

The prehistory of Ossetic verbal inflection (II): The copula



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ABSTRACT

The forms of the Ossetic copula, which diverge significantly between the two principal dialects Digor and Iron, have all been derived from Proto-Iranian sources, but many details of their development remain uncertain. In the singular, a pronominal stem, probably **ta-*, was grammaticalized as a copula and extended to 1SG *d-æn* and 2SG *d-æ*, the remaining portions of which go back to PIr. 1SG **ahmi*, 2SG **ahi*. Other pronouns were then grammaticalized in 3SG Iron *u* and Digor *æj*, whereas Digor *je(s)*, Iron *i(s)* reflects PIr. 3SG **asti*. In the plural, Digor 1PL *an*, 2PL *atæ* continue PIr. subjunctive **ah-a-* or present indicative forms remodeled on the stem **ah-*; while Iron *ystæm*, *ystut*, *ysty* are in origin present forms of PIr. **staH-* ‘stand’.

KEYWORDS

Iranian, Ossetic, copula, suppletion, grammaticalization

1. INTRODUCTION¹

The first installment of this series (Kim 2022) examined the prehistory of the Ossetic person-number verbal endings in the present indicative and imperative, but due to space restrictions the copula could not be included. As seen in (1), the forms of the copula diverge significantly between the two principal dialects, Digor and Iron.

(1)	Digor	Iron	Digor	Iron
1SG	<i>dæn</i>	<i>dæn</i>	1PL <i>an</i>	<i>(y)stæm</i>
2	<i>dæ</i>	<i>dæ</i>	2 <i>ajtæ</i>	<i>(y)stut</i>
3	<i>æj, je(s)</i>	<i>u, i(s)</i>	3 <i>æncæ</i>	<i>(y)sty</i>

In addition to brief discussions by Miller (1903: 74–76) and Thordarson (1989: 477), the prehistory of these paradigms was examined by Weber (1983) and Cheung (2002: 141–142), but a consensus has not yet been reached on the interpretation of their

1 I am indebted to Agnes Korn for her comments and suggestions, which have enormously improved the clarity of argumentation.

Where two Ossetic forms are separated by a slash, the first is in the Digor dialect, the second in Iron. Abbreviations: B, C, MSo. = Buddhist, Christian, Manichean Sogdian; D = Digor; I = Iron; ModP = Modern Persian; O, YAv. = Older, Younger Avestan; (P)Oss. = (Proto-)Ossetic; PIE = Proto-Indo-European; PInIr. = Proto-Indo-Iranian; PIr. = Proto-Iranian; Ved. = Vedic; Yagh. = Yaghnobi.



numerous peculiarities. It will be shown in the following pages that all forms may be plausibly derived from Proto-Iranian sources, and that the evolution of the copula illustrates phenomena of crosslinguistic interest far beyond Ossetic, including grammaticalization of pronominal stems and introduction of stem suppletion.

2. THE FIRST AND SECOND SINGULAR

As already seen by Miller (Oss. St. II: 191), the elements *-æn*, *-æ* in 1SG *dæn*, 2SG *dæ* continue PIr. **ahmi* and **ahi*, respectively. This view is generally accepted,² but the phonological development has never been investigated in detail. In the 1SG, final *-n* may be explained in the same three ways as in PRS.IND.1SG *-un/-yn*, i.e. by

- (2) a. early apocope of **-i* followed by **-m* > **-n*;
- b. regular apocope of **-i* followed by shift of newly final **-m* > **-n* (with **-m* then restored in nominal paradigms, e.g. **nam* ‘name’ > *non/nom*); or
- c. analogical generalization from PIr. PRS.SUBJ.1SG **-āni* > Oss. *-on*.³

In the 2SG, **ahi* was contracted to **ai* and monophthongized to POss. **e*. As this should have remained in a fully stressed monosyllable (cf. PIr. prohibitive particle **mā* > POss. **ma* > *ma*), the weakening to *æ* in both dialects must have been generalized from atonic position, as in (3a); cf. also the regular treatment of POss. **-e* > D, I *-æ* in polysyllables (3b).⁴

