

The plural of *bihan*, *byhan* ‘little, small’ in Breton and Cornish

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1. Plural of adjectives in Middle Welsh and Old Breton

In Middle Welsh, attributive adjectives may be inflected in the plural. Two ways:

i-affection: *gueission ieueinc* ‘chamberlains’ (sg. *ieuanc* ‘young’), *wyn bychein* ‘little lambs’ (sg. *bychan* ‘little’)
-ion: *henyon amseroed* ‘old times’ (sg. *hen* ‘old’).

Adjectives used predicatively are on the other hand only very rarely given a specific plural form (Schumacher 2011: 134). Same system in Old Breton (Schrijver 2011a: 44; Fleuriot 1964: 245). The few exceptions tend to show that the same restriction applied as in Middle Welsh, namely that there is no plural inflection in predicative use:

OBret. *a[i] int mor ai in[t] becan* ‘are they great or are they small’ (*mor* and *becan* being singular adj.).

Singular adjective after a singular noun following a numeral (i.e. semantically plural, morphologically singular):

OBret. *teir lo(i)r trecon[t]oc* ‘three thirtyfold moons’ (cf. Fleuriot 1964: 245; Lambert).

2. The situation in Middle Cornish and Middle Breton

In Middle Cornish, adjectives remain uninflected (Lewis, Williams), apart from a few possible attestations of plural adjectives (Padel 1979/1980: 237-240), two in place names¹ and a few more in the plays. Padel concludes that:

“although a plural ending usually was added to an adjective only when it had the force of a noun [...] there are a few cases where it could be used in a manner so frequent in Middle Welsh. But it was obviously an exceptional usage, and it is most unlikely that it lasted beyond the Middle Cornish period.” (Padel 1979/1980: 239).

In Middle and Modern Breton adjectives also remain uninflected in the plural (thus Pedersen, Lewis & Piette, Pennaod, Trepos). One adjective is actually inflected in number in Middle Breton (Fleuriot 1964, Hemon HMSB, Schrijver 2011b):

Singular *quaez*, *quez* /kεθ/ ‘poor, miserable’ < **kaxt-os/-on/-ā/-ān*
 Plural *queiz*, *queyz* /keiθ/ (G 386) < **kaxti(h)* < *-*o_i*, *-*ūns*.

All other adjectives remain uninflected in number (and gender). However substantivized adjectives may be inflected in the plural, just as any other substantive noun – having uninflected substantivized adjectives would be ambiguous, because they stand alone.

MBret. *maru* ‘dead’ → *ar re maro* ‘the dead ones’ (Dnal. 108; adjectival use, no plural infl.) vs. → *an veru* ‘the dead ones’ (H 34, 54; substantival use, plural inflection).

3. The plural of *bihan* in Middle Breton

The distribution² of *bihan* ‘little’ and another adjective the same meaning, namely *munut*.

MBret. *bihan*, *byhan*, *bian* /bi(h)an/ ‘little, small’ < **bixan* < **bikko-* + dimin. *-an* (MW *bychan*, OIr. *becc*, *becán*)
 MBret. *munut* /mynyd/ ‘little, small’ < **minud* ← Lat. *minūtu-*

1 “*Meinwinion* c. 1200, now *Meinwinnion* (Illogan)” and “*Meynwinion(-wartha)* 1318, now *Menwidden* (Ludgvan)” (Padel 1979/1980: 238), both literally meaning ‘white stones’.

2 The following collections will exclude examples of appositive use, such as *bras ha bihan*, *na bras na bihan*, etc.

3.1 *bihan* vs. *munut* in the Middle Breton Nomenclator

Complete collection of attestations from the Nomenclator³ of *bihan* and *munut*:

With a singular noun:

