

# *Sahasram Ati Srajas*

Indo-Iranian and Indo-European Studies  
in Honor of

**Stephanie W. Jamison**

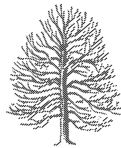
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# So What Is It to Be?

MARTIN WEST†

## I Introduction

My thesis is not a new one. But perhaps my selection of evidence and presentation of the argument will refresh it and succeed in holding for a few minutes the interest of the warm-hearted recipient of this volume, and a few of its colder-hearted readers.

What we generally refer to as the verb ‘to be’, reconstructed as *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-*, is found everywhere in the Indo-European language family. But what does it mean, to ‘be’? Can we reach a clearer idea of the word’s original sense and application?

In the historical IE languages it is convenient to distinguish two basic uses: as a copula and in an absolute, existential sense. By a copula we mean (in this context) a verbal form serving to link a subject to a non-verbal predicate.

Why was such a link sought, seeing that many IE languages, including all the ancient ones, are happy with purely non-verbal predicates, or actually prefer them to using the copula? The nominal construction was satisfactory so long as there was no need to mark the predicate for tense or mood. But when that need arose, it was most easily met by using a verb form. Even when there was no such need, there was always potential pressure to conform to the dominant syntactic pattern of subject + verbal predicate, and a semantically pale verbal copula offered the means to do so.<sup>1</sup>

It is generally agreed that the copulative use of *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-* is likely to be secondary. A similar development can be observed with other verbs in various languages (cf. Delbrück 1900:12). A verb with a rather broad meaning is often combined with a nominative predicate, as in English expressions like *I stand corrected*, *you are running scared*, *she grows lovelier*, and *we are sitting pretty*. It may then happen that the verb weakens to become a mere copula employable under certain conditions. In Greek, for example, γίγνομαι, πέλω, ὑπάρχω, κρέω, τυγχάνω, and φύω all exhibit this trend. In Spanish *estar* has displaced *ser* as the copula used for a temporary as opposed to a permanent condition.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Meillet 1937:357: the verb ‘to be’ (‘être’) “ne figurait en indo-européen que par suite de l’importance qu’y a prise le type verbal d’une manière générale, importance qui a déterminé l’emploi obligatoire d’une forme verbale dans certains cas.”

For all these verbs we can define a primary sense: *γίγνομαι* ‘be born’, *estā* ‘stand’, and so on. So if *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-* belongs in the same category, what was its primary sense?

In the later nineteenth century the standard view, following Curtius (1866:337), was that it was ‘breathe, be alive’. So Grassmann (1873:145) on *as-* (“Die ursprüngliche Bedeutung ‘sich regen, leben’ tritt nur in Ableitungen [ásu, ásurā, ásrj] hervor. Aus ihr hat sich der Begriff des Seins entwickelt”) and similarly Ebeling (1885:1.359), who gives ‘vivo et vigeo’ as the first meaning of *εἶμι*.

After Curtius’ argument crumbled, ‘exist’ was promoted to the status of primary or at any rate oldest determinable sense. So Delbrück (1900:13), “Die Urbedeutung dieses Verbums ist unbekannt, die älteste belegbare ist ‘existieren’”; Brugmann (1904: 627), who repeats Delbrück’s formulation almost verbatim; Meillet (1937:359), “le verbe *\*es-*, dont la valeur propre est d’affirmer l’existence”; Benveniste (1960:114), “le sens en est ‘avoir existence, se trouver en réalité’”; and Watkins (1967:191), ‘really, actually be, exist’.

But what then is the relationship between the existential sense and the copulative function? According to Brugmann, “*die erde ist eine kugel = die erde existiert als kugel.*” But does it exist natural to say “the President of the United States exists Barack Obama”? And how likely does it exist that the Proto-Indo-Europeans felt any need for a word meaning ‘exist’, seeing that philosophical questions about being and non-being arose, so far as we can see, only much later?

Two other views of the primary sense of *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-* enjoyed currency in the last century. They may be designated the veridical and the adessive. According to the first, the basic meaning was ‘be really so, be a fact’. I have just quoted Benveniste’s formulation ‘avoir existence, se trouver en réalité’. He continues, “et cette ‘existence’, cette ‘réalité’ se définissent comme ce qui est authentique, consistant, vrai.” In support of this interpretation he refers to the evidently ancient use of the participle and derived forms to mean ‘true, genuine’.<sup>2</sup> This is also the position embraced by Charles H. Kahn in a massive study of the Greek verb (Kahn 1973:297–370).

