

JACKSON CRAWFORD

Old Norse-Icelandic (*þú*) *est* and (*þú*) *ert*

In influential handbooks of Old Norse-Icelandic or Old West Norse (hereafter OWN) and of comparative Germanic linguistics, an archaic 2nd person present singular form *est* of the verb *vera/vesa* “to be” is often given side-by-side with well-attested archaic twelfth-century forms such as 3rd person pres. sg. *es* and 2 preterite sg. *vast* (e.g. in Iversen 1974: 112, Lehmann 1986: 205, Noreen 1923: 359, Prokosch 1939: 220). *Est* is assumed to have been replaced by the later form *ert* by analogy with the *-r-* common to the rest of the verb’s paradigm, e.g. the 2 pres. pl. *eruð*, the past participle *verit*, etc. (Finnur Jónsson 1901: 92, Noreen 1923: 359).

However, *est* is not attested in any Old Icelandic (hereafter OIc) manuscript, nor can its existence in earlier OIc be inferred from rhymes in skaldic poetry. And while the 2 pres. sg. form *est* is sporadically attested in Old Norwegian (ONorw) and a similar 2 pres. sg. form *æst* is attested from the more distantly-related Old Swedish (OSwed), we do not need to suppose that the amply-attested form *ert* came about by analogical remodeling of *est*, since each form can be explained by its own independent etymology.

I thank the two anonymous reviewers, who offered many useful suggestions. Kirsten Wolf, Jared Klein, and Joseph Salmons also offered helpful feedback on the ideas expressed here.

Crawford, J., Lecturer, Scandinavian Section, University of California, Los Angeles; Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison. “Old Norse-Icelandic (*þú*) *est* and (*þú*) *ert*”. *ANF* 127 (2012), pp. 13–17.

Abstract: Handbooks of Old Norse-Icelandic and comparative Germanic linguistics cite an archaic Old Norse-Icelandic 2 pres. sg. *est* to the verb *vesa/vera* “to be,” assumed to have been analogically remodeled as *ert* in the later language. However, the form *est* is known from only a handful of occurrences in Old Norwegian and Old Swedish prose (none in Old Icelandic nor in the skaldic corpus), and there is no need to conclude that *ert* is an analogical remodeling of *est*, since the two forms can be explained by independent etymologies. *Est/æst* appears to be a regionally restricted variant, rather than an archaic predecessor, of *ert*.

Keywords: Old English, Old Norse, Gothic, medieval manuscripts, etymology, Proto-Germanic, preterite-present verbs, language history.

Occurrences of (*þú*) *es/est/æst*

The sole attestation in OIc of a 2 pres. sg. form with *-s-* is found in *Clemens saga*, in the older section of Cod. AM 645 4o, where the aberrant form attested is not *est* but “*es þv*” (page 13r26; see also editions: Carron 2005: 8, Larsson 1885: 38, and cf. Larsson 1891: 356–63). This could be a unique survival of the original 2 pres. sg. form *es* (cf. Gothic *is*, as well as the archaic OIc 3 pres. sg. *es*, which represents the original 2 pres. sg., as does the 3 pres. sg. in all classes of verbs in OIc except the preterite-present verbs). More likely it is a scribal error; the ms. vacillates between the forms *es* and *er* for the relative particle and for the 3 pres. sg. of *vera*, and a simple slip could have resulted in writing “*es þv*” rather than “*er þv*,” which occurs in AM 645 4to (Larsson 1885: lxix). It is also possible that a form *es* and/or *er*, identical to the 3 pres. sg., competed with the form *ert* for a period, arising out of analogy with the usual state of OWN verbs, which have identical 2 pres. and 3 pres. sg. Whatever the explanation for this lone occurrence of *es* as a 2 pres. sg., it is not an occurrence of *est*, and this part of this manuscript, which dates to the first half of the thirteenth century (Carron 2005: xxiv–xxv), otherwise has 20 occurrences of 2 pres. sg. forms with *-r-*, spelled variously *ert*, *ért*, *ertu*, *ertv*, *erþv* (Larsson 1891: 361). And no other forms of the 2 pres. sg. with *-s-* are found elsewhere in the OIc corpus, including in the early Icelandic Homily Book (cf. de Leeuw van Weenen 2004: 172).