bihan: *vn leufric, vn leufr bihan* Nom. 1; *vn cahieric, cahier bihan* Nom. 3; *œuftric, œufr bihan* Nom. 8; *vn denic, den bihan* Nom. 10; *crouaduric, crouadur bihan* Nom. 10; *merchic, plachic bihan* Nom. 10; *crouaduric bihan* Nom. 11; *crochennic bihan* Nom. 14; *ceruellicq, ceruell bihan* Nom. 16; *an bisic bihan, bis bihan* Nom. 24; *an bis bian* Nom. 211; *an guerzit bihan ves an garr* Nom. 25; *an guerzit bian ā bræch* Nom. 23; *gauftric, gaufr bihan* Nom. 31; *vn caru/-fic bihan* Nom. 31; *vn marchic bihan* Nom. 32; *Eznic, labouçc bihan* Nom. 36; *alcion, vn eznicq bihan á gra ez neiz voar bordan mor* Nom. 38; *banquetic bihan goude coan* Nom. 54; *guinic bihan* Nom. 62; *vn baraic bian* Nom. 72; *muguet bihan* Nom. 85; *sachic bihan* Nom. 119; *bac-/guic, lestric bihan* Nom. 149; *vr gou-/zoucq bihan pe hencq* Nom. 158; *vr gou-/zouc bihan* Nom. 158; *vesselic bihan* Nom. 160; *beric, ber bihan* Nom. 163; *gueleic bihan* Nom. 166; *gueleic bihā* Nom. 166; *pasic bihan* Nom. 211; *glaocq bihan* Nom. 221; *mænic, mæn bihan* Nom. 251; *menic bihan* Nom. 251; *oüigna-/manticq bihan ha subtil* Nom. 278; *porchel bian* Nom. 34; *vn porchel bian farset* Nom. 59; *soulmicq bian* Nom. 41 (r. *coulmicq*); *grüic, vn grübian* Nom. 41; *vn tammic bian* Nom. 53; *an trouch bian* Nom. 102 (ModBret. *troc'h* m. -où coupe, coupure); *vn ty bian* Nom. 127; *vn barquic, barcq bian* Nom. 150; *cordennic bian* Nom. 153; *gobeledicq bian* Nom. 160; *vn paneric bian* Nom. 164; *vn prenestic bian* Nom. 168; *mountaingnin bian* Nom. 231 (r. *mountaingnic?*); *vn caadic bian* Nom. 236 (r. *coadic*); *ruic bian* Nom. 242; *an vreach bian* Nom. 264; *pep tra bian á ve round* Nom. 278; *quyic, quy bi-/han* Nom. 31; *henticq bi-/han* Nom. 238; *mont dan galop bihan* (wr. <bihary>) Nom. 32 (ModBret. *galoup* m. ou f.).

munut: *glau munut* Nom. 221 'light rain' (ModBret. *glav* m. -ioù, -eier pluie).

With a singulative noun:

bihan: *vn pel-/len bian* Nom. 74; *vn guezen bian* Nom. 96; *vn guerz, pe canauen bihan* Nom. 8

munut: –

With a plural noun (including duals, plurals of diminutives and plurals of duals):

bihan: –

munut: *an goüaziedigou munut* Nom. 21; *an berr costou, costou munut* Nom. 22; *pesquetigou ragot, munut* Nom. 42; *frouezigou munut* Nom. 71; *brancouigou munut fall* Nom. 102; *bouttounou munut* Nom. 118; *bugalè munut* Nom. 118; *an bugalè munut* 171; *logou munut* Nom. 127; *cassedou munut* Nom. 134; *tiezigou munut* Nom. 190; *imagigou munut* Nom. 197; *imai-/gouigou munut* Nom. 253; *cleyer munut* Nom. 198; *guezigou munut* Nom. 237; *daoulaga-/digou munut* Nom. 269; *daoulagat munut* Nom. 269.

With a collective noun:

bihan: –

munut: *ræsin munut* Nom. 71 (ModBret. *rezin* coll. -enn raisins); *trinchin munut* Nom. 90 "Oxalis minuta" (ModBret. *triñchin* coll. -enn 'oseille, sorrel'); *frouez munut* Nom. 103 (cf. *frouezigou* Nom. 'little fruits' and not ***froueziouigou* which demonstrate that *frouez* may be a collective in Nom.; ModBret. *frouezh* coll. -enn fruit, fruits); *lien fin ha munut* Nom. 112 "toile fine & menuë" (ModBret. *lien* coll. -enn ou m. -où toile)

Both *bihan* and *munut* with the same noun is found twice:

frouez munut, ha bihan "Pomum nanum; fruit menu, ou petit" Nom. 66 (*frouezh* both possible as singular and coll.); *an toullou bihan pe munut á vez en crochen* 'the bihan or munut holes which are in the skin' Nom. 14 (unexplained).

3.1.1 Summary of the attestation from the Nomenclator

We have many examples of both *bihan* and *munut*. Remarkably, the Nomenclator shows a clear distribution:

3 A Latin-French-Breton thesaurus, translated by Quiquer of Roscoff (L) and published in 1633.

The Nomenclator	<i>bihan</i>	<i>munut</i>	<i>bihan</i> and <i>munut</i>
Singular/singulative noun	59	0	(1)
Singular mass noun	0	1	0
Plural/collective noun	0	21	1

bihan after singular nouns and singulative nouns

munut after plural nouns, collective nouns and dual nouns (1x)

One counter-example: *glau munut* ‘light rain’, which is formally a singular, but semantically a mass noun.

