VARIATION AND CHANGE
IN GREEK AND LATIN

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Again on *as*-nominatives:
A New Approach to the Problem

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Introduction

The use of the morpheme -*as* for -*ae* in the nominative plural of first declension nouns constitutes a well-known phenomenon of Latin morphology, which occurs since the first century BC, both in literary and non-literary sources, especially on late imperial inscriptions (ex. *CIL* II 38 *filias matri piissime posuerunt,* 2nd/3rd century AD). The aim of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, we shall provide an overview of existing research studies and their different approaches to the topic; on the other hand, we shall give an update on frequency and distribution of the form in the Roman Empire and, on this ground, we shall suggest the existence of certain elements that fostered its spreading in non-literary documents, especially in inscriptions.

Overview of the research

The appearance and significance of *as*-nominatives has been often discussed and variously interpreted since over 100 years, raising the interest of several fields of study.[1] On the one hand, Indo-European and Latin linguists have dealt with its origin and the reasons of its spreading over the Empire. On the other hand, Romance philologists have discussed more specifically the possibility of a direct connection between these forms and the plural of feminine nouns in the Romania.[2] In this paper we will face the problem from the perspective of a Latinist, hence focussing on the first type of approach.

The first systematic collection of all known instances of the form was done by Meister 1909, 82ff.[3] Apart from three uncertain literary examples in Pomponius' *Atellanae,*[4] Meister mentions two cases in republican inscriptions from Pisaurum (both with fall of final -*s*)[5] and 30 occurrences on 22 inscriptions, mostly from the imperial time. Of these, over a half (16) were found in Rome, eight in the oriental provinces, four in Africa and

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[1] It is nearly impossible to mention all studies referring to the form. We will hence restrict this survey to the most relevant ones.

[2] Special attention has been given to the feminine -*e* plural ending in Italian, which according to some scholars would not descend, as usually assumed, from the regular nominative -*ae* but from -*as* by way of an intermediate -*es*. See in particular the studies of Gerola 1950; Politzer 1952; Aebischer 1960.

[3] Sporadic mentions of *as*-nominatives are already found in the studies of Mohl 1899, 205–209; Diehl 1899, 204f; Carnoy 1906, 228; Konjetzny 1908, 320 and other scholars. For further details see Väänänen 1934, 81ff; Gaeng 1977, 46ff; Galdi 2004, 59ff.

[4] 141 R. *quot* **laetitias insperatas** *modo mi inrepsere in sinum*, 150 *ego quaero quod comedim;* **has** *quaerunt quod cacent*. These instances have been more recently discussed by Adams 2003, 118f.

[5] *CIL* XI 6300 *Iunone Reg*[*inae*] **Matrona** […] *Pisaurese* […] *dono dedrot*, 6301 *Matre Matuta dono dedro* **Matrona**.

one each in Regio X, Regio IV and Spain.[6] The same type of study was performed a few years later by Hehl[7] who reported 44 instances in 35 inscriptions.[8] Again, most of the examples were found in Rome (21), the eastern provinces (eight) and Africa (five).[9] Hehl's study constituted an important reference point for later research as it contains the latest complete and detailed collection of inscriptional evidence of the morpheme from all over the Empire.[10] All remaining studies are restricted either to specific geographical areas or to single groups of inscriptions.[11]

Several different theories (most of which are not mutually exclusive) have been suggested to explain the origin and use of the form. One of the most accredited traces it back to an influence of the Oscan morphological system, in which *-as* was the inherited feminine nominative plural ending:[12] as a matter of fact, some of the first occurrences of the form in Latin inscriptions were found in Oscan territory.[13] The weak point of this view is, for one thing, that a few examples from republican time also occur in Rome[14] and, for another thing, that Oscan did not exert an analogous influence on plural of second declension nouns.[15] Other scholars suggested the following syntactical solution to the problem: the ending *-as* would result from the well-known extension of the accusative in Latin nominal system, which started at the beginning of the Empire and gradually increased over the centuries.[16] However, if this were to be the only reason, one would reasonably expect a similar confusion between nominative and accusative in the plural of

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[6] Cf. Meister 1899, 84f.

[7] Hehl 1912, 37–39.

[8] Two among Hehl's occurrences must be excluded from the total figures: 1) *IHC* 413 *patrem hunc tutorem hab*(*u*)*ere pupilli viduas solamen captibis pretium* (Spain, 8th century): *viduas* here is a regular accusative determining the following *solamen* "consolation of the widows"; 2) *EE* IX, 776 *fundum q*(*ui*) *a*(*ppellatur*) *Duas casas* (Praeneste, 4th century): the inscription has been later reedited in *AE* 1904, 108 which reads *fundum q*(*ui*) *a*(*ppellatur*) (*a*)*d Duas casas*.

