

Tavet Tat Satyam

Studies in Honor of

Jared S. Klein

on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday

edited by

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Balkan, Indo-European, and Universal Perspectives on ‘be’ in Albanian*

BRIAN D. JOSEPH



I Introduction

Although Albanian was recognized as a member of the Indo-European language family as early as 1835 by Josef Xylander in his book *Die Sprache der Albanesen*, advances in the understanding of its diachronic development have generally lagged behind those for other branches of the family. This situation is due in large part to Albanian’s relatively late attestation, the earliest Albanian being a one-sentence baptismal formula from 1462 and the first substantial material being the 1555 *Meshari* (Missal) of Gjon Buzuku.

To appreciate fully how Albanian unfolded over time, one has to examine the language from a three-fold perspective. First, it must be considered in its genealogical, which is to say its familial, context. In the case of Albanian, such a perspective of course means examining how it fits into the Indo-European family and how the rest of Indo-European informs the view of what Albanian’s prehistory was. Second, Albanian’s geographic context must be taken into account, examining how Albanian fits into the Balkans and how its speakers interacted with their Balkan neighbors. This perspective reflects the fact that Albanian as we know it today has been shaped to a considerable extent by contact with other languages in the Balkans, especially South Slavic, Balkan Romance, and Greek, and especially during the period of the control of the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks (roughly from the 14th into the early 20th century). The effects of this contact are seen in all of the languages, actually, giving a contact zone that has been referred to as the Balkan “Sprachbund” or “linguistic area.” Finally, it is useful to consider Albanian in its human linguistic context, that is to say, viewed as a natural human language, in a typological perspective.

Such perspectives can of course be taken on just about any language but impressionistically speaking at least, the need for a three-fold approach to understanding the history of the language may be greater for Albanian than for most languages and, certainly within Indo-European, greater than for any other branch. In what follows, I illustrate this multifaceted aspect of linguistic Albanology by examining the present tense indicative forms of

*I would like to offer a word of appreciation for all that the honorand has done to further our understanding of Indo-European and especially Sanskrit; I have known him a long time and stand in great admiration of the fine work that he has done, all the while being a fine person as well.

the verb 'to be'. It turns out that each form in this paradigm of 'be' has its own story to tell, and the combination of the six stories, from the six person–number paradigm cells of the present indicative, offers some elements of interest from Indo-European, Balkanological, and cross-linguistic perspectives.

2 The paradigm

The present indicative of the verb 'be' has the following forms in contemporary standard Albanian:

	SING.	PL.
1	jam	jemi
2	je	jeni
3	është	janë

These are the forms that provide the point of departure for discussion here. There are variations on these, most notably the Geg 3sg form *është*; some of these are discussed along with the standard forms where appropriate.

3 The diachrony of the forms, one by one

To understand the diachronic development of the paradigm in §2, one must start with a root **H₂es-*,¹ an uncontroversial reconstruction that is assured by comparisons across the family, including Indo-Iranian (e.g. Sanskrit *√as-*, Avestan *ah-*), Greek (*ἐσ-*), Balto-Slavic (e.g. Lithuanian *ẽs-*, Old Church Slavonic *jes-*), Germanic (e.g. Gothic *is-*), Anatolian (e.g. Hittite *ẽš-*) and others. This root had an athematic conjugation in Proto-Indo-European, so the endings can for the most part be securely reconstructed as:

	SING.	PL.
1	-mi	-me-n/s
2	-si	-t(H ₂)e
3	-ti	-enti

The details of how those endings, or innovative variants of them (especially in the 1/2pl), combine with the root form to give the paradigm in §2 are in some cases far from obvious, and that is where careful diachronic analysis must come into play. In what follows, a form-by-form account is given, with the forms in the paradigm presented in an order dictated by certain expository needs.

3.1 3rd person singular

Hamp (1980) has discussed this form in great detail, adding in data from his years of field-work on outlying Albanian dialects in Italy (the Arbëresh varieties), in Greece (the Arvanitika varieties), and elsewhere (e.g. in Bulgaria); the additional data includes forms with

¹As far as Albanian is concerned, the initial laryngeal is irrelevant, so the root is written as **es-* hereafter.

initial *i*-vocalism (e.g. Arvanitika *ĩštĩ*, Mandrica (Bulgaria) *ĩšt*, etc.) and short forms such as San Nicola (Arbëresh) *o* and Attic-Boeotian (Arvanitika) *ja*, pointing to a long *ē*.² While all of Hamp's observations are characteristically cogent and important, for the present purposes, one comment of his is particularly significant, as soon becomes clear.