4.1 The writings of Gilles de Kerampuil (1570s; from north Cornouaille):

Attributive use:

Singular noun: *nombr bihan* ‘a small number (of)’ H 51; *prefacic bihan* ‘little preface’ Catech. 5v

Plural noun: *lizerennou munut* ‘small letters’ H 53; *an ré munut* ‘the little ones’ Catech. 12*v

Only four examples, all attributive, but it appears that Gilles de Kerampuil also has:

bihan after a singular noun, ***munut*** after a plural noun.

4.2 Ar Varn Diwezhañ, ‘The Final Judgement’ (ms., eastern Trég., late 17th-early 18th c.?)

Attributive use:

Singular noun: *crouadur bian* BD 503; *pachic bian* BD 1053; *eur poentic bian* BD 2060; *den bras na den bian* BD 2184.

Plural noun: *ma bugalle vunut* BD 5262; *al lapousset vunut* ‘the little birds’ BD 5267; *an ynossantet vunut* BD 5272.

Ar Varn Diwezhañ	<i>bihan</i>	<i>munut</i>
Singular noun	4	0
Plural noun	0	3

bian after singular, ***munut*** after plural.

4.3 Bernard ar Speret Santel (1640s; from Lesneven, in central Leon):

Attributive use:

Singular noun: *vr map bian* ‘a little son/boy’ Vd. 55; *Vr Crouadur bian* ‘a little child’ Vd. 58; *vr barquic bian* ‘a small boat’ Vd. 67; *vr crisinadennic bian* Vd. 70; *Vr Paotr Bian* Vd. 116; *vr compendi bian* Vd. 159; *ur groüadennec bian* Dnal. 86; *offiç bian* Dnal. 77.

Singular mass noun: *teil munut* Vd. 145 (ModBret. *teil* m. fumier; *teil-munut* m. terreau);

Numeral + Singular noun: *diou mer'ch bian* Vd. 93.⁴

Plural noun: *bugalé munut* ‘little children’ Vd. 134, Dnal. 154; *bugale munut* Dnal. 32, Dnal. 44; *ar-ré munut* ‘the little ones’ Vd. 135; *d'ar re munut* Dnal. 11; *are munut* Dnal. 69.

Bernard ar Speret Santel	<i>bihan</i>	<i>munut</i>
Singular noun	8	0
Singular noun after numeral	1	0
Singular mass noun	0	1
Plural noun	0	7

4 Cf. Old Breton *teir lo[i]r trecon[t]oc* ‘three thirtyfold moons’ (written *teir lor treconioc*), with a singular adjective *trecontoc* ‘thirtyfold’ after the numeral followed by a singular noun (Lambert).

bihan after singular**munut** after plural (only exx. of *bugale munut* ‘children’ and *ar re munut* ‘the little ones’).**4.4 The Middle Breton poetic corpus**

Attributive use:

Singular noun: *vnn esel bihan* ‘a small limb’ B 473; *Breyz byhan* ‘Brittany; lit. little Britain’ G 51; *vn ta[m] bihan* ‘a little bit’ B 801; *mab bihan* ‘little son’ N p. 29 (3x), 43, 44, 46, 51 (2x), “47” (2x), 57; *map bihan* Nl. 19, 123, 237, 339; *vn deduy bihan* ‘a little joy’ M 356; *mabic bihan* Nl. 131, 230, 301; *Dan liorz bihan* ‘to the little garden’ Jpass. 64; *Diabry dan soubit bihan* Jpass. 165; *vn moment byhan* M 260; *map byhan* Nl. 130, 233, 282; *An mabyc byh[lan]* Nl. 283; *En vn ty byhan* Pm. (Buh.) 262; *map bian* N. l. 10/p. 4.

Singular mass noun: *an pobl munut* Jpass. 22 (*pobl* fem. ‘people, crowd’, but “mass noun”?).

Plural noun: *bugale munut* ‘little children’ M 100, G 646; *An re so enoret, exaltet en bet man / Dispris hep courtsy, pep ty an re byhan* M 1420.

The poetic corpus, attributive use	<i>bihan</i>	<i>munut</i>
Singular noun	31	0
Singular mass noun	0	1
Plural noun	1	2

bihan after singular**munut** after plural, though one counterexample (and *munut* after *pobl* ‘people, crowd’, though formally a sg.; “mass noun”)

Predicative use:

Singular noun: *é pechet ... bezet bras pe bihan* ‘his sin ... be it great or little’ M 1981-1982; *Ne consiff muy Theology so bihan* Nl. 80; *E squient aman bihan* *voe* Jres. ??; *E gloat daz Abbaty ha hoaz mar bez byhan* G 469; *An meuleudy ne voe byhan* Nl. 133.