- (3) a. GEN/ACC clitic *mæ* ‘me’, *dæ* ‘you’ < PIr. GEN/DAT **mai*, **tai*
- b. *ændæ/æddæ* ‘outside’ < POss. **ænde* < PIr. LOC **antai* ‘at the end’ (cf. Ved. *ánta-* ‘end, limit’)
- dælxæ* ‘below, beneath’ < POss. **dæle* < PIr. LOC **adarai* (YAv. *aðara-* ‘lower, western’)
- duuæ/dyuuæ* ‘two’ < POss. **duwe* < PIr. F/N **duwai* (YAv. *duiie*, *duuaē-ca*, Khotanese *dvī*; cf. Ved. *duvé*)

The forms *-æn*, *-æ* are retained in future 1SG *-zæn-æn/-zyn-æn*, 2SG *-zæn-æ/-zyn-æ*, which goes back to a periphrastic construction with PIr. **čānah-* ‘desire’;⁵ otherwise they have been expanded to *dæn*, *dæ* with an initial *d-* of disputed origin. Older hy-

2 See Benveniste 1959: 75, Testen 1997: 715.

3 For details, see Kim 2022: 156–157. Cheung (2002: 141) and Korn (2011: 56fn.10) favor the last option, in which case the SUBJ ending would surely have influenced the general PRS.IND.1SG **-un* as well.

4 On clitic *mæ*, *dæ* see Testen 1996: 369, Cheung 2008: 97. Weber (1983: 89) suggests a development of PIr. **ahi* > **ah* > **æ*, but the “frühe[r] Verlust” of **-i* would have to have been early indeed, before loss of intervocalic **h* and contraction. For POss. **-e* > *-æ* in polysyllables, see Cheung 2002: 65, 2008: 101, Kim 2007: 53–54, 2020: 261.

5 See Benveniste 1959: 75, Testen 1997: 715.

potheses compared this *d-* with preverbal elements or adverbs elsewhere in Iranian or assumed an analogical origin, but all are formally or semantically problematic.⁶

Weber (1983: 90) first suggested that the *d-* of *dæn*, *dæ* goes back to pronominal **ta-* or **aita-* ‘this’. This explanation is attractive, since grammaticalization of demonstrative pronouns as copulas is a crosslinguistically common phenomenon with numerous parallels in Iranian, e.g. So. 3SG/PL (‘)xw, Yagh. 3SG =x from the distal pronoun So. (‘)xw, Yagh. ax < PIr. **hau-/*awa-*.⁷ Korn opts for **aita-*, comparing Pashto 3SG.M *dəy*, 3SG.F *dā*, 3PL *dī* and Wakhi PRS *tey*, PRT *tu* (Korn 2011: 56, 2020: 477; cf. Benveniste 1959: 74–75). The voicing of intervocalic **t* is regular; the aphaeresis of **ai-* is not impossible in a grammaticalized copula, but one would then also expect aphaeresis in 3SG *je(s)/i(s)*, which she derives from PIr. **aiša-* (see §3). I thus prefer to start from PIr. neuter **tat* (Av. *tāt*); the voicing of word-initial **t-* in weakly stressed or unstressed position has an exact parallel in the 2SG pronoun: PIr. NOM **tuwam*, ACC **tawā* > POss. **du*, **dæw* > *du/dy*, *dæu*.⁸ The pronominal stem was extended to the 1SG and 2SG to yield the attested forms (cf. Korn 2011: 56–57, 61). These developments are represented below in (4).

(4)	PIr.				POss.			
	1SG	<i>*ahmi</i>	>	<i>*am</i>	>	<i>*an</i>	→	<i>*dæn</i>
	2	<i>*ahi</i>	>	<i>*ai</i>	>	<i>*e</i>	→	<i>*de</i>
	3	<i>*tat</i>	>	<i>*da</i>			>	<i>*dæ</i>

3. THE THIRD SINGULAR

Of the 3SG copula forms, *je(s)/i(s)* can easily be inherited: PIr. **asti* > **astʰ* > **aist* > POss. **es(t)* > D *je(s)*, I *i(s)*, with regular *i*-umlaut as in *fest(æg)/fistæg* ‘pedestrian; rolled-up (sleeve)’ < PIr. **pasti-* (OP *pasti-* ‘foot-soldier’, Ved. *pattī-* ‘pedestrian, foot-soldier’).⁹ Several authors have connected these forms with the PIr. demonstrative pronoun **aiša-* (Weber 1983: 87, Thordarson 2009: 6, Korn 2011: 56), which is formally acceptable, though the absence of aphaeresis contrasts with that assumed by Korn for