The comparison of the 3sg form *ēshtē* with Geg *ānsht* shows that Albanian somehow developed an *-n-* in the stem, as shown directly by the Geg nasal vowel (spelled ⟨ān⟩) and the Tosk *ē*, inasmuch as Tosk *ē* is a regular result of the denasalization of a Proto-Albanian nasalized vowel. Thus the accretion of the *-n-* took place fairly early, since its effects are seen in both Geg and Tosk dialects.³ Scholars differ on the source of this *-n-*. Orel (2000:179) suggests that it is "probably the result of the analogical pressure from the 3 pl.," though the status of the *-n-* in the 3pl form is problematic, for two reasons. First, the reconstruction that Orel proposes for the 3pl form, **es-nti*, is hard to justify, as discussed in more detail below (§3.3). Even more serious is that even if one were to grant that reconstruction, the *-n-* in 3pl is in the ending and not in the stem, a detail which makes it a much less likely model for the introduction of an *-n-* into the stem of the 3sg form.

A more likely explanation for *ēshtē/ānsht* is that given by Hamp (1980). He traces the Tosk form back to **ensti*,⁴ and then goes further with that, arguing that this derives from a phrase with the adverb **H_een*, the "locative of a defective noun . . . in late Indo-European" (Hamp 1980:341),⁵ and he adduces numerous parallels to the use of this adverbial (or its equivalent) as a preverb with 'be' in locational and existential senses, including the compounded form *ἐνείμι* 'be in' in Greek. Thus, in his view, "one way or another we may see underneath **ensti* an old phrase **ēn esti* < **H_een* **H_eesti*" (idem). The short form *ē* derives from the preverb/adverb used alone, thus **H₁en* (or **H₂en*, as the case may be). Matzinger and Schumacher (forthcoming:§3.6) also take this view, though they posit the shape **an* for the preverb.

Both Matzinger and Schumacher, on the one hand, and Hamp, on the other, agree that the coexistence of a long-form based on **en-(e)sti* and a short form based just on the preverb offers a striking parallel with Koine Greek, where for the 3sg form, both a compounded *ἐνεστί* and a short form *ἐνι* based on the adverb/preverb are to be found, and they see contact between Albanian and Greek speakers as the source of the parallel.⁶ They differ, however, in the directionality of the contact-induced influence; Hamp is inclined to see the Albanian pattern as the model for the Greek, with early Albanians projecting their pattern onto their speaking of Greek in the Koine period and using the Greek adverb *ἐνι* as the equivalent of (that is, a calque for) their short form *ē*, while Matzinger and Schumacher see the influence going the other way, with the Greek pattern being primary and having affected the Albanian.

In either case, the "story" of the 3sg form is instructive from the point of view of the need

²Hamp notes (1980:339) that 19th-century grammars, such as Girolamo de Rada's *Grammatica della lingua albanese* (1871), show *ēē*, suggesting a long vowel.

³Hamp (1980:341) points out that the *a*-vocalism of Geg might well need to be considered analogical, based on the short form *ā*, but the nasalization is original, deriving from a Proto-Albanian form with a nasal.

⁴See n. 3 regarding Geg *ā* here.

⁵Hamp's **H_e* is his notation for the first laryngeal, what is written as **H₁* here.

⁶The short form ultimately prevailed; through various morphological reshapings, *ἐνι* is the basis for the usual form in Modern Greek, *ἐναι* ([ine]).

to recognize multiple dimensions in the understanding of the development of Albanian. That is, in this case, the geographic context of Albanian, namely the fact that it was spoken in the same area as Greek in the relevant period, together with the concomitant social fact deriving from that geography that early Albanians had to be able to speak some form of Greek, provides the basis for gaining insight into how the 3sg forms of 'be' arose. This paradigmatic cell is thus crucial for demonstrating a significant level of contact between Greek and Albanian in a pre-Sprachbund period, prehistoric as far as Albanian is concerned.