Plural noun: *na golch quet [...] / An treit hep muy, mar dint bihan* Jpass. 52; *hoaz ez eu bihan ho poanyou* ‘Still their pains are small’, B 356.

Exclamative/equative use:

Singular noun: *gouly quen bihan* ‘a wound so small (that)’ B 484; *euit queffridy quen bihan* ‘for an assignment so small’ B 509; *pris vn vuy mar bihan* ‘the price of an egg, however small’ M 372; *nep heny, mar bihan* ‘(of) any, however small’ M 1343; *hep fin ... na remsy, mar bihan* ‘without end ... nor respite, however small’ M 2486; *na nep melcony mar bihan* ‘nor any sorrow, however small’ M 2981; *ezedy quen byhan* M 1188.

Singular noun, compared to collective noun: *Ho brut quen munut ha ludu* ‘Their reputation as little as ash’ Pm. (Bmd.) 248.

Plural/collective noun: *aour nac archant az ty, nen dahy mar bihan* “The gold and silver of our house, it will not come (with you), however little” M 374 (*aour, archant* sg. mass noun).

4.5 The Breton of Euzen Gueguen (early 17th c.; south-western Kerne?)

Attributive use:

Singular noun: *an donesonic bihan* ‘the small gift’, Bel. 5v; *vn buguel bihan meurbet* Bel. 17r; *vn prohem bihan* Bel. 37v (r. *problem?*); *excummunuguen bihan* ‘minor excommunication’, Cnf. 31r; *pris bihan* Cnf. 37r; *vn eznic bihan* Cnf. 102v.

Plural noun: *sacrificçou bihan* Bel. 5v; *iniouro bihan* ‘minor injuries’, Cnf. 37r; *traezou bihan-se* ‘those little things’, Cnf. 62v; *an bugalezou munut* Bel. 27; *bugale munut* Bel. 36, 52; *an re munut* Bel. 55; *bugalez munut* Bel. 96.

Euzen Gueguen, attributive use	<i>bihan</i>	<i>munut</i>
Singular/singulative noun	6	0
Plural noun (animate)	0	5
Plural noun (inanimate)	3	0

Predicative use:

Singular: *Me so Bihan* Bel. 1v.; *an bezaññ à map den so bihan* Bel. 10v.;

Plural: –

bihan after singular and some plurals (non-human, inanimate?)

munut after other plurals (fixed phrases? human beings? animate?)

4.6 Modern Literary Breton

Modern Breton *bugale vihan* ‘little children’ occurs frequently.⁵ However, *munut* is still restricted in use. We are likely facing the relics of the Middle Breton suppletive paradigm in the restriction of *munut* to plurals, collectives and mass nouns:

Hemon, GIB: *glav ... munut* ‘fine rain’ (mass noun); *keuneud munut* ‘small firewood’ (coll.); *ar vugale vunut* (plur.); *sukr munut* ‘fine sugar’ (mass noun); *ar re vunut* (plur.); *ar bobl munut* (“mass noun”); *an dud vunut* (“mass noun”).

Le Gleau, Dict. Classique: *daou grankig munut* ‘two little crabs’ (semantic plural, morphological singular!); *an dud munut* (“mass noun”).

4.7 Vannetais

In the Breton dialect of Vannes, which represents the earliest split from common Breton, the distribution has already been lost in the earliest texts (mid-17th c.):

The Vannetais Noëls (ed. Hemon) only have *bihan*, also when attributive following plural nouns, so *mabet bihan* ‘little boys’ (NG 356), *ennet bihan* ‘little birds’ (NG 1059), *en duchentil bihan* ‘the little gentlemen’ (NG 1184).

Abbé Marion (1790s) only uses *bihan*, with both sing. and plural, including with human beings; *treu bihan* ‘little things’ (VM 151; MS 231, 383, 436), *pehédeu bihan* ‘little sins’ (MS 230), *er-ré vihan* ‘the little ones’ (MS 379).

Guillom, *Livr el labourer* (1842), only uses *bihan*, with both singular and plural, including with human beings; *bugalé vihan* ‘little children’, *er hleher bihan* ‘the little bells’, *er ré vihan* ‘the little ones’, *kiri bihan* ‘little carts’, *prinwed bihan* ‘little worms’.