According to the adessive view, the basic meaning was ‘be there, be available’. This already appears, awkwardly conflated with the old Curtius etymology, in Kühner and Gerth 1898:1.3—*εἶμι*, “das eigentlich atme, lebe, bin vorhanden bedeutet”—and then more unequivocally in Delbrück 1900:11: “da die Kopula ursprünglich ein Verbum mit materiellem Bedeutungsinhalt war, also z. B. *est* bedeutete: ‘ist vorhanden’.” On the development of the existential and copulative uses from the postulated primary sense ‘vorhanden sein, sich befinden’, Kłowski (1975:745) is a little more explicit: “Aus dieser lokativen Bedeutung hat sich einerseits durch Betonung der Verbbedeutung in bestimmten Zusammenhängen die existentielle Bedeutung entwickelt und

<sup>2</sup>Hitt. *ašant-* ‘real, true’ (Puhvel 1984:289); Gk. τὸν εὐόντα λόγον, τοῖσι ὄντι, etc. (LSJ s.v. *εἶμι* A III); PIE *\*snt-yó-* > Skt. *satyá-*, Av. *haiθiia-*, OP *hašiya-*, Goth. *sunja* (fem.); PIE *\*sént-o-* > ON *sanmr*, OHG *sand*, OE *sōð*. On the development to ‘guilty’ cf. Watkins 1967.

andererseits in Zusammenhängen mit Prädikatsnomina die statische, sonst aber bedeutungslose copula.” For the derivation of existential from locative sentences (*there is, il y a, c'è*, etc.), Bennekom (1984:261) refers to observations by linguisticians, and to the Platonic and Aristotelian axiom that whatever exists must have a location.<sup>3</sup>

Martínez Marzoa (1974) offers a slight modification of the adessive interpretation, according to which ‘be present’ carries the connotation of ‘be manifest, appear’, functioning either as copula or as an absolute form.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows I shall collect evidence from the ancient languages to show that in all of them continuators of *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-* were widely used in the sense of ‘be there, be present, be available’, and I shall argue for this as the verb’s oldest recoverable meaning.

## 2 Hittite

Such a sense of Hitt. *es̄-*, beside the simple ‘be’, is registered explicitly in the dictionaries. Friedrich (1952–66:42) gives ‘sein, vorhanden sein; sich befinden’; Tischler (2008:36), ditto; Ünal (2007:115), ‘to be, to exist, stay, live, be present’; and Kloekhorst (2008:250), ‘to be (copula); to be present’. In Puhvel 1984:285–9 I find the following relevant examples:

KBo 5.8 ii 24–5

NU.GÁL *kuiški ēšta* “There was no one there.”

KUB 19.37 iii 45–6

*kuēš apan ešir, n-an arḫa dalaḫḫun, n-at ešir-pat* “those who were (left) behind, I left them alone, and they were (remaining) there.” The phrase *apan eš-* can also mean ‘be behind, back up, support’, where *es̄-* must carry the connotation of being *there*.

KBo 12.126 i 27

*nu-šši* <sup>GIŠ</sup>BAN-ŠU *ēšzi* “he has his bow,” literally “his bow is there for him.” (Cf. below on Vedic.)

In the palace building ritual in KUB 29.1 (García Trabazo 2002:477–504) i 50–ii 4 we find:

<sup>3</sup>Pl. *Ti.* 52b, Arist. *Ph.* 208a29. On the adessive use cf. also Kahn 1966:257–8, 1973:375–85, and 2004:399–400, as well as Ruijgh 1979:35–65, who quotes a number of pertinent Greek examples.

<sup>4</sup>Martínez Marzoa 1974:166: ‘manifestación, patencia, presencia, darse’. This sense “es inherente a la cópula como tal, a la constitución de una relación predicativa, no a la presencia o ausencia de *ēšai*.”