[9] The remaining instances come from Spain (three), Regio I (two), Regio IV (two), Sardinia, Regio II and Regio X (one each).

[10] Actually, there has been a further attempt by Berengario Gerola, whose figures appear much richer: he mentions over 65 occurrences, including Pompeian graffiti, most of which are found in Rome (ca. 30), Pannonia and Dalmatia (12), Africa (10) and Pompeii (six). Cf. Gerola 1950, 328f. However, Gerola doesn't distinguish between inscriptions, graffiti and *defixiones*, doesn't furnish any information on the date of the documents and, most importantly, doesn't give a detailed list of all the occurrences of the ending (only seven inscriptions are mentioned), so that one cannot prove the correctness of his figures. In fact, the aim of Gerola's paper was to offer some preliminary results of a wider research that unfortunately never appeared.

[11] In particular, Väänänen 1934 focuses on the few examples from Pompeii, whereas the remarks of Gaeng 1977, 46ff, and Omeltchenko 1977, 376ff, refer to the Christian inscriptions of England, Africa, Italy and the Balkan provinces (latter studies mainly base on Diehl's collection *ILCV*). The occurrences in eastern European provinces have been discussed by Stati (1961, 76) Mihaescu (1978, 219) and by myself (Galdi 2004, 59ff). Special mention should be made furthermore of Bakkum's study (1994) dealing with the few instances of the morpheme on republican stones, along with the *-eis* second-declension masculine plural ending (see below).

[12] See in particular Mohl 1899, 205ff; Norberg 1943, 26ff; Löfstedt 1956, 330ff; Ernout 1974, 21f.

[13] Cf. *CIL* XI 6300, 6301 (Pisaurum) mentioned above and *CIL* I 2685 *duovir*(*is*) **hasc**(*e*) *mag*(*istras*) *V*(*eneri*) *d*(*onum*) *d*(*ant*) (Minturnae).

[14] See *CIL* VI 9430 [*liber*]*ti et libertas … et libertas*. Three occurrences are found on curse tablets: *K* 1.4.4/8, 1.4.4/9, 1.4.4/10. As for the literary instances, it has been noticed that neither Cato nor Pomponius originated from Oscan areas. Cf. Meister 1909, 87; Adams 2003, 119.

[15] Cf. Väänänen 1934, 92; Petersmann 1973, 82. The latter argument, however, is weak because, as is well known, analogy is neither predictable nor rule-governed.

[16] So for instance Konjetzny 1908, 320; Meister 1909; Altheim 1932, 157f.

masculine nouns (of the type *filios* pro *filii*) as well as in the singular of all declensions.[17] The third major theory is that of analogy. Väänänen assumed that the early loss of final -*m* in the accusative singular of feminine nouns resulted in a perfect morphological correspondence between nominative and accusative (both ending in -*a*): this might have fostered an analogous process in the plural, where the replacement of the nominative -*ae* through -*as* also had the advantage of reinforcing the thematic vowel *a*.[18] This certainly represents one of the most interesting hypotheses on the origin of the form, as it allows one to explain why this use of the accusative in place of the nominative is basically restricted to first declension nouns. Nevertheless, it must be noticed, that the type *filia* in the accusative singular is clearly more frequent than *filias* in the nominative plural and that the latter often occurs close to forms regularly preserving final -*m*.[19] Conversely, Norberg,[20] although basically pleading for an Oscan origin of the form, assumed that its large use in imperial inscriptions was probably fostered by the analogy with the plural of third declensions nouns and adjectives (-*am*: -*as* = -*em*: -*es*), for the two morphemes are often found together in inscriptions.[21] In most of the instances, however, this is not the case.[22]

Evidence of *as*-nominatives in non-literary sources

This section is devoted to the specific findings of our research. In the first place, we shall list all known instances of the ending. This latter relies upon the main studies on the language of inscriptions, as well as on the indices of the most common epigraphic corpora. Furthermore, several new instances of the morpheme could be detected through

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[17] This point is made by Löfstedt 1956, 330.

[18] Cf. Väänänen 1934, 94: "La cause principale qui l'a déterminée est sans doute l'action du singulier sur le pluriel, après la chute de l'*m* final : d'après le sg. acc. *filia*(*m*) – nom. *filia*, on a fait au pl. acc. *filias* – nom. *filias*. La forme *filias* était d'autant plus indiquée qu'elle renfermait la voyelle caractéristique *a* de cette déclinaison". It must be said, however, that, as indicated by Väänänen himself, an analogous theory was already suggested by other scholars such as Meyer-Lübke and Paris. Cf. Väänänen, *loc. cit.* and Norberg 1943, 31 (with n. 9).

