

**THE CASE AGAINST THE ALLEGED  
AKKADIAN PLURAL MORPHEME -ĀNŪ**

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On the basis of distributional and derivational considerations  
it is argued that the Akkadian infix-in- is used exclusively as  
a denominal affirmative, and never as a morpheme of the plural.

Current grammatical literature presents as an established fact that Akkadian has a special plural morpheme in -ānū (or -ānu)--thus, for instance, the standard reference work on Akkadian grammar by Von Soden<sup>1</sup>, Lancellotti<sup>2</sup>, Ungnad and Matouš<sup>3</sup>, Riemschneider<sup>4</sup>, Castellino<sup>5</sup>; thus also the linguistic essays by Gelb<sup>6</sup> and Reiner<sup>7</sup>; thus, finally, the textbooks on comparative Semitics such as Moscati's<sup>8</sup> or Diakonoff's.<sup>9</sup> The basic research on this morphological feature of Akkadian remains Goetze's article of 1946, where the thesis was argued that this plural morpheme of Akkadian has an individualizing value.<sup>10</sup>

The thesis I am advancing here is that the value of the infix has to be understood purely in terms of noun formation, not of number morphology.<sup>11</sup> The reasoning will be along two lines, distributional and derivational.

<sup>1</sup>W. Von Soden, *Grundriss der Akkadischen Grammatik*, Rome 1952, §61i; Id., *Ergänzungsheft zum Grundriss der Akkadischen Grammatik*, Rome 1969, §61i.

<sup>2</sup>A. Lancellotti, *Grammatica della lingua accadica*, Jerusalem 1962, §43e.

<sup>3</sup>A. Ungnad and L. Matouš, *Grammatik des Akkadischen*, München 1964, §38e.

<sup>4</sup>K. K. Riemschneider, *Lehrbuch der Akkadischen*, Leipzig 1969, 510.8.

<sup>5</sup>G. R. Castellino, *Grammatica accadica introduttiva*, Rome 1970, 540.

<sup>6</sup>J. Gelb, *Morphology of Akkadian* (multilith), Chicago 1952, p. 14 f.; Id., Review of Von Soden, *Grundriss* (quoted), in *BO* 12 (1955) p. 107; Id., *Sequential Reconstruction of Proto-Akkadian*, Chicago 1969, 57.3 (2), p. 168.

<sup>7</sup>E. Reiner, *A Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian*, The Hague 1966, pp. 61-63; 65.

<sup>8</sup>S. Moscati, (ed.), *An introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*, Wiesbaden 1964, pp. 88 and 91; cf. also Id., "Il plurale esterno maschile nelle lingue semitiche," *RSO* 29 (1954) 28-52, esp. pp. 29f., 31-36, 51f.

<sup>9</sup>I. M. Diakonoff, *Semito-Hamitic Languages*, Moscow 1965, p. 63 f

<sup>10</sup>A. Goetze, "The Akkadian Masculine Plural in -ānū/ī and Its Semitic Background," *Language* 22 (1946) pp. 121-30.

<sup>11</sup>Some of the studies mentioned above had already suggested a connection between the derivational infix and the (alleged) number infix--but they spoke precisely in terms of a connection between two *distinct* features, thereby recognizing an independent status for the (alleged) number infix. See especially, Goetze, "Plural," pp. 120-30, *Morphology*, p. 14; Diakonoff, *Languages*, p. 63.

I. The grammars listed above agree in accepting, next to the plural in *-ānū*, the existence of a denominal affirmative *-ān-*, as in *šarrāq-ān-um* "the particular thief."<sup>12</sup> I too consider this an established fact--and will come back later to a discussion of its particular semantic function. First, another point should be raised. If we assume, as current grammatical thinking suggests, that there are two distinct uses of the infix, one as denominal affirmative, the other as a number infix, then we are faced with a distributional pattern which is peculiar on two grounds. First, we find no attestation of a plural in *-ānū* from nouns which already include the affirmative *-ān-*. Second, we find *two* possible slots for the plural *-ānū*: in one case, *-ānū* can be understood as a single plural morpheme attached to a simple base; in the other, *-ānū* can be understood as consisting of the plural morpheme *-ū* attached to a base with the denominal affirmative *-ān-*. In tabular form, this situation may be represented as follows:

	SINGULAR	PLURAL IN <i>-ū</i>	PLURAL IN <i>-ĀNŪ</i>
A.	<i>il-um</i> <i>il-an-um</i> <sup>13</sup>	2-ii <i>il-ān-ū</i>	<i>il-ānū</i> * <i>il-ān-ānū</i>

There seems to be a needless redundancy in such a system, and the obvious question which arises is whether the two forms *il-ān-ū* and *il-ānū* are truly distinct homonyms or whether they are not rather one and the same form, namely *il-ān-ū*. The second alternative would seem more sensible and more economical, on distributional grounds. Derivational considerations, to be adduced below, are also in support of the second alternative. Before proceeding, however, to that aspect of the research, it may be well to point to a fact which helps to explain why the distributional problem outlined above has not heretofore been perceived.