*Mān=ma haššus andan parna uezzi, nu Halmišuiz haran halzāi: “Eḫu=ta, aruna picimi. Mān pāiši=ma, nu uliliya tiyešna šūwaya, kuyēš ašanzi.” Apāšš=a apa tezzi: “Šuwayanun=wa, nu=wa Išdustayas Papayaš, katereš karūelēš šiūines kūšēš, ḫālianteš ašanzi.”*

And when the king comes into his house, the Throne goddess calls an eagle: “Hey! go north for me. When you go, spy out the forest greenery (and see) who are there.” He (goes, returns, and) replies, “I have spied it out; Isdustaya and Papaya, the ancient nether divine maidens, are there kneeling.”

### 3 Vedic

In discussing the primitive meaning of the IE verb Delbrück relied entirely on Vedic examples, which he took to support the sense ‘exist’. His first passage is RV 8.100.3a–c:

*prá sú stómam bharata vāyajānta Índrāya satyam, yádi satyam ásti.  
néndro astūti néma u tva āha.*

He translates: “bringt doch wetteifernd dem Indra ein Loblied dar, ein wahrhaftiges, wenn er in Wahrheit existiert. ‘Indra existiert nicht’, so sagt mancher.” Geldner (1951) has, “wenn es Wahrheit ist! ‘Es gibt keinen Indra’, so sagt manch einer.” Jamison and Brereton (2014) have, “Proffer praise as you all seek the prize—real praise to Indra, if he is the real thing. ‘Indra does not exist,’ so says many a one.” However, the question about Indra is raised in the context of the ritual event, and it can be interpreted as a question about his presence or availability rather than about his absolute existence. Delbrück does not quote the fourth line of the stanza, which goes, *ká īm dadarśa, kám abhi śtavāma?* Nor the next stanza, in which Indra himself refutes the doubter: *ayám asmi jaritaḥ, páśya mehá!* We may render the passage:

Bring Indra a praise-song eagerly, a true one, if he is truly there.

“Indra is not there,” says so-and-so. “Who has seen him? Whom are we to praise?”

“Here I am, singer, look at me!”

In Delbrück’s next two examples *ásti* is linked with a dative pronoun in the familiar IE construction expressing possession, which we have already seen in one of the Hittite examples. RV 1.37.15:

*ásti hí śmā mādāya vaḥ*

For you have (the wherewithal) to carouse. (I.e. it is there for you, at your disposal.)

So too 8.67, where after 6a–c,



*yád vah śrāntaya sunvaté vārūtham āsti, yác chardih,  
ténā no ādhi vocata*

What cover you have for the toiling soma-presser, what protection,  
with that intercede for us,

the pronoun is again to be understood in 7a:

*āsti devā amhór urú, āsti rátanam ánāgasah*

There is (in your power), gods, freedom from strait,  
there is enrichment of the innocent one.

In such cases *āsti* is equivalent to Lat. *praesto est* ‘is at hand’, ‘is available’. In translating his next three examples (1.40.8, 4.18.4, 5.31.2) Delbrück himself uses the expression ‘ist vorhanden’. He continues, “Off steht ein Wort dabei, welches den Ort des Vorhandenseins angiebt,” quoting 6.19.12, 8.75.15, and 5.74.6 as instances.

Grassmann, as I noted earlier, supposed the original meaning of *as-* to be ‘sich regen, leben’, while allowing that this does not appear in the actual usage of the verb. When he starts to classify its ostensible meanings, they go “1) *sein, da sein, vorhanden sein, existieren* . . . 2) *bereit, gegenwärtig sein, zur Hand sein* . . . 3) *an einem Orte sein, sich dort befinden* . . .”

I submit that we should always be on the lookout for the contingent sense ‘be there, be available’. I do not want to deny that the verb may sometimes have a pure existential meaning. I daresay many unimpeachable examples can be produced. One place where one naturally thinks of looking is in the famous cosmogonic hymn, 10.129. It begins:

- .1 *nāsad āsīn nó sād āsīt tadānīm, nāsīd rájo nó víomā parō yāt.  
kīm āvarīvah, kíha, kásya sármann? ámbhah kīm āsīd gáhanam gabhīrām?*
- .2 *ná mṛtyúr āsīd, amṛtam ná tárhi, ná rátriyā ábna āsīt prakatá.  
ánīd avātām svadháya tād ékam: tásmād dhānyán ná paráḥ kīm canāsa.*
- .3 *táma āsīt támasā gūlham ágre, apraketām salilām sárvam ā idám . . .*

- .1 Neither non-being nor being was there at that time,  
there was not the air-space, nor the heaven that is beyond (it).  
What was it moving forward? Where? In whose charge?  
Was it water there, that deep covert?
- .2 Death was not there, nor deathlessness then;  
of night and day there was no signpost.  
It breathed windless, autonomous, that One:  
other than it, there was nothing there.
- .3 Darkness hidden in darkness was there in the beginning;  
this All (was) unsignposted ocean.

