּמְנַקִּיֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר יֻסַּךְ **בָּהֵן** זָהָב טָהוֹר תַּעֲשֶׂה **אֹתָם**"

"And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings" (Ex 25:29).

‏"וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן תַּעֲשֶׂה **עֶשֶׂר יְרִיעֹת** שֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתֹלַעַת שָׁנִי כְּרֻבִים מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֵׁב, תַּעֲשֶׂה **אֹתָם**"

"Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman" (Ex 26:1).

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[29] See Rensburg 1980; 2001, pp. 35–39; Blenkinsopp 1996.

Feminine plural pronouns appear only three times when a full variation of the pronoun appears, *i.e.* when it contains the original consonant /h/, and after certain prepositions:

"וְעָשִׂיתָ קְּעָרֹתָיו וְכַפֹּתָיו וּקְשׂוֹתָיו וּמְנַקִּיֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר יֻסַּךְ **בָּהֵן** זָהָב טָהוֹר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם"

"And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings" (25:29).

"וְאֵת שְׁתֵּי הַכְּלָיֹת וְאֶת־הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר **עֲלֵיהֶן**"

"both kidneys with the fat on them" (29:13, 22).

Needless to say, that in two out of the three examples the antecedent is actually dual. This careful reading reveals that we should not count all these examples as a clear indication of the use of dual pronouns. It is clear that in the dialect reflected in this source the option of the "אותן" combination was not available, either in the plural or in the dual forms and according to the evidence in these chapters was not always used with other prepositions as well.

Ruth 1

A stronger evidence for Rendsburg would have been if he had found a source in which there are both plural feminine entities and pairs of entities and that the lack of the regular "grammatical" agreement is found only when the dual forms are expected. In fact it could be suggested that this is the case in the book of Ruth,[30] in which, on the one hand, there are many instances of a lack of agreement when the antecedent is a couple of women and, on the other hand, none when the antecedent is plural with more than two members:

יְהוָה **עִמָּכֶם** חֶסֶד כַּאֲשֶׁר **עֲשִׂיתֶם** עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי יִתֵּן יְהוָה **לָכֶם** (יַעַשׂ) "יעשה
וּמְצֶאןָ מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁהּ"

"May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband (1: 8–9)"

In this context, Naomi is speaking with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, and using the masculine pronouns in the forms: **עִמָּכֶם** and **לָכֶם**, and in the verbal form: **עֲשִׂיתֶם**.

In another context, when Boaz speaks with Ruth he uses feminine forms when he is referring to the servant girls in general:

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[30] See, for example, Tropper 1992, pp. 206–207.

״הֲלוֹא שָׁמַעַתְּ בִּתִּי אַל־תֵּלְכִי לִלְקֹט בְּשָׂדֶה אַחֵר וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבוּרִי מִזֶּה וְכֹה תִדְבָּקִין
עִם־נַעֲרֹתָי עֵינַיִךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־יִקְצֹרוּן וְהָלַכְתְּ **אַחֲרֵיהֶן** הֲלוֹא צִוִּיתִי אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים
לְבִלְתִּי נָגְעֵךְ״

″My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't
go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where
the men are harvesting, and follow along after them. I have told the men not
to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the
water jars the men have filled.″ (2: 8–9)

Although there are not examples of plural feminine nouns (with more
than two members) with masculine agreement, there are still examples of
dual antecedents with regular feminine pronouns.[31] While Rendsburg
might take these examples as exceptions, a careful reading will indicate that
in fact all of these examples can be explained in a different way, ruling them
out as cases of dual pronouns and verbal forms.

In another paper,[32] I demonstrated that in the book of Ruth the language
spoken by the women is marked with the use of a phonological phenom-
enon.[33] According to this suggestion, in all the verbal forms and pronouns
that end with one of the nasal consonants /m/ or /n/, the original /m/ is
represented with the letter נ and the original /n/ with מ. Presumably this
was chosen as a spoken language marker, since in this dialect there was a
neutralization of the difference between the two consonants in the final
position. This phenomenon is well known from a later stage of Hebrew, *i.e.*
Mishnaic Hebrew.

Following this explanation, it becomes clear why the lack of agreement is
found only in forms that end with final /n/ and not with other forms, and
it demonstrates a clear distribution between the 'grammatical' and the 'non-
grammatical' forms. The grammatical forms appear in the narrative part of
the text, while the non-grammatical forms occur only in the direct speech.
In addition, this proposal explains the fact that we find next to this lack of
agreement a different one in the opposite direction, in which feminine
forms appear with masculine antecedents:

״כִּי אָמַרְתִּי יֶשׁ־לִי תִקְוָה גַּם הָיִיתִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם יָלַדְתִּי בָנִים **הֲלָהֵן** תְּשַׂבֵּרְנָה עַד
אֲשֶׁר יִגְדָּלוּ **הֲלָהֵן** תֵּעָגֵנָה לְבִלְתִּי הֱיוֹת לְאִישׁ״

"Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband to-
night and then gave birth to sons- would you wait until they grew up?
Would you remain unmarried for them? " (1:12–13)

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[31] See, for example, two instances in 1, 9.
[32] Bar-Asher 2008.
[33] After the publication of Bar-Asher (2008), Jamison (2008) demonstrated a similar phe-
nomenon in the hymns of the Rig Veda in Sanskrit.

The two instances of the feminine pronoun לְהֶן are clearly referring to the potential sons. In that paper I suggest another example of a similar phenomenon in the book of Ruth, and mentioned similar examples in other biblical books.

If I am right in my proposal, all the examples from the book of Ruth should not be counted in Rendsburg's statistical calculation, as they are clearly evidence for another linguistic phenomenon.

Ezekiel

Finally, the book of Ezekiel exhibits similarities to what has been noted earlier regarding Exodus 25–30. There are four examples of alleged dual forms from chapter 13, and, as Rendsburg himself indicates, in Ezekiel 1–26 there are many examples of a lack of agreement among the feminine forms. These examples probably attest to either the underlying dialect of the text, to the writing style of its author, and/or to a certain stage of the book's transition.

By carefully examining the examples in their larger contexts, it becomes obvious that merely counting examples and using their number for a statistic calculation can lead to misleading results. Many of these examples just happen to be instances of dual entities in contexts in which, for different reasons, the standard Biblical Hebrew grammar's rules of agreement were not kept. This is due in part to the general syncretism of the masculine and feminine forms, and in part to the choice of a phonological form to mark the spoken language. It, therefore, is only coincidental that most of the female characters in these contexts appeared in pairs.

4. Conclusions

After suggesting an updated reconstruction for the dual pronouns of Proto-Semitic, I examined the suggestion that vestiges of dual verbal forms and pronouns are evident in the biblical text, and especially the recent arguments made by Rendsburg for supporting this hypothesis. I concluded that it is based on very weak evidence. As noted by Blau, all the examples which Rendsburg considered to be proofs for his theory can be taken as instances of the general phenomenon of syncretism between the 3rd plural feminine and masculine forms, a common phenomenon cross linguistically and particularly in Biblical Hebrew. In responding to Blau's criticism Rendsburg argued that statistical analysis strengthened his hypothesis. This paper,

therefore, is a response to Rendsburg's response. I have attempted to demonstrate that merely counting examples can be very misleading; either separately counting examples found in the same biblical context falsely increases the number or, far worse, some examples should not even be considered at all since there are other motivations for the use of their peculiar forms.

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