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- 6 See Müller 1864: 528, Salemann 1876: 85, Miller Oss. St. II: 191 (comparing preverbal elements of the shape *dV-* in Mazandarani and Kurdish), Salemann 1883: 143 (from **du d(u) æ*, whence by analogy 1SG *æz dæn*), Miller Oss. St. III: 165 (comparing YAv. *hadā* ‘always’), 1903: 75 (connecting *d-* with *æd-* < **hadā* ‘(together) with’; semantically improbable, cf. Benveniste 1959: 74, Weber 1983: 90), Tomaševskij 1925: 77–80 (geminate dental introduced into intransitive preterites, e.g. *cæddæn*, *cæddæ* ‘I, you went’, whence copula *dæn*, *dæ*; why only 1SG and 2SG?), Axvlediani 1948: 82 [1960: 159] (borrowing from Ingush *da*).
- 7 See in general Korn 2011, and for this example Benveniste 1959: 75, Weber 1970: 21–24, 1983: 88, Korn 2011: 55–63, Benkato 2020: 7–8, 10–11, 11–15, 20.
- 8 A similar change has taken place in Armenian: *dow* ‘you.sg’ < PIE **tuh₂*; *d-a*, *-d* < PIE **to-*. Cf. also the voicing of initial [ʒ-] > [ð-] in English function words: *the*, *this*, *that*, *there*, etc.
- 9 See already Müller 1864: 528, Salemann 1876: 84, Miller Oss. St. II: 190, 1903: 75 (tentative); further Benveniste 1959: 75, Isaev 1987: 622, Christol 1990: 39 (but not from **asty-*), Cheung 2002: 100, 141, 194.



**da-* < PIr. **aita-* (see §2). If the Alanic phrase τὸ φάρν-ετζ in Tzetzes's *Theogony* stands for /dæw farn-e(s)c/ [PRON.2SG.GEN glory-COP.3SG] 'yours is the glory' (Lubotsky 2015: 58), it would constitute strong support for a derivation from **asti*. The reduction of the final consonant cluster is widely paralleled in IE languages, from Germanic (Old English *is* vs. Gothic, Old High German *ist*) to Romance (Spanish *es*, Italian *è* < Latin *est*) to Slavic (Czech *je* vs. Polish *jest*) to Iranian itself (ModP colloquial *-e* beside literary *ast*).

Alongside this form are two others that are unrelated to one another and strongly recall pronominal stems: I *u* < PIr. **hau-* and/or **awa-* (cf. I *u*, D OBL *wo-* 'that'); and D *æj*, probably from PIr. **aya-* (cf. D NOM *je* 'that').¹⁰ A pronominal origin for these forms is supported by their usage, with *je(s)/i(s)* serving as existential verb and *æj/u* in identificational function, as in the Iron examples in (5).¹¹

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|--------|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------|
| (5) a. | <i>mæ</i> | <i>xælar</i> | <i>sk'olæ-jy</i> | i(s) |
| | PRON.1SG.GEN | friend | school-LOC | COP.3SG |
| | 'my friend is in/at school' | | | |
| b. | <i>mæ</i> | <i>xælar</i> | <i>student</i> | u |
| | PRON.1SG.GEN | friend | student | COP.3SG |
| | 'my friend is a student' | | | |

Most likely, I *u* and D *æj* replaced POss. **dæ* after the latter fell together with 2SG *dæ* < POss. **de*. Since that merger took place separately in the two dialects (see §2, (4)), it is not surprising that they chose different stems.

4. THE DIGOR PLURAL FORMS

The forms of the two dialects diverge in the plural, where only the D paradigm stands a chance of continuing the old present of **ah-* 'be' (Weber 1983: 84–85). D 3PL *æncæ* could be from PIr. **hanti*, with the same replacement of **t* with **θ* under the influence of the 2PL as in PRS.IND.3PL **-anti* → **-anθi* > **-antʰ* > **-ænc* → POss. **-unc(æ)* >

¹⁰ See Miller 1903: 75, Benveniste 1959: 74–75, Weber 1970: 24fn.57, Isaev 1987: 622–623, Christol 1990: 39–40 (on I *u*); Weber 1983: 86–87, Thordarson 2009: 5–6, Korn 2011: 56. Weber (1983: 87) and Korn (2011: 56, 57) separate *jes/is* from *je/i* and take the latter along with D *æj* from PIr. **aya-/i-*, which is uneconomical and does not address the formal gap between D *je* and *æj*.