The form *ert* occurs in *skothending* (rhyme of consonants in syllable coda; in this case *ert*: *skortir*) in a skaldic stanza written by the Icelander Einarr Skúlason (fl. ca. 1140), who shows by other rhymes that the 3rd person pres. sing. “is” remains *es* in his twelfth century OIc (Finnur Jónsson 1901: 92–93). Having reviewed the corpus of skaldic poetry in Finnur Jónsson’s *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (1912–15), I have found no occurrences of the 2 pres. sg. of *vera/vesa* in a rhyming position that could suggest the existence of a form *est*.

Widely-cited authorities such as Noreen (1923: 359) together with Finnur Jónsson (1901: 92) have assumed that *est* was replaced by *ert* earlier than *es* was replaced by *er*. However, the form *est/æst* does not seem to be an archaic forerunner of *ert*, but rather a regionally restricted variant of the 2 pres. sg. of *vera*. The 2 sg. pres. *æst* is sporadically attested in the OSwed *Äldre Västgötalagen* (e.g. in Collin and Schlyter 1827: 38, 39), which dates from the early thirteenth century (Wessén 1965: vii). The form *est* also occurs three times in the Old Norwegian Homily Book (Indrebø 1931: 8, 9, 149; cf. Holtsmark 1955: 703), written

by two hands, both of whose language is identifiably Northwest Norwegian (Hægstad 1907: 41–54). The manuscript is dated to the early thirteenth century (Indrebø 1931: *38), but Indrebø dates the exempla for the homilies in question to ca. 1150 based on archaic features, one of which is the verb form (*þú*) *est* (Ibid.: *39–*57). It is notable, however, that of all the occurrences of the copula verb *vera* in the Norwegian Homily Book, the only other form with *-s-* is a single occurrence of the infinitive *vesa* (cf. Holtsmark 1955: 703–711).

Etymology

The form *æst/est* could be explained by the etymology which Prokosch and Noreen offer for *est* (viz. the original 2 sg. *es* + *-t* from the analogy of preterite-present verbs and/or the accretion of the 2 sg. nom. personal pronoun – see Prokosch 1939: 220 and Noreen 1913: 213). But the sporadic attestation of this OSwed and ONorw form cannot be taken to imply that the form *ert* is derived from it. With the single aforementioned exception of one occurrence of the infinitive *vesa* in the Norwegian Homily Book, the form *æst/est* does not occur in mss. that contain other forms of the copula with archaic *-s-* (indeed, in the literary period, it is almost only in OIc that we do see forms such as *vesa*, *es*, *vas*, but conspicuously never *est*), and an alternative etymology, which does not require an intermediate form *est*, can be offered for the attested OWN *ert*. By this account, OWN *ert* is a cognate of Old English (OE) *earth*.

The 2 pres. sg. of the cognate verb *wesan* “to be” in OE is attested in the forms *earth* (West Saxon), *earth* (Mercian), and *arð* (Northumbrian); the 3 pres. sg. in all dialects is *is* (Hogg and Fulk 2011: 309–13; for the relation of this form to Gothic 3 pres. sg. *ist* see Mezger 1937: 139 n. 4). The OE 2 pres. sg. forms presuppose Proto-Germanic (PGmc) **arþ*, part of the paradigm of a preterite-present verb built to the Proto-Indo-European root **er/or-* “arise, arouse” (Hogg and Fulk 2011: 312, Ringe 2006: 261, Seebold 1970: 80–1). The 2 pres. sg. of this verb was added by suppletion to the paradigm of the verb “to be” in Pre-OE and, according to my account, in Pre-OWN as well. This otherwise lost preterite-present verb also supplies the present plural in Mercian OE (*earun*) and Northumbrian OE (*arun*, *aron*), though the resemblance of these forms to the OWN present pl. forms *erum*, *eruð*, *eru* is probably coincidence; the vowel /e/ of the OWN forms is better accounted for if these are

descended from PGmc 1 pres. pl. **izum* etc. with OWN lowering of **i > e* *_R* (< **z*) (Ringe 2006: 195; cf. the Old Gutnish 3 pres. pl. *iru* (Noreen 1904: 475).

