Zarathushtra entre l'Inde et l'Iran

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ed. par
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Syntax and etymology of Avestan bā and bōīt

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1. The honorand of this volume has always paid due attention to the syntax of Avestan, showing that a more profound knowledge of syntactic details yields a better insight into the prehistory of verbal and nominal morphology (Kellens 1974, 1984), but may also give important clues to the history of the composition and transmission of the Avesta as a literary text (Kellens 1996, 2004, 2006: 274-288). A specific area which suffers from a lack of attention – especially when compared with recent contributions in the field of Vedic Sanskrit – seems to me that of pronouns and particles. While the OAv. evidence was studied by Pirart in Kellens-Pirart 1988-91, volume II, the YAv. evidence has not been studied extensively since Caland’s 1891 study of pronominal syntax. The present contribution will try to extend our knowledge in this field.

We find in Young Avestan three different particles with initial b-: bā (also attested once in Old Avestan), bāda and bōīt. They are often mentioned in one breath, because they share their initial consonant, their apparent function of modifying or commenting on the pragmatics of an utterance, and their predominant placement after the first word in the sentence, which Wackernagel (1892) has recognized to be the preferred position for unstressed particles and pronouns in PIE. In fact, bā and bōīt are always found in the second position of a clause, whereas bāda can also occur at other positions. In this paper I will focus on bā and bōīt; the analysis of bāda will follow on a different occasion.

In his dictionary, Bartholomae (1904: 912, 953, 962) provides the following translation and interpretation of the two particles in question:

bā: “Particle of affirmation and accentuation, after the first word (or stress) of the sentence.” Bartholomae distinguishes four positions: after a verb, a noun, a pronoun, and after adverbs and others.

bōīt: “Particle of affirmation”, occurring after the first word in the clause: after a noun in V 13.22 and Ny 3.11, after a pronoun in Yt 5.89.

Firstly, it should be investigated whether the formal difference between bā and bōīt is correlated with a tangible difference in meaning. Secondly, the notions of affirmation and accentuation invoked by Bartholomae are rather vague, and invite a closer investigation in terms of information structure. It may be useful to give a short definition of the main terminology which I will be using (cf. Brown-Yule 1983: 137, 153-189, 192f., Klein 1985 I: 16ff.). On the level of information status, I define as topic the main character, object or idea of a text (this is also often called theme), as comment further information provided about the topic (also called rheme), and as focus the prominent part of a sentence. Obviously, in a corpus transmitted only in writing and without any information on sentence intonation, it will often be difficult to clearly
distinguish between these entities. To indicate the relations between different parts of speech I distinguish between introductory reference (which introduces a referent), anaphoric reference (which looks back in the text for its interpretation), and cataphoric reference (which looks forward in the text for its interpretation).

2. All instances of \( b\) and \( bo\) are found in direct speech. Since large parts of the YAv. corpus consist of dialogues and invocations, this is not very surprising, but we can be more specific: in the overwhelming majority of cases, \( b\) and \( bo\) occur in the answer to a previous question.

2.1 YAv. \( b\) mainly occurs in introductory nominal and adverbial sentences (often called cleft sentences) of the type ‘It is he (…), who’ or ‘It is so (…), as’ which start an answer. The particle \( b\) provides a signal which says that a specification of the answer will follow immediately afterward. Thus, it is used for cataphoric reference to a following comment. The focus status of the initial pronoun or adverb is due to its clause-initial position, not to \( b\); thus, I find no affirmative or emphatic function of \( b\).

The clearest examples occur in the questioning dialogues (frašna) between Ahura Mazda and Zarathustra on the principles and definitions of the religion. This text genre makes up several parts of the Videvdad, and is also found in some of the fragmentarily transmitted YAv. texts. In V 9.51-52, the question \( ci\) is answered by means of \( h\) ...

\[ \text{citi hau as ahura mazda yo mä asadaiia fradaam apa.baraq varadaam apa.baraq yaskam apa.baraq mahram upa.baraq} \]

\[ \text{āat mraas ahurā mazdā: hō bā aēśō as aśāun zarathustra aśōmarō aśāunia yo aśāhmi an'hu nā yat aśūwānti paiti.hīṅcāli ā dim nōī aśūwatātte dāalālā māzduaśnōī yaaśādhiāt haya} \]

‘Who is he, o Ahura Mazda, who takes away my visible prosperity and increase, who brings sickness and death? Ahura Mazda said: he is the one, o righteous Zarathustra, the unrighteous heretic who in this material world makes a libation, although he is not familiar with the Mazdayasnean religion as regards the office of purificator.’