¹¹ This functional distribution speaks against a comparison of I *u* with the present of PIr. **bawa-*, which in Ossetic has the meanings 'become, grow' or 'be/appear/happen sometimes, once in a while' (Miller Oss. St. II: 192, 1903: 75, Isaev 1987: 622, Cheung 2002: 141; see Kim 2022: 164–5). It also further disfavors the idea of Benveniste (1959: 75–76; cf. Christol 1990: 40) that D *æj* < **hati* was remodeled after the 3PL **hanti*, which is highly improbable on typological grounds (no comparable reshaping of the 3SG on the basis of the 3PL can be adduced from any other IE language).



-uncæ/-ync and IMPV.3PL *-antu → *-anθu → POss. *-æntæ > -æntæ/-ænt.¹² In contrast, 1PL *an*, 2PL *ajtæ* can hardly continue PIr. **hmah(i)*, **sta* (OAv. *mahi*, *stā*; cf. Ved. *smāsi*, *sthā*), which would have been perceived as irregular very early on and thus obvious candidates for remodeling. Generalization of full-grade **ah-* from the singular to 1PL **ahmah(i)*, 2PL **ahta* would be a straightforward step, as in OP 1PL *amahi*.¹³ However, examples such as PIr. COP.1SG **ahmi* > **am* → POss. **d-æn* (§2) and PIr. **hazahra-* > **azara-* > **azra-* > POss. **ærze* ‘thousand’ show that there was no lengthening of the vowel in OIr. sequences **ahC*. The preforms **ahmah(i)*, **ahta* would thus have given **amah*, **ata* > **æm*, **ætæ*, not the required POss. **am*, **atæ*.

The only realistic source for the *a-* of D 1PL *an*, 2PL *ajtæ* is a sequence **ahǎ-* with loss of intervocalic **h* and contraction to **ā*, as in PIr. **upa-had-* > **bād-* > POss. **bad-* > *badun/badyn* ‘sit’.¹⁴ This leads to two possibilities. The D forms could go back to subjunctives, namely PIr. **ahāma*, **ahaθa* (OAv. 1PL *āṇhāmā*; cf. Ved. *āsāma*, *āsatha*).¹⁵ Their generalization could be attributed to confusion following the loss of **h*, leading speakers to prefer the subjunctive forms to the opaque reflexes of PIr. **hmah(i)*, **sta*. Alternatively, A. Korn (p.c.) calls to my attention the Parthian copulas *ahāz* and *ahād*, which have been explained as IMPF.3SG **ahat* (OP *āha*) > **āδ* and SUBJ.3SG **ahati* > **ād* attached to the present stem to give **ah-āδ*, *ah-ād*.¹⁶ A similar recharacterization could have taken place in pre-Ossetic, whereby 1PL **ahmah(i)*, 2PL **ahta* with analogical full-grade root (see above) became **amah(i)*, **ata* and were remade to **ah-amah(i)*, **ah-ata*.

In either case, the forms would have given **āmah*, **āθa* with contraction of **aha* > **ā* and generalization of the usual endings, 1PL *-*mah* and 2PL *-*θa* (see fn. 12), whence POss. **am*, **atæ*. The expected D reflexes of these are *ʃon*, *ʃatæ*. The secondary -*j-* of 2PL *ajtæ* is also found in other categories, e.g. SUBJ.2PL -*ajtæ*;¹⁷ and the *a* of the 1PL was apparently leveled from the 2PL, since sequences of *a* plus nasal are extremely rare in both Oss. dialects due to the late (post-Alanic) change of **aN* > *oN*.

5. THE IRON PLURAL FORMS

Turning to Iron, Miller, following a proposal of Salemann (1883: 143), understood I 1PL (*y*)*stæm*, 2PL (*y*)*stut* to be formed on the basis of 3SG **asti*, citing as parallels ModP *hast-īm*, *hast-īd* and Polish *jest-eśmy*, *jest-eście* (Miller *Oss. St.* II: 191, 1903: 75–76; Isaev

12 See Kim 2022: 162–163; first observed for the imperative by Benveniste (1959: 76). Ossetic has generalized PIr. **θ* > **t* from PRS.IND.2PL *-*aθa* > POss. *-*tæ* (→ -*etæ*/-*ut*) to all 2PL endings.

