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## Contending for the cosmos: a Zoroastrian poet's mysterious rival

To Professor Almut Hintze on the occasion of her 65th birthday on 7 June 2022

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### Abstract

The ancient Zoroastrian hymn of worship dedicated to the *frauuāši-s* (affirmative choices) of righteous mortals and divinities refers to an important discourse that takes place between an unnamed Zoroastrian poet-sage and his mysterious rival, named Gaōtəma. The figure of Gaōtəma has intrigued Avestan scholars through the years, but the significance and the implications of Gaōtəma's identity, and of his presence in the hymn, has to date not been seriously studied. This article first examines the context in which Gaōtəma is presented in the hymn. Building upon this, it then evaluates four potential identities for Gaōtəma: Avestan, Turanian, Buddhist, and Vedic. Conducting a multidisciplinary and comparative assessment, the article eventually argues in favour of a Vedic identity for Gaōtəma, specifically that of a poet-sage who was a proponent of the Rig Vedic divinity Indra. This investigation into Gaōtəma's identity concomitantly provides important perspectives on certain aspects of the Zoroastrian religion, and often in a comparative context.

**Keywords:** Zoroastrianism; Avestan; cosmology; mythology; spirituality; poetry; Vedic; Indo-Iranian; sacred literature

### Introduction

The first *karde* (section) of the Zoroastrian *Yašt* (Yt) 'hymn of worship' to the *frauuāši-s* (affirmative choices) (*Yašt* 13), extends from Yt 13.1 to Yt 13.19, and depicts Ahura Mazda revealing to Zaratuštra how the various wonders of cosmogenesis were accomplished by virtue of the splendour and the *xʷarənah-* (Glory)<sup>1</sup> of the *frauuāši-s*. From the unfurling of the luminous star-adorned sky, fashioned by spiritual force, which Ahura Mazda wears as a garment whose two peripheries are not visible to anyone, to the unfurling of embryos within the wombs of their mothers, the narrative conveyed through the

<sup>1</sup> *xʷarənah-* refers to the sophisticated concept of divine 'Glory' in Zoroastrianism. In brief summary (from *Yašt-s* 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 19, and *Dēnkard* 7.2): *xʷarənah-* is created by Ahura Mazda, and was with him when he created the creations. It is a luminous ethereal substance that can belong to Zoroastrian divinities. It can dwell within certain celestial bodies, be gathered together and conveyed unto the earth from the heavens, be distributed across the earth, flow through and reside within the waters, evade attempts made to acquire it, and fly through the air in the shape of a bird. If a being is truly worthy, and therefore bestowed with *xʷarənah-*, it greatly enhances that being's ability to actualise a beneficent destiny and to overcome adversity. It becomes perceivable as an indwelling radiance emanating from the being, and as an aura surrounding the being. For a detailed discussion on *xʷarənah-*, refer to: A. Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt: Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 15–33.

voice of Ahura Mazdā threads together macrocosm and microcosm. The climactic event of this elaborate progression that unfolds through the *karde* is the birth of a specific but unnamed individual, who is compellingly eloquent, who makes his words heard at ceremonial gatherings, who becomes sought-after for his discernment, and who emerges from the discourse as one whose entreaty surpasses that of Gaōtāma's (Yt 13.16).

The settings for this discourse are the ancient Aryan<sup>2</sup> ceremonial gatherings where poet-sages would employ their sacred craft to expound their spiritual visions and put forth their entreaties for the consideration of the divinities and for the benefit of the chieftains and other participants gathered together. The curious fact that the prevailing poet-sage, whose birth is a culminating point in the progression of the *karde*, remains unnamed, while his defeated antagonist is clearly named, urges us to consider who exactly this mysterious Gaōtāma might have been. For Gaōtāma's defeat is not only significant enough to be memorialised in the Zoroastrian *Yašt* dedicated to the *frauuāši-s*, but it evidently accords cosmogonic relevance to the birth of the unnamed poet-sage who surpassed him. There is no reference other than this one, either to him or to this name, in all of the Avestan literature. Scholars have only commented very briefly and inconclusively on the intriguing subject and implications of Gaōtāma's identity, and the topic has not received any serious consideration.