For semantic and contextual reasons, to be elucidated below, it so happens that nouns for which one finds a singular in *-ānum* do not normally appear with a plural in *-ānū*, and vice versa, nouns for which one finds a plural in *-ānū* do not normally appear with a singular in *-ānum*. This situation has been interpreted as follows:

	SINGULAR	PLURAL IN <i>-ū</i>	PLURAL IN <i>-ĀNŪ</i>
B.	<i>šarr-um</i> * <i>šarr-anum</i>	<i>šarr-ū</i> --	<i>šarr-ānū</i> --
C.	<i>šarrāq-um</i> <i>šarrāq-ānum</i>	<i>šarrāq-ū</i> --	* <i>šarrāq-ānū</i>

This paradigm is based on two assumptions, first, that nouns in *-ānum* do not occur in the plural at all, and second, that the infix *-ān-* occurs in a complementary distribution based on the interplay of the notions of number and derivation, i.e., either as a plural morpheme or as a denominal affirmative, and that this alternation is mutually exclusive. Both assumptions, though unstated in grammatical treatments of the subject, are inescapable if one accepts the traditional presentation of the data. Once made explicit, these assumptions, and the structure to which they lead, result bizarre and unlikely. Clearly, a different type of distributional pattern seems to be called for, namely:

	SINGULAR	PLURAL IN <i>-ū</i>
A.	<i>il-um</i> <i>il-ān-um</i>	<i>il-ū</i> <i>il-ān-ū</i>
B.	<i>šarr-um</i> * <i>šarr-ān-um</i>	<i>šarr-ū</i> <i>šarr-ān-ū</i>
C.	<i>šarrāq-um</i> <i>šarrāq-ān-um</i>	<i>šarrāq-ū</i> * <i>šarrāq-ān-ū</i>

<sup>12</sup>See especially Von Soden, *Grundriss*, 556r; Id., *Ergänzungsheft*, 556r.

<sup>13</sup>The term *ilānum* occurs only as a personal name (which I would interpret as in CAD s. v., i.e., *il-ān-um* "the individual characterized by *Ilum*," rather than as in AHW s. v., i.e., *il-ān-um* "A m is my god." The same base is also present in the adjective *il-ān-i-um* "typical of the individual characterized by *Ilum*," i.e., "prosperous, lucky," cf. CAD I 70.

II. The infix -ān- in the singular has the clear derivational function of allowing for the formation of a noun from another noun through external inflection, rather than directly from the root through internal inflection. There are only two other productive denominal affirmatives of this kind in Akkadian, the infix -ī- which provides for the formation of adjectives (especially, though not exclusively, from geographical proper names) and the infix -ūt- which provides for the formation of abstract nouns. The affirmative -ān- provides for the formation of concrete substantives which refer to the subject of an action or condition, e.g. *qaqqad-ān-um* "the individual characterized by a peculiar head," *šarrāq-ān-um* "the individual characterized by a particular act of stealing." It is, in other words, an affirmative with a particularizing function.

It is obvious that this function of the affirmative is identical to the function ascribed to the plural in -ānū by Goetze, which is generally (and rightly) accepted: *āl-ānū*, he argued, means "certain individual cities," as different from *āl-ū* "cities." It must also be obvious, on the other hand, that such a particularizing value is heterogeneous with respect to a number marker, and that it can better be understood in terms of a derivational mechanism, e.g. *il-ān-um* "the individual subject characterized by a specific attribute of divinity," with its plural *il-ān-ū* "the (or: some) specific gods."

The exact nature of the particularizing effect will normally be conditioned by one of two factors, i.e. either by the context or by the semantic value of the noun which serves as a basis for the derivation. (1) As examples of CONTEXT-BOUND occurrences one may consider *šarr-ān-ū*, which refers to individuals who are kings in given, particular situations (e.g. of specific countries), as opposed to kings understood generically as bearers of authority (i.e. *šarr-ū*); or again *šābit-ān-um*, which refers to someone who seizes a particular type of object (i.e. the captor of a criminal), as opposed to the generic action of seizing, with no implication as to an implied object (i.e. *šābit-um*). (2) As example of CONTEXT-FREE occurrences one may consider *qaqqad-ān-um* "an individual characterized by a peculiar head."

(Transformationally, there seems to be a correlation between these two types of nouns in -ān-um and two different types of underlying structure. In the first two examples, the noun which serves as a base for the derivation (*šarr-*, *šābit-*) is identical to the predicate of an underlying sentence: *šarr-ān-ū* corresponds to a sentence like "they are kings in a special situation," and *šābit-ān-um* to a sentence like "he seizes a particular object." In this case, one could say that nominalization is of the predicative type. In the third example, the noun which serves as a base for the derivation is identical to the object of an underlying sentence: *qaqqad-ān-um* corresponds to a sentence like "he has a peculiar head." In this case, one could say that nominalization is of the objective type.)

The distinction between context-bound and context-free types of derivation (regardless of whether the transformational correlation obtains regularly or not) suggests what seems like a satisfactory explanation for the peculiar distributional pattern noted above. With context-bound occurrences of the affirmative -&- , the context as a conditioning factor is likely to remain similar in nature for each occurrence. Thus, if context particularization is linked with the feature of count (e.g. "kings of various, specific countries"), the noun is more likely to occur in the plural (*šarr-ān-ū*) than in the singular (\**šarr-ān-um*). As a result, there are several nouns, formed with the derivational infix -ān-, which are in fact attested only in the plural.<sup>14</sup> According to my interpretation, these nouns should be entered as separate entries in the lexicon, as unattested in the singular--thus, for instance, \**ālānum* or \**šarrānum* should be entered separately in the same way that the word for "point," occurring only in the plural *iddātum*, is entered under the singular \**iddum*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>See a list in Goetze, "Plural," pp. 123-25; Von Soden, *Grundriss*, §61i; Id., *Ergänzungsheft*, §61i.

<sup>15</sup>For a collection of pertinent data from the dictionaries I am indebted to a research paper by Peggy Polinger, Los Angeles.

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