13 See Miller *Oss. St.* II: 191, 1903: 75, Isaev 1987: 623, Christol 1990: 40.

14 See Thordarson 1989: 464, Cheung 2007: 126 s.v. **had*.

15 Tentatively mentioned by Weber 1983: 85 (“analoger Ausgleich wie etwa **ah-a-* mit Vollstufe und sekundärer Thematisierung (oder eventuell auch Konjunktivformen)”).

16 See Jügel 2015: 128–132 for discussion and references.

17 I see no way of determining whether this change influenced the generalization of the optative ending in PRS.IND.2PL -*etæ* (Miller 1903: 70) or vice versa (Miller *Oss. St.* II: 191–192, 1903: 75 [*ajtæ* < *a+etæ*], Weber 1983: 85fn.3), or is an independent innovation.



1987: 623). Weber (1983: 86) took a further step in positing $(y)sty < *asti$ as the original 3SG form,¹⁸ which was then ousted by new copula forms of pronominal origin ($< \text{PIr. } *aiša-, *awa-, *aya-$; see §3) and shifted to 3PL function. Against this four objections may be raised:

- (6) a. the remodeling of the plural but not the singular on the basis of the 3SG would to my knowledge be without parallel (cf. ModP 1SG *hast-am*, 2SG *hast-ī*, Polish 1SG *jest-em*, 2SG *jest-eś*);
- b. the absence of *i*-umlaut in $(y)sty < \text{PIr. } *asti$ is contradicted by *festæg/fistæg* ‘pedestrian; rolled-up (sleeve)’ $< \text{PIr. } *pasti-$, which rather points to COP.3SG *je(s)/i(s)* $< \text{POss. } *es(t) < *aist < *astʷ$ as the regular development of $\text{PIr. } *asti$ (§3);
- c. the *-y-* of intransitive preterites, which are composed of preterite participle + copula (e.g. PRT.1PL *cyd-ystæm*, 2PL *cyd-ystut*, 3PL *cyd-ysty* ‘went’), and the underlying *-y-* of PRF.1PL *festæm*, 2PL *festut*, 3PL *festy* ‘turned out to be, became’ (*fe-* $< fæ-y-$; cf. PRF.1SG *fæ-dæn*, 2SG *fæ-dæ*, 3SG *fæ-c-i(s)*) argue against a prothetic origin (Cheung 2002: 142);
- d. there is no evidence for confusion of the 3SG and 3PL at any point in the history of Oss. (Cheung op. cit.).

As seen by Bielmeier (1977: 162–163), the I plural forms rather go back to $\text{PIr. } *staH-$ ‘stand’ ($< \text{PIE } *steh_2-$) and have split off from the paradigm of D *istun*, I *styn* ‘stand (up)’.¹⁹ Since the reduplicated present of this root was thematic already in PIr. (cf. Ved. *tīṣṭhati*, YAv. *hištaiti*, OP IMPF *aištata*),²⁰ the 1PL and 2PL forms would have developed in the same way as those of ordinary presents, whence $(y)stæm$, $(y)stut$ (cf. *kænæm* ‘we do’, *kænut* ‘you.PL do’).

As for 3PL $(y)sty$ with its peculiar short ending, this cannot directly reflect $\text{PIr. } *hištanti$, since word-final *-nti* should have given $\text{POss. } *-ndʷ > \text{D } -j, \text{I } -nʷ$.²¹ It can

18 The idea goes all the way back to Bopp (1847: 48), but he later abandoned it and took $(y)sty$ to be a “Verstümmelung” of $(y)stync$ (op. cit. 80n.39; see below, fn. 21).

19 Cf. Thordarson 1989: 477, 2009: 6, Cheung 2002: 142, Korn 2011: 56fn.10, 2020: 482. The connection was proposed already in the 19th century: see Bopp 1847: 48, 80n.39 (wrongly including 1SG *dæn*, 2SG *dæ*), Müller 1864: 528–529 (wrongly comparing ModP *hastim*, *hastid*, *hastand*). Copular forms from ‘stand’ occur frequently in western IE languages (Irslinger 2019) but are otherwise not found in Iranian, where $\text{PIr. } *staH-$ has become grammaticalized in imperfective and continuous constructions (Benveniste 1966, Korn 2020: 481–482).