This article first situates the discourse between the unnamed poet-sage and Gaōtāma in the context and the themes of the *Yašt*, the *karde*, and the stanza in which it occurs. Then, after a basic analysis of the name Gaōtāma and a brief review of the few passing comments made by scholars on this name, four potential hypothetical identities for Gaōtāma are discussed: Avestan, Turanian, Buddhist, and Vedic. It is argued that a Vedic identity, specifically that of a poet-sage who was a proponent of the worship of the Rig Vedic divinity Indra, provides the most plausible scenario.

### The concept and entities to whom *Yašt* 13 is dedicated

The word *frauuāši-* refers to a constituent aspect of being and of will that pre-exists, joins, and outlasts mortal life. Thus, it entails the consequential notion of spiritual existence, volition, and agency: prior to, during, and after earthly life. Its more specific qualities and characterisations can be viewed through this frame.

The nominal stem *frauuāši-* (grammatically feminine; morphologically a verbal abstract formed with a *-ti-* suffix and derived from the verbal root *var* [to choose, to decide] with the prefix *fra-*)<sup>3</sup> denotes a being's 'affirmative choice' in favour of Ahura Mazdā, in allegiance with his spiritual vision and his efforts in the cosmic and existential struggle between good and evil. This 'affirmative choice' gives rise to the underlying motivating impetus, and contextualises the unfolding course, of one's life. It is thus the aspect of being that, by virtue of its own inherence as a beneficent and enlightened choice, situates itself within a spiritual lineage of goodness and virtuous purpose.

This 'affirmative choice' also exists in an inner spiritual association with a being's *daēnā-* (spiritual vision) and *uruuan-* (soul), and it participates in the process of an individual's self-actualisation; by doing so, it also participates in the collective ongoing existential struggle between the forces of good and evil. It thereby exerts agency and

<sup>2</sup> The people of the Avestan and the Vedic cultures independently referred to themselves as Aryan in their most ancient texts (the *Avesta* and the *Rig Veda*), approximately three-and-a-half millennia ago. In scholarly practice the term 'Aryan' is used interchangeably with Indo-Iranian, and refers to the peoples and languages of that specific branch of the Indo-European peoples and languages.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion on this term and concept, see J. Narten, 'Avestisch *frauuāši-*', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 28 (1985), pp. 35–48, and A. Hintze, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy: The Worship in Seven Chapters (Yasna 35–41)* (Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 171–177.

simultaneously operates on both the personal and the universal scale. As such, the *frauuāši-* is often prominently depicted as an impelling cosmic force that drives, shapes, and keeps watch over the unfolding, the perpetuation, and the healing of the cosmos itself. This illustrates the sense of possibility, potency, and responsibility with which this Zoroastrian concept of ‘choice’ is imbued.

As an immortal aspect of self, which is in allegiance and concord with Ahura Mazda before, during, and after a being’s mortal life, the *frauuāši-* is also often understood as a protective force or ‘guardian spirit’, whose protection ultimately derives from one’s own choice to help and support Ahura Mazda.<sup>4</sup> In this capacity the *frauuāši-*s are portrayed as decisive agents in the primordial cosmic battle between *spənta- mainiiu-* (the life-giving spiritual force) and *anra- mainiiu-* (the evil spiritual force), and as warriors surrounded by light, who fight in battles against the *daēuua-*s (false gods). As a multitudinous array, they keep watch over the essential aspects of creation, such as the shimmering Vourukaša Sea and the stars of the Haptōiringa constellation, and they also keep watch over the destiny of existence itself, by guarding the seeds from which the future saviours of the world shall rise up. They swiftly fly down to help the righteous people who worship and invoke them, and they are likened to birds with good wings. For a period of ten days every year, the *frauuāši-*s of ancestors visit the homes of their families to be welcomed with worship and nourishment, and to bestow generous blessings in return.

All these, and other various and associated facets of the *frauuāši-*s, demonstrate both the centrality and the multidimensionality of this unique concept. As an ‘affirmative choice’ of self-actualising spiritual allegiance, the *frauuāši-* animates, orients, drives, and characterises the very purpose and destiny of one’s existence. It is easy to appreciate why this ‘affirmative choice’ is therefore understood to be an integral part of one’s being.