3.2 1st person singular

The 1st singular form *jam* is well behaved in terms of its diachronic development. A starting point **esmi* gives exactly the form attested, *jam*, as the result of a sound change by which *e* became *ja* before two (or more) consonants (what may be written: *e > ja / __CC*). This sound change is amply attested in Albanian and is shown by such forms as *jashtë* 'outside' < **eghs-to-* (cf. Greek *ἐξθός*, Latin *extra*), *gjashhtë* 'six' < **seks-ti-*, *mjaltë* 'honey' < **melt-o-* (< earlier **melit-*, cf. Greek *μέλι* [genitive *μέλιτ-ος*], Hittite *milit*), *djathë* 'cheese' < **dedhH-* (cf. Sanskrit *dadhi* 'sour milk'). What is interesting about the 1sg form is not its rather unexceptional development per se, but instead the role it plays with respect to other forms, in particular the 3pl form, discussed in the next section.

3.3 3rd person plural

As for the 3pl form *janë*, the starting point in Proto-Indo-European would have been **s-enti*, with a zero-grade of the root (cf. Sanskrit *santi*, Latin *sunt*, etc.). Such a form, **senti*, would probably have yielded **gjanë* (with initial **s > gj* as in *gjarpër* 'snake' from **serpen-*, and assuming **-nt- > -nn- > -n-* ultimately),⁷ though perhaps **gjantë* is conceivable too. Thus some other preform is needed. As noted in §3.1, Orel reconstructs **esnti*, with nonsyllabic (consonantal) **n* in the ending and with the *e-* in the stem generalized from the full grade of the singular. This could give **janë*, with **e > ja / __CC* and the presumed treatment of **-nt-* needed in any case, but positing this form achieves the right result at the expense of a phonotactically impossible reconstruction; that is, Orel needs the sonorant **n* to be nonsyllabic in order to allow for the *e > ja* change, but the *n* occurs between two consonants, exactly the environment where the sonorants are expected to vocalize (i.e. syllabify, and take on syllabic quality). However, the phonotactically regular reconstruction, **esnti*, with the sonorant **n* properly vocalized, would probably have yielded **eatë*,⁸ and while initial **ea* could (perhaps) have given *ja*, getting the *-n-* in the ending would be difficult.

Thus an alternative to any version of Orel's reconstruction is needed. Hamp assumes **senti*, and formulates the next step as **(s)enti*. However, he offers no indication of why the **s* would elide in that position; one might presume that an unaccented **senti* could undergo such a change, but it is not clear that there are any parallels to that development. One further alternative to consider is **es-enti*, with a generalized full grade and the expected

⁷This single intervocalic *-n-* would have to have arisen after the sound change by which *n* became *r* in that position.

⁸One has to assume here the loss of intervocalic **-s-*, a change that is reasonable but needs its own justification; **s*-aorist forms like 1sg *dhashë* 'I gave', from **(e-)dH₃-s-ṃ*, seem to retain **s* but could in principle show generalization of a *-sh-* outcome of **s* after *i* or *u* (so Orel 2000:193). On **ṇ > a*, see Orel (2000:42).

ending *-enti. However, the outcome of such a reconstruction is likely to have been *jejanë (with the development of initial *e to *je* before a single consonant, and of *-enti as posited by Hamp for *(s)enti) rather than the attested *janë*.

Thus none of these possibilities can give exactly the right result on its own. Two reconstructions come close, if there were a way to get from *gjanë or *jejanë to *janë*. As it happens, there is such a pathway. In particular, if analogical pressure from a stem form in *ja-*, that is from the 1sg form *jam*, is invoked, then the adjustment of *gjanë or *jejanë so that it would have an initial *ja-* becomes reasonable, thereby yielding the required *janë*. All that is needed is some motivation for a linkage between *jam* and the 3pl form. Here, the geography of Albanian provides the necessary motivation, because within the Balkans, there is a language, specifically Balkan Romance, that shows exactly that relationship on a widespread basis, though other models within the Balkans were present.⁹ As for Romance, it can be noted that in Romanian, in the present tense of the second, the third, and (most of) the fourth conjugations, the forms for the 1sg and the 3pl are identical, e.g. *eu/ei văd* ‘I/they see’, *eu/ei merg* ‘I/they go’, *eu/ei zidesc* ‘I/they build’; this 1sg–3pl syncretic linkage extends even to some irregular verbs, most notably *sînt* ‘I am’/‘they are’. Outside of Romance, one can look to Greek as perhaps a more immediate source of influence for such an intra-paradigmatic linkage, as the verb ‘be’ itself shows the same root vocalism in the 1sg and 3pl of ‘be’ from Classical Greek up through Koine Greek, in the forms *εἰ-μί* ‘I am’/‘they are’ (and cf. *ἐσ-τί* ‘is’ or *ἐσ-μὲν* ‘we are’ displaying a contrasting root vocalism). With the 1sg–3pl convergences in both Romance and Greek, languages that Albanian speakers would have been in close contact with, there is a powerful model for precisely the relationship among paradigmatic cells that could lead to the re-formation of a 3pl form *gjanë or *jejanë to *janë* so that it matches the 1sg form in the vocalism of the root.