Larboulette, *Buhé ar Sent* (1907) uses *bihan* with both sing. and plural (*urheu* ‘orders’ and *bredér* ‘brothers’). However, we find *munut* in *en dud munud*, *er bobl munud* (2x), *er bobl menud* ‘humble folks’.

Hence, as in literary Modern Breton, *bihan* has spread widely and *munut* is restricted to a few fixed phrases.

5. Summary

We may summarize the distribution of *bihan* and *munut*. The texts can be divided into three categories:

Attributive adjective	1.	2.	3.
text → type of noun ↓	Quiquer, Kerampuil, The Final Judgment	Bernard, MBret. Poetry	Euzen Gueguen, Modern Breton and Vannetais
singular, singulative	<i>bihan</i>	<i>bihan</i>	<i>bihan</i>
plural, collective singular mass noun	<i>munut</i>	<i>munut</i> or <i>bihan (munut)?</i>	<i>bihan (munut in fixed phrases)</i>

5 Other examples of plural nouns with *bihan* are e.g. *listri bihan* (GIB), *pobloù bihan* (Le Gleau). Many more could be adduced.

- The texts in group 1 have a full-fledged suppletive system with *bihan* in the singular and *munut* in the plural.
- The texts belonging to group 2, i.e. the texts in the poetic corpus and the works of Bernard ar Speret Santel, can belong to either group 1 or group 3, since they only have examples of *bugale munut* ‘little children’ and *an re munut* ‘the little ones’. These forms, *bugale munut*, *an re munut* appear to be residual forms, with *munut* being preserved because of the high frequency.
- The texts in group 3 allow *bihan* as a plural and only seem to preserve *munut* in fixed phrases.

Did the collapse of the system spread from the south (Euzen Gueguen, SW; Early Vannetais, SE) to the north (Nomenclator, NW; The Final Judgment, NE)?

6. Cornish

Cornish has a similar, unnoticed distribution between *byhan* and *munys* (the Cornish cognates of MBret. *bihan* and *munut*). All attestations of *byhan* and *munys* from the Middle and Late Cornish corpus will be given (with the exception only an obscure possible example from *Bywnans Ke*⁶ and the instances from Lhuyd’s self-authored introduction⁷ to the Cornish section of his AB – Lhuyd only spent four months in Cornwall and clearly cannot be considered a reliable source on such subtleties as the one discussed here).

6.1 Attributive use:

Singular noun:

bychan

Dheworté un lam bechan yth êth ‘From them a little space (r. step) he went’, MC 53

My hãm gwrêk, ha’m flôch byhan ‘Me and my wife and my little child’, OM 397.

Mâb Dew o nèb a welsys, avel flôch byhan maylys ‘The son of God it was whom thou sawest, like a little child swathed’, OM 810.

Reys yw dhyso lafurya un pols byhan alemma ‘It is necessary for thee to labour a little while hence’, OM 1269.

Reys yw dhys gyné pols byan lafurye ‘need is to thee with us a little while to labour’, PC 3004.

vniversite vyen ‘a small university’, BM 76.

mytern yn bryton vyan ‘King in Little Britain’, BM 169.

nynsus in breten vyen / ov parov ‘There is not in Little Britain my peers’ BM 517.

gans the flogh byen ‘with your little child’, BM 1550.

the vap byē ‘your little son’, BM 3629.

nago offense bean ‘that it was not a minor offence’, TH 4.

fatlla mar teffa ha contradicion ha varians chansya the vos drehevys war questyon bean. ‘What about if controversy and disagreement happened to arrive over a small question?’ TH 19.

An pith ew tra vean ‘This is a small thing’, TH 24a.

ken thewa the hevelep lyas onyn, mas tra vean ha fawt bean ‘Although to many, it appears only a small matter and a small fault’, TH 28a.

in kythsame lesson bean cutma ‘in this short little lesson’, TH 28a.

ha nysens y mas parcell bean a aphrica ‘and they are only a small part of Africa’, TH 32.

6 MCorn. *Henna ew gwastervynnys* Ke 1129; translated as ‘That is a little cake’ by Thomas & Williams (2007), but left untranslated by George (2006). Probably not to be emended to *gwastell venys* with Thomas & Williams, since the word *gwastell* is otherwise unattested in Cornish (it would have to have been borrowed from Breton or EOfR. *guastell*). The word *gwastervynnys* is corrupted, as so many other things in Ke. Note also the unexpected double <nn>, which is isolated in Middle Cornish.