*Yašt* 13, in full keeping with the concept of the *frauuāši-*s, appeals to the sense of lineage and allegiance, and weaving across spiritual and material realities, it eulogises the deeds and the qualities of the *frauuāši-*s, depicting an unbroken thread of choices and continuities that extend all the way from primordial creation, through to the present moment, and deep into the future perfecting of existence. As we shall see throughout this article, there are various reasons why the triumph of the unnamed poet-sage over Gaōtəma is particularly pertinent to this hymn dedicated to the *frauuāši-*s.

### Situating Yt 13.16 within the structural and thematic scheme of the first *karde*

Within the compositional framework and overall thematic orchestration of *Yašt* 13, the first *karde* (Yt 13.1–19) is thoughtfully placed and well-integrated with the entirety of the *Yašt*, yet it simultaneously exhibits its own distinct internal structure and thematic sense. Stanza Yt 13.16, in which we learn about the discourse between the unnamed poet-sage and Gaōtəma, is an important constituent of this internal structure of the *karde* and of its thematic purpose. Therefore, for a fuller appreciation and understanding of Yt 13.16, it is particularly useful to examine its relevance in relation to the structure and theme of the *karde*. The *karde* is framed by an opening and closing stanza (Yt 13.1 and Yt 13.19) that are mostly identical to each other.<sup>5</sup>

Yt 13.1 *mraōt ahurō mazdā<sup>ā</sup> spitamāi zaraθuštrāi*  
*aēuuu.tē zāuuarə aōjasca*  
*x<sup>v</sup>arənō auuasca rafnasca*  
*framrauuu ərəzuuō spitama*

<sup>4</sup> Narten, *Avestisch frauuāši-*, pp. 35, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, the translations and summaries of Avestan texts in this article are my own.

yaṭ aṣāōṇaṃ frauuaṣiṇaṃ  
 uḡraṇaṃ aiβiθūraṇaṃ  
 yaθa.mē jasən auuaṅhe  
 yaθa.mē barən upastaṃ  
 uḡrā aṣāōṇaṃ frauuaṣaiiō

Ahura Mazdā spoke to Spitama Zaraθuštra:  
 ‘In this way, I shall proclaim for you, O upright Spitama,  
 the agility, and the strength,  
 the Glory, and the help, and the assistance,  
 which belong to the affirmative choices of the righteous,  
 (that are) powerful, unwavering;  
 (I shall proclaim for you) how they came to my help,  
 (I shall proclaim for you) how they brought me support,  
 the powerful affirmative choices of the righteous!’

Yt 13.19 iθa.tē zāuuarə aōjasca  
 xʿarənō auuasca rafnasca  
 framraōmi ərəzuuō spitama  
 yaṭ aṣāōṇaṃ frauuaṣiṇaṃ  
 uḡraṇaṃ aiβiθūraṇaṃ  
 yaθa.mē jasən auuaiḡhe  
 yaθa.mē barən upastaṃ  
 uḡrā aṣāōṇaṃ frauuaṣaiiō

Therefore, I am proclaiming for you, O upright Spitama,  
 the agility, and the strength,  
 the Glory, and the help, and the assistance,  
 which belong to the affirmative choices of the righteous,  
 (that are) powerful, unwavering;  
 (I am proclaiming for you) how they came to my help,  
 (I am proclaiming for you) how they brought me support,  
 the powerful affirmative choices of the righteous!’

The first line of the opening stanza *mraōṭ ahurō mazdā spitamāi zaraθuštrāi* (Ahura Mazdā spoke to Spitama Zaraθuštra) is not repeated in the closing stanza because it is evident that Ahura Mazdā has been speaking to Zaraθuštra about a particular theme throughout the entire *karde* and that he is once again reiterating the importance of this theme to Zaraθuštra in the closing stanza.<sup>6</sup> In Yt 13.1 Ahura Mazdā is indicating to Zaraθuštra what he is about to do. The pivotal verb *framrauua* is in the subjunctive mood, and the adverb *aēuuu*, taken with the subjunctive mood of the verb, yields a prospective and introductory feeling. Together they can be rendered: ‘In this way, I shall proclaim...’. After this opening stanza, Ahura Mazdā proceeds to proclaim, in a clear progression, the many ways in which the *frauuaṣi*-s of the *aṣauuan*- (righteous, imbued with the Truth) have helped him (Yt 13.2–18). When we reach Yt 13.19, the pivotal verb of the stanza is no longer in the subjunctive mood, but is now noticeably in the indicative mood, as *framraōmi*, and the demonstrative adverb *iθa*, taken with the indicative mood of the verb, yields