Thus language contact seems to have been involved in the shaping of the 3pl form. But the language-internal issue of pressure from the 1sg form is interesting in its own right, even if contact-induced, given that the forms do not share person features or number features and thus seem not to have a clear basis for being connected. The question of which cells in a paradigm can be linked with—and thus can analogically affect or be syncretic with—which other cells is an issue for morphological theory. There clearly are such linkages, but some linguists have sought to constrain them; Burzio (2005), for instance, introduces the notion of “morphological neighborhoods” as a basis for syncretism, whereas Tantalou and Burzio (2007:1091) explicitly state that “cross-linguistically, syncretism obeys two main generalizations. One is that it tends to affect neighboring cells.” Based on this Balkan Romance and Albanian evidence, whatever constraints might exist—and it is possible that there are none (see Joseph 2009:53)—must allow for the perhaps somewhat unusual 1sg–3pl connection.

3.4 2nd person singular

For the 2sg form *je*, Orel (2000:207) reconstructs *es-si as the source without comment, suggesting he sees the development to *je* as straightforward. Hamp (1980:337), by contrast, posits a seemingly, but only seemingly, similar *e(s)-s-i as the Proto-Indo-European form, and gives the successive steps to the attested *je* (with length [*jē*] in Sofikó, an Arvanitika va-

⁹I thank Mark Wenthe for drawing these other models to my attention.

riety in the district of Korinthias) as *esi (presumably, Proto-Albanian), whence *ie-si, then *je. Hamp is more explicit, but there is still more to be said, starting with the parenthesized (*s*) in his PIE reconstruction.

The *s* is given in parentheses to signal that there was a degemination at the PIE stage, so that *es-s-i would be the pre-PIE form or perhaps more accurately, the synchronic underlying form for PIE, thus */essi/,¹⁰ with the degeminated form *[esi] as the synchronic surface form in PIE.¹¹ This degemination is motivated independently, especially by the comparison of the synchronically anomalous 2sg form in Sanskrit, *asi*, with its corresponding form in Greek, *εἶ*, though forms in a few other languages, e.g. Old Church Slavonic *jesi*, point in the same direction; from a PIE form without degemination, a (non-occurring) *assi** would be expected in Sanskrit and *ἔσσι* in Greek. There are languages that do not show evidence of *esi, e.g. Latin, where Old Latin 2sg *ess* points to a geminate form (Meillet and Vendryes 1966:§229); Armenian, where 2sg *es* must be from *essi (Hamp 1980:337); and Hittite, where the 2sg form is *ḫssi*, and even Greek itself has *ἔσσι* in Homer and in some dialects. All of those forms, however, are generally presumed to show an analogical restoration of the root and ending structure, and not a PIE non-degeminated form per se. Thus, *asi*, *εἶ*, and *jesi* are archaisms pointing to a surface form *esi in PIE.¹²

From that PIE surface form, the ultimate Albanian form *je* can be arrived at by the relevant sound changes affecting final syllables. It is significant to note that what did not happen is the *e* > *ja* change (i.e., the modern form is not **ja); this failure of occurrence for this change indicates that there was just one consonant following the *e, not two, thus motivating the reconstruction with a single *-s- (hence Hamp's parenthesized *s). This means that Albanian can be added to the languages across the Indo-European family that give testimony to the need to reconstruct a degemination rule that dates to the Proto-Indo-European era. Albanian *je* is thus a precious archaism on a par with *asi*, *εἶ*, and *jesi*.¹³