If OWN *eart* is indeed from PGmc **arþ* as I suggest, then its vocalism may be expected to have been influenced by the remainder of the present paradigm of archaic OWN *vesa* (1 sg. *em*, 3 sg. *es*, 1 pl. *erum*, 2 pl. *erud*, 3 pl. *eru*); otherwise PGmc **arþ* should lautgesetzlich have produced OIc **art*. The *-t* of *ert* is expected as the result of the devoicing of word-final **ð* after nasals and liquids in Proto-Scandinavian (Iversen 1973: 32) and/or as the result of analogy to the 2 pres. sg. ending of the preterite-present verbs, as the unique 2 pres. sg. ending **-ð/-þ* would have been subject to heavy analogical pressure from the common preterite-present ending *-t* at any stage of the language's development from PGmc to OIc. This latter explanation accounts for final *-t* in West Saxon OE *eart* as well (Prokosch 1939: 221).

In conclusion, the notion that *est* is an archaic 2nd person pres. sing. of the verb “to be,” later analogically remodeled to *ert*, requires rethinking, as the two forms *ert* and *est* can be accounted for by two separate etymologies, and the occurrence of *est* appears to be regionally restricted rather than archaic. It is possible that the two forms once coexisted, with the form *ert* generalized earlier in OIc than in some dialects of ONorw and OSwed.

References

- Carron, H. 2005. *Clemens saga: The Life of St Clement of Rome*. London.
- Collin, H. S. and C. J. Schlyter. 1827. *Westgöta-Lagen*. (Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar 1.) Stockholm.
- de Leeuw van Weenen, A. 2004. *Lemmatized Index to the Icelandic Homily Book*. Reykjavík.
- Finnur Jónsson. 1901. *Det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*. Copenhagen.
- Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1912–1915. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. Copenhagen.
- Firchow, E. S. and K. Grimstad. 1989. *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*. Reykjavík.
- Hogg, R. M. and R. D. Fulk. 2011. *A Grammar of Old English. Volume 2: Morphology*. Malden, Massachusetts.
- Holtsmark, A. 1955. *Ordforrådet i de eldste norske håndskrifter til ca. 1250*. Oslo.
- Hægstad, M. 1907. *Vestnorske maalføre fyre 1350. I. Nordvestlandsk*. Christiania.
- Indrebø, G. 1931. *Gamal norsk homiliebook. Cod. AM 619 4o*. Oslo.

- Iversen, R. 1973. *Norrøn grammatikk*. 7th ed., revised by E. F. Halvorsen. Oslo.
- Larsson, L. 1885. *Isländska handskriften No 645 4o*. Lund.
- Larsson, L. 1891. *Ordförrådet i de äldsta isländska handskrifterna*. Lund.
- Lehmann, W. P. 1986. *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary*. Leiden.
- Mezger, F. 1937. "Ae. eart, eard, ard (du bist) und got. sijum (wir sind)". *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete der Indogermanischen Sprachen*, Vol. 64 Issues 1 and 2, pp. 137–41.
- Noreen, A. 1904. *Altschwedische Grammatik mit Einschluss des Altgutnischen*. Halle.
- Noreen, A. 1913. *Geschichte der nordischen Sprachen*. 3rd ed. Strassburg.
- Noreen, A. 1923. *Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik*. 4th ed. Tübingen.
- Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*. 1989–. Accessible at <http://www.onp.hum.ku.dk/>
- Prokosch, E. 1939. *A Comparative Germanic Grammar*. Philadelphia.
- Ringe, D. 2006. *From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic*. New York.
- Seebold, E. 1970. *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch der germanischen starken Verben*. Paris.
- Wessén, E. 1965. *Äldre Västgötalagen*. 2nd ed. Copenhagen.