In V 4.5 and 5.16, Zarathustra asks Ahura Mazda seven questions about his dealings with the water in connection with dead bodies. In V 5.17 and 5.18, Ahura Mazda gives seven affirmative answers, which are preceded by an introductory clause containing \( b\):

\[ \text{āat mraas ahurā mazdā: aśūwatā bā zarathustra yathu tām aśūwō vaśāyhe} \]

‘Ahura Mazda said: it is entirely so, Zarathustra, as you correctly say.’

In V 3.1, the question \( kwa\) ‘where?’ is answered by Ahura Mazda with \( yat bā paiti nā aśāunia fraśia q ‘when a righteous man goes forward’;\n
\[ \text{āat mraas ahurā mazdā: aśūwatā bā zarathustra yathu tām aśūwō vaśāyhe} \]
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dātāra gaēbānām astavaititānām aśām: kunā paevīrīm aśīhā zomō šāṅīhā?
śaṭ mraot ahūrō mazādā: yat bā paitī nā aśānā vaḷīaṣ spitama zarāthuṭra ... vaca
framru
'O creator of the material world, righteous one! Where on this earth is it most agreeable, first of all?
Ahura Mazda said: when a righteous man goes forward, o Spitama Zarathustra, ..., saying aloud the words.'

In V 3.2 through V 3.35, we find thirteen other instances of an answer starting in yat bā paitī; if the answer has a different word than paitī after yat, or if the answer does not begin with yat, no bà is inserted. Now paitī only makes semantic sense in V 3.1, where we can read a compound verb in tmesis paitī ... fraiata. In the other clauses, paitī must have been copied from V 3.1; it can be omitted without changing the meaning of the text. Since yat ‘when’ can also be followed directly by a genitive (in V 3.7, 3.15), it may be the case that bà originally stood only in V 3.1, and was transposed to the other answers at a later stage of the text transmission. This would imply that only the first answer to the question originally contained bà.

In V 5.22, Zarathustra asks Ahura Mazda how much the Zarathustrian creed is better than others. The answer is introduced by mnaiaiōn ‘just like, as if’ which introduces a comparison, followed by bà:

śaṭ mraot ahūrō mazādā: mnaiaiōn bā spitama zarāthuṭra aśām dāsām yim
vidūtīm zarāthuṭri upārī anīiīs sanāūīs māsonaça vaŋhanacca sraitanaça yatī zraiiō
vourukaṣom upārī anīiī ṣpō

‘Ahura Mazda said: this daeva-hostile Zarathustrian Law, o Spitama Zarathustra, is similar in surpassing the other creeds in greatness and goodness and beauty as (is) the lake Vourukasha in surpassing the other waters.’

The same mnaiaiōn bā spitama zarāthuṭra introduces the comparisons in V 5.24 (2x) and 5.25, and is also found in V 7.55 and V 9.46, 9.48, where Ahura Mazda is equally responding to Zarathustra. On the whole, the form mnaiaiōn is only found in the two YAv. constructions mnaiaiōn ahe yatī and mnaiaiōn bā (without yatī). I adopt the analysis proposed by Hambach (1969: 71-73) that mnaiaiōn represents an adverbial acc.sg.n. of a pres.part.act. *mānaiajant- ‘resembling’. Hoffmann (1975 I: 264f.) has accepted this solution and stipulated that *mānaia- can be interpreted as a causative stem ‘denken lassen an’ to mun- ‘to think’. It is true that mnaiaiōn would also allow for an analysis as a 3pl.inj.act. or a 3pl.opt.act., compare V upa.mnaiaiōn ‘they should wait’. Yet the presence of the genitival object ahe in mnaiaiōn ahe yatī suggests a nominal form which can take an object in the genitive. Another argument against taking mnaiaiōn as an optative is the fact that the presence of an optative in an answer otherwise excludes the use of bà, as we will see in section 2.2.
I refrain from discussing the other passages with a structure similar to the preceding examples, in which Ahura Mazda is answering and uses bā in the first sentence. A survey of the core elements of these dialogues must suffice:

