Research article

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The Colloquial Form of the Linking Verb in Persian: ast > e?

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Abstract: Colloquial Persian employs *-e* as a linking verb, commonly regarded as the colloquial variant of *ast*. This article endeavors to delineate the usage of this verb form in early texts, encompassing both regional and supra-regional ones. Drawing from the instances outlined in the article, the author, then, advances a hypothesis concerning the origin and evolutionary trajectory of this form. Through a meticulous examination, incorporating Early Judaeo-Persian, as well as early and late New Iranian textual remains, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter. As the study shows, this form of the linking verb takes different forms in early regional and supra-regional texts, including ⟨-h⟩, ⟨-y⟩, ⟨-ʾy⟩, ⟨ʾyd⟩, and ⟨hy⟩. The common origin of all these forms is most likely to be **(a)hēd*, which still remains in present-day Iranian varieties.

Keywords: enclitic, colloquial Persian, early Persian, early varieties

1 Introduction

Contemporary New Persian (as spoken in present-day Iran) uses the enclitic *-e* as a linking verb, which is generally considered to be the colloquial form[1] of *ast*. Thus, *Īn ketāb māl-e man-e* "This book is mine" corresponds to *Īn ketāb māl-e man-ast* (Lazard, 2006 = 1992, §121). The pronunciation can be reflected in writing with ⟨(-)h⟩.[2]

Evidence for the existence and pronunciation of this form in Early New Iranian comes from a passage in Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* (in Arabic), which reads,

> *Wa ammā luγat al-Furs fa-lā tastaʿmil al-qaẓāyā xāliyah ʿan dalālah ʿalā hāδihi al-nisbah* [= *ʿalā al-nisbah al-rābiṭah*] *immā bi-lafẓ mufrad ka-qaʷlihim* ⟨flʾn ǰnyn [*scriptio defectiva* for čnyn] hst⟩ *aʷ* ⟨hy⟩ *aʷ* ⟨hw⟩, *wa immā bi-ḥarakah ka-qaʷlihim* ⟨flʾn ǰnyn⟩ *wa yaftaḥūna al-nūn min* ⟨ǰnyn⟩ *fatakūnu al-fatḥah dāllah ʿalā anna* ⟨ǰnyn⟩ *maḥmūl ʿalā* ⟨flʾn⟩.[3]

1 While it may sporadically appear in formal speech, such instances likely reflect the occasional register interference of colloquialisms into more formal registers. That it is not (*pace* Bernard, 2025, p. 110, fn. 2) considered part of the formal layer by general contemporary Persian speakers is evident, for instance, in social media transcriptions, where I have observed that *-e* usually turns into *ast*.

2 In reference to this linking verb in Persian and other Iranian languages, whether used enclitically or not, it will be referred to as "IST" henceforth.

3 The transliteration system follows, in the main, the conventions customary in Early Persian studies, with the specification *ḍād* = *ẓ* and *ẓāʾ* = *ż*. Vowel markings (*fatḥah* [a], *kasrah* [e or i], *ẓammah* [o or u]) in transliterations are indicated with superscript a, e, and w, respectively. Passages in (Judaeo-, Early) New Persian appear in or along with transcription. As our understanding of (especially Early) New Iranian varieties, particularly their phonology, is far from complete, the evidence in these passages (except for the verse in §2.6) is presented solely in transliteration—much as Sogdian passages are usually by Sogdianists. All English translations of non-English passages are, unless otherwise indicated, my own. While I have consulted existing scholarly readings and translations where available, the final rendering presented here reflects my independent reading and judgement. Dates are given as Hijri/approximate AD in the text and as Shamsi/approximate AD in the references. I thank the re-

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> [As for the Persian/Iranian language, it does not use propositions (*al-qaẓāyā*) that are devoid of [any means] to signify this relationship [viz. the connecting relationship]; [this relationship is shown] either with a single word, as in their saying ⟨fl'n ǰnyn [*scriptio defectiva* for čnyn] hst⟩ [= A is so-and-so] or ⟨hy⟩ or ⟨hw⟩, or with a vowel, as in their saying ⟨fl'n ǰnyn⟩ and they put a *fatḥah* on the [final] ⟨n⟩ of ⟨ǰnyn⟩ so that the *fatḥah* is an indication that ⟨ǰnyn⟩ is the predicate of ⟨fl'n⟩.] (quoted in Khanlari[4], 1986, p. 453)[5]

In 2016, Kamali referenced this statement by Avicenna concerning the copula. He further cited a freely translated version of Avicenna's statement by x^{w}āǰa Nasir al-Din Tusi in his *Asās al-Iqtibās*, where he writes: "… *lafż-i* ⟨'st⟩ *dar Pārsī dar ēn qaẓiya ki 'Zayd dabīr ast' yā ḥarikat-i rā'-i* ⟨dbyr⟩ *dar baʿẓē luγāt-i ʿAǰam ki gōyand* ʿzyd dbyr'" […the word *ast* in Persian in the proposition '*Zayd dabīr ast'* or the diacritic of the final ⟨r⟩ of ⟨dbyr⟩ in some *ʿAǰam* varieties[6] where it is said ⟨zyd dbyr⟩ [is the copula].] (quoted from Kamali, 2016, p. 34).

Through comparison of five manuscripts of *Asās al-Iqtibās*, Kamali found that one MS, dated 843/1439, lacked diacritics on the final ⟨r⟩ of ⟨dbyr⟩, while three from the 11th/17th c. (MSS 4934[7], 3783, and 357T of the Library of Iran Parliament) displayed the final ⟨r⟩ with a *kasrah* (indicating the vowel [e]). In the 5th MS, also from the 11th/17th c. and copied by Mohammad-Reza al-Qomi in Delhi, the word *ma'an* "both" is written above ⟨dbyr⟩, suggesting that the scribe intended to capture both pronunciations, viz. *Zayd dabīr-**e*** and *Zayd dabīr-**a***.

Moreover, based on the passage from *al-Šifā'* and after analyzing the MSS of *Asās al-Iqtibās*, Kamali concludes that during the 5th/11th c., IST in most or all Persian-speaking regions was likely pronounced as a *fatḥah* (i.e., *a*). His analysis suggests that by the 11th/17th c., the pronunciation shifted towards *kasrah* in most regions.

With Kamali's analysis as a point of departure, the present study utilizes a comprehensive examination of Early Judaeo-Persian, early and late New Iranian textual remains, and metalinguistic sources to re-evaluate the history of the Persian enclitic copula. The article proceeds as follows: §2 presents the primary evidence, beginning with Early Judaeo-Persian attestations (§2.1), followed by a reassessment of Early New Persian (§2.2) and a detailed survey of IST across early New Iranian varieties (§2.3). §2.4 introduces crucial metalinguistic evidence, including a previously overlooked treatise by al-Shurunbulali, and re-examines the MS tradition of *Asās al-Iqtibās*. §2.5 traces IST in later varieties, while §2.6 discusses the pronunciation of the attested forms. §3 advances a new hypothesis concerning the origin of IST and outlines tentative transformation pathways. §4 offers a reanalysis of Avicenna's ⟨hy⟩ and ⟨hw⟩, connecting them to broader developments in Iranian verbal morphology. §5 examines the distinctive form ⟨hn⟩ and its implications for the history of the copula. A brief conclusion (§6) summarizes the findings.

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viewers of the journal for their constructive comments, including the reference to Bernard (2025), which appeared while the article was under review. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own.

4 Khanlari's prior citation of Avicenna's statement, not noted by Kamali, was kindly brought to my attention by Dr Ahmadreza Ghaemmaghami (Tehran University).

5 Before Avicenna, the subject of linking verbs was addressed, among others, by al-Farabi (260–339/873–950) in his *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, where he (1990, p. 111) points out the linking verbs in Arabic, Greek (⟨'styn⟩ = ἐστίν), Sogdian (⟨'sty⟩), and Persian. The only verb he identifies for Persian is, however, ⟨hst⟩.

6 Just as *ʿAǰam* may refer—similar to *Furs* in Avicenna's statement—specifically to Persian or, more generally, to Iranian, so too *luγāt* may refer to what are now classified as "languages" or "dialects". I use "varieties" both as a cover term for translating *luγāt* here and as a neutral designation throughout the article, without implying any particular classification of the forms discussed as languages or dialects.

7 Copied by a certain Ibrahim of Isfahan.

2 Evidence

2.1 Early Judaeo-Persian

This section examines evidence from a *trans-cum-commentary* of the book of Genesis (Chs. 1–4) in Early Judaeo-Persian[8] to explore the use of IST in early New Persian. The MS of the text, housed in the Firkowicz I Collection (No. 4605) of the National Library of Russia (see Shaked, 2003 for details and excerpts), lacks an explicit date and can be confidently placed no later than the late 6th/mid-to-late 12th century.

A passage from the text (p. 9, lines 11–15; quoted in Shaked, 2003, p. 209, s.v. ⟨bʿṭy⟩) reads:

> wrbnʾn gwynd ky pʾ tšry ʾprydʾ ʾmd ʿwlm. wbʿṭy ʾz qrʾn ʾbʾ ʾyšʾn hnd pʾ ʾyn skwn … wʾn drwsttr**y** ky pʾ nysn ʾprydʾ ʾmd.
> *Wa Rabbanān gōyand ki pa Tišrī āfarīda āmad ōlam. Wa baʿẓē az Qarān abā ēšān hand pa ēn saxun … wa ān d(u)rusttar⟨**y**⟩ ki pa Nīsan āfarīda āmad.*
> [The Rabbanites say that the world was created in Tishre, and some Karaites agree with them in this matter, …, but the greater truth **is** that it was created in Nisan.]

The occurrence of ⟨-y⟩ is also observed elsewhere in the commentary on Ḥannah (text and transliteration provided in Haim, 2018, pp. 191–192):

> hmy gwynd ky ʾptʾb rʾ ṣndyn hyst drʾzy ʾw: wmʾng rʾ hmy gwynd ky drʾz tr**y** (דראז תרֵי) ʾz zmy.[9]
> *Hamē gōyand ki āftāb rā čandēn hist d(i)rāzī(-yi) ō: wa māng rā hamē gōyand ki d(i)rāz-tar⟨**y**⟩ az zamī.*
> [They say that the sun has such-and-such a length, and they (also) say that the moon ⟨**y**⟩ longer than the earth.]