7 Thus: *ha py ny kouze mēz nebaz bian adrô ’n Tavazo raglaveryz en an levar-ma* ‘and where we speak but never so little about the tongues aforesaid, in this book’ Lhuyd AB 222; *an gerlevran bian* ‘the small vocabulary’ Lhuyd AB 222; *sau neb levro bian Arvorek ha Frenkek* ‘except some small Breton and French books’, Lhuyd AB 222.

Dên **bian** ‘a little man’, Lhuyd AB 57.

Marh **bian** ‘a colt’, lit. ‘a little horse’, Lhuyd AB 57.

coos **bian** ‘the little wood’, Pryce ACB [74]

munys

pe dyth munys kewsovgghwy ‘If it be a little saying that ye speak’ (Stokes’ translation), BM 96. Uncertain interpretation.

The word *dyth* is usually taken to mean ‘saying’ < Lat. *dictum*, but this is the only attestation in all of British Celtic. The easiest way of accounting for the discrepancy would be to assume that *dyth* was collective or else that the identification is simply wrong.

Plural noun:

bychan

why hagus flehys vyan ‘you and your little children’, BM 1676.

orth flehys gruegh ha byen ‘Towards little and innocent children’, BM 1692.

munys

Yn lyfryw scryfys yma, bôs collenwys louené a ganow an flechys da, ha’n rê munys ow tené ‘in books it is written, that joy is fulfilled from the mouths of good children, and little ones sucking’, PC 438.

Yma oma kuē munys ‘Here are little hounds’, BM 3223.

hen ew, fatla mar pith ha contencyon ow consernya ran an questonow menys ‘That is, what if there is dispute also concerning some of the smaller questions?’, TH 36a.

Poccys minys ‘measles’ (Engl. “small-pox”, Jut. *smâpokker*), Lhuyd AB 169; LCorn. *poccys* ← MEng. *pokkes*, the plural of *pock* ‘pus filled swelling’.

pysgaz minys ‘small fishes’, Pryce ACB [141]

Der taklow minniz ew bres teez gonvethes, avelan tacklow broaz: dreffen en taklow broaz, ma an gymennow hetha go honnen; bus en tacklow minnis, ema an gye suyah hâz go honnen ‘by small things are the minds of men discovered, as well as by great matters: because in great things, they will stretch themselves; but in small matters, they will follow their own nature’, Pryce ACB [216].

The Cornish corpus, attributive use	<i>byhan</i>	<i>munys</i>
Singular noun	20	1(? BM)
Plural noun	2 (BM)	7

The Cornish material also provides some nice singular/plural pairs:

– sg. *questyon bean* ‘small question’ TH 19 → pl. *questonow menys* TH 36a.

– sg. *tra vean* ‘little thing’ TH 24a, 28a → pl. (twice suppletive!) *tacklow minnis* Pryce ACB [216].

6.2 Predicative use:

Singular noun: *ha dre begh an parna the hevelep ran an bobill nynso mas bean* ‘and through sin of that kind that in the sight of some people was but small’, TH 5.

Plural noun: *Nyng-yw ow faynys behan ús lemyn war ow sensy* ‘my pains are not small, that are now holding me’, MC 166.

6.3 Equative/exclamative use:

Singular noun, compared to collective noun: *Ha’y brewy [...] mar venys avel skyl brâg* ‘And to bruise (r. crush, break) her as small as malt dust (i.e. ‘break her into as (many) small pieces as malt dust’) [malt sprouts??], OM 2620.

Plural noun: *Agen flehys kekeffrys, whâth ke’dhyns y mar venys, me a dhôg ran war ow keyn uskes lemyn* ‘our children likewise, yet since they are so small, I will carry some on my back immediately now’, CW 100.

7. Conclusion on SWBritish

Cornish shows the same distribution as in Middle Breton:

Attributive use	Cornish	Middle Breton	Middle Welsh
Singular/singulative noun	<i>byhan</i>	<i>bihan</i>	<i>bychan</i>
Plural/collective noun	<i>munys</i>	<i>munut</i>	<i>bychein (bychan)</i>

7.1 Non-attributive use

As we have seen above, the clear distribution encountered in attributive use is not mirrored in other contexts.

7.1.1 Predicative use

The few examples we have of *bihan/munut* in predicative position with a plural noun show *bihan*. This is likely to be compared to the situation in Middle Welsh, where adjectives are only very rarely inflected in the plural when used predicatively.

MBret. *hoaz ez eu bihan ho poanyou*_[plur.] ‘Still their pains are small’, B 356;

MBret. *na golch quet [...] / An treit*_[plur.] *hep muy, mar dint bihan* Jpass. 52.

MCorn. *Nyng-yw ow faynys*_[plur.] *behan us lemyn war ow sensy* ‘my pains are not small, that are now holding me’, MC 166.