V 7.79  hō bā oŋhaį ašāum zarathustra yō ... 'It will be he, o righteous Zarathustra, who ...'
V 17.2  hāu bā ašāum zarathustra yō ... 'It is he, o righteous Zarathustra, who ...'
V 18.62  jahi bā ašāum zarathustra yō ... 'The whore, o righteous Zarathustra, who ...'
H 1.7  hāu bā ašāum zarathustra yqm bā nā fraŋ'harota haurwātbiia amsrotētbiia ašom stavāti
'It is that (prayer), o righteous Zarathustra, which a man when eating prays as Aša to health and immortality.' The second bā is unique in this syntactic position and probably persevered from the first clause.
H 2.20  auvaàa bā ašāum zarathustra ansn̄ kamsreààt handuuaraiti
'There, o righteous Zarathustra, it runs up and down close to his head.'
Yt 12.2  azm bā tē tāt framrauānā sraosha ašāum spitama nq̄brō spoŋtō yō aš x'aronā
'I will tell it to you as it is, o righteous Spitama: the holy word, which has big splendour.'
P 26  kat tē asti ahunahe vairiehe hāsām? manā bā vohu zarathustra odsosiamm
'What is the essence of thy Ahuna Vairya? (A) good mind, o Spitama Zarathustra, infallible.' (Jamspsa-Humbach 1971 I: 42f.)

A slight deviation in word order is found four times between V 18.34 and 18.54, in the frašna between Sraosha and the Druj. In these passages, the answer which the Druj gives is preceded by a vocative, whereas the vocative follows bā in the passages we have seen so far:

āat hè bā pailli.dauwata yā daēwui druś:
sraosha ašīa huraodo bā bā mé aētasq̄n arš̄q̄n paoirītī (V 18.34)
'She answered him, the daevic Druj:
o believing, well-built Sraosha, he is for me the first of those men.'

In Yt 15.43, a litany starts which lists many names of Vayu in the first person singular with nq̄ma ahmi 'my name is'. Although Yt 15.43 is not preceded by a question, the text addresses the Zarathustra in the vocative, as if answering the prophet's question 'What is your name, o Vayu?'. The word bā only occurs in the first two lines of Yt 15.43, never to reappear in all the remaining 50 occurrences of nq̄ma ahmi until Yt 15.52. Hence, it may be argued that bā here has the same cataphoric function as elsewhere:
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Vaius bā napna ahmi aṣṣāum
zarathustra: aumāt vaius bā napna
ahmi yat uva dapna vaiami
‘Vayu is my name, o righteous Zarathustra:
Vayu is my name for that reason, that I blow (through) both creations.’ (For the translation of vaiami as ‘I blow’ see Panaino 2002: 73 after Kellens 1984: 89, 138).

2.2 The use of bā can be further determined by comparing the more numerous dialogues in which it does not occur. I have studied the passages in which statements and answers are introduced by means of mraomi ‘I say’, mraot ‘(s)he said’, aoxa ‘said’, aoxaja- ‘saying’ and daumata ‘spoke (as a daeva)’. The particle bā turns out to be absent from an answer:
- which starts in yezi ‘if’ (Yt 4.4, V 5.28);
- which contains an optative;
- which contains a negation;
- which contains zi ‘for, because’ (V 13.41);
- which forms the immediate answer to a question with ka-, ci- ‘who, which?’, cuuà ‘how much?’, kuua ‘where?’, kuûa ‘whereto?’, unless the initial answer is commented on by means of a relative clause in ya-.

The last type is the most frequent type of bā-less answer. It occurs many times, especially in the Videvdad. Here are a few examples of its usage.

In Yašt 14.1, Zarathustra asks:
ko asti mainionuwanm yazatamn zaiiùemò?
dat mraot ahurò mazdà: verìèraynò ahurùàtò splitama zaradhòstra
‘Who is the best armed of the spiritual deities? Ahura Mazda said: (It is) ahura-created Verārayna, o Spitama Zarathustra.’

Videvdad 3.36:
daùòa gaèòhèm astúwaëiòinm aòùm, yat .... hò astì ciìba?
dat mraot ahurò mazdà: pàncà sàta upàzáwamànt upàzòì òspòke aòstràiìa
‘O righteous creator of the material world, when ..., what is the penalty for that? Ahura Mazda said: five hundred lashes he must be given with the horsewhip.’

