One of the persistent traditional problems of Germanic historical/comparative linguistics is the origin of the long-vowel nominative-accusative plural suffix of Old High German a- (IE o-) and ō- (IE ō-) stems. In the a-stems there exist variant nominative-accusative plural endings - -a (e.g., taga 'days'), which is traditionally derived from the accusative plural in *-anz (Prokosch 1938: 236, Voyles 1992: 228) and -ā (e.g., tagā 'days'), which is not easily derivable from the nominative plural in *-ōez(ez) which has reflexes in other Germanic dialects (e.g., Go. wulfōs, Ol ulfar, OE wulfas 'wolves'). In the ō-stems alternate nominative-accusative plural desinences are also found. As Voyles (1992: 230-231) points out, "The OHG paradigm presents a problem: the earliest OHG nom. plural is gebo ['gifts'] < NWG *yeboz by regular phonological change. However, in later Old High German a nom. pl. gebā occurs .... The occurrence of the nom. pl. gebā has led some to posit a change of NWG word-final /+ōz/ in *yeboz to /+ā/ in OHG gebā. However, in view of the facts that the homophonous gen. sing. /+ā/ does not show this development and that all of the Gmc. changes ... have only shortened or deleted vowels in unstressed word-final syllables, such a change is unlikely. Thus the question remains as to how OHG /ā/ in gebā originated." In this brief paper I wish to provide a possible answer to the question of the origin of the long-vowel nominative plural suffix of both a- and ō-stem nouns. What makes my approach different from the many which have preceded is that my proposal is formulated in the context of what Adrados (1992: 1) has called the "new image" of Indo-European morpho-syntax—a view which ascribes the development of the non-singular category to late Indo-European and the dialects themselves and which, more generally, sees the less complex inflectional structures of dialects like Hittite and Germanic as representing the structural patterns of the Indo-European proto-language. In short, for the "new image," Germanic is an archaic Indo-European dialect.

Although the "new image" view of Indo-European proposes that such categories as case, gender, and number in nouns and pronouns, and aspect, voice, and mood in verbs owe their rich development to the latest stages of Indo-European and the early dialects, evidence for
The late emergence of the category of number is especially compelling. Lehmann (1974: 201-202) argues, for example:

The system of verbal endings clearly points to an earlier period in which there was no verbal inflection for number .... For the dual and plural endings are obviously defective. We cannot reconstruct endings in these two numbers which are as well supported as are those of the singular, except for the third plural .... The number system is defective in substantival as well as in verbal inflection. The personal pronouns never did introduce expressions for plurality, as suppletive paradigms indicate, e.g., Hitt. uk 'I,' uēš" 'we,' etc., in contrast with demonstratives, e.g., kāš" 'this, these,' and nouns, e.g., antuhsaš, antuhsaš 'man, men' .... Number accordingly was not consistently applied in late PIE and the early dialects in accordance with natural reference. Subsequently application became more regular, and number congruence was carried out for both substantives and verbs.

I have maintained elsewhere (e.g., Shields 1991/2) that there exists a close etymological connection between the inflectional non-singular suffixes which can be reconstructed for late Indo-European and the early dialects (cf., e.g., *-e/os [Skt. pād- as, Gk. pōd-es 'feet'], *-i [Gk. lūko-i, Lat. lup-i 'wolves,' Hitt. kurur-i 'hostilities'], *(e/o)n [Toch. AB kāntwān 'tongues,' riñ 'cities,' cf. Schmalstieg 1980: 74], *-e [Gk. patēr-e 'two fathers,' OLith. žmun-e 'two persons'], *(e/o)T [= t or d; OE wit 'we two,' git 'you two,' cf. Shields 1992: 66], *(e/o)or [which "liegt vielleicht in den armenischen Formen auf -er, -ear, und in den keltischen (mittelirischen, mittelkornischen) Formen auf -ar vor" (Erhart 1970: 80)], and *-u [Skt. vīkā-u 'two wolves,' cf. Shields 1987]) and grammaticalized deictic/demonstrative elements — a connection based on sound typological principles (cf., e.g., Markey 1987). The late emergence of the non-singular category, which still later bifurcates into dual and plural, results in substantial variation between and within dialects regarding its formal expression. Indeed, the sheer number of reconstructed non-singular morphemes indicates the largely dialectal provenance of the category. More specifically, for example, "the ō-stem ending *-ai functions as a plural marker in Greek and Latin (cf. Gk. khōr-ai 'lands,' Lat. port-ae 'doors'), whereas