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Artabas of Grain or Artabas of Grains?

Willy Clarysse *KU Leuven*

Abstract

Survey of the use of the singular and plural with Greek words for grain. The original plural gives way to the singular in the course of the Hellenistic period, but the plural reappears in the later Roman period for barley, whereas wheat, for which σίτος is then used rather than πυρός, occurs in the singular. There are, however, a number of exceptions to the general picture, often depending on the case in which the words occur.

In classical Greek and Latin, names of materials are usually plural, as if individual parts of the material are indicated rather than the total mass. One example in R. Kühner and B. Gerth, *Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* 2.1 (1898) 15, is taken from Xenophon's *Anabasis* 6.4.6: πυροὶ καὶ κριθαὶ καὶ ὄσπρια, "barley(s), wheat(s) and beans." When discussing the value of grain Polybius 34.8.7 states that ὁ μὲν τῶν κριθῶν Σικελικὸς μέδιμνος ἐστί δραχμῆς, ὁ δὲ τῶν πυρῶν ἐννέα ὀβολῶν, "the price of barley(s) is one drachma for a Sicilian medimna, that for wheat(s) is nine obols." E. Schwyzer and A. Debrunner, *Griechische Grammatik* 2 (1950) 43, notice that the difference between singular and plural in such cases is often "ohne materiellen Bedeutungsgrund." According to LSJ, κριθή (and ὄλυρα) are "mostly in plural." As an early example for the singular they quote *P.Grenf.* 2 29, a second century BC papyrus, where both πυρός and κριθή are used in the singular. For πυρός the lexicon also gives a long lists of examples in the plural, side by side with the singular. In classical authors words for grain appear only infrequently, given the subject matters treated by them. Homer prefers the plural πυροί, but can change to singular *metri causa*.¹ Aristophanes, Demosthenes, Dio Chrysostom, Herodotus, Plato, Plutarch, Polybius, Xenophon, and the Hippocratic Corpus (nearly) always use the plural; in Lucian πυρός is used in the singular, κριθή in the plural. Plural and singular are attested side by side, in Galen, in the Septuagint,² in Flavius

¹ Cf. P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* 2 (Paris 1963) 30.

² The Septuagint usually follows the Hebrew model. In Hebrew the plural is used for grain as a material, after threshing, the singular for grain as a plant on the field; cf. W.

Josephus, and in the New Testament. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and F. Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (1984) § 141, n. 11, give one example of the plural of κριθή. In all these cases, instances are too few to be statistically relevant.

In the inscriptions (checked with the PHI online database³), the plurals πυρῶν (162 instances) and κριθῶν (36 instances) heavily predominate: there are only 6 matches for πυροῦ⁴ and just one for κριθῆς.⁵ In Attica only plurals are attested, e.g. in the famous grain tax law SEG 48 (1998) no. 96. The singular forms are all late Hellenistic or Roman, but plural forms are found a few times as late as the 230s AD.⁶

According to E. Mayser, *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri* 2.1 (1936) 34-35, both singular and plural are used in Ptolemaic papyri, with a preference for the plural when amounts of grain are given in artabas.

In this article I map the use of singular and plural for the four types of grain most commonly found in papyri. My starting point was the Papyrological Navigator, but searching with this instrument was problematic, because the common combination πυροῦ/κριθῆς/ὄλυρας ἀρτάβαι is usually abbreviated. With the help of Mark Depauw⁷ I was able to filter out the hundreds of abbreviated forms, where singular or plural is supplied by modern editors, while keeping the passages where the words in question are marked as uncertain by dotted letters. I checked all passages where the words are fully written out, usually in the genitive.

Genesius and E. Kautzsch, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Leipzig 1909) 418, note m.

³ <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions>.

⁴ *I.Fay.* 1.70.15 = *Prose sur pierre* 29 = *OGIS* 1.177 (97 BC); *I.Fay.* 1.71.14 = *Prose sur pierre* 31 = *OGIS* 1.179 (95 BC); *IG* 4².1.66.31 (74 BC); W. Peek, *Inschriften aus dem Asklepieion von Epidauros* (Berlin 1969), no. 40.8 (III/IV AD); L.M. Ugolini, *Albania Antica* 1 (Roma 1927) no. 197.19 (Roman period); R. Heberdey and E. Kalinka, *Bericht über zwei Reisen* (Wien 1897) 48.63 (Roman period). The accusative πυρόν is found in four texts: *IG* 2².1088 = *TAM* 5.2.1180 = *SEG* 47.163.28 (τὴν περὶ τὸν πυρόν ἀφθονίαν; Hadrian); *I.Ephesos* 211 (ἀθροιζόμενον πανταχόθεν πυρόν; II AD); *SEG* 56.1359.1.11 and 27 (Hadrian); *TAM* 2.791 = *IK Arykanda* 39 ([σίτον καὶ] πυρόν; II AD); *SEG* 58.1536.36-37 (πυρόν and κρειθῆν in a damaged context; AD 129). Because PHI often quotes different publications of the same text side by side, one has the impression that there are more examples.