[19] Ex. *ILCV* 497 *Fl. Cascinivo … **arcam** de proprio suo ubi positus est **collegas** sui conparaverunt si quis **eam** aperire voluerit dabit in fisco auri pondo sex* (Regio X, 4th/5th century AD).

[20] Norberg 1943, 26ff. (in particular p. 31).

[21] Ex. *CIL* III 3551 *hic quiescunt **duas** matres, **duas filias** numero tres fac[i]unt et **advenas** II **parvolas*** (Pannonia Inferior, 3rd/4th century AD).

[22] Mihaescu maintains that in the spoken language a merger took place between the ending of the feminine nominative *filiae* and the masculine *filii*. Thus, in order to disambiguate the gender, the speakers generalized the form *filias*, sacrificing, so to speak, the morphological nominative-accusative distinction in the plural. This process would be part of the more general tendency of spoken language "à réduire les forms multiples des cas à des forms doubles, voire unique". See Mihaescu 1978, 219. This theory is barely sustainable because we do not have any explicit evidence for the confusion between -*ae* and -*i* in the pronunciation, not even in the late centuries of the Empire. A fairly different approach to the problem is found in Bakkum 1994, who deals exclusively with the republican occurrences of sigmatic nominatives in the plural of first and second declension. Bakkum does not focus on the origin of the morpheme (that he, however, refuses to ascribe to any Italic idiom, due to the very scant number of instances, p. 34f.), but on its context of usage. He notices that the ending regularly occurs either with demonstrative pronouns or with various types of nouns constituting a larger heading or common denominator of a group of specifically named persons (he refers to that as *resumptiveness-parameter*). Bakkum's results apply however only to some of the -*as*-nominatives in imperial time. See Galdi 2004, 63 n. 282.

the use of the websites listed in final literature.[23] For the *defixiones*, we referred to the rich collection of texts edited in the CD-ROM of Kropp, 2008 (*K*).

The total figures appear quite impressive as compared to those of Hehl and Gerola: the *as*-ending occurs 82 times,[24] of which three in Pompeii,[25] five on republican inscriptions,[26] six on curse tablets[27] and 68 on imperial stones from the following areas:

Rome (18),[28] Pannonia Inferior (10),[29] Africa (eight),[30] Pannonia Superior (seven),[31] Moesia Inferior (six),[32] Dalmatia (four),[33] Hispania (two),[34] Gallia Narbonensis (two),[35] Regio IV (two),[36] Regio X (two),[37] Sardinia (two),[38] Dacia,[39] Moesia Superior,[40] Ostia,[41] Numidia[42] and Regio II[43] (one each).

Besides, there are 35 uncertain cases in which a syntactical explanation (accusative in place of nominative) cannot be ruled out: of these, 15 figure on inscriptions and 20 on the *instrumenta* from La Graufesenque (we will return to these cases later on in this article).

Relevant differences from previous studies emerge also in connection with the geographical distribution of the form. Nearly all scholars referring to it mention the total lack of occurrences in Gaul, which appears rather surprising, in view of the later development of sigmatic feminine plural both in Provençal and French. Now, the numerous uncertain occurrences at La Graufesenque and the two instances in Gallia Narbonensis,[44]

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[23] Since none of these websites includes any sort of grammatical search or index, we conducted a stochastic research based on those words that occur more frequently with *as*-ending (as *filias, collegas, depositas, reliquias*, etc.): it is hence possible that some further instances still "hide" in these corpora.

[24] These figures (as those of Hehl and Gerola) refer to every single instance of the ending. For example *CIL* IV 1517 *sodales hic ad exemplar fela*(*n*)*t n*(*os*)*t*(*ras*) **Stabianas puellas** (Pompeii) accounts for two occurrences.

[25] *AE* 1912, 237 **Asellinas** *rogant*, *CIL* IV 1517 (see above).

[26] Pisaurum (*CIL* I 378; 379, twice); Rome (*CIL* I 2685, twice); Minturnae (*CIL* I 2685).

[27] Rome (*K* 1.4.4/8, 1.4.4/9, 1.4.4/10); Africa (*K* 11.1.1/8, 11.2.1/3); Arezzo (*K* 1.1.1/1).

[28] *CIL* VI 8398, 13830, 16821, 17959, 32588; *ICUR* I 544 (twice), 619, 1462 (twice), 1653, 2134; *ICUR* V 13217; *ICUR* VII 17861, 18046, 19063; *ICUR* IX 23981; *FER* 74.