In Judaeo-Persian texts, yod represents the glide *y* and also serves as a *mater lectionis* marking long *ī*/*ē* as well as short *i*/*e*. The pronunciation of ⟨-y⟩ can, thus, be assumed to be *ī*, *i*, *e*, or *ē* (see §3). In the Genesis commentary (an excerpt in Haim, 2022), IST occurs again and is transcribed by Haim (ibid, para. 76) as "*ī*" (in "*pa ān drustar**ī** ki īn məʾorot az nā-čīz āfrīda āmadand*"), which is not implausible; yet, considering other pieces of evidence cited in §2 and the explanations provided in §3, a pronunciation *ĕ* seems more likely.

Shaked initially (2003, p. 208) suggested a Northern Iranian origin for this commentary, later specifying the Bukhara region of northeastern Greater Iran in his linguistic classification of Early Judaeo-Persian texts (2009, pp. 450–451). Linguistic evidence, however, points rather toward western or north-central regions, a view supported by Lazard (2014, p. 92). Therefore, the observed ⟨-y⟩ likely represents the form of IST prevalent in these western or north-central regions prior to the Mongol period.

2.2 Early New Persian and IST?

To the best of my knowledge, IST is not attested in Early New Persian, that is, New Persian written in the Perso-Arabic script, which was in use roughly until the time of the Mongol invasion. However, in their investigation of an Early New Persian manuscript (likely from the 5th or 6th/11th–12th c.), Sharifi and Hajiyan-Nezhad (2021, p. 161 and fn. 20) identified one alleged instance of the use of IST represented as ⟨-h⟩. Citing Kamali's work, they suggest that it may have been pronounced as *-a*. The instance runs as:

8 Defined by Paul (2013, p. 9) as a bundle of dialects and regional variants of Persian that was spoken and written by the Jews of Iran, and the Jewish-Iranian diaspora in Central Asia and the Levant, approximately from the 8th to the beginning of the 13th century AD.

9 Neither Shaked nor Haim explicitly identifies or analyzes the use of ⟨-y⟩ as a linking verb in the quoted passages.

Tawāẓuʿ az har kasē nēkō-st u az tuwāngar nēkōtar⟨**h**⟩.
[Humility is good in everyone, and in the wealthy better⟨-**h**⟩.]

A meticulous examination of the MS itself (Figure 1) indicates that the character assumed to be ⟨-h⟩ by them is not, in fact, ⟨-h⟩; rather, it is a symbol resembling a virgule, with a function similar to that of a semi-colon, also observed in other early Persian MSS (see Afshar, 2003, p. 52, XXXIV), in some MSS taking the appearance of a hollow point (e.g., in *Nasīm al-Rabīʿ*; see Navidi Malati, 2010, p. 174). The context also supports our reading: The sentence is part of a saying with three compound sentences, in each of which ⟨ʾst⟩ occurs in the first clause and is omitted in the second:

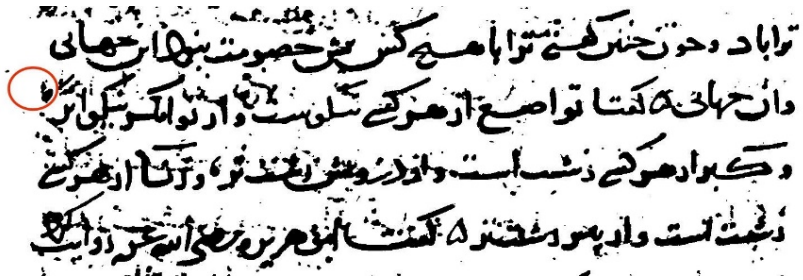


Figure 1: *Microfilm No. 4595-2, p. 61r (© Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin | microfilm: Central Library and Documents Center of University of Tehran)*

Tawāẓuʿ az har kasē nēkō-st u[10] *az tuwāngar nēkō*[11]*-tar, u kibr az har kasē zišt ast u az darwēš zišt-tar, u zinā az har kasē zišt ast u az pēr zišt-tar* (Microfilm No. 4595-2, p. 61ʳ).
[Humility is good in everyone, and in the wealthy better; and arrogance is unpleasant in anyone, and more unpleasant in the poor; and adultery is unpleasant in anyone, and more unpleasant in the elderly.]

Therefore, until future investigations show otherwise, it can be concluded that IST is not yet attested in Early New Persian texts.

2.3 Early New Iranian Varieties

In this section we delve deeper, examining evidence for IST across various early New Iranian varieties.

Razi: Verses from Bondar Razi (in Sadeghi, 2008, pp. 402, 405) exhibit forms like ⟨-h⟩ and ⟨-y⟩, possibly representing *i* or *ĕ*. Newly discovered records reveal the additional form ⟨-ʾy⟩ (*ē*): "ʾblhʾn wʾžnd kʾyn my ʾ**y** (other sources: by) ḥrʾm / ʾz ndʾnm kʾyn ḥrʾm ʾz čh dry" [The foolish say that this wine **is** forbidden / I do not know why they deem it so.] (cited in Khatami & Saket, 2018, pp. 84 [verse], 86–87 [annotation]). Also, in a newly found verse of his in *Rasāʾil ul-ʿUššāq wa Wasāʾil ul-Muštāq*: "nʾzš bkšm kh dym nykwy**h** / wʾngšt-nmʾy nykwʾn ʾwy**h**" [I keep him/her sweet for s/he **is** beautiful / Her/his beauty **is** the envy of the beautiful.] (cited in Kameli, 2023, §2). In the following evidence from the 8th/14th c. *Daqāyiq al-Šiʿr* (Al-Halavi, 1962, p. 89) it is clear that ⟨-h⟩ equals *ast*:

Muwārida ān bāšad ki šāʿir rā dar yek bayt yā dar miṣrāʿī muwāfiqat uftad dar lafẓ yā dar maʿnē yā dar har dō čunān ki Bundār-i Rāzī gōyad, "rwǰ my xwrdn w šʾdy w nšʾṭ w ṭrb**h**[;]" *Anwarī* [*gōyad*]: "*rōz-i may xʷardan u šādī u nišāṭ u ṭarab* ***ast***."
[*Muwāridah* refers to the phenomenon where two verses or half-verses closely correspond with each other in theme, wording, or both; as Bondar says, "rwǰ my xwrdn w šʾdy w nšʾṭ w ṭrb**h**;" (and) Anvari says, "*rōz-i may xʷardan u šādī u nišāṭ u ṭarab* ***ast***" (It is the day of drinking wine, happiness, joy, and pleasure).]

10 Or *wa/wu*

11 Written with an *alif* after its final *wāw*, the *alif* being, much like the word-final stroke in Pahlavi script, devoid of any linguistic reality.

Tabari: The Tabari variety from the early centuries exhibits IST in the form of ⟨-h⟩ across the 4th, 5th, and 6th/10th–12th centuries:

4th c.: "xyry pnyhwm krd w nrgys nmʾyn / ʾ xyryᵉ xwy**h** d ʾwsty wrʾyn (Monchi-Zadeh's transcription: *xīrī pa-nihūm kard o nargīs namāyan / i xīrīye xoy **e** da ostī var-āyan*)" [S/he veiled his/her face and unveiled narcissus / This **is** the plant of cheiri emerging from the sleeve.] (cited in Monchi-Zadeh, 1969 [1970], p. 167);

5th c.: "sy dšmn bšr tw dʾry rmwnh / nhrʾsm wr myr khwn wrdwn**h**" [The enemy himself is like a … (?) / I am not afraid whether he **is** the lord of the world or a commoner.] (cited in Kia, 1948, pp. 12 [text], 228 [translation]);

6th c.: "ʾyn dw xr kh dʾrnh šʾh ʾyrwn / yk xr bzyn nyk**h** yky bpʾlwn" [These two donkeys that the king of Iran possesses / One of them **is** burdened with a nice saddle, and the other burdened with a halter.] (ibid, pp. 13 [text], 229 [tentative translation]).

This usage persisted even in later Tabari translations; for example, in the translation of *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*: "ʾkr t wy mdḥ bkny bšʿr dynʾr tyš**h**" [If you praise it in verse, the dinar **is** yours.] (as cited in Pakzad, 2005, p. 134); with the same spelling in Tabari trans-cum-commentaries of the *Qurʾān* from the 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries, including in "čy**h** ʾwn hʾwyh" (= Ar. *mā hiya*; what **is** *hāwiyah*) (as cited in Borjian, 2009, p. 115) and "ʾlʾ kh ʾwn xyʾwnd kh ʾfryʾr hmh xlqwn**h**" [except for God who **is** the Creator of all beings] (as cited in Sadeghi & Poshtdar, 2020, p. 89). However, there are instances where ⟨-h⟩ is not explicitly written, but its presence is implied; for example, in the following phrase within a Tabari Qurʾānic trans-cum-commentary from the 7th/13th c.: "ʾwnkh" (*une ke*; = Ar. *al-laδī*; cf. *Tarǰome-ye Qurʾān Mūze-ye Pārs*, *Tāǰ al-Tarāǰim* and *Tafsīr-e Nasafī*: "*ān **ast** kī*") (as cited in Mohammadi, 2014, p. 246, no. 50).[12] A third form as ⟨-ʾ⟩ (in "ǰyʾ [= čyʾ]") is also seen in the following sentence: "tw ǰh dʾny yʾ mḥmd fẓylt lylt ʾlqdr ǰyʾ" (= Q *wa mā adrāka mā laylatu al-qadr*?) (as cited in Borjian, 2009, p. 110).[13]