⁵ *IG* 4².1.92 = W. Peek, *Inschriften aus dem Asklepieion* 40 (examples 1 and 2); the third example (*SEG* 46.940) is an editorial supplement.

⁶ *SEG* 39.1277 and 1279 from Lydia; *IG* 2².1064 = *SEG* 30.82.27 from Athens.

⁷ With thanks to Mark Depauw and Dorothy Thompson for commenting upon an earlier draft of this note.

1. πυρός

	BC3	BC2	BC1	AD1	AD2	AD3	AD4	AD5-6	total ⁸
πυροῦ	55	209	124	198	708	471	166	2/0	1713
πυρόν	23	52	23	20	47	46	10	0	228
πυρῶι/πυρῶ	7	9	8	15	43	41	7	1	94
πυρός	3	1	3	1	2	1	0	0	13 ⁹
πυρῶν	167	71	15	0	1 ?	1	2?	0	251
πυρούς	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
πυροῖς	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 ¹⁰
total	257	342	173	234	803	561	171	0	2302
% sing./plur.	35/65	79/21	91/9	100/0	100/0	99/1	99/1	-	

The above table clearly shows that the plural predominates in the third century BC (169 plural vs. 88 singular), but the situation is reversed in the second century (71 plural vs. 271 singular). From the second century onwards the plural is only found in the genitive. The 15 first century BC plurals are mostly from the beginning of the century.¹¹ Most examples of plurals in the Roman period are due to false or uncertain readings.¹²

⁸This column is not the total of the preceding columns, but is counted directly from the attestations in PN. Texts dated over more than two centuries are counted twice in the columns by century.

⁹In seven other instances πυρός in PN is the genitive of πῦρ.

¹⁰The only example of πυροῖς in *PSI* 8.936.2 (VI AD) is a supplement: ὑπ[ἐρ] παντοίων ἐκφο[ρίων ἐν πυροῖς] καὶ κριθαῖς. Though the supplement is not unlikely, we have not counted it. There are no examples of the nominative plural.

¹¹The only later examples are *BGU* 4.1192 (60-50 BC), *PSI* 10.1098 (51 BC); *P.Bingen* 45.13 (an order by Cleopatra in 33 BC; here one finds τὴν τῶν πυρῶν καταγωγὴν, perhaps due to high brow language in a royal letter, but in l. 2 one finds the singular πυροῦ ἀρτάβας); *SB* 26.16745 (15 BC); *BGU* 16.2611 (10 BC).

¹²*SB* 14.11303.7 (πυρῶν; dated AD 50-99, but the text is perhaps earlier); *SB* 14.11431 (AD 96; [εἰς σ]πορὰν πυρῶν, but the reading of the end of the word is uncertain); *P.Wisc.* 1.9.30 (the editor reads πυρῶν προσφορ[ά]ν, but the beginning is heavily abraded and this is clearly an example of the formula διὰ τὸ τὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ NN ἔτους τούτων προσφορὰ εἶναι σοῦ; cf., e.g., *P.Oxy.* 9.1208. 22, *P.Oxy.* 51.3638.28 or *PSI* 15.1550.25-26; I read ll. 29-30 as follows: διὰ τὸ τ[ἄ]πὸ τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος τετάρτου καὶ εἰκοστοῦ ἔτους τριῶν προσφορ[ά] εἶναι σοῦ); *SB* 5.7822 (AD 208; P.J. Sijpesteijn, *P.Customs*, p. 173, corrects πυρῶν in l. 2 into ἐλαιῶν in l. 3); *P.Cair.Isid.* 61.3 (AD 323; τιμῆς πυρῶν βασιλικῶν; the reading of πυρῶν is far from certain: the first editor read τελλῶν). In *P.Laur.* 1.12 bottom