<sup>6</sup> The line *mraōṭ ahurō mazdā spitamāi zaraθuštrāi* also introduces the subsequent *karde* (Yt 13.20–25), in which Ahura Mazdā is no longer revealing the marvels of cosmogenesis to Zaraθuštra, but is teaching him the words with which to extol, invoke, weave hymns for, and worship the *frauuaṣi*-s.

an explanatory or conclusive feeling. Together they can be rendered: ‘Therefore, I am proclaiming...’. The stanzas Yt 13.2–18 are held within the ring formed by Yt 13.1 and Yt 13.19, and the change in the mood of the verb indicates the opening and the closing of that ring. Within the frame of Yt 13.1 and Yt 13.19, six cornerstone sub-themes—the unfurling of the sky, the unfurling of the water, the unfurling of the earth, the unfurling of embryos in wombs, the primordial cosmic struggle, and the birth of a particular unnamed man—establish the *karde*’s internal organisational structure, around which the narrative is then elaborated and through which it proceeds. Let us look into this in more detail.

The *karde* opens with a flourish of evocative descriptions that reveal to the listener how the *frauuaši*-s of the *ašauuan*- helped Ahura Mazda: 1) unfurl the luminous star-adorned sky, which Ahura Mazda wears as a garment, and whose two peripheries are not visible to anyone (Yt 13.2–3); 2) unfurl *arəduuī- sūrā- anāhitā-* (the [water], proficient, flourishing with life force, unbound),<sup>7</sup> which, rushing forth from Mount Hukairiia and into the Vourukaša Sea, spreads far and wide and *yaōždađāiti* (sets into the sphere of life) the seminal fluid of all males, the wombs of all females, and the mother’s milk of all females (Yt 13.4–8); 3) unfurl the earth which bears much that is beautiful, including all corporeal life and the lofty mountains full of pastures and rich in water, upon which plants are growing, for the protection of domestic animals, brave men, the Aryan peoples, and the five kinds of animal, and also for the help of righteous men (Yt 13.9–10). The focus of the hymn then shifts from the majestic scope of the macrocosmic arena of creation to the precious and intricate microcosmic realm of creation. In Yt 13.11 we learn that with the help of the *frauuaši*-s of the *ašauuan*-, Ahura Mazda 4) unfurled children within the wombs of their mothers, fortifying them against harm until their set date of delivery and protectively assembled their internal organs and tissues within the womb. In Yt 13.12–13 the hymn pivots back from the microcosmic realm to the macrocosmic arena, and we learn about 5) the horrible fate that would have come to pass, had Ahura Mazda not had the help of the *frauuaši*-s of the *ašauuan*-. In that unfortunate scenario, strength, rule, and corporeal existence itself would have belonged to deceit, and the evil spiritual force would have enthroned himself between earth and sky, and laid down his conquest:

Yt 13.12 *yeidi.zī.mē nōiṭ daiḍiṭ upastəm*  
*uyrā ašāunəm frauuašaiiō*  
*nōiṭ mē ida ājhātəm pasuūira*  
*yā.stō sarədanəm vahišta*  
*drujō ađgarə drujō xšədrəm*  
*drujō astuua ānhuš ājhāt*

But, if they had not given me their support,  
the powerful affirmative choices of the righteous,  
then both domestic animals and brave men would not have been mine,  
who are both the best of their (various) kinds;  
(then) strength would have belonged to deceit,  
(then) rule would have belonged to deceit,

<sup>7</sup> The three epithets: *arəduuī-* (proficient), *sūrā-* (flourishing with life force), and *anāhitā-* (unbound) together refer to the Zoroastrian goddess of the waters, who descended to the earth from the stars, when she was requested to do so by Ahura Mazda (Yt 5.85–89). P. O. Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism* (New Haven and London, 2011), p. 17, notes that the noun for ‘water’ is generally implied in her name, but it is made explicit in *Yasna* (Y) 65.1. Indeed, in the first line of Y 65.1 the noun *ap-* (water) appears in the accusative singular form and is qualified by all three adjectives: Y 65.1 *yazāi āpəm arəduuīm sūrəm anāhitəm...* (I shall worship the water, proficient, flourishing with life force, unbound...). The adjective *anāhitā-* (unbound) itself soon comes to be used as a proper noun denoting the name of the goddess.