Now, this is not just a catalogue of things that did or did not exist at the beginning of the world. The alternating negative and positive statements together make up a description of that primal scene. ‘There was’ shades into ‘was there’ and ‘there was not’ into ‘was not there’; the ‘there’ in the latter formulations tips us over from a purely abstract idea of existence to something more contingent, presence in a particular context. So even in this most philosophical text we may consider understanding *as-* as ‘da sein, vorhanden sein’ rather than simply as ‘sein’.

#### 4 Iranian

The first meaning given for *ah-* by Bartholomae (1904:266–7) is ‘sein sva. da sein, vorhanden sein, existieren; es gibt’. In the Old Avestan texts its use as a simple copula is still quite restricted. It does not occur in the *Gāthās* in the third person singular or plural of the present tense, and it may be omitted even in first- and second-person statements (West 2011:3–4). We do find *astī* twice in the short Aṣəm Vohū mantra (Y 27.14), and here we may suspect that it is something more than a copula. The articulation and interpretation of the text are uncertain, but in line with my thesis it might be punctuated and understood thus:

*aṣəm volū, valīštəm astī:  
uštā astī, uštā alhmāi,  
hīiaṭ aṣāi valīštāi aṣəm.*

Right is good, the best thing there is (available);  
it is there (for us) as desired, for itself as desired,  
what(ever) best Right sees as Right.

The following Gāthic passages are less ambiguous:

29.5ab     *aṭ vā ustānāiš abuuā zastāiš frīnəmnā Aburāiīā,  
mā uruuā gəušcā aziīā, hīiaṭ Mazdān dunaīdī frasābiīō.*

But we two are (here) with outstretched hands propitiating the Lord,  
my soul and the milch cow’s, as we put Mazda to our questions.

29.9c     *kadā yauuā huuō aṇhaṭ, yā hōi dadaṭ zastanuṭ auuō?*

When will he ever be (there), he who will give him physical assistance?

31.16a     *pərəsā auuṭ, yaθā huuō yā hudānuš . . .  
 . . . yadā huuō aṇhaṭ yā.šīiaəθnascā.*

I ask this: how that munificent man . . .  
 . . . when he will be (there), and how acting.

43.16cd *astuuat ašam xiiāt, uštānā aojōnhuuat;  
xʷang darəsōi xšathrōi xiiāt ārmaitiš.*

In bodily form may Right be (present), vigorously strong;  
in sight of the sun with Dominion may Piety be (present).

50.7d *mahmāi xiiātā auuañhē.*

May ye be (there) for my succour.

In several passages the subjunctive *añhat* or *añhatī* is used in predicting how something will turn out, as in 29.4c *abā [nā] añhat, yaθā huuō vasat* “it will be so [for us] as he wishes,” 30.11c *at aipī tāiš añhaiī uštā* “then thereafter it will be as desired,” 31.5c *tācīt . . . yā nōit vā añhat añhaiī vā* “those things that will not be or will be,” 48.4d *θabamū xratāu apēmam nanā añhat* “in thy sapience at the last it will be differently” (for the adherents of good or bad thought), and 48.9d *vīdiiāt . . . yaθā hōi ašiš añhat* “may he know how his reward is to be.” ‘Be’ in these passages implies more than just achieving existence in a particular form. It refers to how future outcomes will present themselves (*vorhanden sein*) and be experienced by those affected.

In one passage of the Behistun inscription (DB iv 60) Darius claims that

*Auramazdā-maiy upastām abara utā aniyāha bagāha tyaiy hatiy.*

Auramazda brought me assistance, and the other gods that there are.