V 6.44-45:
kuua naram iristamam tamim haròma ahurò mazdà kuua nidaùòìma?
dat mraot ahurò mazdà: barezìèstùaxùago posì gùàùììna
‘Where shall we carry the corpse of dead men, o Ahura Mazda, where shall we put it down? Ahura Mazda said: on the highest places.’
V 13.17:

kuua asti spâ pastâ hauruâ dâîtîh gântâ?

dât mroy ahurô mazdâ: yô yûjiiastim haca gaëôabilî parôiti sraësommô tääniis
volôkôanca

‘Where is the sheepdog in its rightful place? Ahura Mazda said: (with) who(m) goes a yûjiiasti- away from his household in order to chase thieves or a wolf.’

In semantic terms, these findings may be summarized in the following way. YAv. bâ is lacking from an answer in two pragmatic contexts:

1) If the answer is uncertain or negative, as shown by the use of yezi, the optative or a negation.

2) If the answer is given by the very first word(s) of the sentence, such as a name (Yt 14.1), the height of a penalty (V 3.36), the place where something is to be done (V 6.44f.), or an explanatory relative clause (V 13.17). Probably, the explicitness of the answer bleeds the cataphoric function of bâ.

As it turns out, the analysis of the absence of bâ confirms our preliminary conclusions reached for the passages with bâ: it signals that the answer is going to be further specified.

The only clear set of exceptions occurs in Videvdad 18. In V 18.36-37, Sraosha asks the Druj: cis ajhê asti uzuaarzom ‘What is the atonement for this?’. The answer follows: sraosha ašia huraâda aom ajhe asti uzuaarzom yat ... ‘O believing, well-built Sraosha, this is the atonement for it, (viz.) that ...’. Similarly in V 18.43 and 18.49. Thus, although aom ajhe asti uzuaarzom yat resembles the structure of passages containing bâ, the particle itself is absent. Note the contrast with hô bâ mê aëtaêzam arsnâm paoirô in V 18.34ff.

A seeming exception is found in Yasna 9.1f., in the dialogue between Zarathustra and Haoma. In Y 9.1, Zarathustra asks kö nara ah! ‘Who, o man, are you?’. The answer follows in Y 9.2:

ôat mê aëm paaittâxta haomô aðaunu dûrâosô:
aom aîmî zarâthùstra haomô aðaunu dûrâosô

‘Then righteous, death-destroying Haoma answered me: I am, o Zarathustra, righteous, death-destroying Haoma.’ (Josephson 1997: 43)

Kellens 2006: 276 has argued on metrical and compositional grounds that Y 9.1–2 originally contained a direct address by Haoma to Zarathustra, which was reworked during a later text redaction into a dialogue of the frâsna type in order to append it smoothly to the remainder of Yasna 9. If Haoma’s speech in Y 9.2 was not originally an answer to a question, this could explain the absence of bâ.
2.3 If a speech act is not an answer to an earlier question, it does not normally contain bà. A few exceptions occur in which bà features outside the answer to a question. Since it still refers cataphorically to a comment on an already mentioned topic, there is a close resemblance to the cataphoric function of bà observed in section 2.1.

In Yāst 5.77, bà refers forward to the clause in yat which comments on the topic 'words':

\[\text{temps yazata vistauruš yō naotairišnō upa ēpom yam vīnaj'haiśūm orṣatōdā patī vacahat uti vacāhiś ajanīō: tä bà ašjā tā arṣivāya arṣivāyā sūre anāhite yat mē "auuat dāēučaianšanāgin nişatmī} \]

'To her sacrificed Vistauru, the Naotaryan, at the water Vitalhvati, thus speaking in words the well-spoken word:

this is according to truth, these are truthful words, o beneficial strong Anahita, that I slew so many daeva-worshippers' (For the translation of arṣivāya as 'beneficial', see Oettinger 1983: 349f.)

In Yāst 17.5, the topic is namō 'honour'. Again, bà points ahead to a comment introduced by yat:

\[\text{haomaheca namō maḍraheca ašaomačca zaraṭuštrahe: ačīt bà namō haomaī yat višpe anie maṣaṅgho aśīma haceintel xruuddurū} \]

\[\text{āat hō yō haomahe maḍo ašja hacite x'āepeī} \]

'Praise to Haoma and to the Word and to righteous Zarathustra: praise to Haoma, for all other intoxications are accompanied by Aeshma who has a bloody club, but Haoma's intoxication is accompanied by Order itself.'