7.1.2 Equative/exclamative use

Here we find *bihan* in Middle Breton spite of the reference to a collective/singular mass noun, while Cornish here has the expected plural *venys* with reference to a plural noun (or rather pronoun).

MBret. *aour*_[sg.] *nac archant*_[sg.] *az ty, nen dahy mar bihan* ‘the gold and silver of our house, it will not come (with you), however little’, M 374.

LCorn. *Agen flehys kekeffrys, whâth ke’dhyns* *y*_[plur.] *mar venys, me a dhôg ran war ow keyn uskes lemyn* ‘our children likewise, yet since they are so small, I will carry some on my back immediately now’, CW 100.

7.1.3 True equative

Here Middle Breton and Cornish show the same seemingly ungrammatical choice of *munut/munys* referring to a singular noun/pronoun, when this is equated with a collective noun (presumably as a form of attraction):

MBret. *Ho brut*_[sg.] *quen munut ha ludu*_[coll.] ‘Their reputation as little as ash’, Pm. (Bmd.) 248.

MCorn. *Ha’y*_[sg.] *brewy [...] mar venys avel skyl*_[coll.] *brâg* ‘And to bruise (r. crush, break) her as small as malt dust (i.e. ‘break her into as (many) small pieces as malt dust’) [or malt sprouts?], OM 2620.

8. Comparison

It is difficult to exclude the absence as accidental, but it may be noted that neither *munut* nor *munys* ever seem to occur in the comparative and the superlative. The reason for this may be that these forms were supplied by the singular (basic) allomorph *bihan*, *byhan* of which we have numerous attestations both as comparative (MBret. *bihanoch* ‘smaller’) and superlative (MBret. *bihanhaff* ‘smallest’, *da vianaff* ‘at least’).

9. The verbal side of things

The singular/plural distinction between *bihan* and *munut* also seems to be reflected in the etymologically related Breton verbs:

MBret. *bihanhat* ‘reduce, diminish, make little’ Ca. 22a, ModBret. *bihanaat*. This is a simple deadjectival verb derived from *bihan* with the productive suffix *-ha-*.

MBret. *munudiff**, *-aff** ‘to crush, break into pieces’, past participle *munudet* Cathell ‘fragmenté’; ModBret. *munudiñ*, Vann. *munudein* ‘chop, crush’. The corresponding verb is not attested in Cornish but most likely existed.⁸ Probably

8 MCorn. *v lon bowyn dufunys* BM 3224 is translated as ‘five beef steers minced’ by Syed & Edwards (with *lon* < *lothen*), presumably seeing *dufunys* as an endingless ‘participle’ of a verbal stem *dufunys-* ‘to chop to little bits’. Or maybe, actually fitting the context rather well, it could be interpreted as a privative compound, ‘unminced’, giving us an example of the literal meaning *munys** ‘in little pieces’.

directly from Latin, cf. LLat. *minutare* (5th c.), cf. Romance reflexes of a denom. verb **mīnūtiāre*, in OFr. *menuisier* ‘to cut to pieces; reduce’ and *mincier* ‘to cut in small pieces, crush to bits’ (→ Engl. *mince*).⁹

10. Dating the rise of suppletion

The *bihan/munut* distribution likely arose when Breton and Cornish still had a fully functional sg./pl. opposition in attributive adjectives. Sufficiently exotic that it must have happened when SWBrit. was still more or less *one* language, most likely before the Breton migration. Likely time frame for the incorporation of **minud* as the plural of **bixan* is 200-500 AD.

11. The plurality of *munut*

Singular *bihan*, dimin. in *-an* derived from **bix* ‘little’ < **bikko-* (preserved in Welsh and Cornish place-names and in Irish *becc*).

Plural *munut* << Lat. *minūtus* ‘little, small’, the past participle of *minuo* ‘to diminish’.

Of the 14 examples of *minūtus* given in Lewis & Short’s *A Latin Dictionary*,¹⁰ 13 are with a plural noun and one is with a mass noun (*aere minuto*). The original meaning of *minūtus* must have been something like “reduced to little pieces”, i.e. “in small units”. This meaning then causes the restriction to plural nouns:

**puer minutus* ‘a boy in small units’ does not make a lot of sense
pueri minuti ‘boys in small units’, i.e. ‘little boys’ does work.¹¹

In later Gallo-Romance, the restriction to plural nouns and mass nouns does not survive and Old French *menu* is free to qualify a singular noun.