20 As also in Latin *sistō* and (with secondary *-y^e/o-* inflection) Old Irish *·sissedar*. These, along with Greek athematic ἵστημι , may be derived from a PIE h_2e -conjugation present $*stī-sth_2-$ (Jasanoff 2003: 130–131).

21 Cf. D *æfsoj*, I *æfsonʷ* ‘yoke’ $< \text{POss. } *(æ)fsandʷ < \text{OIr. } *spān-ti-$; also D *fij*, *fīnʷ(æ)*, I *fīnʷ* ‘nose’ $< \text{POss. } *fīndʷ$, borrowed from Northwest Caucasian (cf. Abkhaz *a-pīnc’a*, Abaza *pīnc’a*). The parallel change of $\text{OIr. } *ti > \text{POss. } *-dʷ > \text{D } -j, \text{I } -ʷ$ is robustly supported, e.g. in *insæj/ssæʷ* ‘twenty’ $< \text{POss. } *insædʷ < \text{PIr. } *winčati$; *kuj/kʷyʷ* ‘dog’ $< \text{POss. } *kudʷ < \text{PIr. } *kuti-$ ‘bitch’. See Benveniste 1959:75, Christol 1990:14; for further examples, see Cheung 2002: 98–9, Kim 2007:60–4. — Suggestions that the final cluster was simply lost (Bopp 1847: 80n.39 “ver-

however continue a shortened byform **hištani*, generalized from rapid speech. This would have become **ištainʷ* and then POss. **istinʷ*, with *i*-umlaut followed by the regular change of **ai* > **i* before nasals; cf. (7) and for the latter (8).²² POss. **istinʷ* would in turn have become (y)styj (attested in 19th-century sources), with evolution of word-final **-nʷ* > I -j as in the noun-forming suffix *-ojnæ/-oj* (9), and finally modern I (y)sty.

- (7) PIr. **kani-* → **kanikā* > **kainiča* > POss. **kinzæ* > *kinzæ/čynz* ‘daughter-in-law, bride’ (MSo. *knc* ‘girl’; cf. Av. *kainiiā-*, *kainīn-*, Zazaki *keynek*)²³
- (8) PIr. **wain-* ‘look at’ (GAv. *vaēna-*) > POss. **win-* > *winun/wynyn* ‘see’
 PIr. **-aina-* (suffix forming adjectives of material; Av. *-aēna-*, OP *-aina-*, MP *-ēn-*) > POss. **-in* > *-in/-yn*, e.g. *γæd-in/qæd-yn* ‘wooden’ to *γædæ/qæd* ‘wood’
 PIr. **abi-šaiθnī-* → **abišai(θ)nyā* > **avišinya* > POss. **æfsijnæ* > *æfsijnæ/æfsin* ‘landlady, mother-in-law, housewife, hostess’
- (9) PIr. **-āna-* + **-γā-* > **-ānyā-* > POss. **-anʷæ* > *-ojnæ/-oj*, e.g. *æncojnæ/æncoj* ‘rest, support’, *sagojnæ/sagoj* ‘pitchfork’ (to *æncon* ‘light, easy’, *sag* ‘deer; *horned’) ²⁴

An analogous explanation underlies SUBJ.3PL *-oncæ/-oj*, which should go back to PIr. thematic SUBJ.3PL **-ānti* (OAv. *-āntī*, YAv. *-ānti*). The Iron ending reflects a reduced allomorph **-āni*, which became POss. **-anʷ* > I -oj by the change seen in (9). Digor on the other hand continues **ānti* → **-ānθi* → POss. **-ancæ* > *-oncæ*, with replacement of **t* with **θ* after the 2PL just as in PRS.IND.3PL **-anti* → **-anθi* → POss. **-unc(æ)* > *-uncæ/-ync* or COP.3PL **hanti* → **hanθi* → POss. **æncæ* > D *æncæ* (§4). There is thus some basis for assuming a variant **hištani* of **hištanti* ‘they stand’, which by sound change yielded the Iron copula (y)sty ‘they are’.