[29] *CIL* III 3551 (five times), 13374; *AE* 1967, 371; *RIU* 1073, 1227 (twice).

[30] *CIL* VIII 9156, 18199; *ILCV* 791 (twice), 2042, 2044; *AE* 1908, 155; *EE* VII 519.

[31] *H* 158 (three times); *CIL* III 4590; *RIU* 83, 636, 714.

[32] *ISM* II 215, 303, 351; *ISM* V 104; *ILB* 170 (twice).

[33] *CIL* III 2386, 6551, 10107; *ILI* 597.

[34] *CIL* II 38, 5094.

[35] *EAOR* 12 (twice, see n. 44).

[36] *CIL* IX 3105, 3387a.

[37] *CIL* V 5078; *ILCV* 497.

[38] *ILS* I 100; *AE* 1978, 376.

[39] *AE* 1986, 614.

[40] *IMS* III 2, 45.

[41] *EE* IX 444.

[42] *AE* 1937, 149.

[43] *CIL* IX 959.

[44] *EAOR* 12 *Vivont dei Man*[*es*] *sacrum umane T. Vettius P. f. Pap. Loripes summae rudi P. Vettius T. f. .Pap. Martialis* **duas Vettias** *T. l. Suavis et Utilis*.

both from the first century AD, show that the *-as*-morpheme is likely to have been used also in this territory, and that this happened even at an early date.[45] A similar consideration applies to the two Moesiae: since no examples from this area were known before the studies of Stati (1961) and Mihaescu (1978), Hehl claimed that this situation would be in perfect agreement with the later evolution of Rumanian language whose feminine plural forms go back directly to Latin *-ae*.[46] More generally, our data from the eastern European provinces, especially Pannonia, Moesia and Dalmatia exhibit significant differences from the collections of Hehl and Gerola: here there are 29 instances, which corresponds to over 40 % of global occurrences. The data from Rome instead are smaller than those of Gerola, because he includes in his list some dozen occurrences of the form *ollas* (instead of the more common *ollae*) in funerary inscriptions indicating the urn holding the ashes of the deceased, ex. *CIL* VI 4952 *Fabiae Nomadis* **ollas** *II*. These instances should rather be classified as uncertain, since they can easily be ascribed (as suggested by Gerola himself) to the ellipse of a verbal expression as *hic habes*, *contines* or similar.[47] In the same so to speak "syntactical" group I included a handful of uncertain cases in which the forms involved can be explained as accusatives, as in the next two examples from Rome:

ILCV 3753 *locus Asteri, quem se vivu*[*m comparavit?*] **filias intercedentes** *cum pa*[*tre? ...*] *quae vix. ann. p.m. L. d*[*ep. ...*] *<Fl.> Mallio Sthillicon*[*e c.c.cons.*] (5th century AD)

ICUR IX 23807 *D.M. parentes filiabus que dulcissimis voluistis nobis esse* **inimicas** (4th century AD)

Although both inscriptions are mentioned by Gaeng (1977, 47) as examples of *as*-nominatives, in the first, fragmentary text, *filias intercedentes* might be an accusative absolute, whereas in the second *inimicas* could result from an erroneous usage of the infinitive construction depending on the preceding *voluistis*.

A special group is finally represented by the 20 uncertain occurrences on the pottery graffiti from La Graufesenque, all engraved around the first century AD. These forms have been ascribed both by Marichal and Adams to a possible influence of Gaulish morphology, which had a feminine plural ending *-ias* (see n. 45). Besides, a syntactical explanation (accusative of lists or ellipse of the verb) cannot be ruled out.[48]

The dates of the documents are summarized in the next table. The occurrences on curse tablets are in bold, while those on Pompeian graffiti are in cursive. The column marked as "Late" refers to a group of Christian inscriptions mostly edited in *ICUR*, which are very likely to have been engraved not earlier than late third century AD. Unfortunately, about 35 % of the inscriptional evidence (that is 32,5 % of the total occurrences) could not even approximately be dated. The remaining material, however, is enough to reveal a

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[45] The reason why the form is usually avoided on later imperial inscriptions from Gaul remains unclear. There might be however a connection with Gaulish noun morphology. Since here *-ias* was the regular plural ending of feminine nouns (cf. Marichal 1988, 74–75; Adams 2003, 701), it is possible, as suggested by Adams 2007, 675, that "because of its Gaulish association" the form *-as* was generally "stigmatized" in local Latin and consequently avoided, at least at the written level.