Qūmis: Remnants of the early Qūmis variety—considered a link between Semnani and Gorgani by Borjian (2021)—offer instances of ⟨-w⟩ potentially functioning as IST. In the following sentence from Bayazid of Bastam quoted in one of the MSS of *Dastūr al-J̌umhūr*, ⟨-w⟩ in ⟨dlw⟩ and ⟨ntw⟩ (the latter probably an error for ⟨tnw⟩) seems to function as IST: "*Šayx [Bāyazīd] guft: 'dil u tan rā aṣlē nēst.*' [*Murīd*] *guft*: '*na gōyand ki aṣl hama dil ast*?' [*Bāyazīd*] *guft*: 'ʿʾy mskyn! yky ʾsyr dl**w** w nt**w** čh bw kh ḥq tʿʾly rʾ dwst dʾrd⟩? *Banda čunān gōharī-tar ki ḥaq taʿālē way rā dōst dārad ba ārāyiš-i xʷad hā-gīrad.*'" [Sheikh [Bayazid] said: "Heart and body are not significant." [The disciple] said: "Do they not say that the heart is the core of all?" He said: "O poor one! One **is** a captive of the heart and ⟨ntw⟩. What significance does it have if it does not love the Almighty? A servant is so valuable that the Almighty loves them and takes them with their own adornment."] (quoted from Shafi'i Kadkani, 2004, p. 93). Another possible form observed in the early variety of this region is likely ⟨-y⟩ in a statement by Abulhasan of Kharaqan quoted in *Muntaxab min Kitāb Nūr al-ʿUlūm*: "*Šiblī, raḥmat Allāh taʿālā ʿalayh, guft*: '*Ān xʷāham ki na-xʷāham.*' *Šayx Abulḥasan-i Xaraqānī gufta-st*: 'ʾn hm xwʾst**y**'" [Shibli, may Allah's mercy be upon him, said: "I desire not to desire." Sheikh Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani has said: "That too **is** (a) desire.] (quoted from Shafi'i Kadkani, 2005, p. 365, para. 1137).[14]

Kazeruni: Remains of the old Kazeruni variety of the 4th c. to the early 5th/10th to early 11th c., as recorded in the MSS, reveal both ⟨-ᵉh⟩ and ⟨-ᵃh⟩ forms. It is noteworthy that within the same MS (assuming the accuracy of Sadeghi's readings, 2004a), ⟨-h⟩ is diacritized with *fatḥah* in one instance

12 *Vide* also Elwell-Sutton, 1963, p. 119.

13 Currently, in most dialects of Mazandaran province, it is pronounced as *ə* (*vide*, e.g., Akbarpur, 2015a, p. 315, sentence 17; 2015b, p. 309, sentence 17). Additionally, this pronunciation is found in a Tabari text from the beginning of the 14th/20th c. (*vide* Borjian, 2008, p. 43).

14 Shafi'i Kadkani (ibid) has corrected Kharaqani's sentence by adding "*ast*" to "ʾn hm xwʾsty [*ast*]," but if, as it seems to us, ⟨-y⟩ in ⟨xwʾsty⟩ (*xʷāst* + ⟨-y⟩) is equivalent to *ast*, then there is no need for his addition.

(⟨nᵉzᵉykᵃh⟩, §18) and with *kasrah* in another (⟨dwrᵉh⟩, §19) on a subsequent page. This may suggest, among other possibilities, that the transmission process accounts for such diacritical fluctuation.

Tabriz: The early language of Tabriz used ⟨-h⟩, as seen in a poem by Homam of Tabriz (d. 714/1314): "d βyndmh lw ǰtw mʾn šwʾ nh hwrym**h** nh hʾn / ʾwmrh ʾwwm βdhʾn ʾwx ǰlwwnr bmrwn" [Until I saw your lips, there **is** neither eating nor sleeping to me at night / My mouth has watered up to my lips, alas, I might die for the sake of your lips.] (cited in Firuzbakhsh, 2022 [2023], p. 39); also in the works of other Tabrizi poets, including those by Maghrebi of Tabriz ("kwy ryn kyš**h** bwrr" [It **is** apart from this religion (?), pass by.]; Adib Tusi, 1956a, pp. 127–128), Mama Esmat ("ḫnw mst**y** hnw mst**y** hnw mst" [S/he **is** still intoxicated, s/he **is** still intoxicated, still intoxicated.]; quoted from Adib Tusi, 1956b, p. 242) and Mahan Kashfi ("hmydwn khnh ʿhdm nw**y** [nōw/yĕ] kšfy" [Thus my old covenant **is** new, O Kašfī!]; quoted from ibid, p. 244). IST also appears with the spelling ⟨-y⟩ in the vernacular of Tabriz, as quoted by Mostowfi in *Nuzhat al-Qulūb*: "ʾngwr xlwqy bčh drdw syw**h** ʾndr" [A *xalūqī* grape **is** set (?) in the basket.] (quoted from Firuzbakhsh, 2022 [2023], p. 53); in *Resāle-ye Rūḥī-ye Anārǰānī* (ed. by Rezazade-ye Malek, 1973), which probably represents the language of the people of Tabriz in the late 10th and early 11th/late 16th to early 17th c.[15], IST appears in various forms: *kasrah* (e.g., in "xᵃrdʷnm mʾst kʾwᵉ" [My food **is** cow's yoghurt.]; p. 15); ⟨-y⟩ ("xrʾby hmh bsr wrwy mʾy**y**" [All the ruin **is** on our head and face.]; p. 39); and ⟨-ʾ⟩ ("wᵃ myʾn sʾzndkʾn qʾyᵃh mʾ" [And (it) **is** hidden (among other) musicians.]; p. 9).

Azarbaijani: A Qaside copied in 730/1330 in the early variety of Azarbaijan exhibits ⟨-y⟩: "tᵃk dʷlʷr hᵉyzᵃʾnkᵃ sndʷwn**y** ǰᵃɣᵃʾr hᵉyzᵃʾnkᵃ sʷɣ" [You whose heart **is** like a flint (and your) liver like a stone.] (quoted from Firuzbakhsh, 2022 [2023], p. 82).

Shirvan: A ghazal by Badr of Shirvan (789–854/1387–1450) in the "knʾr ʾb"[16] variety uses ⟨-h⟩ at the verse-ends: "čw mn dlbr xwš w ṣʾḥb ǰmʾl**h** / bᵃrʷx bᵃdr**h** bʾbrwwʾn hlʾl**h**" [My sweetheart **is** nice and beautiful / His/her face **is** like the full moon and in terms of eyebrows s/he **is** like crescents.] (as cited in Zoka', 2006, p. 78).

Gil(ak)i: Gilaki poems of Sayyed Sharafshah-e Talesh of Dulab, a *ṣūfī* of the 7th/13th c., showcase the forms ⟨-h⟩ and ⟨-yh⟩ (the latter with the ⟨-y-⟩ to resolve vowel hiatus); for example, in: "ʾwn sbzh sbzh bhšt**h** kh dylgšʾy**h** / ʾwn dr bhšt**h** kh tmʾm qrṣš ṭlʾ**yh**" [That greenery **is** the verdure of paradise, which **is** heart-opening / That gate **is** the gate of paradise, which **is** entirely made of gold.] (Dulabi, 1982, p. 52). In the Tabari poems of the MS of *al-Kifāyat fī ʿIlm al-Iʿrāb* preserved in the Astan Quds Library belonging to the 9th/15th c., a verse is also found which bears the title "gyly", where ⟨-h⟩ of "nxwšh" is possibly representative of IST: "… / ǰwn nxwš**h** my znʾy ʾwy yʾr" [… / How unpleasant my life is without the beloved!] (as cited in Zabihi, 2014, pp. 37 [transcription], 38 [MS reproduction]; translation mine, tentative).[17]

Fahlaviyyāt:[18] IST appears as ⟨-y⟩ in Fahlaviyyāt, as in the Fahlaviyyāt of Sheykh Safi of Ardabil ("šyxh [prob. šyx[y]m?] šyx**y** kh ʾḥsʾnš bʾ hmy ny / tnm bwry ʿšqm ʾtš kmy-ny" [My Sheykh **is** a Sheykh whose kindness extends to everyone / My body is filled with the fire of love and there's (no) shortage (in it).]; as cited in Sadeghi, 2003b, pp. 12–13), Obeyd of Zakan ("drdm**y**" [there **is** a pain to me

15 According to Henning (1954, p. 176, fn. 5), this text is not "written in any 'dialect', but in a vulgar (extremely vulgar!) and slangy type of colloquial Persian."

16 For more on the term, *vide* Firuzbakhsh, 2022 [2023], p. 57.

17 Currently in Gilan province, it is pronounced as *ə* (Rastorgueva et al., 2012, p. 132).

18 Fahlaviyyāt refers to a corpus of compositions from the medieval period (ca. 4th–9th/10th–15th centuries), originating in the Fahla regions and adjacent areas of western, central, and northwestern Iran. These remains are composed in a New Western Iranian variety conventionally termed Fahlavī, which functioned as a regional literary medium, though individual compositions often exhibit features influenced by the local vernaculars of their authors (on the Fahlaviyyāt tradition and its linguistic features, *vide* Firuzbakhsh, 2022 [2023]; Mohammadi, 2026).

[= I have pain].[19]]; Sadeghi, 1998, pp. 6–7) and Ayn-al-Quzat of Hamadan[20] ("ky'n**y**" [which one **is** it?]; Sadeghi, 2003a, p. 19).

Baba Taher: Couplets attributed to Baba Taher, a 5th/11th-c. mystic[21], demonstrate the use of ⟨-h⟩, as in: "'gr dl dlbr**h** dlbr čh nwm**h** / w gr dlbr dl**h** dl 'z čh nwm**h**[22]" [If my Sweetheart **is** my heart, how shall I name her?[23] / And if my heart **is** my Sweetheart, whence **is** she named?] (quoted from Heron-Allen, 1902, §31, 40 [text], 76 [En. translation]). In Vahid Dastgerdi's edition (*Dīvān-e Kāmel-e Bābā-Ṭāher*, 1932, Ghazal 5), this couplet appears as "'gr dl dlbrw dlbr kd'm '**st** / w gr dlbr dl w dl r' čh n'm '**st**," which seems to suggest potential influence from contemporary Persian in transmission.[24] In the Judaeo-Persian versions of Baba Taher's poems, it is represented through yod, as in (cited and translated in Asmussen, 1968, p. 45),

dly dyrwm zʿšqt gyǰwyǰ**y** דלי דירום זעשקת גיגויגי
mǰh br hm znm xwn'bh ryǰy מגה בר הם זנם כונאבה ריגי
[A heart I have …; for love of thee it is giddy and bewildered … / When I strike my eyelashes together, tears of blood pour out.]

