There are two traditional explanations for the form and meaning of Latin *aliás* ‘at another time’ [Pl(au)t(us)+], which cannot be separated from *alterās* ‘id.’ [Plt., Cato, P(aulus ex) F(esto)] and *utrāsque* ‘on both occasions’ [Caecil., Hem.1]. According to one school of thought, the form is a first-declension gen. sg. of the archaic (pater) *familias* type, and thus a “genitive of time.”2 Another theory holds that this is a fem. acc. pl., in an elliptical expression with an omitted noun like *uices* (cf. *in uicem/in uices/per uices* ‘alternately, in turn’, *uicibus* ‘in return’, etc.).3 Neither approach is attractive.4

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1 Cassius Hemina (prose historian), flor. mid-2nd c. BC (Santini 1995).
3 E.g., Ernout and Thomas 1959: 453, Leumann 1977: 419 (the latter also admitting the possibility of the gen. sg. interpretation); similarly Kühner and Holzweissig 1966: 70 for *alterās* (“*alteras (sc. *uices*)”), cf. Wölfflin 1885: 235 (“*alteras (uices*)”).
4 As often in matters of etymology and historical morphology, the OLD presents a muddled picture, offering both explanations more or less simultaneously: s.v. -ās2, glossed as an “adv[erbial] suff[ix]”, we find “Orig[inally] acc. fem. pl. of adj., sc. *uices (alias, alteras, utrasque)*”; but the reader who checks s.v. *utrāsque* will be told that this form is “old gen. sg. of *vterque*; cf. *alias*, etc.” Lewis and Short (1879) s.v. *alias* (sub 2.C.) cite both possibilities.
The account via a fem. acc. pl. ellipsis has little to recommend it, and the assumption of an elliptical *uices* is especially weak. There is no indication that *aliās* ever had such a source: it is nowhere correlated, in this meaning, with *uices*, or with any other fem. acc. pl. noun—unlike other elliptical usages in Latin, where both the full and the reduced version are attested: *breui* (= *breui tempore*) ‘in a short [time]’; *ad Dianae* (= *ad aedem / fanum Dianae*) ‘to the [temple / shrine] of Diana’, etc. Nor is it encouraging that adverbial expressions involving *uices* (i.e., *in uices*, *per uices* ‘alternately, in turn’) are almost restricted to post-Augustan writers (*in uices* also occurs in Augustan poetry)—a profile that holds generally, in fact, for all other usages of the word as a noun (abl. *uice*, acc. *uices*, etc.) in its meaning ‘change, alternation’; for which Classical usage preferred *uicissitudo*.

There is, most damagingly, no evidence that the original reference of *aliās* involved a plural; and indeed, the reverse is true—the early usages unequivocally point to singular reference, as in three of the four clear attestations of the adverb in Plautus and Terence:

\[
\begin{align*}
aliās & \text{ me poscit pro illa triginta minas,} \\
aliās & \text{ talentum magnum; ...} \\
\text{ “at one time he asks me for thirty minae for her, at another time a large talent”}
\end{align*}
\]  
\[(\text{Plt., Curc. 63–64})\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{ si non quaeret, nullus dixeris,} \\
\text{aliās ut uti possim causa hac integra.} \\
\text{“if he doesn’t ask, don’t say a word, so that I can use this excuse afresh some other time”}
\end{align*}
\]  
\[(\text{Ter., Hec. 79–80})\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{ si impetro,} \\
\text{quid aliās malim quam hodie has fieri nuptias?} \\
\text{“if I get what I want, what other time than today could I prefer for the wedding?”}
\end{align*}
\]  
\[(\text{Ter., Andr. 528–529})\]

Even the fourth attestation, though usually translated as plural, can be given a singular interpretation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{ date benigne operam mihi} \\
\text{ut uos, ut aliās, parter nunc Mars adiuuet.} \\
\text{“kindly give me your attention, so that Mars may help you now, just as he has done at other times” — or: “at any other time”}\text{5}
\end{align*}
\]  
\[(\text{Plt., Asin. 14–15})\]

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5 Cf. Ernout (1959: 86): “aujourd’hui comme hier”. The attestation at *Mil.* 1269,