Presumably the intention is not to contrast a set of gods who exist with another set who do not. In another inscription (DPd 13, 22, 24) it is

*manā Auramazda upastām baratuv hadā viθaibiš багаibiš.*

Let A. bring me assistance together with the gods of my house.<sup>5</sup>

So the gods *tyaiy hatiy* are probably the ones “that are there (for me),” “my gods.” Zoroaster uses a similar expression when he says he will worship under their own (true) names those (powers) *yōi āñharəcā hənticā* “who have been and are” (Y 51.22b).

## 5 Greek

In Ebeling’s Homeric lexicon, as mentioned earlier, the first meaning given for *εἰμί* is ‘vivo et vigeo’. There are certainly passages where it distinguishes living from dead persons. *οὐ γὰρ ἔτι . . . ἦσαν*, it is said of the sons of Oineus (*Il.* 2.641 [cf. 642], *Od.* 1.289), and people of the future are *ἐσσόμενοι ἄνθρωποι* (*Il.* 3.287, 460) or just *ἐσσόμενοι* (2.119, 6.358, etc.). Yet it is not the Homeric view that the dead do not exist. They

<sup>5</sup>Elsewhere (DSe 50, XPb 27, etc.) it is simply *hadā багаibiš*.

exist, but in another place. In *Od.* 24.263–4 Odysseus, concealing his identity from his father Laertes, tells him how he asked someone he had met on the way

ἀμφὶ ζεῖνῳι ἐμῶι, ἣ ποῦ ζῶει τε καὶ ἔστιν  
ἣ ἤδη τέθνηκε καὶ εἰν Ἀΐδαο δόμοισιν.  
About my friend, whether he is alive and ἔστιν  
or is now dead and in Hades' halls.

As ἔστιν is contrasted with being in Hades, it evidently means ‘is here in this world’ (Klowski 1967:139). In *Il.* 22.378–84 Achilles proposes a renewed assault on Troy to see whether, now that Hector has fallen, the Trojans will give in or whether they will stand fast καὶ Ἴκτορος οὐκέτ’ ἔοντος “even though Hector no longer ἔστι.” He says this standing over Hector’s body, to men who are gleefully stabbing it, and at the end of his speech “he began to do unseemly things to lordly Hector” (395). So Hector has not ceased to exist. καὶ Ἴκτορος οὐκέτ’ ἔοντος means, in effect, “even with Hector no longer there (to help them).”

When Laertes learns that his son is alive before him and has killed the suitors of Penelope, he exclaims (*Od.* 24.351):

Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἣ ῥα ἔτ’ ἔστέ θεοὶ κατὰ μακρὸν Ὀλύμπῳ.  
Father Zeus, in truth you gods still exist/are still there on Olympus.

In several places we find the phrase θεοὶ αἰὲν ἔοντες, usually rendered “the gods who are forever” or “the everlasting gods.” We cannot quarrel with the translation, but we should remember that the Homeric gods do not, like those of Epicurus, exist in a separate realm unconnected with our world: they are there to observe, react to, and intervene in human affairs. To speak of their eternal existence is to remind the hearer that they are a force in our present world and not to be forgotten. We might translate “the gods who are always there.” It is the same when Hesiod warns the local squirearchs that there are gods present among us taking note of perversions of justice (*Op.* 249–56):

ἐγγὺς γὰρ ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔοντες  
ἀθάνατοι φράζονται . . .  
τρίς γὰρ μυρίοι εἰσὶν ἐπὶ χθονὶ πολυβοτείρῃ  
ἀθάνατοι Ζηνὸς φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων . . .  
ἣ δέ τε παρθένος ἔστι Δίκη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα . . .

Note the qualification of ἔοντες by “nearby, among mankind” and of εἰσὶν by “(here) on earth”; with ἔστι Δίκη we understand similarly, “is here present in our world.”

Ebeling’s second heading (1885:1.360) is ‘il y a, es gibt’. From the many passages

cited I will select a very few. At *Od.* 10.193 Odysseus, finding himself and his men on an unknown island, invites them to consider

εἴ τις ἔτ' ἔσται μῆτις ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ οἴομαι εἶναι

whether there is to be any further strategy (for us); I do not think there is any.