Qazvin: In a verse by Hafiz Sabuni of Qazvin (10th/16th c.) recorded in *Farhang-e J̌ahāngīrī* (as cited in Kia, 1978, p. 77), there is a probable case of IST as ⟨-y⟩: "srk srk twrh b' mn čh ǰng w byr'h**y** / mw 'šqwm w tw dyw'nh['y] w srm'hy."

Unspecified: A probable instance of IST is found in a 10th/16th c. *Qur'ān* translation MS no. 814 preserved in Astan Quds Library, where Arabic *bi'sa* is translated as ⟨bd**h**⟩, while other early translations have *bad ast* "it is bad." (*Farhangnāme-ye Qur'ānī*, 1993, p. 333).

2.4 Metalinguistic Evidence

Apart from Avicenna's statement quoted above, a crucial discovery comes from a treatise titled *Al-Nafḥah al-Qudsiyyah fī Aḥkām Qirā'at al-Qur'ān wa-Kitābatih bi-al-Fārisiyyah wa-mā Yataʿallaq bihā min Bāqī al-Aḥkām*, by the Egyptian scholar Hasan b. Ammar b. Ali al-Shurunbulali (994–1069/1586–1659). In a section of this treatise discussing translations of the phrase *Allāh-u akbar* into Persian, the pronunciation of IST as *e*/*i* during that era is explicitly mentioned (Figure 2):

La^{w} *kabbara bi-l-Fārisiyyah faqāla* ⟨xd'y bzrgst⟩ *a*^{w} *qāla* ⟨xd'y bzrg⟩ *a*^{w} *qāla* ⟨bn'm xd'y bzrg⟩, *yasīru šāri*^{ʿan} *fī ṣ-ṣalāti ʿinda Abī Ḥanīfah …*[25] *Wa-ʿlam anna lafẓa* ⟨'st⟩ *bi-l-Fārisiyyah rābiṭat*^{un} *tufīdu θ-θubūt;*

19 In the so-called *mihi est* construction.

20 The ⟨-yh⟩ at the end of the half-verses of a *rubāʿī* ("'brwy tw b' čšm tw hm-phlwyh / …") attributed to him as quoted in *Seyr-e Robāʿī dar Šeʿr-e Fārsī* (Shamisa, 1995, p. 141), which may be considered as evidence of IST, is incorrect, and, as noted by Mirafzali (1996, p. 317), ⟨b^{e}h⟩ is the correct form.

21 The couplets, attributed to Baba Taher, were likely composed in a New Western Iranian idiom but have undergone corruption over the centuries, with copyists apparently imprinting their own idioms and subjecting the text to later Persianization. Consequently, while the couplets are unreliable for establishing the precise variety of IST, references herein to instances of IST in these verses serve as exemplars of its earlier usage.

22 According to Sadeghi (1984, p. 63), the sound changes ⟨'n⟩/⟨'m⟩ to ⟨wn⟩/⟨wm⟩ are not characteristic of Baba Taher's language but rather instances of textual corruption in his poems.

23 The fact that Heron-Allen translates ⟨čh nwmh⟩ here into "how shall I name her?" suggests that he has, at the moment of translation, read ⟨nwmh⟩ as either ⟨*nwmm⟩ (= Standard Persian *nāmam*) or taken the final ⟨-h⟩ as the 1SG secondary verbal ending attested in a number of New Iranian varieties (e.g., in old Kazeruni ⟨nmybnh⟩ "I do not see"; *vide* Aliyari Babolghani, 2025, §5.2.5).

24 In some versions of the couplets, the 3SG present ending (regarding the relationship between this ending and IST, *vide* §4) appears as ⟨-w⟩ (Huart, 1885, p. 510); cf. *-u* in Judeo-Hamadani (Gholami, 2021, p. 782) and evidence provided in §4. Mohammadi (2026, pp. 57, 75, fn. 3) argues that, in employing the forms ⟨-y⟩ [and ⟨-h⟩], Baba Taher follows Fahlavi rather than the idiom of his hometown, where the corresponding ending was ⟨-w⟩ (*vide* al-Maqdisī's statement cited *infra* §4). While the argument is intelligent and plausible, the co-existence of these forms in Baba Taher's vernacular cannot be ruled out.

*wa qad tuḥδafu tā'uhu wa qad tuḥδafu hiya bi-l-kulliyyati wa yuktafā bi-**kasri āxiri l-kalimah**.* (Al-Shurunbulali, 1936, p. 17 = Al-Shurunbulali MS no. 324482, pp. 5^{r}–5^{v26})
[If he pronounces it in Persian, saying "*X^{w}adāy buzurg-ast*" or "⟨xd'y bzrg⟩" or "*Ba nām-i x^{w}adāy-i buzurg*", he has duly entered prayer according to Abu Hanifah … And know that the word *ast* in Persian is a linking particle indicating permanence; its ⟨-t⟩ may be omitted, and sometimes it is omitted in entirety, and it suffices to have a ***kasrah* at the end of a word**.]

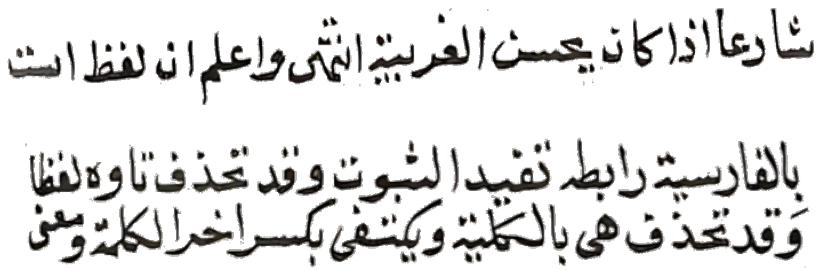


Figure 2: *Al-Shurunbulali, MS No. 324482, pp. 5r–5v [enhanced] (© al-Azhar Library)*

2.4.1 Revisiting the Case of *Asās al-Iqtibās*

Returning to the evidence from *Asās al-Iqtibās*, the oldest MS examined by Kamali (2016), viz. MS No. 4929 of the Library of Iran Parliament, is dated 843/1439, where IST is unmarked. However, I was able to identify that an even older MS of this book, dating back to 680_{AH}, exists, currently preserved as No. 2479 in the Ayasofya Library. In this MS (Figure 3), IST is shown with a *kasrah*, consistent with the majority of our evidence. Furthermore, in MS number 3828 of the Library of Iran Parliament (from the 12th or early 13th/18th to early 19th c.), ⟨dbyr⟩ is written with a *kasrah* on ⟨r⟩ (p. 22^{r}).

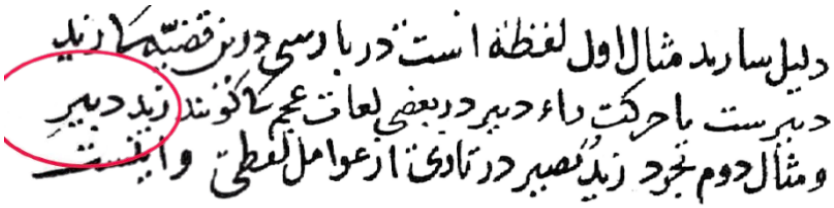


Figure 3: *Tusi, MS No. 2479, p. 51r (© Ayasofya Library)*

2.5 Late New Iranian Varieties

Here, we explore instances mostly from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries AD. The provided examples showcase IST across diverse geographical locations.

Kashan: ⟨-y⟩ in the following half-verse by Sayyed Nasrullah Qamsari is a probable case of IST in Kashani Persian of the 13th/19th c.: "'l'ɣ m'čgy xyly q^{e}šng**y**" [The jenny is very pretty.] (quoted in Atefi, 2007, p. 15, final verse; translation mine, tentative).

Zanjan: In the travelogue of William Price, secretary to Sir Gore Ouseley, completed in 1825, several sentences in the idiom of one of the villages of Zanjan, named "žhr'n č'hy," are documented, in which IST is used with the pronunciation *e*; for instance, in (Price's transcription) "*heemeh adami maun nau sauzeh*" [My man **is** unwell.] (Price, 1825, pp. 45–46).

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25 Up to this point, this subject has also been addressed in earlier Hanafi jurisprudence texts; however, the continuation of the subject, namely the description of the Persian "*rābiṭah*" and its forms, is, as far as I know, specific to this treatise.

26 The editor edited the treatise using only the MS from the al-Azhar Library. However, there exists another MS of it in the collection numbered 2715 at the Šehīd ʿAlī Pāša Library (Turkey), dated 1102/1690 (pp. 152^{v}–169^{v}).

Shushtar/Isfahan: A ghazal by Molla Saleh of Shushtar (fl. 13th/19th c.) features IST with the spelling ⟨-h⟩: "tw kh hšty xw hlm kʷšty w gndt nh bɣm / tw čh prwʾt**h** kh hr sʿth ṣd xwynh kny" [You who have abandoned me, let it be, abandon me. You killed me and you don't care / What fear **is** to you? You cause a hundred tumults every hour.] (as cited in Firuzbakhsh, 2017, p. 335). The 13th/19th-c. *Loyat-e Maḥallī-ye Šūštar* (2021) helps us clarify the pronunciation of IST as *fatḥah*: "xʾrk sᵃwzᵉš rʷṭbᵃh … *hā-yi āxir-i* ⟨rʷṭb⟩ *ba ʿawaẓ-i kalama-yi ʿastʾ dar Fārsī ast, mānand-i kasra-yi āxir dar zabān-i ahl-i Iṣfahān*" [⟨xʾrk sᵃwzᵉš rʷṭbᵃh⟩ … The final ⟨-h⟩ of ⟨rʷṭbᵃh⟩ equals *ast* in Persian, like the final *kasrah* in the language of the people of Isfahan.] (p. 63). Therefore, the unknown compiler of this dictionary, in addition to clarifying the pronunciation of IST in Shushtar (which was, according to him, *a*), has provided us with how it was pronounced in Isfahan at that time (*e*). This Isfahani pronunciation is, as already noted (*supra*, fn. 7), also reflected in a MS of *Asās al-Iqtibās*, copied by an Isfahani scribe, where IST is represented by a *kasrah*.