(then) corporeal existence would have belonged to deceit,

Yt 13.13 *nī aṅtarə zəm asmanəmca*  
*drujā maniuuā hazdiiāt*  
*nī aṅtarə zəm asmanəmca*  
*drujā maniuuā vaōniiāt*  
*nōiṭ pascaēta vanō vaṅtāi*  
*upa.daiiāt aṅrō mainiiuš spəṅtāi mainiiauue*

(then) between the earth and the sky,  
 the deceitful one of the two spiritual forces would have enthroned himself,  
 (then) between the earth and the sky,  
 the deceitful one of the two spiritual forces would have laid down conquest;  
 nor thereafter, would the conqueror give in to the conquered:  
 the evil spiritual force, to the life-giving spiritual force!

The text thus emphasises that it is due to the support of the *fruuuāši*-s during the primordial struggle between the two spiritual forces that this profoundly unfortunate and evil fate does not come to pass, and instead we have a much more pleasant outcome that is characterised by the beautiful stanzas Yt 13.14–15:

Yt 13.14 *āṅhəm raiia xʷarənaṅhaca*  
*āpō tacīṅti frātaṭ.carətō*  
*xā paiti afrajiimnā*  
*āṅhəm raiia xʷarənaṅhaca*  
*zəmāḍa uzuxšiieṅti uruuarā*  
*xā paiti afrajiimnā*  
*āṅhəm raiia xʷarənaṅhaca*  
*vātō vāṅti dunmō.frutō*  
*xā paiti afrajiimnā*

By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
 the waters are rushing, flowing forth along their courses,  
 towards inexhaustible springs!  
 By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
 the plants are growing up from the earth,  
 towards inexhaustible springs!  
 By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
 the winds are blowing, flying along with clouds,  
 towards inexhaustible springs!

Yt 13.15 *āṅhəm raiia xʷarənaṅhaca*  
*hāirišiš puθrē vərənuuaiṅti*  
*āṅhəm raiia xʷarənaṅhaca*  
*huzāmitō zizanəṅti*  
*āṅhəm raiia xʷarənaṅhaca*  
*yaṭ bauuaiṅti hacat.puθrā*

By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
 females are fortifying their children (within their wombs),

By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
females are giving birth with easy delivery,  
By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
it is so, that females are with child!

It is now, after the narrative arc has threaded itself through macrocosm into microcosm and back to macrocosm once again, that we arrive at our stanza Yt 13.16, where the focus of the *Yašt* suddenly narrows to 6) the birth of a specific unnamed individual, who emerges from the discourse as one whose entreaty surpasses that of Gaōtəma's. That the grand and wide-sweeping exposition of cosmogenesis in this *karde* should culminate by concentrating its focus onto a single human birth, and then, on the very particular juxtaposition of that person with his rival, is worthy of attention.

Yt 13.16 *āṅhąm raiia xʋarənaṅhaca*  
*us.nā zaiieiti viiāxanō*  
*viiāxmōhu gūšaiiat.uxdō*  
*yō bauuaiti xratu.kātō*  
*yō nāidiiāṅhō gaōtəmahe*  
*parō.yā parštōit auuāiti*  
*āṅhąm raiia xʋarənaṅhaca*  
*huuarə auua paθa aēiti*  
*āṅhąm raiia xʋarənaṅhaca*  
*mā auua paθa aēiti*  
*āṅhąm raiia xʋarənaṅhaca*  
*stārō auua paθa yeiṅti*

By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
a compellingly eloquent<sup>8</sup> man is born,  
one who makes his words heard at the ceremonial gatherings,  
one who becomes sought-after for his discernment,<sup>9</sup>  
who emerges from the discourse,  
(as) one whose entreaty surpasses that of the inferior Gaōtəma.  
By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
the sun goes along, by that path over there.  
By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
the moon goes along, by that path over there.  
By virtue of their splendour and Glory,  
the stars go along, by that path over there.