When *minūtus* entered SWBrit., it brought along with it the restriction, that it almost exclusively occurred with plural nouns and mass nouns. This tendency probably then first resulted in **minut-* in SWBrit. becoming completely defective, occurring only in the plural, and later on taking the paradigmatic place of the inherited plural form of *bihan*, which is still found in MW *bychein*.

11.1 Possible implications for Latin–British Celtic language contact

What kind of language contact is needed for SWBrit. to be able to pick up on the plurality of *minūtus*? Unlikely that this kind of borrowing can be explained with a superficial “loan-word” scenario, since it introduces a subtle morphological restriction probably not present in the receiving language.

Possibly best explained as “interference through language shift”, in which many of the structural features of Latin which entered British Celtic were due to speakers of Latin from the low-land cities fleeing westwards from the incoming Saxons and being absorbed by British Celtic speakers of the countryside (Schrijver 2002). In the process of shifting from Latin to British Celtic, they carried over a number of structural features (such as loss of phonemic length), though not necessarily many loan-words (*munut* would be one, along with the restriction to plural).

MW *mynut* ‘good manners (noun); well-behaved, courteous (adj.)’ probably borrowed at a different time. Points to a late transmission of the SWBrit. word, and only to SWBrit., cf. the notion that Latin/Romance influence on SWBrit. continued for a few more centuries than in Wales (Schrijver 2002: 97).

9 Cf. the adverb *munut* ‘in little pieces’ as in MBret. *Nac eu quen munut ambludet* ‘tant il est réduit en petits morceaux’, B 802; ModBret. *malañ munut* ‘grind to pieces’, *troc’hañ munut*, Vann. *trouhein munut* ‘cut into little pieces’.

10 Page 1148: A. Lit.: *pueri minuti*; *omnes magni minutique*; *litterae m.*; *folia m.*; *ossa m.*; *opuscula m.*; *itinera m.*; *aere minuto*; *facies minutiae* ‘small portraits’. B. Trop. “petty, paltry, insignificant”: *alii minuti et angusti*; *philosophi m.*; *imperatores*; *plebes m.*; *versibus minutis*.

11 Note also the adverbs *minūtē*, *minūtim* ‘into small or fine pieces, finely, minutely’.

12. A typological parallel

Adjectival singular/plural suppletion in the word ‘little’ is also found in the Modern Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian (both kinds) and Swedish), e.g. Danish sg. *lille*, pl. *små*. Earlier on there was more fluctuation (Ljunggren 1944). In early Modern Swedish, *små*, the plural form, was also used with collectives¹² and a nouns such as *folk* a neat parallel to SWBrit. (mass nouns and groups of people).

Why did this happen in Scandinavian? According to Ljunggren, *lille* and *små* were originally synonymous and the restriction to plural nouns developed within Scandinavian itself, more or less by chance. However, in light of the origin of the *bihan/munut* suppletion, we may have a second look at the etymologies for *lille* and *små*.

Dan. *lille*, Goth. *leitils*, etc. < PGerm. **lītīla-*, formed with a dimin. suffix, just like **bīxan*. Probably internally connected to PGerm. **lūtīla-*, **lūttila-*, **lutti-* but the further PIE etymology for these is unknown (cf. Orel 2003: 248).

Dan. *små*, ON *smár* ‘little’, OHG *smāhi* ‘little, small, puny’ < PGerm. **smāha-* (cf. Heidermanns 1993: 519) < PIE **sméh₁ko-*, from a root(?) **smeh₁(i)k-*? ‘ground down, tiny crumb’; thus IEW 966, comparing Gr. (σ)μῖκρός ‘little’, Lat. *mīca* ‘crumb’.

A challenge to Germanicists: What is the oldest reconstructable meaning of *små*? Was there already plural semantics in Proto-Germanic? Are there still traces of plurality in Old Icelandic? It is full well possible at least, bearing in mind the development of **minūtus* in Later Romance, that the plural restriction seen in Scandinavian was subsequently lost in Old Icelandic and Old High German independently and only survived in Scandinavian Germanic, where it was further developed. At least with the PIE input likely being something like “ground to pieces, in little pieces” and the Scandinavian output is an adjective restricted to the plural, it lies close at hand to assume that there is a link, that the “plurality” survived from PIE to Scandinavian. This would make the typological parallel to the development of *bihan/munut* is even more precise.

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¹² Ljunggren (1944: 51-52) notes that “Dock har sing.-formen [of små] länge haft en stark ställning vid kollektiver (dividua) i betydelsena “bestående av små delar, småväxt” and he gives examples from early Modern Swedish of *små* used with the words for cattle, fish, grain, cabbage.