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 another 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, 192ff., 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 bà and bói t 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, bà and bói t occur in the answer to a previous question.

2.1 YAv. bà 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 bà 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 bà; thus, I find no affirmative or emphatic function of bà.

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 cīs is answered by means of hā bà ...

\[
\text{cīs hāu ās ahūra mazdā yō mē asādātīa frādātīm apa.baraṭ vārōdātīm apa.baraṭ yāsām upa.baraṭ māhrām upa.baraṭ} \\
\text{āat mraōt ahūra mazdā: hō bā aēāō ās āstām zarāthūstra āsāmārī āmānīa yō āstāhmi aŋ̪humō yāt āstūuāntī paiti.hīn̪cālī ā dim nōi āpiuumūtīe ādēnālā māzdaīasānōi yōāzādāhri̞āt hācā} \\
\text{‘Who is he, o Ahura Mazda, who takes away my visible prosperity and increase, who brings sickness and death?} \\
\text{Ahura Mazda said: he is the one, o righteous Zarathustra, the unrighteous heretic who in this material world makes a libation, although he is not familiar with the Mazdayasnean religion as regards the office of purificator.’} \\
\]

In V 5.15 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 bà:

\[
\text{āat mraōt ahūra mazdā: ośūuātā bā zarāthūstra yāāō tūm aŋ̪zūūa vaśāyhe} \\
\text{‘Ahura Mazda said: it is entirely so, Zarathustra, as you correctly say.’} \\
\]

In V 3.1, the question kūna ‘where?’ is answered by Ahura Mazda with yat bā paiti nā aśāuwa frātīt ‘when a righteous man goes forward’:

\[
\text{āat mraōt ahūra mazdā: aśūuātā bā zarāthūstra yāāō tūm aŋ̪zūūa vaśāyhe} \\
\text{‘Ahura Mazda said: it is entirely so, Zarathustra, as you correctly say.’} \\
\]
Syntax and etymology of Avestan bà and bôî

*dâtaro gaëûanqm astauâingm ašiûm: kuua paouirim aihâ zomô šätînûm?
*ät mraot ahuro mazdâ: yat bà paiti nā ašaûa fraiìt spitama zaroâûstro ... vaca framrû

'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 bà paiti; if the answer has a different word than paiti after yat, or if the answer does not begin with yat, no bà is inserted. Now paiti only makes semantic sense in V 3.1, where we can read a compound verb in tmesis paiti ... fraiìat. In the other clauses, paiti 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 mqnaiisn 'just like, as if' which introduces a comparison, followed by bà:

*dâat mraot ahuro mazdâ: mqnaiisn bà spitama zaroûstro aëisn däisn yim vidöîûm zaroûstro upairi aniûiûs sraniûis masanaça vajhanaca sraîtanaca yada zralîô vouruûașom upairi aniûô òpô

'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 mqnaiisn bà spitama zaroûstro 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 mqnaiisn is only found in the two YAv. constructions mqnaiisn ahe yada and mqnaiisn bà (without yada). I adopt the analysis proposed by Humbach (1969: 71-73) that mqnaiisn represents an adverbial acc.sgn. of a pres.part.act. *mânajant- 'resembling'. Hoffmann (1975 I: 264f.) has accepted this solution and stipulated that *mânaji- can be interpreted as a causative stem 'denken lassen an' to mun- 'to think'. It is true that mqnaiisn would also allow for an analysis as a 3pl.inj.act. or a 3pl.opt.act., compare V upa.mqnaiisn 'they should wait'. Yet the presence of the genitival object ahe in mqnaiisn ahe yada suggests a nominal form which can take an object in the genitive. Another argument against taking mqnaiisn 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 anhaį ašāum zarathuṣṭra yō ...

'It will be he, o righteous Zarathustra, who ...'

V 17.2  

hāu bā ašāum zarathuṣṭra yō ...

'It is he, o righteous Zarathustra, who ...'

V 18.62  

jahi bā ašāum zarathuṣṭra yō ...

'The whore, o righteous Zarathustra, who ...'

H 1.7  

hāu bā ašāum zarathuṣṭra yqmn bā nā fraį harsta hauwauṭhi amsaōtauṭhi ašom stavoći̧

'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  

auaōta bā ašāum zarathuṣṭra asne kamaṛṣeō ḫanosuvaraiti

'There, o righteous Zarathustra, it runs up and down close to his head.'

Yt 12.2  

azom bā tē tāt framrauṭeni sraoṣuō ašāum spitama nqbrō spoṇṭō yō ašx'aromā

'I will tell it to you as it is, o righteous Spitama: the holy word, which has big splendour.'