Tehran/Tajrish: Late 19th-c. AD materials from the now-dead dialect of Tajrish show IST represented as *e*; for example, in (as transcribed by V. A. Zhukovski): "*īn mard kūr**e***" [this man **is** blind.] (as cited in Sadeghi, 2004b, p. 38).[27] Even older evidence, from the 11th c. AH, is available from Tehran, in a poem by Molla ⟨Sḥry⟩ of Tehran: "ʾgr ʿʾšq nym ʾhm čh čy**h** / ʾgr hm gwš w klʾhm čh čy**h** // mkšy xnǰr w mhly w mšy / nmy-dʾnm kh gnʾhm čh čy**h**" [If I am not in love, what is my sigh for? / If I am, then what is my nook and hat (viz. dignity) for? // You draw a dagger, and you leave me, and you go / I do not know what my sin is.] (as cited in Mirafzali, 2001, p. 40; reading and translation mine).

Lori: A Lori text of the 11th/17th c. has ⟨-h⟩: "mθl mhšwr**h** kh [verse:] ʾylʾɣ ʾr čh bhšt**h** / py hmrhy dwstʾn srznšt**h**" [It **is** a famous proverb that [verse:] even though the summer pasture **is** (like) paradise / without the company of friends, it **is** reproach.] (as cited in Rashno, 2024, p. 143).

The variety of evidence presented makes it clear that IST was not a recent invention. Its presence across various regions throughout history is well documented. This finding challenges the generally held notion that IST is exclusive to modern speech.

2.6 ⟨-h⟩/⟨-y⟩: Pronunciation?

Our evidence, as observed, highlights the use of two primary forms to represent IST: ⟨-h⟩ and ⟨-y⟩. Interestingly, these variations can even exist within different MSS of the same text, as seen in the Fahlaviyyāt of Ayn-al-Quzat of Hamadan ("dʾry"/"dʾrh" [it has]; Sadeghi, 2003a, p. 17). While conclusive evidence remains elusive, the possibility exists that both forms, at least in some cases, might have shared a similar pronunciation, potentially *ē*, based on the analysis of poetic meter. In the following Hamadani half-verse (cited in Tabibzade, 2013, p. 71), the presence of the 3SG present ending[28] as ⟨-y⟩ (in ⟨wʾǰy⟩ < *vāǰēd*) and ⟨-h⟩ (in ⟨ʾyh⟩ < *āyēd*) within the same verse probably[29] suggests a long vowel pronunciation for both forms.[30]

ʾlwnd wʾǰ**y** kh xwš bw ʾz mn ʾy**h**
ʔalvan(d) vāǰ⟨y⟩ ki x⁽ʷ⁾aš bō ʔaz man āy⟨h⟩
- - - ˗ / ◡ - - - / ◡ - ˗
Alvand says, "the pleasant fragrance comes from me."

Despite the possibility of a shared long *ē* pronunciation for ⟨-h⟩ and ⟨-y⟩ in some cases, due to the lack of definitive evidence, we should still cautiously consider both short *e* and long *ē* pronunciations for spellings with ⟨-h⟩ and ⟨-y⟩. Unless there is conclusive phonetic, orthographic, or metalinguistic

27 *Vide* also Borjian, 2011, p. 256.

28 For the relationship between this ending and IST, *vide* §3.

29 "Probably," since, in the present sample, ⟨-h⟩ appears in the final position, and as evident, a short vowel in the final position can be lengthened in poetry to conform to the meter (Thiesen, 1982, §62ff.).

30 It is likely due to consideration of poetic meter that Browne (1908, p. 85) transcribes the IST ⟨-h⟩ as *é* (in a reprint of a few couplets in Browne, 1927, p. 98 as *ē*).

evidence to the contrary, the pronunciation of the spelling ⟨-h⟩ in earlier remains should be considered to be *ĕ/i* rather than *a* (see §3). Also, the occurrences and evidence of *kasrah* to represent IST all appear in relatively late sources: *Asās al-Iqtibās*, *Resāle-ye Rūḥī-ye Anārǰānī*, *Al-Nafḥah al-Qudsiyyah*, and *Loγat-e Maḥallī-ye Šūštar*. In one group of texts, namely the 7th–8th/13th–14th-c. Tabari trans-cum-commentaries, IST is sometimes left unwritten. The most likely pronunciation for all these instances is *e/i* (or even *ə*).

The next section will delve deeper into the implications of this *ĕ* predominance. However, before proceeding, it should be noted that regarding the ⟨-ʾ⟩ form in the Tabari translation as well as *Resāle-ye Rūḥī-ye Anārǰānī*, ⟨-ʾ⟩ is likely related to the linking verb of the feminine gender, pronounced as *ā* in Zazaki (alongside *o* for masculine) (Paul, 1999, p. 83), Esfarvarini and Takestani (Yar-Shater, 1969, p. 196), Sangsari (Morgenstierne, 1960, p. 107), and several other varieties[31]. The ⟨-ʾ⟩ [-ā] in all these varieties may, as proposed by Nyberg (1933, p. 349) despite Barr's criticism (*apud* Andreas, 1939, pp. 267–268, fn. 2), trace back to *hāh* (that is, "to be" plus 3SG subjunctive ending). The discussion about the ⟨-w⟩ form is reserved for a later section (§4).

3 Origin of IST

Benveniste[32] and Lazard (2006 = 1992, §17.3)[33] propose that the *-e* stems from the complete dropping of the consonant cluster *-st* and a subsequent vowel shift from *-a* to *-e*. This view is also held by Iranian linguists—such as Vahidian (1964, p. 14), Shaqaqi (1995, p. 148), and Kalbasi (2001, p. 62), among others—and literati—e.g., Bahar (1976, p. 250).[34]

Sadeghi (2008, p. 406) suggests a transformation pathway in which *ast* initially evolves into *e/ist*, followed by the subsequent loss of *-st* in a later stage. He cites evidence for the initial *e/ist* form from *Tafsīrī bar ʿUšrī az Qurʾān-e Maǰīd*. Elsewhere, he (Sadeghi, 2016, §29) strengthens this suggestion by referencing its presence in Masoud Sa'd's poetry[35], pinpointing Ghazna as a possible location for the aforementioned Qurʾānic trans-cum-commentary.[36]

While the deletion of final ⟨-t⟩ from the copula *ast* is recognized in Early New Persian—e.g., in "čnʾnkss" [čunān kas as] in a 5th/11th c. *Qurʾān* translation (cited in Karimi-Niya, 2019, p. 112)—this study offers a distinct explanation for the origin of the ⟨-h⟩ (and ⟨-y⟩). The deletion of solely the ⟨-t⟩ aligns with the documented sound change, but the complete absence of ⟨-st⟩ in some cases may necessitate an alternative analysis.

31 *Vide* Morgenstierne, 1962; Windfuhr, 1989, §§4.1.0.3.1.1, 4.1.0.3.2.1.

32 "Il est probable que iron *i* n'est qu'une réduction de *is*, analogue à *-e* (pour *ast*) du persan parlé" (Benveniste, 1959, p. 75).

33 Among the earliest mentions of this form in Persian grammars, I have found two. In Clair-Tisdall's *Modern Persian Conversation-Grammar* (1902, p. 64), it is recorded as *-ah* and connected to "the old Pahlavi *āi*." In Phillott's *Higher Persian Grammar* (1919, p. 218), it appears as a remark: "[v]ulgarly, instead of *ast* … *-a* (pronounced *e*)." The spelling *-a* suggests that Phillott understood the form as a reduced variant of *ast*.

34 The same view is maintained as recently as Kim (2021 [2023], p. 22).

35 Here we add that another Qurʾānic MS (*Qurʾān Translation* MS No. 631 of Astan Quds Library; for example, on p. 76) probably dating back to the 6th/12th c. in Transoxiana displays the *est* form; the form *est* in the idiom of Arab settlers in Sarab (in southern Khorasan) (Noruzi & Salehi, 2018, p. 236), who migrated to this region after the Arab conquest, might also be a remnant of the *e/ist* from previous centuries in the East. There is a slight possibility that this *e/ist* may have arisen from the coalescence of *ast* and Middle Persian **ist-*, a substantive verb hypothesized by MacKenzie (1984).

36 For an alternative explanation regarding the pronunciation of ⟨ʾst⟩ based on its rhyme with the past formative ⟨-st⟩, *vide* Idgah-e Torqabe'i, 2020, pp. 317–323. ⟨-prst⟩ (in ⟨btprst⟩) cited from the *Dīvān* of Nasir Khusraw among Idgah-e Torqabe'i's evidence (ibid, p. 322) to support the pronunciation *-ast* for the past formative ⟨-st⟩ should be disregarded; the Middle Persian pronunciation of ⟨prst⟩ is *parist* with *-i-* (noted already by Dadras, 2023, p. 214).

We propose another perspective: the contemporary *-e* could be a remnant of **(a)hēd*, the 3SG present tense of the verb "to be" in Middle Persian. A tentative potential transformation path[37] is outlined:

Middle Iranian: **(a)hēd* (/**(a)had*[38]) >
Early & Late New Iranian: **hēd/δ* ‖[39] **had/δ* ‖ *ēd/δ* ‖ *ĕ* ‖ *i*[40] ‖ *ə* ‖ *a* >
Contemporary New Persian: *e*

Nearly a century ago, Nyberg (1928, p. 231, §3), in his examination of a segment of *Bundahišn* (a Zoroastrian Middle Persian cosmological text), identified "*avē buxtēt*" as a notable construction previously unaddressed. He proposed that the second component of this phrase comprises the past participle *buxt* and the copula *ēt/d*, taken from the 3SG ending of the present tense.[41] Table 1 presents the singular forms of the verb "to be," highlighting the third-person singular form **(a)hēd* (linking verb), which, according to Nyberg, was formed by analogy with the corresponding personal ending.