[46] Hehl 1912, 38f. Both examples show how dangerous it is to assume or exclude a regional diversification of the language on the base of epigraphic data, whose findings, as well known, are often due to fortuitous elements.

[47] See Konjetzny 1908, 320; Gerola 1949–1950, 215f.

[48] Cf. Adams 2007, 675.

quite frequent and regular appearance of the form over the centuries, especially in the late period: so from the first century BC to the third century AD the ending occurs 24 times, 16 of which on inscriptions, whereas in the later period (until at least the sixth century) it figures 31 times, only in inscriptions.

Century	1 BC	1 AD	2 AD	2/3 AD	3 AD	3/4 AD	4 AD	4/5 AD	5 AD	5/6 AD	Late	Undated
No. of epigraphs	3 + 5	4 + 3	2 + 1	2 + 1	4 + 1	7	4	1	2	2	15	25

Table 1. The chronology of the documents.

Discussion of the data

Leaving aside the question of a possible connection of *as*-nominatives with other Italic languages, which we probably do not have enough data to answer, it can be preliminary observed that this form occurs in different areas and over a very long period (from the first century BC until early Middle Ages).[49] In particular, it becomes very frequent in Late Latin inscriptions, in which, as is well known, many features of spoken language emerge,[50] and it occurs in various types of texts, some of which – notably graffiti and *tabellae defixionum* – are typically characterized by a smaller degree of linguistic control. Interestingly enough, in more than 30 cases, which approximately correspond to 40% of the total figures, the text containing the form exhibits at least one further "deviating" feature, which hints at a poor (or at least imperfect) command of the language by its author. These are two examples from the imperial time:

> *ICUR* VII 18046 *Sindina vixit annis numero XXII messe n. X dies n. VIII Urbica et Vincentia* **eilias** *fecirunt matri oulcisime* (Rome, late)

> *CIL* III 13374 *Domo Mursa, vix. an. XXXVI stip. XVIII. Aurelia Priscilla coiiux eiu Prisca et Probilla* **filias** *et eredes posuerunt, qui defunctus est Perento et ossua eiius in unc locu sunt* (Pannonia Inferior, 3rd/4th century AD)

The first inscription exhibits, apart from the nominative *filias* (wrongly engraved as *eilias*), the variants *messe* for *menses* and *fecirunt* for *fecerunt*; in the second one we read *eiius, Perento ossua*, *unc* and *locu* respectively for *eius, Perinthi, ossa, hoc* and *loco*.

Very instructive in this connection are the occurrences on curse tablets. As it clearly emerges from the recent monograph of Kropp, this type of documents is characterized by a large use of "pre-romance" linguistic features (the loss of neuter, the use of the ending

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[49] For details see Gerola 1950, 329f.

[50] I refer here to those non-classical linguistic features which due to their appearance and frequency also in other sub-literary texts as well as to their occasional survival in the Romance languages are very likely to have been spread in some registers of spoken usage.

-o in the accusative masculine singular, etc.), which already occur in the first century BC.[51]

In view of all these aspects, that is, the variety of documents, the low level of correctness of many of them, the diachronic and diatopic distribution, and the probable survival in some Romance languages, we can assume that *as*-nominatives were rather common in spoken language, at least in some spoken varieties of Latin.[52] In literary texts, instead, this form, along with many others certainly spread in common usage was "filtered out" by the conservative character of the language. The first certain examples go back to the fourth century AD.[53]

However, it is well known that the possible or even probable existence of a special phenomenon in spoken usage does not necessarily imply its emergence in sub-literary texts. Thus, the question one has to face is whether any – and, in the affirmative, which – special reason has fostered the use of *as*-nominatives in the extant sources. Some plausible explanations have already been presented above. So, it is rather likely that the extension of the ending in imperial time, especially in the late period, has been fostered by the parallel spreading of the accusative in the Latin nominal system, where it tended to impose itself as a sort of "Universalkasus".[54] A look at the distribution of the forms confirms this guess. The areas with the highest number of occurrences are respectively a) Rome, b) the eastern provinces and c) Africa. Now, the studies of Poukens and Konjetzny on the syntax of African and Roman inscriptions report numerous instances of "deviating" accusatives, which reflect a general extension of this case.[55] Also the inscriptions from Dalmatia, Pannonia and Moesia, in which nearly all eastern occurrences were found, exhibit a remarkably high number of irregular accusatives.[56] Conversely, the results of Carnoy (1906), Martin (1909), and Pirson (1901), hint at a much more regular use of the accusative on the inscriptions of Spain and Gaul, where the *filias*-type is nearly non-existent.[57] A further significant element is the reinforcement of the thematic vowel invoked by Väänänen (1934): after the early monophthongization of *ae* to *e*, one might have felt the necessity of strengthening, at least at a graphical level, the thematic *a*, characteristic of feminine nouns, through the use of the *filias* type. An aspect in support of this view is found in the dative and ablative plural in which the form *filiis* posed a similar problem: the

