EXISTENTIAL AND OTHER SENTENCES IN ANCIENT GREEK

BY

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I

In a review of Kahn's *magnum opus* on the verb *be* in ancient Greek (1973), Ruijgh (1979) puts forward as basic ('valeur fondamentale') a meaning of εἶναι which in Kahn's spectrum of meanings does not figure at all, viz. 'be present, be there' ('être présent, être là'). In support of his proposal, Ruijgh quotes a small number of passages which allegedly show this meaning; the following three may be taken as representative examples:

1. ὥσχυς ἦν γαῖς (Hom. Il. 23, 420)
   'There was a break in (lit. of) the ground'

2. τὸ μὲν δὴ ἱρὸν τούτῳ οὖτω κεκόσμηται, ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἱδια ἀναθήματα πολλά (Hdt. 1, 183, 3)
   'Such are the ornaments of this temple, and there are also many private offerings'

3. τούτῳ τ' ἦν τὸ μειράκιον καὶ τῷ Ἄδειμάντῳ ἄμφιτέρῳ, ... καὶ ἄλλοι τινὲς ἔφαίνοντο (Pl. Prot. 315E)
   'This boy was there and the two Adeimantoses, ... and some others were also discernible'.

These passages are certainly remarkable, especially the third, which Kahn has not taken into account. Their very eccentricity, however, prompts caution as to whether they represent something basic, and makes an alternative explanation desirable. Such an explanation exists, I believe: viz. to assume in their underlying structure an unstressed locative (or 'weak deictic': for terminology, cf. Lyons 1975) adverbial constituent. This constituent is lexicalized in many I.-E. languages (English *there*, French *y/là*, German *da &c.*), and no doubt in many other languages as well (for Swahili, see Christie 1970), but not in Greek (or Latin, or Spanish). There is
no enclitic *-tou (*toθi) to correspond to interrogative πού (πόθι), relative οὗ (ὁθι) &c. Yet sentences like 1-3 are badly in need of some kind of locative anchoring. Sometimes this anchoring can be realized with the help of the preverb παρά: παρένοαι (cf. Lat. adesse, astare ‘to stand there, dastehen’), but not obligatory. Here are some examples of the phenomenon of a non-expressed locative constituent with stative verbs other than εἶναι:

4. πρόην έλων ὑπέφηλη τραπέζης | κείμενον (Hom. Od. 17, 410; cf. also 17, 331; 20, 300; 22, 327)
   ‘A foot-stool he showed up from under the table which was lying there’

5. καταβάς δὲ κάτω ἐς τὸ κατάγαυον οὐκήμα διαίτατο ἐπ’ ἔτεα τρία (Hdt. 4, 95, 4)
   ‘He went down into his subterranean cell and lived there for three years’

6. ἑστι δὲ ἀλός μεταλλοῦ ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ἁνθρωποὶ οἰκέοντες (Hdt. 4, 185, 2)
   ‘There is a salt-mine in it and people who live there’.

It would surely be unsatisfactory to postulate, e.g., a meaning ‘to lie there’ for κείσθαι in sentence 4; just as Spanish estar does not mean ‘to be there’ because No está can mean ‘It isn’t there’.

Ruijgh objects to the idea of an implicit locative adverb in sentences 1-3 that there is no locative phrase in their context for such an adverb to refer to. The point is, however, that weak deictic adverbs do not need a specific referent in order to fulfill their function of anchoring a sentence to a spatio-temporal location. Compare an English sentence like The money isn’t there (the so-called ‘existential there’ is better not invoked here in order not to beg certain questions, see section II) or a German one like Es steht ein Mann da: in either case the adverb is not anaphoric in the sense that it refers to a well-defined place, but it rather relates a state of affairs to a location which is known from the general context.

1) There is no demonstrative τού either, a form which will have been too equivocal to have a chance against ἕκει, but there is a poetic demonstrative τόθι. As for the mainly poetic demonstrative ἕθα, it tends to dissolve its locative function into a vaguer, more general referential function (‘at that point’, cf. Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos s.v. ἕθα B 1 a α bb), but it does not thereby lose its ‘strong’ deictic force.