P 26  

kat tē asti ahumahie vaiśiehe haṭṭhun?

manō bā vouh zarathuṣṭra oṣaōtmānām

'What is the essence of thy Ahuna Vairya? (A) good mind, o Spitama Zarathustra, infallible.' (Jarnaspasa-Humbach 1971 I: 42f.)

A slight deviation in word order is found four times between V 18.34 and 18.54, in the fraṣṇa 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:

āqā hē bā paṭi,daṇuṭa yā daeũu druṣā:  

sraoṣa aš̄ita hauṣaōa hō bā me aétuṣkām arṣṇaṃ paṇiūṭīō (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 nqma 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 nqma ahmi until Yt 15.52. Hence, it may be argued that bā here has the same cataphoric function as elsewhere:
2.2 The use of *ba* 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’, *aoxta* ‘said’, *aojana* ‘saying’ and *dauuata* ‘spoke (as a daeva)’. The particle *ba* 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?’*, *cuan* ‘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 *ba*-less answer. It occurs many times, especially in the Videvdad. Here are a few examples of its usage.

In Yašt 14.1, Zarathustra asks:

> **kô asti mainianuamq yazatanqam zaiiätemà?**
> **dât mraot ahurò nazdà: veoröraynò ahurâtìtò spita zaraûustrà**

‘Who is the best armed of the spiritual deities? Ahura Mazda said: (It is) Ahura-created Varœrayna, o Spitama Zarathustra.’

Videvdad 3.36:

> **dâtara gaðtanqam astuaitinqam åžäum, yat ... kà hë asti ciûa?**
> **dât mraot ahurò nazdà: pança sata upäzanamqam upäzoit astaïia**

‘Who is the 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 naraqm ivristanqam tamùm barïma ahuro nazda kuua nidžâòna?**
> **dât mraot ahurò nazdà: barozïašyiwaaco poiti gâtuusua**

‘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.’
Where is the sheepdog in its rightful place? Ahura Mazda said: (with) who(m) goes a *yujiiasti*- 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. *bā* 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 *bā*.

As it turns out, the analysis of the absence of *bā* confirms our preliminary conclusions reached for the passages with *bā*: 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 aijhā asti uzuumazzem* 'What is the atonement for this?'. The answer follows: *sraosa aśīja huraoda aom aijhe asti uzuumazzem 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 aijhe asti uzuumazzem yat* resembles the structure of passages containing *bā*, the particle itself is absent. Note the contrast with *hā bā mê aētaēsam arsnam paoirīō* 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 nare ah!* 'Who, 0 man, are you?'. The answer follows in Y 9.2:

*āat mê aēm paitīacaot haomō aṣāna dūraosō: aom ôhī zarathuṣṭra haomō aṣāna dūraosō* 

'Then righteous, death-destroying Haoma answered me: 

"I am, 0 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 *frāṣṇa* 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 *bā*. 
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’:

\[
\text{tēm yazata vistauruś yō naotairiśa upa ēpm yam vičḥ'haiśm} \quad \text{orēótōdi pati vacahat uti vacbiś aṣanō:}
\]
\[
tā bā aṣa tā orśuśa arēduśi sûre aṇāhite yat mē "aunāt daēuuiænunān nisātīm
\]
‘To her sacrificed Vistauru, the Naotaryan, at the water Vitahvati, 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 *arēduśi* 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:

\[
haomaheca namō mañoheca aṣaomaheca zarathuštrahe:
\]
\[
aṣtī bā namō haomaī yat vispe anie mašānō aša maçahe xruuupunō
\]
\[
ātī hō yō haomahe mašō aša hacaite x'ēplāhe
\]
‘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 yat introduces the comment to which bà refers:

\[
tē narō xšāstra xšāliente (…) yōi hacahi aṣiš vacuhi:
\]
\[
ūsta bā yat hacahi
\]
‘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 yathu:

\[
ātī aoxta zarathuštrō: mṛūhi bā vacō arā vacō ahura mazda yāda tē aghon yat ...
\]
‘Zarathustrā 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 hā and direct speech is also confirmed by the only Old Avestan instance of hā, in the Yasna Haptanhāiti:

Y 35.5 huxslōtrōmānī hā aṣ xēbrōm ahnaṣ hīaṣ aibā daemonsēcē cēsmahicē huaqsmahicē hīat mazdāī ahurāi aṣāicē vahistāī


As argued by Narten (1986: 94, 95), the use of aṣ in the second position of the clause places the first word huxslōtrōmānī in focus. The function of hā can again be interpreted as pointing ahead to the comment hīaṣ mazdāī ahurāi aṣāicē vahistāī 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 hā 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: cuṣat aētaēṣam šiiaodhūraṃ āstāraitī ‘to what extent are such deeds sinful?’. The answers in V 13.20 and 21 take the form yaṣta ... paiti tarō, pīṭṣam dainīīṭ ‘As if he would refuse food to ...’. The answer in V 13.22 involves the particle bōīt:

āṣt mraot ahurō mazdā:

narōm bōīt iva aṣjaiwaṃ ‘jasontom

ahmiia nāne maṣ cauwbāibī daxšāibīō

yathā dērunā paiti tarō pīṭṣam dainīīṭ

‘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 hā in that the initial answer narōm is further commented on as ajaiwaṃ and jasontom ahmiia nāne. A clear difference with the rules as established for hā is that in V 13.22, the verb dainīīṭ 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, böît occurs in the second part of an address to Zarathustra by the goddess Anânîta:

"Truly, 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 tum. Oettinger (p. 320) mentions but does not follow a proposal by Karl Hoffmann that tum represents a vocative *tuuan *strong one!* to a stem tuuan- ‘able’ attested in V 3.33. In view of the presence of a vocative in most clauses containing the particle bà, it would indeed be attractive to assume a voc.sg. next to böît in Yt 5.89. Of course, Oettingers alternative solution of an adverb *tuuan *strongly* cannot be excluded. In terms of function, böît could be interpreted cataphorically, referring to the comment nipaiiemi on the topic ‘I’ which occurs as mañ and mana in the preceding lines. Since ‘I’ is being talked about before, one might also attribute a climactic function to böît as we have hypothesized for V 13.22.

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

"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: may you bestow apparent splendour, o waters, on the one who sacrifices [to you]."

(translation after Kellens 1974: 102f.)

If böît is again cataphoric, it must be linking citrôm to its head noun x’aranô, not to a whole sentence. The plural pronoun ‘you’ (enclitic vô in the second line) could be interpreted as the topic on which the final line comments. The climactic position of citrôm after the preceding mentionings of citrô is obvious.
3.2 We may conclude that böiṭ 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’, böiṭ 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 böiṭ, 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 -īt.

YAv. böiṭ 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’ā or *b’āH, böiṭ may represent *b’ā-id or *b’āH-id; compare Av. nōtī ‘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. îit is attested with this function in combination with -ca: Y 39.3 ät iith yazamaidē vayhāšcā ît vayhāścā ît ‘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. cöīt in Y 12.5 and 12.6: abā abā cöīt ‘so und gerade so’ (Hoffmann 1975 II: 616). Thus, the meaning of böiṭ can be explained as a direct reflex of the cataphoric meaning of *b’āH combined with the emphasizing function of *id.


In Hittite, we find the sentence particle -pat < PIE *-b’oHd (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 apā- ‘that (near you)’ and Lycian ebe- ‘this’ reflect Proto-Anatolian *Hobô-, which was built from PIE demonstrative *h₁o₁o + *b’o (Kloekhorst 2008: 191). A similar formation is found in Germanic, viz. Gothic ibai ‘or?’, OHG ibu, OS Olc. of ‘or, whether’ from *h₁e-b’o- (Lühr 1976: 91f.). Hence, both Germanic and Anatolian show *b’o-as a suffix to a deictic pronoun. If this construction was inherited from PIE, the Avestan combinations hō bà and hāu bà, with the Ilr. pronoun *s-a- 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: bā could be the outcome of an instrumental *bʰeh₁ or *bʰoh₁, a neuter plural *bʰeh₂ or *bʰoh₂, or endingless *bʰe or *bʰo.

5. Another possible cognate of bā is the rare Greek particle φη 'like, as', attested in the Iliad (2x; in 2.144 only as a varia lectio next to ὧς), 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:

Iliad 14.499-500:
δ ἐδὲ φη κόδιεαν ἀνασχῶν
πέρανδε τε Τραῖσσαι καλ ἐνεχάμενοι ἐπος πόδα
'He, lifting it high like a poppy,
showed it to the Trojans and spoke braggingly'

HymnHerm. 240-241:
ἐν δ' ὁλοίρῳ σωφάλοσσε καρφι σχῆμα τε πόδας τε
φη καὶ νεόλογοτος προκατόλογος ἵπποι δίπον (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:
εὐτέ κόρας ...
κυνόνον φη πισταν ἐπὶ περὶ νῦν ὀφαλὸν ἔδω (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 ἄγο), 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 bā. 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. *bʰeh₂ (Frisk) or an ins.sg. *bʰeh₁ (Chantraine). In view of δὲ 'indeed' (beside δέ), an ins.sg. *bʰeh₁ or a variant with lengthened vowel *bʰě seem most likely.

Alternatively, φη has been explained as a reflex of a PIE imperative *bʰeh₂ 'say!' belonging to the athematic present φἠμι '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 oxytonesis 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 bà and bōit


Wackernagel, Jacob. 1892. Über ein Gesetz der indogermanischen Wortstellung. Indogermanische Forschungen 1, 333-436.