Table 1: *Singular forms of the verb "to be," showing the third-person singular (a)hēd, formed by analogy*

person (singular)	1st	2nd	3rd
verbal ending (present)	*-ēm*	*-ē*	*-ēd*
"to be"	*(a)h-ēm*	*(a)h-ē*	x = *(a)h-ēd*

To substantiate his proposal, he cited two additional probable instances of the usage of this copula, including ⟨YMLLWN-yt⟩ "es wird gesagt" [= *guftēt*]. Interestingly, Goshtasb and Mohammadi (2018) independently arrived at a similar explanation for the formation of *(a)hēd*, also observing its attestation in *Draxt ī Āsūrīg* (a Middle Iranian[42] versified contest compilation) alongside the standard *ast*, without apparent knowledge of Nyberg's earlier work. Earlier, Barr, in his edition of Carl Andreas's *Nachlass* (Barr *apud* Andreas, 1939, p. 267, fn. 2), drew attention to this secondary verb, suggesting that the forms *-à* and *-e*, prevalent in most New Western Iranian varieties, result from the transformation of this *ēt/d*.[43] It should be noted that vestiges of *(a)hēd* persist in contemporary Iranian varieties, such as *hēd/δ* in Bakhtiari (Hasandust, 2010, s.v. ⟨bwdn⟩; Lorimer, 1922, p. 55).[44]

The ⟨h-⟩ forms of the verb "to be" (1SG: ⟨hwm⟩, 2SG: ⟨hy⟩, etc.) are documented in Early Judaeo-Persian (see Paper, 1967; Paul, 2013, §174), as well as in select Early New Persian texts, manifesting as

37 Note that the following path is not exhaustive. Identical forms in different varieties need not derive from a single source; they can result from distinct origins (cf. ⟨hn⟩ discussed in §5, prominently attested in the geographically distant regions of Fars and Herat) or reflect divergent developments (e.g., the Azerbaijani form ⟨-y⟩, possibly from a pre-form **-ĕr*, with the well-attested rhotacism in that variety).

38 *Vide infra* for this plausible form.

39 ‖ = Co-occurring pronunciation in a single location and/or in another region.

40 Such dual pronunciation is also observed within modern varieties; for instance, in the Meyme'ī dialect, IST is used with both pronunciations, *e* and *a* (contrary to Lambton's assertion, 1938, p. 10).

41 The innovation with regard to "is" is not limited to Iranian but finds parallels in other languages, such as Welsh, where "is" is *oes*, originating from the Indo-European 2SG **esi*, with the addition of the personal pronoun "o" (Lewis, 1967).

42 Mohammadi (2026, §2.1.5) argues that the text must originally have been composed in the Fahlavi language.

43 Markwart (1927, p. 75, fn. 1), on the other hand, in a remark made nearly a century ago and subsequently overlooked, derived *-a* in New Western Iranian from the Old Persian 3SG conjunctive *ahatiy*.

44 In the rare instance found in the Early Judaeo-Persian trans-cum-commentary of Ezekiel, this secondary linking verb *(a)hēd* was treated as a whole stem, evidenced by its use in forming ⟨hydnd⟩ (i.e., ⟨hyd-⟩ + the 3PL.PRES ending ⟨-nd⟩) instead of the regular *hastand* (Noruzi, 2024, p. 85). Cf., e.g., Bactrian ⟨(α)στααδο⟩ secondarily derived from 3SG.PRES ⟨αστο⟩ (according to Yoshida, 2000, p. 157)—comparable to Dari *asta*—and **birir-* in Balaxani Abşeron Tat < *būd-* + *-īd* (Suleymanov, 2025).

⟨hym⟩ (1PL) and ⟨h(y)nd⟩ (3PL) (Honar, 1992). Additionally, such forms are found in Pazand[45] (Horn, 1898–1901, p. 153, §92).

The form ⟨ʾyd/δ⟩ has been used in Early New Persian texts coming from Herat and xʷāǰa Abdullah Ansari's works (cf. e.g., instances cited in Karimi-Niya, 2021, pp. 23–24). Apart from Ansari's writings, ⟨ʾyd/δ⟩ can also be seen in the *Qurʾān Translation* MS no. 4651 of Astan Quds Razavi[46] (p. 45ʳ). Considering the same form of the verb in Ansari's *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*, Ivanow (1923, pp. 355–356) speculated—interestingly, but against the general consensus then and now[47]—that the spelling ⟨ʾYT⟩ in Pahlavi texts is not actually an Aramaeogram of *ast*, as is commonly assumed, but "a *reproduction* of a word, which in the earlier period was used everywhere, but for some reason was forgotten later and became a kind of symbol."[48] Such a wrong recognition of ⟨ʾyt⟩, he maintains, is the reason why Pazandists rendered it phonetically into *hast*, which was "the other more fashionable and up-to-date form of speech."[49]

Our evidence supporting the *ē* stage includes the Early Judaeo-Persian trans-cum-commentary of Genesis, along with the regional forms mentioned earlier where IST is represented as ⟨-y⟩. Additionally, potential evidence for IST arises from Early New Persian texts where the 3SG present tense ending is rendered as ⟨-y⟩.[50]

Examples of the *e*/*i* stage are also found, among others, in the poems of Bondar Razi and possibly the Tabari variety.

Therefore, in terms of chronology, the forms with *ĕ̄* seem to be closer to the Middle Persian pedigree than *a*, and, as indicated by the evidence provided above, were the predominant pronunciation. This form is suggested to be related to *(a)hēd* and, more generally, to the 3SG present tense ending.[51] Further investigation is required to ascertain when, where, and how the vowel of the 3SG present tense ending changed from *ĕ̄* to *a* in all cases.[52] Nonetheless, it is evident that IST was mostly pronounced as (/with) *ĕ̄*, a pronunciation also reflected in early texts from various regions of Greater

45 Pazand is traditionally understood as the practice of rendering the ambiguous Pahlavi script into the comparatively unambiguous Avestan script. As Azarnouche (2014, p. 96) emphasizes, it constitutes a hybrid phenomenon, positioned between the transcription of Pahlavi and the phonetic recording of Persian as spoken by the Zoroastrian community in India from the 12th century AD onward.

46 It includes the text and translation of the 20th *juzʾ* of the *Qurʾān*, possibly originating from the 5th c. AH, with the location of translation remaining unknown (on this translation, *vide* Karimi-Niya, 2019).

47 *Vide* Ferrer Losilla (2013, p. 443).

48 The form ⟨-yt⟩ "is" itself occurs in early Persian texts as well, including a Judaeo-Persian Bible MS (Paper, 1975, p. 218, §3), and the Early New Persian *Montaxab-e Roʷnaq al-Maǰāles va Bostān al-ʿĀrefīn va Toḥfat al-Morīdīn* (1975, pp. 12–13).

49 Elsewhere, in the context of the Gabri dialect (Ivanow, 1935, p. 85), he refers to ⟨ʾyt⟩ when discussing the Gabri *-nit* "is" and, after taking the *-n-* as a glide, relates the *-it* of that form to Old Persian *aitiy* and Avestan *aēiti*, both < Old Iranian **ai-* "to go"; it thus becomes clear that he had later changed his mind with regard to the ultimate root of the ⟨ʾyt⟩ form. This latter suggestion is phonologically and typologically plausible, semantically in need of evidence, in our case of ⟨ʾyt⟩ from contemporary eastern Iranian idioms, for which, looking s.v. *H*ai* in Cheung (2007), I find no explicit evidence of any copular or existential development.

50 For instance (as quoted in Sadeghi & Haji-Sayyed-Aqayi, 2010, §2-3-1): "*tā bīm kunē*" [translating *liyunδira* (Q XXXVI: 70)] (in [the so-called] *Tarǰome-ye Tafsīr-e Ṭabarī*, Golestan Palace MS), and "*čerā na-mē-ārē*" [= *laʷ lā yaʾtīnā* (Q XX: 133)] (in *Qurʾān-e Qods*).

51 Note that in colloquial Persian, both IST and the 3SG present tense marker are represented as *-e*. This is also the case, for instance, in the couplet by Pir Jamal of Ardestan (*vide infra*, §4).

52 For the development of the present tense suffixes from Middle Persian to New Persian, *vide* Durkin-Meisterernst (2015). For the development of the past tense suffixes, *vide* Paul (2008). It should be noted that in addition to the examples quoted above of the 3SG present tense markers, both forms ⟨-yd⟩ and the diacriticized form ⟨-ᵃδ⟩ are found in Early New Persian MSS in Syriac script; for example, ⟨bwyd⟩ "is" in a text which de Blois (2006, p. 101, s.v. ⟨bwdn⟩) has transcribed incorrectly as /bawaδ/, and the diacriticized form ⟨bwᵃδ⟩ in another text (Sims-Williams, 2011, p. 368).

Iran.[53] However, the proposed path must, of course, be taken *cum grano salis*. One may, for instance, posit that the ⟨-y⟩ forms continue the ending **-ayati*, while the *-a* forms reflect **-ati*. Nevertheless, it is not inconceivable that, in certain varieties, the ⟨-y⟩ forms could also have developed from *-ati*. A possible parallel may be found in the Wanechi dialect of Pashto, where *-ati* is reduced to *-ə* (Morgenstierne, 1942, p. 104, §21)—suggesting that, under this possibility, a development of the ending's vowel from *-a* > *-ə* > *-e*/*i* would not be unexpected. An alternative explanation, proposed by Markwart (1927, p. 75, fn. 1) as mentioned above, is to derive *-a* instead from the Old Persian 3SG subjunctive *ahatiy*.