In Yāst 17.7 and 17.14, the topic is narō 'men', while yim introduces the comment to which bà refers:

\[\text{tē narō xšātra xšālente (...) yōi hacahi ašī vacuhi: uśta bà yim hacahi} \]

'Those men rule the reigns (...), whom you accompany, o Good Ashi; Hail indeed whom you accompany'

In Yāst 3.2, bà appears to be referring to the comment on vacō 'word' which is introduced by yatbu:

\[\text{āat aoxta zararaṭuštrō: mrūhi bà vacō ar̄k vacō ahura mazda yada tē aŋhan yat ...} \]

'Zarathustra said: just speak the well-said word, o Ahura Mazda, as they were when ...'
However, there is no clear syntactic connection between Yt 3.1 and Yt 3.2, and Wolff (1910: 161) notes about this passage that "Die §§ 1 und 2 sind unvollständig und konfus." Hence, it is of limited value to us.

2.4 The connection between bā and direct speech is also confirmed by the only Old Avestan instance of bā, in the Yasna Haptanhāiti:

Y 35.5 *huxsārōtəmāy bā aṣ xštōram ahuāt hiiat aibā dāvomahicā cīsmahicā hnuṣārōtəmāy hiiat mazdāi ahurāi aṣāicā vahistāi*


As argued by Narten (1986: 9431, 95), the use of aṣ in the second position of the clause places the first word *huxsārōtəmāy* in focus. The function of bā can again be interpreted as pointing ahead to the comment *hiiat mazdāi ahurāi aṣāicā vahistāi* which follows further down.

3. We may now turn to the analysis of bōīt, attested only three times. In two passages, it appears in a dialogue, again in clause-second position. The main surface difference with bā is that bōīt does not occur in an introductory clause, but is an integral part of the answering sentence.

3.1 In V 13.20–23, a series of questions is put to Ahura Mazdā about the degree of sinfulness of letting different kinds of dogs starve: *cuuāt aētaēqm šīaodnaranqm āstāraitī 'to what extent are such deeds sinful?'. The answers in V 13.20 and 21 take the form *yaub ... paiti tärō,pičēm daibītāt 'As if he would refuse food to ...'. The answer in V 13.22 involves the particle bōīt:*

āuēt mruat ahurō mazdā:

*narōm bōīt ṭa aśjāwanem jasōntem
ahmīta nmāne maq cauābīlō daśābīlō
yaubō ābranem paiti törō,pīčēm daibītāt*

‘Ahura Mazdā said: [as if] he would refuse food to a righteous man here who comes to his house with these characteristics like a priest.’

This usage resembles the use of bā in that the initial answer *narōm* is further commented on as *āshjāwanem* and *jasōntem ahmīta nmāne*. A clear difference with the rules as established for bā is that in V 13.22, the verb *daibītāt* is in the optative. It may be significant that V 13.20-22 show an ascending degree of seriousness of the offence: in V 13.20, the measure of comparison is a ‘master of a smaller house’, in V 13.21 the ‘master of a medium-sized house’, whereas in V 13.22, the measure is a priest. It is conceivable that bōīt lends a climactic connotation to this third *narōm*. 
In Yt 5.89, böi occurs in the second part of an address to Zarathustra by the goddess Anahita:

\[\text{asūm spītā} \text{ tūm daūa} \text{ ahuō mazdā} \]
\[\text{ratūs astuachītō gāṭhālā} \text{ mān daūa} \text{ ahuō mazdā} \]
\[\text{nīpāārā vispaīā aṣaonō sīōs:} \]
\[\text{maṇa rāīa x'arauñhāca pasuauascar staurāca} \]
\[\text{upāriṣa点赞 maśīuca biṣongra:} \]
\[\text{āziōm bōi tūm tā nīpāīemī vispa vohā mazdaātā aṣacīfōra} \]
\[\text{maṇaīemī ahe yaṭha pastīm pasu vāstrōm} \]

"Truely, o righteous Spitama, Ahura Mazda created you.
(You are) the Ratu of the material world. Ahura Mazda made me.
(We are) the guardians of the whole righteous creation.
On account of my wealth and splendour, small cattle and large cattle and the two-legged men go over the earth.
I, o strong one, protect all the good created by Ahura Mazda and sprung from Order, just like the cattle-fleece (protects) the cattle."