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[51] See Kropp 2008, 255f: "So ergibt sich aus der sprachlichen Analyse der Texte, daß typisch 'romanische' Phänomene (durch Synkopen verkürzte Wörter, Aufgabe des Neutrums oder Universalkasus Akkusativ) bereits in Zeugnissen aus dem 1. Jh. v.Chr. nachweisbar … sind."

[52] An analogous conclusion is reached by Väänänen 1934, 94f, who though bases his view on fewer elements: "Le nom. plur. en -ās du latin est une formation qualifiable de «vulgaire», étant donné, d'un côté, qu'il n'apparaît que dans les documents d'un caractère populaire, et de l'autre, qu'il se poursuit jusqu'aux langues romanes."

[53] For details see Gerola 1950, 329.

[54] On this phenomenon see in particular Calboli 1996; Herman 1997, 66f; Galdi 2004, 443.

[55] Cf. *CIL* VI 3067[d] 1ff. *coh*(*ors*) *VII vig*[*i*]*lum* **centuriam** *Crispini sebaciaria fe*(*cit*) (Rome), *CIL* VIII 7467 **[*f*]*i*[*l*]*ios et ne*[*p*]*ote*[*s*] *salvos** *m*[*emo*]*ria*(*m*) *... posuerunt* (Africa). See Poukens 1912, 254–261; Konjetzny 1908, 316–320.

[56] Cf. Galdi 2004, 443–462. In these three areas there also emerges the highest amount of "errors" involving final *-m* and *-s*. The relatively high frequency of both phenomena (especially of the loss of final *-s*, which, as well known, is usually maintained on imperial inscriptions, even in later times) suggests that in Dalmatia, Pannonia and Moesia these phonological changes were more developed, a phenomenon which might have contributed to the syntactical confusion between nominative and accusative. See Galdi 2004, 64.

[57] In particular, Pirson 1901, 186–191 observes that the most irregular uses of the accusative are basically confined to the late Christian era (5th/6th century AD).

large use of the form *-abus* for *-is* on inscriptions and its retention up to the late period[58] seems to reflect the same necessity of marking feminine nouns and distinguishing them from the corresponding masculine ones.[59]

Beside these aspects, whose weak points were summarized above, a third, very important one (so far neglected in the literature) emerged from the analysis of the single occurrences of the form. Specifically, I focussed my attention on the epigraphic material, as this offers by far the highest number of instances.

An onomastic analysis of the texts reveals that the great majority of the personal names that appear in the inscriptions are Latin. There are only very few exceptions, as the name *Ziles* on a Moesian inscription.[60] On the other hand, a great variety appears in the type of words involved: the ending is found with 36 different *termini* (substantives, adjectives and pronouns), only a few of which occur more than once, notably *filias* (23 times),[61] *reliquias* (five times)[62] and *collegas* (four times).[63] To more interesting and specific results lead the study of the type of inscriptions involved. Leaving aside the three examples from the first century AD and three further instances from imperial time (ex. *CIL* VI 2817 *Iovi Optimo Maximo Capitolino cives* **Dalmatas** *posuerunt*), all remaining occurrences were found on funerary inscriptions. A closer examination of the structures typically found on these texts provides significant elements for the explanation of the form.

Non-metrical funerary inscriptions are usually characterized by two elements. The most important one is, obviously, the name or names of the deceased, usually found at the beginning of the text and followed by various types of indication, such as years of life, military service, or marriage, social status, etc. The second section, instead, mostly exhibits the name of the donor or donors who commissioned the inscription. As for the syntax of the text, in older inscriptions the deceased is often put in the genitive, depending on the initial formula *Dis Manibus* or *D.M.*, but in imperial time there is a very large extension of the dative, which becomes the typical case of the dedicatee. The donor, instead, is constantly found in the nominative. Very important is the indication of the relation between donor and deceased, which is mostly based on kinship, but can also rely on friendship, a particular group affiliation etc. Thus, in the second part of the epigraph we typically observe a central pragmatic opposition between the nominative of the giver and the dative specifying the role or position of the deceased, according to the schema *Corneliae, quae vixit annis tot. Licinia titulum posuit filiae benemerenti.* Even in the not infrequent cases in which the text begins with the nominative of the dedicatee, this is usually taken up by a further dative: *Cornelia vixit annis tot. Licinia titulum posuit*

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[58] The ending occurs, for instance, 765 times in *CIL* VI 2. For details cf. Hehl 1912, 42ff; Galdi 2004, 68ff.