ἔσται/εἶναι means 'be available to us'. Similarly at *Od.* 24.486 Zeus decrees an end to the dispute between Odysseus' family and those of the slain suitors. Let them be friends as before,

πλοῦτος δὲ καὶ εἰρήνη ἄλλις ἔστω,

let prosperity and peace be (there for them) in abundance.

It would have made little difference to these examples if a dative pronoun had been added. At *Il.* 22.50 Priam says that if his sons Lykaon and Polydoros are alive, he will be able to ransom them for bronze and gold, ἔστι γὰρ ἔνδον "for it is available within," while at 23.549 a similar statement is made with a pronoun included: Antilochos says to Achilles, ἔστι τοι ἐν κλισίῃ χρυσὸς πολὺς, ἔστι δὲ χαλκός. The very common construction of ἔστι with a dative to indicate possession rests on just this sense of the verb, 'is present, is available'.

Another usage expresses availability for some immediate purpose or need, as in *Il.* 2.687 οὐ γὰρ ἔην ὅς τις σφιν ἐπὶ στίχας ἡγήσαιο "for there was no one (there) who could lead them to the battle-lines," 9.688 εἶσι καὶ οἶδε τάδ' εἰπέμεν "here are these men to confirm this," *Od.* 14.496–7 ἀλλά τις εἴη / εἰπεῖν Ἀτρεΐδῃ Ἀγαμέμνονι "let there be someone to tell Agamemnon" (i.e. let someone here make himself available to take the message), and 22.25 οὐδὲ πη ἀσπίς ἔην οὐδ' ἄλκιμον ἔγχος ἐλέσθαι "there was no shield or spear anywhere (there) to take." A subject is not necessary, as ἔστι/οὐκ ἔστι is often used impersonally with an infinitive to mean 'it is possible/impossible', i.e. 'the opportunity is/is not there to...' (cf. Delbrück 1900:28–9). With either the personal or the impersonal use there may be a dative to specify the party to whom the opportunity is or is not available.

We routinely say 'it is Thursday', and when we see *Od.* 2.89 ἥδη γὰρ τρίτον ἔστιν ἔτος or D. 18.169 ἐσπέρα...ῆν, we naturally translate "it is now the third year," "it was evening." But what is the "it" that is Thursday or the third year or the evening? The Greek examples, at least, may be better understood as "the third year is here," "evening was at hand," as if it were *πάρεστι, παρῆν*; compare Catullus' *Vesper adest*. We render *Il.* 4.164 = 6.448 ἔσσεται ἡμᾶρ ὅτ' ἂν ποτ' ὀλώλῃ "Ἴλιος ἰρή" as "there will be a day when Ilios will perish," but it is not a matter of that day's having *existence* but of its attaining *presence*. "There will come a day" is an equally appropriate translation. At *Il.* 8.66 ὄφρα μὲν ἠὼς ἦν is not "while the morning existed," for Eos does not go out of existence after making her daily appearance. It is "while the morning was there."

I will add a couple more post-Homeric passages. One is from the *Theognidea* (515), where the poet welcomes a guest. He says he is a poor man, he “has nothing,” τῶν δ’ ὄντων τᾷριστα παρέξομεν “but I will give you the best of what there is (in my house),” as if it were τῶν ὑπαρχόντων. The Homeric equivalent is παρόντων, as in the formulaic line εἶδατα πόλλ’ ἐπιθεῖσα, χαρίζομένη παρόντων, of the housekeeper who sets a generous meal before a visitor. Such a use of τὰ ὄντα was recognized more widely; cf. Pl. *Grg.* 511b ἐκείνον ἀποκτενεῖ, εἰάν βούληται, καὶ ἀφαιρήσεται τὰ ὄντα “he will kill that man if he likes, and take away his property” and other passages cited in LSJ s.v. εἰμί A I.

Another case where ὦν is clearly equivalent to παρών is S. *Ant.* 1108–9. Kreon, finding himself in need of urgent action, shouts for all his servants: ἴτ’ ἴτ’ ὀπάονες, / οἱ τ’ ὄντες οἱ τ’ ἀπόντες “go, go, attendants, those present and those absent.”