In the third century BC the plural is fairly ubiquitous in the expression πυρῶν ἀρτάβαι, which is found 30 times against 3 examples of the singular πυροῦ ἀρτάβαι.¹³ Even in the genitive, however, the change from plural to singular already sets in in the third century BC, especially when ἀρτάβαι is omitted.¹⁴ The singular is more often used in the accusative and the dative and particularly when the text deals with “a field of wheat” rather than with the product,¹⁵ e.g. βοτανίζω τὸν πυρὸν (*P.Lond.* 7.2174.3; *P.Cair.Zen.* 4.59635.9).¹⁶ In the genitive the singular is often found when the word is accompanied by an adjective or by the article, e.g. πυροῦ καθαροῦ, ἀκοσκινευτοῦ, λευκοῦ, τοῦ ἐκ τοῦ κε (ἔτους) πυροῦ, or simply τοῦ πυροῦ.

(AD 250), slightly damaged and without context, the reading seems unavoidable (with thanks to R. Pintaudi for a photograph). Certain examples are *CPR* 5.8.17-19 (IV AD; πάντων τῶν περιγ[ινο]μένων [ἐξ] αὐτῆς πυρῶν τε καὶ ἀχύρων; notice that here even the word ἀχύρος is used in the plural, which is unusual), *SB* 16.13035.3 (IV AD; πυρῶν (ἀρτάβαι) ε; checked on photograph kindly provided by L. Criscuolo) and *PSI* 1.95.5 (πυροῦς ἢ ἐνέχυρον). I have not been able to check *P.Oxy.* 3.530.2-3, where a correction occurs in a damaged context.

¹³*P.Ent.* 90.3 (reading checked on the original); *P.Petrie* 3.105.1; *P.Cair.Zen.* 4.59569.4; *O.Leid.* 34 is no doubt second century, on the basis of the script (checked by F.A.J. Hoogendijk) and the superfluous *iota* adscript ἔχωι in l. 2. Similarly, *BGU* 3.1005 is second rather than third century BC (checked on a photograph kindly provided by F. Reiter; the formulas are similar to those of some Pathyris loans, e.g. *P.Grenf.* 2.29). In *P.Sorb.* 3.10 the supplement [πυροῦ] should be corrected to [πυρῶν]. In *O.Wilcken* 1253 (checked on a photograph kindly provided by A. Benaissa) and in *O.Taxes* 2.104 I prefer the reading πυρῶν (with high-rising *ny*) to the editor's πυροῦ. Similarly in *P.Genova* 3.114.9-13 πυρῶν should be read each time even though this results in unexpected expressions such as φορικοῦ πυρῶν (l. 9) and ἀγοραστοῦ πυρῶν (l. 10): the ending -ου is clearly different from -ων. No doubt σίτου is understood in these two cases. The term ἀγοραστός is often used without σίτος; cf. T. Reekmans, “Σίτος ἀγοραστός in Ptolemaic Egypt,” *Studi Calderini-Paribeni* 2 (Milano 1957) 203-210.

¹⁴E.g. in *P.Lond.* 7.1991 the singular is used in ll. 44, 73 (πυροῦ), 23, 80, 109 (κριθῆς), but the plural in ll. 5 and 118 (κριθῶν); ὀλυρῶν is plural throughout (ll. 29, 61, 93, 116, 136); in *P.Lond.* 7.1194, a similar account, the plural is the usual form (e.g. ll. 5, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23, etc.), but the singular is found in the expression ἔχει πυροῦ/κριθῆς εἰς ιδίόσπορα (ll. 101, 109); in the enumeration ll. 185-192 and 255-260 singular πυροῦ and κριθῆς contrast with plural ὀλυρῶν, but in l. 292 the plural κριθῶν is found in a parallel passage. Similarly, in *P.Lond.* 7.1995 plural and singular are found side by side.

¹⁵Cf. biblical Hebrew in n. 1 above; a similar distinction is apparently made in classical Latin; see E. Löfstedt, *Syntactica. Studien und Beiträge zur historischen Syntax des Lateins* 1 (Lund 1956) 29-30.

¹⁶Perhaps the singular can be explained in the same way when the grain is used for sowing, as in *P.Petrie* 3.95.7 ([σπόρ]ος πυροῦ (ἄρουραι) θ) and in *P.Yale* 1.31 (σπέρμα εἰς τὸ λ (ἔτος) πυρ[ο]ῦ ἑβδομήκοντα).

The word *πυρός* disappears from the lexicon after about AD 350.¹⁷ It is replaced by *σίτος*, which is always used in the singular, as was already the case in the classical language.