[59] However, despite these similarities, there is an important difference between the endings *-as* and *-abus*. The former, as seen above, is very likely to have been spread in the spoken language, whereas the latter is generally considered a feature of juridical and religious language, which, although largely attested on inscriptions, was confined to written texts. In particular, most of the occurrences are found within the fixed formulas *filiis filiabusque, diis deabusque* and similar. Cf. Galdi 2004, 69f with further bibliography.

[60] *ISM* II 303 *D.M. Saturn[i]nus Biti vixit annis XXXX et Curitthie filius et Valeria et Sabina* **filias** *eius;* **Ziles** *marita … titulum posuit.*

[61] Cf. *CIL* VI 17959 *Flavianae filiae bene* [*merenti*] *Macriae Hilarae matri bene merenti q. v. ann. XXXVIIII d. V* **filias** *in pace fecerunt.*

[62] Cf. *CIL* V 5078 *bone memorie et perpetue securitati bene quiescant* **reliquias** *Maximini* (Regio X, late).

[63] Cf. *ICUR* IX 23938 *Fl. Castino singulari off. p. p. q. vix. an. p. m. XXX* **collegas** *kar. posuerunt* (Rome, late).

filiae benemerenti. Within this scheme, the ending *-ae* could pose some problems due to its polyfunctionality. Specifically, since dative gradually becomes the normal case of the dedicatee and there are thousands of epigraphs engraved for one single woman, the ending *-ae* (when referred to persons) chiefly marked the dative feminine singular. In comparison, much less frequent are the stones commissioned by two or more women, which might have required the nominative plural ending *-ae* (ex. *filiae posuerunt*). It is therefore conceivable that in these special cases the need of distinguishing in a clear-cut way the donors and their relation to the dedicatee favoured the use of *as*-nominatives (which, as previously noticed, was probably spread in spoken usage). This didn't cause any sort of syntactic ambiguity between the accusative and the nominative, because Latin funerary inscriptions (as distinguished from the Greek ones) typically do not display the accusative of the person. In support of this theory we can observe that 45 of the total occurrences of the *filias*-type in imperial stones (that is approximately 65 %) were found with the name of the donors, ex. *ICUR* V 13217 *Dp. pri. Non. Ian. dilectissime matri Successe* **filias** *fecerunt* (see also the examples above).

Besides, in several of these instances, the deceased is a woman as well, and thus the use of the morpheme *-ae* could be particularly ambiguous. Two examples from Spain are reported below:

CIL II 38 *D.M.S. M.L. filia Cupita ann. XXXXIII Q.L.N. marite t Antonia Fundana et Mumia Rufina* **filias** *matri piissime posuerunt h.s.e., s.t.t.l.* (2nd/3rd century AD)

CIL II 5094 *Cor. Suriacis an. XXXXI, pia in suis* **amicas** *merenti aram posuerunt h.s.e., s.t.t.l.*

In the first text, the use of *filias* clarifies the number and role of the donors (Antonia Fundana and Mumia Rufina) and distinguishes it from that of the deceased (*matri piissime*). In the second one *amicas* differentiates the unspecified donor from the dative of the deceased (*merenti*). Similar cases are found in the next three epigraphs:

H 158 [*Cocceie I*]*smare* **Cocceas** *Vitalin Nonnita et Fidentia sorores* **carissimas vivas** *mimoriam fecert* (Pannonia Superior)

RIU 1227 *D.M. Domitio Longino vet. coh. Heme. (e)t Domit(i)ae Avitae parentibus posuerunt* **Domitias** *Revocata et Amata* [**fi**]**lias vivae***, instantibus Ar. Firmo vet. et Aur. Aunio generis* (Pannonia Inferior)

ILS I 100 *D.M. Arrius Callistus vix. XX per annis. quen tumulant* **Arriae** *Chia et Crispinilla* **patronas** *b.m.f.* (Sardinia)