3.5 1st person plural and 2nd person plural

For reasons that become clear, it is appropriate to treat the 1pl and 2pl forms together. To start with 1pl *jemi*, it cannot be from *esmen or the like (Orel suggests *esmei); because of the *e > *ja* change, the expected form would be *jami. The source of the -e- vocalism in *jemi* must be sought in analogical influence from some other form in the paradigm. The only form with -e- "organically", that is via sound change alone, is the 2sg form *je*, but the question must be asked how the 2sg form would come to affect the 1pl form. While the discussion in §3.3 might suggest that anything goes as far as paradigmatic cell linkage is concerned, it is still preferable to have some motivation for the analogical connection. The motivation is to be found in the developments with the 2pl form *jeni*.

It is clear that *jeni* cannot continue a Proto-Indo-European *s-t(H₂)e or an innovative *es-t(H₂)e directly; there is simply no way to get the vocalism of the Albanian root of *jeni*

¹⁰This underlying form is morphologically well motivated, as the stem is clearly *es- in other singular forms, and the ending *-si is found throughout the present system.

¹¹The slashes indicate an underlying morphophonemic form, and square brackets indicate a surface phonetic form.

¹²I thank my colleague Dan Collins for very helpful discussion about the Slavic forms of 'be'.

¹³I leave as an open question whether the fact that early Slavic had a degeminated form played a role, via language contact in the Balkans, in the retention of a form with a single *-s- in prehistoric Albanian.

nor the ending from such a starting point: *st- should give *sht-* (as in *shteg* ‘path, road’ < *stoigh-; cf. Greek *στοῖχος* ‘row, line’) and *e before *st- would give ja. Thus the 2pl form must have been built on the 2sg *je*, with the addition of the ending *-ni*, which has its own interesting history, based on a pattern evident throughout the present system, e.g. *ti di* ‘you know’ ~ *ju dini* ‘y’all know’.¹⁴ The 1pl *jemi* would then have resulted from influence from this innovative 2pl form, ousting an inherited *jami, in a linkage between paradigmatic cells found in other languages from different eras, as seen, e.g., in the later Greek rhyming endings 1pl -*μαστε*/2pl -*σαστε* in the nonactive imperfect.¹⁵ A 1pl/2pl connection is thus a likely universally available sort of analogical development. And, the 2sg/2pl connection, though motivated internally within Albanian, as noted above, is reminiscent of the way the Latin 2sg -s affected the presumed original 2pl *-ti (< *-t(H₂)e) to give -tis, and of the resulting synchronic sharing of final -s between these two forms (e.g. 2sg *ama-s* / 2pl *ama-ti-s*); whether that Latin matching had any affect on the Albanian pattern is hard to say, but given the degree of contact with Latin that Albanian speakers had in the post-Classical period, it cannot be ruled out.

4 Concluding remarks

It is well known that the verb ‘be’ in many languages shows special developments and irregularities. Old English had suppletion in the 2sg form *eart*, and that irregularity continues into the modern language (*are*), and has even spread into the plural, ousting Old English forms built more regularly on a stem in *s-*, namely 1/2pl *sind*, 3pl *sindon*. Spanish anomalously has *eres* as the 2sg form, with a stem *er-* found nowhere else in the paradigm. Lithuanian has a suppletive 3sg form *yra*, which replaced the more regular *ėsti* of Old Lithuanian. In Modern Greek, only in the verb ‘be’ are the 3sg and 3pl forms identical. And so on. Thus in a number of languages, forms of ‘be’ have their own stories to tell, so that, in a sense, it is not surprising that ‘be’ in Albanian should similarly prove interesting. However, those other stories are not as rich as what ‘be’ in Albanian has to offer, in that they deal with only a few forms and mostly involve language-internal matters. In Albanian, by contrast, all of the forms are notable in some respect and the collective story they tell touches on more than just language-internal developments, extending to matters of language contact and of cross-linguistic typological interest. In that way, therefore, the verb ‘be’ in Albanian offers a microcosm of the multi-dimensionality of perspective needed to understand Albanian linguistic history.

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¹⁴It is probably from the PIE adverb *nū ‘now’, as argued by Rasmussen (1985); see Joseph 2011 for some further discussion.

¹⁵The 2pl -*σαστε* replaces earlier -*εσσε*, and this reshaping of the ending is due to the 1pl.

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