Regarding the dropping of ⟨-d⟩ (> ⟨-δ⟩) from the ending, it likely occurred in the earliest stages of New Persian. Apart from the regional evidence quoted earlier, the earliest dated non-regional instance of this ending without ⟨-d⟩ can be found in a poem included in two MSS of a Qurʾānic excerpts collection, donated to the Imam Reza Shrine in 421/1030: "ʾy hr kh **bdzdh**[54] ʾyn krʾsh / ʾyzdš bdhd mrg btʾsh" [O, whoever steals this pamphlet / May God give him a lingering death.] (quoted from Karimi-Niya, 2017, p. 23).

It is worth mentioning that Khwarezmian, an Eastern Middle Iranian language, exhibits a similar form for IST: ⟨yẗ⟩ [yϑi] (Humbach, 1989, p. 200). This observation may further reinforce the connections between the Persian IST and other Iranian languages.

4 Avicenna's ⟨hy⟩ and ⟨hw⟩

Returning to Avicenna's earlier statement: "*ka-qaʷlihim* ⟨flʾn ǰnyn [= čnyn] hst[55]⟩ *aʷ* ⟨[flʾn čnyn] hy⟩ *aʷ* ⟨[flʾn čnyn] hw⟩." ⟨hy⟩ can also align with and be derived from the Middle Persian *(a)hēd*. ⟨hy⟩ was also used in Gorgani (as noted by Goshtasb & Mohammadi, 2018). Additionally, in a New Iranian text in Hebrew script (line 3:4 of Shaked's edition, 1988), initially considered as an unknown Iranian variety by Shaked and later identified by Borjian (2016, p. 238) as "Judaeo-Gorgani," IST is also used as ⟨hy⟩. The pronunciation of ⟨hy⟩ could possibly be *hē* (or *hay*[56]). It is worth mentioning that such a form did exist also in Transoxiana, as the author of *Maǰmūʿat al-Furs* (Jaruti, 1977, p. 268; composed probably in the 8th/14th c.) considered ⟨hy⟩ to be specific "to the language of Transoxiana."

Avicenna's ⟨hw⟩ functions identically to ⟨hy⟩. Notably, the Isfahan idiom of the 5th c. employed ⟨hw⟩ as IST (transcribed as *hū* with the so-called *wāw-e maʿlūm* by Tafazzoli): "*var deh xarāb xarāj nahū*," translating Arabic "*laysa ʿalā al-bawār xarāj*" [There is no tax on the wasteland.] (quoted from

53 The presence of the 3SG present ending in rhyme position with words ending in ⟨-h⟩ (< Middle Persian *-ag*), including in a poem by Suzani of Samarqand and also in *Kulliyyāt-e Šams* (*vide* Idgah-e Torqabe'i, 2020, p. 64), indicates that in some parts of Greater Iran in the 6th–7th/12th–13th c., the IST pronunciation was likely *a*.

54 However, in one of these two MSS (MS No. 1501; image no. 7 in Karimi-Niya, 2017), this verb seems rather to be ⟨bbrdh⟩. For other instances of the deletion of ⟨-d⟩, *vide* Horn, 1898–1901, pp. 83–84, §38.6; Lazard, 1963, p. 144, §27; and for its deletion from this ending, *vide* Sadeghi & Haji-Sayyed-Aqayi, 2010, §§2–3; Sadeghi, 2015, pp. 241–242.

55 The ⟨hst⟩ in the passage—as in that discussed by al-Farabi (1990, pp. 110–111)—is copular, not existential; cf. ⟨h(y)st⟩ in Early Judaeo-Persian and contemporary dialects of Fars.

56 Examples of this pronunciation include ⟨hy⟩ (*hay*) in a *tarkīb-band* attributed to Hafez in rhyme with *ḥay* (< Ar. *ḥayy*) and *ṭay* (< Ar. *ṭayy*), among others, in a verse from *Masnavi* in rhyme with ⟨py⟩ (cited in Lazard, 1963, §495), and also in a *rubāʿī* by Athir al-Din Akhsikati, where it rhymes with *nay*, *pay*, and *way* (*vide* Idgah-e Torqabe'i, 2020, p. 575). *hay-* in the remains from Transoxiana and in contemporary eastern dialects (now within the borders of Tajikistan) is, according to Bernard (2025, pp. 142ff.), either analogically re-modelled from the negative paradigm of the copula or derives from the ancient optative of the verb "to be." Evidence from Hafez and Rumi remains unexplained. This copular *hay* is also mentioned in the 12th/18th-c. Persian dictionary *Bahār-i ʿAǰam* (Bahar, 2000, p. 2146, s.v.; cited as well by Vullers in *Grammatica Linguae Persicae*, 1870, p. 111), where it is stated that *hay* "*muštarak ast dar Hindī*" [*hay* is common with (i.e., also found in) Hindi.]. This Hindi copula, however, is linked to a different stem (see Turner, 1966, p. 46, s.v. 1031 *ā́kṣēti*), and is therefore etymologically distinct. Let us also note that the northeastern Katë copula *-ay* (3PL), although formally similar, is to be explained differently (Halfmann, 2025, p. 54, fn. 57).

Tafazzoli, 1971, p. 100).[57] This usage finds parallels in the post-vocalic ⟨-w⟩ of the 8th/14th c. Awhadi Maragha'i's vernacular poems (e.g., "wyḏ'd kᵉrᵉ hmyšh ʾxᵉr / kʾry wᵉh ʾz ʾyn kᵉr ʾyn čh kʾr**w**" [You always do injustice / do something better than this, what kind of behavior **is** this?]; quoted from Khani-e Habib-Abadi et al., 2020, Ghazal 1, verse 9) and the old Ardestani variety (transcribed as the *maʿlūm ū* by Firuzbakhsh) exemplified by the following verse of Pir Jamal of Ardestan, a poet and mystic of the 9th/15th c.: "mʷǰz-kᵃrʾn xδʾ rʾ kʷm ḥᵃʾl zᵃʾrᵉ zᵃʾrʷ**w** / ʾz ʿšq ʾn mᵉrᵃʾnh ʾw xᵃʾ xbr ndʾrw" [O you who do wonders, I swear by God that my condition **is** very deplorable / He himself is unaware of my love for that … (?).] (the text and its tentative translation quoted from Firuzbakhsh, 2022 [2023], p. 42). This ⟨-w⟩ appears to have also been the 3SG present ending in the early language of Hamadan, as documented by the 4th/10th-c. al-Maqdisi (al-Muqaddisi) in the verb ⟨wʾtwʾ⟩ ("s/he says"): "*Wa alsinatuhum muxtalifah ammā bi-l-Rayy fa-yastaʿmilūna al-rāʾ yaqūlūna* ⟨rʾ dh rʾ kn⟩ *wa ahl Hamaδān* ⟨wʾtm wʾtwʾ⟩" (see Akbari Mafakher, 2022–2023 [2024], pp. 116–117); the final ⟨-ʾ⟩ is most likely graphical, devoid of any phonetic reality.

To elucidate the ending ⟨-w⟩ in ⟨hw⟩ and ⟨-w⟩ of the old Hamadani, Isfahani and Ardestani varieties, as well as their remnants in current varieties[58], we can refer to Gershevitch (1970, p. 168), who posits that in Early New Iranian, the sequence *-ōt* in forms such as *bōt* (~ *bawēd*) and *šōt* (~ *šawēd*)[59] was re-analysed as a 3SG present ending, although *ō* originally belonged to the stem.[60] Thus, this *-ōt* then became the ending for the 3SG present tense.[61] Therefore, the ⟨hw⟩ in Avicenna's statement and attested in the early idiom of Isfahan and Hamadan may be considered as composed of the stem ⟨h-⟩ ("to be") and *-ō* ending (< *-ōt*), with a *maǰhūl* vowel, and not the *maʿlūm* one (*pace* the researchers cited above). Later in some mentioned varieties, it was shortened to a simple *u*.[62]

A comparable explanation has also been advanced on the Eastern Iranian side. In Sogdian, the irrealis suffix *-ōt* has been explained as resulting from the re-analysis of *βōte* "would be" (*βōt* < Old Iranian **bawati* + *e*, 3SG optative of *h-* "to be") into *β-* (stem), *-ōt-*, and *-e* (Sims-Williams *apud* Yoshida, 2009, p. 282). Furthermore, the 3SG present form of the verb "to be" in Sanglechi is *ǒ*, whose ancestry Morgenstierne (1938, pp. 355, 359) traces back to the Proto-Iranian form **-ati*. He proposes a sound-change pathway whereby this **-ati* developed into **-ōδ*, then **-ōv*, and finally **-ōu* > *ǒ*.[63] However, this explanation leaves unaddressed how the transformation from **-ati* to **-ōδ* occurred in the first place.

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57 *(h)u* has survived in the current dialects of Isfahan province (*vide*, e.g., Borjian, 2015, p. 289, sentence 17). Also, it should be noted that outside the Isfahan region and in Central varieties, the 3SG (masculine) present tense ending in Gorani and Zazaki is also *u*/*o* (Stilo, 2007, para. 61).

58 *Vide* the previous fn.

59 Gershevitch has marked these two forms with an asterisk, meaning they are hypothetical; however, these two verbs have been used in the form of ⟨bwt⟩ and ⟨šwt⟩ in old Shirazi and old Kazeruni (*vide* Sadeghi, 2004a, pp. 10, 20), both indicatively and subjunctively. ⟨bwt⟩, as pointed out elsewhere (Bigdeloo, forthcoming), can be compared with Bactrian ⟨βοδο⟩ and ⟨βοοδο⟩ and Sogdian *βōt-* in *βōte*.

60 Provided this explanation is historically accurate, it would suggest that the formation of this ending preceded the un-rounding of *ō*/*ū* in the varieties concerned (e.g., *ri* < *rōy* "face" and *did* < *dūt* "smoke" in Judeo-Hamadani).

61 Previously, Geiger (1898–1901, p. 398) dismissed the *u* form in the Kashani dialect as highly "verstümmelt" and Markwart (1927, p. 84) believed *-ō* to be the remnant of the "Middle Median" 3SG conjunctive present *-ād* < *-āt*. Later in 1976, Eilers (p. 79, fn. 3), likely unaware of Gershevitch's work, was unable to explain *h(ū)* in the Khʷansari dialect and its use instead of *a* (this < *ast*). Windfuhr's explanation (1991, p. 249) of this ending in the Central dialects is identical to Gershevitch's (although Windfuhr cites no source for the explanation), but he further postulates that the form may also have been influenced by 3SG demonstrative *ū*.