2. κριθή

	BC3	BC2	BC1	AD1	AD2	AD3	AD4	AD5	AD6	total
κριθῆς	49	40	19	47	133	118	122	9	16	575
κριθήν	21	3	1	6	17	22	8	2	3	83
κριθῆ/κριθήι	9	5	2	4	21	10	1	2	2	46
κριθή	2	0	2	0	5	3	1	0	0	13
κριθῶν	90	7	2	0	0	0	55	46	39	225
κριθάς	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
κριθαῖς	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7
κριθαί	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
total	177	55	26	57	174	152	187	59	67	951
% sing. / plur.	45/55	87/13	92/8	100/0	100/0	100/0	71/29	22/78	32/68	

As with *πυρός*, the plural is more common than the singular in the third century BC. The singular is used mainly when κριθή is not in the genitive or when it is further defined. The second and first century BC examples of plural κριθῶν are all followed by a figure (“xx artabas of barley,” though the word for artabas is often omitted). Since the two first century examples date from 98 and 97 BC (*P.Ryl.* 2.71 and 72), plural forms disappear at the very beginning of the first century BC. There are no plural forms in the Roman period, but

¹⁷ See H. Cadell, “Le renouvellement du vocabulaire au I^{er} siècle,” *Akten des XIII. Papyrologenkongresses* (München 1974) 64-65; eadem, *Cd’É* 48 (1973) 329. As P.J. Sijpesteijn and K.A. Worp point out in *P.Mich.* 20, p. 28, n. 25, there are in fact a few late fourth century examples, e.g. *P.Col.* 7.160 (AD 354), *SB* 22.15286. 29 (AD 362), *P.Mich.* 20.803-809 (AD 366-372), *BGU* 4.1092.17 (AD 372), *P.Vindob.Sijp.* 13.9 and 25, and *BGU* 12.2148 (AD 375). The rare references to *πυρός* in sixth century documents found in PN, are all supplements by the editors, where [πυροῦ] or (πυροῦ ἀρτ.) should be corrected into [σίτος] or (σίτου ἀρτ.), e.g. *BGU* 17.2722 passim; *CPR* 19.46.3; *P.Bad.* 4.95.19, 55, 264, 265, 342, 419, 555 (corrected in *BL* 11); *P.Cair.Masp.* 1.67006.2 (κατὰ σπορὰ[ν π]υρῶν corrected in *BL* 3:33); *P.Cair.Masp.* 2.67129.15; *P.Flor.* 1.37.5 (*BL* 1); *P.Michael.* 60.10; *P.Sijp.* 11e (in margine; reading doubtful), *P.Strasb.* 6.597, *P.Strasb.* 7.657.7; *PSI* 8.936.2-3 ([ἐν πυροῖς καὶ] κριθαῖς, no doubt to be corrected into [ἔν τε σίτω καὶ] κριθαῖς); *SB* 14.12948.v; *Stud.Pal.* 20.126.11 ([πυ]ροῦ; AD 515)

then, unexpectedly, the plural returns in the middle of the fourth century¹⁸ and gets the upper hand in the Byzantine period. The overwhelming majority of plural instances are in the genitive: the accusative plural is all but absent,¹⁹ the nominative is found in five texts of the third century BC only, the dative plural turns up in the 6th century AD, mainly in the expression ἐν τε σίτῳ καὶ κριθαῖς.

3. ὄλυρα²⁰

	BC3	BC2	BC1	AD1-5	AD6	total
ὄλυρας (gen.)	19	19	13	0	0	38
ὄλυραν	9	8	0	0	0	17
ὄλυραι/ὄλύρα	1	1	0	0	0	2
ὄλυρα	1	2	0	0	0	3
ὄλυρων	31	14	2	0	0	46
ὄλύρας (acc.)	0	0	0	0	1	1
total	51	44	11	0	1	108
% sing. /plur.	40/60	68/32	81/19			

The spread of the word ὄλυρα (“emmer”) is similar to that of πυρός: usually plural in the third century BC, except when there is a defining adjective or article, and a growing number of attestations of the singular in the second and first centuries²¹. The word did not survive into the Roman period, because *tritium dicoccum* (ὄλυρα) was replaced on the menu by *tritium durum* (πυρός).²² The only attestation in the Byzantine period (*P.Cair.Masp.* 67002.3.10) uses

¹⁸ *O.Kellis* 255, which is dated by the editor to the 3rd-4th cent., may well belong to the fourth century. All other instances date from the 340s or later. The plural κριθῶν may, therefore, be used to establish a terminus post quem of ca. 330 for a whole series of texts dated more generally to the fourth century AD: TM 31712; 32833; 32223; 33333; 33544; 33740; 34180; 34378; 34722; 72773; 72777; 73914; 73971; 74107; 74121; 74183. TM 32978 and 41691, which are dated to the first half of the fourth century by the editors, may belong to the second quarter of that century.