In the first inscription, the three nominatives *Cocceas, carissimas* and *vivas* syntactically disambiguate the givers from the initial dative *Cocceie Ismare*. More interesting is *RIU* 1227, in which both nominative plural endings *-ae* and *-as* occur side by side. Apart from the *as*-morpheme, the text exhibits good Latin. In the initial section (*D.M. … posuerunt*), the ending *-ae* refers to one of the deceased (*Domitiae Avitae*). The repeated use of this form after the verb *posuerunt* might have caused confusion in the text due to the very high frequency in funerary stones of the pattern: *alicui ponere.* Probably therefore, the mason first employs the *-as*-morpheme (*Domitias filias*), which distinguishes number and case of the donors, and then the form *vivae* which due to its

proximity to *filias* doesn't generate any morphosyntactical ambiguity.[64] Similarly, in *ILS* I 100 the concomitant use of the two nominative morphemes (*Arriae, patronas*) appears to be favoured by the need of making clear gender and number of the donors.[65]

The remaining 25 occurrences of -*as*-morpheme are all found with the name of the dedicatee or with the form *reliquias* referring to him. Interestingly enough, in most of the cases the name of the donor is not expressed, so that no possible ambiguity could result between the two elements, ex. *ICUR* I 1462 [*hic r*]*equiescent in pace sacra*[*s virgines*] ***germanas*** *unius utere* ***natas*** *Rufi*[*na*] [*B*]*onifatia d*(*e*)*p*(*osita*) *VIIII Kal. Ian. cons. S*[…] (Rome, 5th century AD). As for the explanation of these instances, we can assume that in some cases the involved nominatives were felt as psychological object of the sentence and thus put in the accusative.[66] However, if we consider that nearly all these occurrences were found on late inscriptions (from the late third century onwards), they basically appear to be the result of a larger and more generalized use of the morpheme not only in the spoken language but also in written texts, as emerges from the fact that around the fourth century AD *as*-nominatives begin to spread even in literary documents.

Conclusions

The use of the -*as*-ending as a nominative plural of feminine nouns represents one of the most debated problems of Latin noun morphology since the end of 19th century. Although several explanations have been so far suggested, at least one main objection for each of them can be raised. The purpose of this paper, without claiming to give a "universal" solution to the problem (which is not likely to exist), is to offer an update to the problem, by focussing specifically on the non-literary occurrences of the ending, as well as to underline the importance of some factors accountable for its use (the problem of its origin has not been considered due to the very few number of occurrences from republican time). At first, it was observed that at least four elements hint at the use of the ending in spoken varieties of substandard Latin, namely: a) the diversity of the documents involved, b) the low level of correctness of many of them, c) the large diachronic and diatopic distribution of the occurrences, and d) the likely survival in some Romance languages. On the other hand, the emergence of the morpheme in written texts must be ascribed to a plurality of causes. Data emerging from previous epigraphic studies show that its large extension in imperial times is very likely to be connected to (or fostered by) the parallel spreading of the accusative in the syntactical system. Equally important appears to be the necessity of strengthening (at the least at the graphical level) the thematic vowel *a*, characteristic of

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[64] It is theoretically possible that *vivae* is a dative referring to Domita Avita: this would mean that, when the inscription was made, the mother of the two donors was still alive. However, since the epigraph refers to both parents and these are considered together (*parentibus*), it is preferable to intend *vivae* as a nominative plural.

[65] There is another aspect to consider. In all eastern inscriptions of the Empire (which are approximately 30000) there appear over thirteen hundred cases of monophthongization -*ae* > -*e* in the dative singular and only three in the nominative plural. See Galdi 2004, 65f. This glaring difference could be fostered, once again, by the will of keeping distinct at a graphical level the endings of the two cases. This hypothesis should be confirmed, however, by further research in other geographical areas and by a systematic comparison of the three forms -*ae*, -*e* and -*as* in the nominative plural.

[66] This is particularly likely in the examples with past participle or passive verbal forms, ex. *ICUR* I 619 *Petronia q*[*uae*] *vixit annus* [*…*] *et Martina soror eius que vixet annus VI* ***depositas*** *pridia Idus Iulias bene merentibus in pace* (Rome, late); AE 1908, 155 *hic abetur* ***reliquias*** *martiris Bincenti* (Africa, late).

feminine nouns, after the early monophthongization -*ae* > -*e*. Besides, a closer look at the occurrences in non-literary texts has revealed that the form is found almost exclusively on funerary inscriptions and mostly with the name of the donors. Thus, due to the very large diffusion in funerary texts of the dative singular -*ae* (or -*e*) in connection to the dedicatee, it has been suggested that the form -*as* was often preferred to -*ae* in the nominative plural in order to distinguish the name of the givers and to avoid confusion with that of the deceased, especially when both elements were feminine in gender. This need might have fostered its use also in cases in which the text was not ambiguous. A final, equally important aspect to consider is the late age of the documents involved, most of which go back to the late period (from the end of the third century onwards), when the morpheme was certainly more extended in common use and began to be accepted and codified even in literary texts.

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