## 6 Latin

Latin *esse* has a similar range of uses to the Greek verb, except that it is not found for ‘it is possible to . . .’. I will content myself with citing a number of passages from early writers where it clearly means ‘is/was at hand’. First, one that recalls one of the Hittite texts quoted above, Turp. *com.* 194–5 Ribbeck:

*simul circumspectat: ubi praeter se neminem  
uidet esse, tollit aufert.*

At the same time he looks about: when he sees that no one but himself  
is (there), he picks it up and carries it off.

Out of many passages in Plautus, diligently registered by Lodge (1901–33:2.701–2), I will pick out, from a fragment quoted by Gellius 3.3.3,

*ubi is [uenter] te monebat, esses, nisi cum nihil erat.  
nunc etiam quod est, non estur, nisi Soli lubet.*

A parasite is complaining that in his youth people did not set their mealtimes according to the sundial but ate when they were hungry:

When your belly prompted you, you would eat, except when there was  
nothing there.

Nowadays even what is there is not eaten except at the sun’s pleasure.

Other examples include *Am.* 429 *cadus erat uini, inde impleui birneam* “there was a jar of wine (there), I filled the jug from it,” *As.* 195 *quid si non est?* “What if I haven’t got (the money)?” (cf. *Aul.* 376, *Cur.* 34), *Per.* 655 *nam etsi res sunt fractae, amici sunt tamen* “for even if my fortunes are wrecked, I still have friends,” and *Rud.* 841 *quin occidisti extemplo? :: gladius non erat*, “why didn’t you kill him on the spot? :: There was (I had) no sword.” From prose authors: Cato *Agr.* 28 *caueto, cum uentus siet aut imber, effodias*

*aut feras* “beware of digging (trees) up or transporting them when there is wind or rain,” 120 *totum annum mustum erit* “there will be must for the whole year” (if you follow these rules), and Var. R. 1.11.2 *si omnino aqua non est uiua, cisternae faciendae sub tectis et lacus sub dio* “if there is no running water at all (on the site), you must make cisterns indoors and a pond in the open.”

Also relevant is the idiom *quid tibi est?* or just *quid est?* (Pl. *Am.* 810, Ter. *An.* 860, etc.), meaning “what is the matter?”, that is, the thing that is besetting you.

## 7 Conclusion

We take similar uses for granted in English. We are as likely to say *What is it?* as *What is the matter?* And someone who asks *Is there any sugar?* does not mean “Does sugar exist in the universe?” but “Is sugar available here and now?” (in this house/bar/restaurant).

But it is the pervasiveness of the adessive function in the ancient languages that guarantees its antiquity, if not its primacy. In favour of its primacy is the relative ease with which the other main uses of the verb can be derived from it. The development of the existential and copulative uses, I think, is straightforward and needs no further explanation. As to the veridical use, it is not difficult to trace a line from ‘is there’ to ‘is manifest’ and so to ‘is undeniable’. Seeing is believing. “There you are,” “it is staring us in the face,” “es liegt auf der Hand” are all equivalent to “it is plainly so.” As noted earlier, the participle of *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-* and extended forms (*\*snt-*, *\*snt-yó-*, *\*sont-o-*) were especially favoured in this sense, but it was not exclusive to them. A Hittite king could confess to a sinful act by saying *ēšzi-at*, *iyawen-at* “there it is, we did it,” where “there it is” is equivalent to “it is a plain fact.”<sup>6</sup>

The tidiest formulation is perhaps the following. From the general meaning ‘be there’, a series of more specialized uses developed: (1a) ‘be on earth among the living’; (1b) ‘be on the cosmic scene, exist’ (e.g. of gods); (2) ‘be in store’; (3) ‘be to hand’; (4) ‘be manifest, undeniable’; (5) with nominative predicate, ‘be there’ in a certain condition or with a certain identity (the copulative use). There is an interesting non-IE parallel in the Akkadian verb *bašû*, whose range of meaning corresponds exactly to (1)–(4) above, whereas it is not used as a copula.<sup>7</sup> We may take this as a further indication that the copulative use of *\*h<sub>1</sub>es-* is contingent, not intrinsic.

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<sup>6</sup>Muršili’s second Plague Prayer (CTH 378): Goetze 1929:212 §6.3, 214 §9.5 (cf. 216 §10.6 *ašān-at*, *iyannun-at* “it (is) true [participle of *aš-*], I did it”; cf. Watkins 1967:192–3).

<sup>7</sup>See the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, B 144–61.

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