¹⁹ The only example is *PSI* 5.543 (III BC).

²⁰ Nominative and dative plural are not attested.

²¹ The two first century examples are *UPZ* 1.118 (probably 83 BC) and *BGU* 4.1202 (18 BC). I have excluded *BGU* 8.1926, where the word is in lacuna.

²² See, e.g., R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 24 and n. 52; a different opinion in A. Battaglia, *Artos. Il lessico della panificazione nei papiri greci* (Milano 1989) 44-46.

olyra as a symbol for near starvation (ἐν τῷ χειμῶ[ν]ι δροξίμα [l. τρώξιμα, “raw vegetables”] καὶ ὀλύρας ἐσθίομεν).

4. φακός²³

	BC3	BC2	BC1	AD1	AD2	AD3	AD4	AD5	AD6	total
φακοῦ	11	23	15	11	96	48	22	11	6	202
φακόν	0	1	3	4	15	5	2	0	0	29
φακῶι/φακῶ	4	15	4	2	7	2	0	0	0	34
φακός	2	1	0	0	3	4	1	0	0	9
φακῶν ²⁴	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6
total	22	40	22	17	131	59	25	11	7	280

The word φακός is so rare in classical authors and in inscriptions that no clear view is possible about the use of its number. In Galen and in the Corpus Hippocraticum, singular and plural are found side by side.²⁵ In the papyri the plural is found only six times, all except one in the third cent. BC.²⁶ I have mainly included this word because here Greek prefers the singular where modern languages have the plural: “one kilo of lentils, un kilo de lentilles, ein Kilo Linzen.”

Conclusion

In classical Greek and in koine literary Greek, including the inscriptions, the mass nouns πυρός, κριθή, and ὄλυρα are usually plural. This remains so in the early Ptolemaic papyri, especially in genitive expressions like πυρῶν ἀρτάβαι. In the second century BC the plural is replaced by the singular. Only the genitive plural survives until the end of the century. Early examples of singulars are often found when the word for grain is somehow determined.

²³ The numerous instances of the nominative singular φακός “mole” in personal descriptions are excluded manually.

²⁴ There are no plural forms attested for nominative, accusative and dative.

²⁵ See G. Maloney and W. Frohn, *Concordantia in Corpus Hippocraticum* 5 (Hildesheim-New York 1986) 4570-4571.

²⁶ *P.Mich.Zen.* 2.12; *PSI* 6.620.8 (φακῶν ἀρτάβαι); *P.Petrie* 3.76 passim (with and without ἀρτάβαι); *Wilck.Chrest.* 198.17 (φακῶν ἀ(ρ)τάβαι); *P.Petrie* 3.37b.v; the unexpected 6th century example *SB* 18.13779 is certain.

By the early first century BC the evolution is complete, also in the genitive,²⁷ and in Roman papyri only the singular is found. The reason why this change occurred escapes us.

In the course of the Roman period, first ὄλυρα and then πυρός disappear from the language. Κριθή survives, and the plural returns in the Byzantine papyri, no doubt as yet another example of Atticism.²⁸ In the terminology developed by A. Wierzbicka,²⁹ the general evolution of these words could be described as moving from “pluralia mostly: names denoting collections of small things, possible to count but normally not counted” to “singularia only: names of substances with a minimal unit.”

²⁷ One may wonder whether words for grain have developed in Greek from count nouns to mass nouns; cf., e.g., G.G. Corbett, *Number* (Cambridge 2000) 78-80, or, more generally, D. Massam, *Count and Mass across Languages* (Oxford 2012). I did not find examples, however, of words changing from count nouns to mass nouns in the course of time, as seems to be the case in ancient Greek.

²⁸ Cf. W. Clarysse, “The Democratisation of Atticism: Θέλω and Ἐθέλω in Papyri and Inscriptions,” *ZPE* 167 (2008) 144-148; N. O’Sullivan, “The Future Optative in Greek Documentary and Grammatical Papyri,” *JHS* 133 (2013) 93-111.

²⁹ A. Wierzbicka, “‘Oats’ and ‘Wheat’: The Fallacy of Arbitrariness,” in J. Haiman (ed.), *Iconicity in Syntax* (Amsterdam-Philadelphia 1985) 309-342, esp. 338-339.

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