The translation is adopted from Oettinger (1983: 95, 316-322), with the exception of tūm. Oettinger (p. 320) mentions but does not follow a proposal by Karl Hoffmann that tūm represents a vocative *tuoan 'strong one!' to a stem tuoan- 'able' attested in V 3.33. In view of the presence of a vocative in most clauses containing the particle bā, it would indeed be attractive to assume a voc.sg. next to bōi in Yt 5.89. Of course, Oettinger's alternative solution of an adverb *tuoan 'strongly' cannot be excluded. In terms of function, bōi could be interpreted cataphorically, referring to the comment nīpāieimī on the topic 'I' which occurs as mān and maṇa in the preceding lines. Since 'I' is being talked about before, one might also attribute a climactic function to bōi as we have hypothesized for V 13.22.

In Ny 3.11, a priest or worshipper is addressing the gods:

\[\text{yaṣata purū.s'arauñhā ha yaṣata purū bašasa} \]
\[\text{ciṭra vō butīrōst maśānā ciṭra vō zauanō sūmō:} \]
\[\text{ciṭram bōi viṣaṃkt x'arānō yaṣaṃmā dīḍ dāītāta} \]

'O you deities, who have much splendour! O you deities, who have much medicine! May your greatnesses become apparent, (the greatnesses) of you who thrive by libations:

\[\text{may you bestow apparent splendour, o waters, on the one who sacrifices [to you].} \]
(translation after Kellens 1974: 102ff.)

If bōi is again cataphoric, it must be linking ciṭram to its head noun x'arānō, not to a whole sentence. The plural pronoun 'you' (enclitic vō in the second line) could be interpreted as the topic on which the final line comments. The climactic position of ciṭram after the preceding mentionings of ciṭra is obvious.
3.2 We may conclude that bö̈t and bà have a very similar meaning and distribution. The main difference – as far as one can judge on the basis of only three examples – concerns the type of clauses in which they are found. While bà mainly occurs in introductory nominal and adverbial sentences of the type ‘it is he, who’ and ‘it is so, as’, bö̈t is only attested after the object or subject of a full sentence; this sentence itself is the locus of a comment on the topic. Furthermore, there seems to be a climactic connotation to bö̈t, or it prefers to be employed in climactic sentences; it is therefore tempting to translate it as ‘even’. Since the sense of a climax is absent from bà, it must lie in the addition -it.

YAv. bö̈t can therefore be explained as a compound particle consisting of bà plus PIE *id ‘this’ [n.]. Whereas bà may reflect Indo-Iranian *b‘a, *b‘a or *b‘aH, bö̈t may represent *b‘a-id or *b‘aH-id; compare Av. nōt ‘not’ < Indo-Iranian *na + *id, Vedic nēd < *na id. Vedic id adds emphasis to a preceding word, and it can strengthen an antithesis with earlier utterances. Hence, it is frequently translated as ‘even’, ‘indeed’ or ‘only’. Similarly, OAv. itu is attested with this function in combination with -ca: Y 39.3 àt èba yazamaidê vañhûscä èt vañhûscä èt ‘So verehren wir nun gerade die guten (Männer) und gerade die guten (Frauen)’ (Hoffmann 1975 II: 617, Narten 1986: 260). Merged into one word we find this combination in YAv. cöit in Y 12.5 and 12.6: aða aða cöit ‘so und gerade so’ (Hoffmann 1975 II: 616). Thus, the meaning of bö̈t can be explained as a direct reflex of the cataphoric meaning of *b‘aH combined with the emphasizing function of *id.


In Hittite, we find the sentence particle -pat < PIE *-b‘od (Kloekhorst 2008: 652), which is defined by the Chicago Hittite Dictionary as an “enclitic particle of specification, limitation and identity”. The various English translations of -pat depend on the context: ‘the same’, ‘even’, ‘only’, etc. Its specifying and identifying function can be compared with the cataphoric value of YAv. bà. In addition, the Hittite and Cuneiform Luwian pronoun apä- ‘that (near you)’ and Lycian ebe- ‘this’ reflect Proto-Anatolian *Hobó-, which was built from PIE demonstrative *h₁ó-o + *b‘oe (Kloekhorst 2008: 191). A similar formation is found in Germanic, viz. Gothic ibai ‘or?’, OHG ibu, OS Oic. of ‘or, whether’ from *h₁e-b‘oe- (Lühr 1976: 91f.). Hence, both Germanic and Anatolian show *b‘oe- as a suffix to a deictic pronoun. If this construction was inherited from PIE, the Avestan combinations hō bà and hāu bà, with the IIr. pronoun *sā- in front of the particle, might reflect the same syntactic feature inherited from PIE. If this is correct, it would help us understand why bà is preferably used in cleft sentences after pronouns. Its preference for answers to questions can then be explained as a secondary development, caused by the fact that cleft sentences in general occur more frequently in dialogue situations.
The exact preform of the Avestan particle remains unclear: bà could be the outcome of an instrumental *bʰəh₁ or *bʰəh₂, a neuter plural *bʰəh₂ or *bʰoh₂, or endingless *bʰe or *bʰo.