62 The Ossetic copula *-u*, previously proposed by Sims-Williams (*apud* Cheung, 2002, p. 139) and Cheung (ibid, p. 141) as deriving from an earlier form **bū-* (< **bō-* < **baṷa-*), has recently been more firmly rejected by Kim (2021 [2023], §3) in favor of a pronominal origin. The ⟨hw⟩ in *al-Šifāʾ* and in Old Isfahani, given its initial ⟨h-⟩, clearly cannot be of pronominal origin (though secondary pronominal influence cannot be excluded) and is instead consistent with the explanation provided in the main body.

63 He (ibid, p. 145), in another section, tentatively identifies the *-ō* of the Yidgha language as a representative of an old form of *asti* and compares it with the mentioned Sanglechi form.

5 ⟨hn⟩

While not mentioned by Avicenna, ⟨hn⟩ stands as another noteworthy variant of IST. This form emerges in Early New Persian texts from the Herat region (including Ansari's *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah* [Ansari Heravi, 1983]), *Tarǰome-ye Qurʾān-e Mūze-ye Pārs* (1976, e.g., pp. 109, 226, 273), old Shirazi[64] (see Nawabi, 1964, p. 172), and old Neyrizi (see Adib Tusi, 1962, poem 12, last half-verse; poem 15, half-verse 2). Vestiges of ⟨hn⟩ persist in some contemporary varieties[65].

The origin of ⟨hn⟩[66] likely lies in the expansion of the use of the third-person plural verb form (derived from **(a)hēnd*) with the final ⟨-d⟩ dropped.[67] Examining IST forms in Fars dialects, Barr (*apud* Andreas, 1939, p. 267, fn. 2) proposed a potential blurring of singular and plural distinctions in the third person. In this case, the 3PL ending (*-and*/*-ēnd*) has been adopted for the singular person, possibly starting with mass nouns. Consequently, ⟨hn⟩ has become an element attached to the predicate, regardless of the subject's number.[68]

The exact timeframe for this shift towards using plural endings for the singular in the Fars region remains uncertain. However, I propose that the earliest evidence is to be found in "An Early Jewish-Persian Argument" (ed. by MacKenzie, 1968), written in southwestern Iran before the 6th/12th c. The Judaeo-Persian author sporadically employs ⟨hynd⟩ (< **(a)hēnd*) instead of ⟨hyst⟩, the expected singular form in the Argument. Here is an example showcasing the parallel usage:

ḥq ʾn **hynd** ymn pdyš ʾystydʾ hwm (ibid, p. 258, g1)
ḥq ʾn **hyst** kw mn pdyš ʾystydh hwm (ibid, p. 260, h4–5)

MacKenzie (1968) and subsequently Paul (2013, p. 106) interpreted the ⟨ʾn⟩ of the first sentence as plural, thus translating it as "The truth is **those** things on which I stand." However, it is clear from the context[69] that ⟨ḥq⟩ (that is, "truth") is a singular concept (i.e., not composed of different parts). Therefore, it is also possible to understand ⟨ʾn⟩ in the singular sense. This reading suggests the usage of the plural form ⟨hynd⟩ (> ⟨hn⟩) for the singular likely emerged in the 5th/11th c. or even earlier.

64 I cannot find ⟨hn⟩ (*pace* Firuzbakhsh, 2013, p. 47) in the current corpus of the early idiom of Kazerun; in the only Kazeruni fragment quoted in *Firdawsī al-Muršidiyyah* including ⟨hn⟩ (cited in Vajed Shirazi, 1970, p. 478), ⟨hn⟩ actually occurs in the question of the Shirazi man in the "*lafẓ-i Šīrāzī* [Shirazi idiom]."

65 For instance, in the dialect of Larestan and Bastak (Azarli, 2008, p. 413). Zokaʾ (2019, p. 386, s.v. ⟨hn⟩) has equated ⟨hn⟩ in the idiom of Tabriz, signifying "*balī, ārī*," with the ⟨hn⟩ under discussion here. The comparison does not appear convincing to me.

66 I am uncertain whether the ⟨hn⟩ forms attested in the Herat region and those in Fars dialects, despite their formal identity, share a common formation and developmental trajectory. Yet I am unable to accept Sadeghi's (2023) proposal that the ⟨ʾyd⟩ form in early Herat derives from **āy-*. Nor is recourse to the Parthian *ay* (p. 21) justified, as that form represents the 2SG. The identification of ⟨ʾyd⟩ with ⟨ʾʾy⟩ (p. 22) is likewise untenable, since the latter corresponds to the verb *āy-* "to come," which in early texts may, in certain contexts, approximate the meaning of *šaw-* "to become". It is also unclear how reference (p. 33) to the Pashto verb *y-* "to be" advances the argument, given that the 3SG forms in Pashto (m. *dəy*, f. *da*) derive from the Old Iranian demonstrative **aita-* (Korn, 2011, p. 56).

67 The dropping of ⟨-d⟩ from the 3PL ending, albeit of the past tense, in the Early Judaeo-Persian letter known as Dandan Uiliq II (Zhang & Shi, 2008, p. 92, §12), written in 790–791 AD (Zhang, 2016, p. 79, fn. 373) from Eastern Iran (like the Herat texts), may indicate that this dropping is a phenomenon that likely occurred in a very early and initial period of New Persian.

68 Just recently, Noruzi (2024, p. 85), unaware of Barr's explanation, proposes ⟨hn⟩ of the Old Shirazi singular verb derived via elision of the final ⟨-d⟩ from *hend* < **hedd* < Middle Persian *hēd*. A reviewer points out to me a similar explanation deriving the form from the singular *hēd* "with a phonetic transition from *-d* to *-n*."

69 kw hmy ʾbʾysty ++ ʾʾynʾn rʾ dʾnystn kw ḥq ʾkwǰʾ hyst wkdʾm hyst wnzyk yky hyst by cym ymwxʾlfʾn rʾ ʾyk ʾdygr rʾ gwynd hr yky kw ḥq ʾn hynd ymn pdyš ʾystydʾ hwm.
kŭ hamē abāyistē ēnān rā dānistan kŭ ḥaq(q) a-kuǰā hist u-kadām hist u-naz(z)īk ĭ-kĕ hist be čim ĭ-muxāli(/a)fān rā a-yak a-dīgar rā gōyand har yakē kŭ ḥaq(q) ān hind ĭ-man padiš ēstīda hum.

6 Conclusion

The present contribution set out to examine the so-called colloquial linking verb in contemporary New Persian, namely *-e*, commonly regarded as a shortened form of *ast*. The primary question was whether this form represents a recent innovation or whether its use can be traced to earlier stages of the language. An attempt was made to assemble a diverse and sizable body of evidence from Early and Late New Iranian materials, with the aim of strengthening the empirical basis for the historical and comparative analysis of Iranian copulas. As the attested forms are not uniform, a number of tentative explanations were proposed to account for their variation. On the basis of these data, a reverse reconstruction was undertaken to suggest a common origin. The form *(a)hēd* was proposed as a plausible source, and tentative transformation pathways were outlined to explain the development of the various reflexes, including *-e*.

While this article was under review, two relevant studies appeared: Bernard's contribution on Persian copulas (2025) and Mohammadi's *Daftar-e Fahlavī* (2026). Both works (Bernard, §9; Mohammadi, §3.5.3) present solutions to the *-e* copula problem that are, in essence, similar to the one proposed here. Far from diminishing the present study's aim, their appearance underscores it: one objective of this article was to recover early attempts—made nearly a century ago—that had already adumbrated the emergence of *(a)hēd* and the connection between contemporary copular forms and their historical origins, but which had been entirely overlooked. The present study has sought to situate these early insights within a broader and more focused framework and to refine them in light of newly assembled evidence.

An important methodological issue, rightly raised by one of the anonymous reviewers, concerns the relevance of evidence from North-Western Iranian varieties (e.g., Razi, Tabari, Azerbaijani) to the historical development of Persian, traditionally classified as a member of the South-West Iranian branch. The available data do not permit definitive conclusions as to whether the *-e* forms in these varieties reflect borrowing, parallel development, or distinct transformation pathways. Nonetheless, the comparison remains significant for situating Persian within the wider Iranian context. This broader perspective becomes all the more crucial in light of the fact that, with the only alleged instance of IST in Early New Persian dismissed (§2.2), no confirmed case of its use in Early New Persian remains. Its absence, in contrast to the presence of IST in spoken contemporary Persian of Iran, may further support the idea that "spoken contemporary Iranian Persian does not derive *recto itinere* from the literary Classical Persian language such as recorded by, for instance, the 13th–15th century canon literature" (Bernard, 2025, p. 161).

In addition to these findings, several secondary but noteworthy observations emerged. The report by x^{w}āja Nasir al-Din Tusi on the existence and pronunciation of IST was re-examined, and, through comparison of earlier and later manuscripts of the work, the predominance of the *-e* form over *-a* was established (§§1, 2.4.1). To the two previously known early metalinguistic pieces of evidence regarding the pronunciation of IST, a third has here been identified and presented, again supporting a pronunciation in *-e*. An exploration of the Early Judaeo-Persian corpus (§2.1) yielded a few probable instances of IST, while §2.2, as said, dismissed the only alleged Early New Persian instance. The pronunciation of the various observed forms was discussed throughout the article, especially in §§2.6 and 3.

Finally, one complementary aim of the study was to address some of the "many other unusual Iranian 3SG copulas" (p. 149, fn. 42) that Bernard (2025) left "to be treated in separate works" (p. 146). Forms such as ⟨hy⟩, ⟨hn⟩, ⟨hynd⟩, ⟨hw⟩, and ⟨-w⟩ were re-analysed; the latter two were shown to have probably emerged under the influence of another, at times synonymous, verb, *baw-*.

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