6. CONCLUSION

Most of the individual points discussed in this article have been previously proposed in the literature, but only when taken together does one obtain a coherent picture of the evolution of the copula from Proto-Iranian to the present. Although

stümmelt”) or dropped to avoid homophony with 3PL *stync* ‘stand’ (Miller 1903: 76, Isaev 1987: 623) are entirely ad hoc.

22 For additional examples of **ai* > **i* before nasals, see Miller 1903: 18, Cheung 2002: 17, Kim 2003: 60–62.

23 On PInIr. **kani-* and its derivatives, see EWAia I: 297–298 s.v. *kanyā-*. For the suffix **-ičā*, see GMS: 39 §247, Testen 1994: 300–303; pace Abaev *Dict.* I: 607–608 (**kanti*), Morgenstierne 1962: 161–162, Cheung 2002: 13, 199 (< **kaničī-*).

24 See Cheung 2002: 136; on the cognate So. suffix [-ānī] forming action nouns, e.g. B *'krt'ny(h)*, M *'kt'nyy*, C *qt'ny* [(ə)ktānī] ‘sin’ < **krtānyā* to **kṛta-* ‘done’, see Sims-Williams 1981: 16–17, 19.



a few forms are phonologically (nearly) regular continuants of their Pr. sources, namely 1SG (*d*-)æn, 2SG (*d*-)æ, 3SG *jes/is* < Pr. **ahmi*, **ahi*, **asti* (§§2, 3) or 3PL D *æncæ* < **hanθi* ← Pr. **hanti* (§4), the most notable changes are of wider crosslinguistic interest, such as the grammaticalization of pronominal stems in **ta*- (> 1SG *d*-æn, 2SG *d*-æ), **hau*-/**awa*- (> I *u*), and **aya*- (> D æj) and the creation of a suppletive paradigm with forms of Pr. **staH*- 'stand' in I PL (*y*)*stæm*, (*y*)*stut*, (*y*)*sty*. The former has numerous parallels within and beyond Iranian, whereas the latter is isolated in Iranian but has arisen independently in IE languages of medieval and modern western Europe.

The extremely scanty premodern attestation of Ossetic naturally precludes judgments as to chronology, but it is interesting that none of the changes posited here is exactly paralleled in Sogdian or Yaghnobi, the Iranian languages often considered to be most closely related to Ossetic,²⁵ nor farther afield in e.g. Khotanese or the Pamir languages. Given the evidence already in Sarmatian proper names for loss of **h*,²⁶ which would have largely obscured the synchronic relation between OIr. PRS.IND.1PL **hmah(i)*, 2PL **sta* and PRS.SUBJ.1PL **ahamah(i)*, 2PL **ahaθa*, the generalization of subjunctive forms in D *an*, *ajtæ* is likely to have occurred in Alanic or even Sarmatian times. The copular use of pronominal **ta*- may likewise be an old innovation, since this pronoun does not otherwise survive in Ossetic. On the other hand, the copular use of **staH*- 'stand' may have begun already in Proto-Ossetic but ousted the inherited plural forms only in Iron, giving rise to a suppletive paradigm. The grammaticalization of new pronominal stems in the 3SG, **hau*- and/or **awa*- in Iron and **aya*- in Digor, naturally took place after the dialects had begun to diverge.

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²⁵ See Bailey 1945, Sims-Williams 1989: 1970, Kim 2003: 67–68 and *passim*; the most famous isogloss is generalization of the originally collective suffix **-tā*- as plural marker (Oss. *tæ*, So. *-t'*, *-t*, Yagh. *-t*). Recent studies have arrived at a more nuanced picture of the position of Oss. within Iranian, however; see Wendtland 2009: 185 (Table 16) and *passim*.

²⁶ Cf. retention of **h* in *Χανάκης* (Pantikapaion; < OIr. **hana*- 'old', cf. Av. *hana*-) vs. loss in Ἀζαρίων (Tanais, 220 AD; < OIr. **hazahra*- 'thousand', cf. YAв. *hazajræm*), Ἀφθαίμακος ~ Ἀφθείμακος (Tanais, 3rd c. AD; < OIr. **haft-am-yāka*- 'seventh', cf. Oss. *ævdæjmag*) and see Harmatta 1951: 307–308, 1970: 93–94, Biemeier 1989: 241.

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