5. Another possible cognate of bà is the rare Greek particle φη 'like, as', attested in the Iliad (2x; in 2.144 only as a varia lectio next to ὥς), the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, in Hesiod (in a fragmentary line of the Catalogue of Women), Callimachus and Antimachus. Its usage may be illustrated by the three clearest text examples:

Il. 14.499-500:
δ δὲ φη κῶδειαν ἄνασσαν
πέρασε τε Τρακσσα καὶ εὐχάριστον ἐποτὸς ἣδον
‘He, lifting it high like a poppy,
showed it to the Trojans and spoke braggingly’

HymHerm. 240-241:
ἐν δὲ ἄλυκτο συνέλοισε κάρη χείρας τε πόδας τε
φη ἐκ νεκόλλουτος προκοκελύμως ἱδόνων ὅπων (Merkelbach-West 1967: 99ff.)
‘Swiftly he drew up his head and hands and feet,
lying like a newly-washed baby inviting sweet sleep’

Call., Hecale 74, 15-17:
εἴσπε κόρας...
κυάνον φη πίσσαν ἐπὶ πτερόν οὐλοδὸν ἔξει (Hollis 1990: 98, 250ff.)
‘when the raven ... will put on a sad plumage, black as pitch’

Thus, φη directly precedes the comparandum (once with intervening ἄνασσαν), but does not influence its case form. The use for introducing a comparison can easily be explained on the basis of the specifying or identifying usage seen in Hittite -pat, and also matches the cataphoric function of Avestan bà. I therefore agree with the major etymological dictionaries of Greek (Boisacq, Frisk, Chantraine), which derive φη from PIE *bʰe/o, as a nom.acc.pl.n. *bʰe₂h₂ (Frisk) or an ins.sg. *bʰe₁h₁ (Chantraine). In view of δ ἄνασσαν ‘indeed’ (beside δἐ), an ins.sg. *bʰe₁h₁ or a variant with lengthened vowel *bʰe seem most likely.

Alternatively, φη has been explained as a reflex of a PIE imperative *bʰe₂h₂ ‘say!’ belonging to the athematic present φιμ ‘to say’. The development of imperative ‘say’ into a pragmatic marker meaning ‘take, for instance’ finds a parallel in Dutch zeg (maar) ‘for example, more or less’ and English say (If there are, say, three people on each corner ...). While this etymology is possible on paper, I find no syntactic trace of an original imperative in the usage of φη. Ruijgh (1982: 205) mentions as an argument in favour of an original imperative the oxytones of φη, which could be interpreted as a retention of the original accentuation which escaped the analogical change to φη observed in the verb. But, obviously, the acute accentuation is not an argument against a different etymology.
In theory, YAv. bà could also represent PIE *bʰeh₂ 'say!' Yet in Indo-Iranian, the root present *bʰeh₂- is only attested in the meaning 'to shine', which renders an explanation of bà as 'say!' difficult: one would have to assume that the novel meaning 'to say' was retained only in a petrified form in the particle, while the earlier meaning 'to shine' prevailed in the verb. This would be the opposite of the expected development. Pirart in Kellens-Pirart 1988-91 II: 170 suggests that bà might continue a PIE neuter root noun *bʰeh₂ 'which shines' used adverbially. This is formally possible, and it would remove the need to pass by a meaning 'to say'. But a neuter root noun to a root in *-H would be unique. There is also a semantic drawback to this explanation. A derivative of a word meaning 'appear(ance)' is often used to tone down the absoluteness of a communication: *He, apparently* it seems, is the leader of the gang. Yet in the usage of YAv. bà I find no such connotation, on the contrary: Ahura Mazda gives straight and clear answers. Thus, I stick to the derivation from PIE *bʰe/o/e.

References:


Syntax and etymology of Avestan bā and bōīt


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