We must also not fail to notice that this proximate and human juxtaposition of the unnamed poet-sage and Gaōtəma follows directly after the primordial and cosmic juxtaposition of the life-giving spiritual force and the evil spiritual force. Both the proximate and the primordial juxtapositions resolve in beneficial outcomes due to the help of the

<sup>8</sup> For more on *viiāxana-*, which I translate as 'compellingly eloquent', refer to F. B. J. Kuiper, 'The Ancient Aryan verbal contest', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 4 (1960), pp. 243–264.

<sup>9</sup> *xratu-* may also be translated more broadly as 'mental power'. I translate the term with more focus as 'discernment', based on several attestations where the term describes the capacity to perceive and recognise with clarity, and to keenly and correctly distinguish and differentiate between things based on their true nature, motivation, and origin (Y 31.9–10, Y 48.4, and Yt 19.94).

*frauuāši*-s of the *ašauuan*-. Curiously, the stanzas depicting the unfortunate outcome of the primordial and cosmic juxtaposition that would have come to pass, had it not been for the help of the *frauuāši*-s (Yt 13.12–13), are followed by stanzas Yt 13.14–15 which describe earthly and proximate beneficial consequences, while the depiction of the successful outcome of the proximate and human juxtaposition (Yt 13.16, first half) is followed by the second half of Yt 13.16, which describes beneficial cosmic consequences.

It would therefore seem that beneficial outcomes on the cosmic level bode well for the flourishing of the human realm, and beneficial outcomes in the human realm bode well for the upholding and perpetuation of the cosmic order, thus demonstrating an interrelated and interdependent correspondence. Finally, both Yt 13.14–15 as well as the second half of stanza Yt 13.16 share a very similar compositional formulation. Is this all just a mere coincidence or is the poet somehow intentionally associating the primordial cosmic battle between good and evil with the more immediate poetic contest taking place at ceremonial gatherings during which the eloquence and discernment of the unnamed poet-sage triumph over that of Gaōtōma?

Skjærvø argues that evidence of interconnection and correspondence between rituals or ceremonies on the earthly realm, and the unfolding of the cosmos itself, is already possible to discern in the *Gāθās*, where, among other poetic devices, the imagery of a chariot race upwards and into the heavens is alluded to in order to convey this fundamental idea,<sup>10</sup> and that ‘the tongue of the singer is what impels the chariot containing the songs of praise’.<sup>11</sup> Skjærvø goes on to elaborate on how the imagery of weaving is overlaid onto this image of the chariot race:

...it includes the chariot race as an ‘image’, as it were, for the weft shuttle zigzagging upward toward heaven... the sacrificer... weaves the fabric of dawn by sending his breath-soul through the web. The breath-soul, presumably, spins out the thread of the poet’s breath, upon which the hymns to Ahura Mazdā’s praise are carried. Ahura Mazdā... weaves from the other end *his* fabric. Thus, together, divine and human sacrificers weave the web of the sun-lit sky, the fabric, or tissue, out of which the new life will be born.<sup>12</sup>

It is not necessary to agree with all aspects, nuances, and innovations of Skjærvø’s proposition in order to appreciate the basic idea that the performance of Avestan poetry in the appropriate ritual or ceremonial setting opens up pathways of correspondence between the poet and his creator, between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The poet-sage thus takes on the crucial role of interlocutor between the earth and the heavens.

In her edition of the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti*, Hintze describes how, upon being invoked by the worshippers, the heavenly fire of Ahura Mazdā comes down and merges with the ritual fire of the worshippers, and how through this fusion, ‘the latter assumes the characteristics of its heavenly counterpart’.<sup>13</sup> She observes how ‘from that moment on, the worshippers consider themselves to be in the presence of Ahura Mazdā, whose visible form is the light as embodied by the ritual fire’.<sup>14</sup>

In a different context, Jamison and Brereton, while discussing the power of the spoken word in Rig Vedic poetry, comment on the importance of the poet’s skill in using words to

<sup>10</sup> P. O. Skjærvø, ‘Poetic and cosmic weaving in Ancient Iran—Reflections on Yasna 34’, in *Haptaṅhāitiš. Festschrift for Fridrik Thordarson*, (eds) D. Haug and E. Welo (Oslo, 2005), pp. 267–279.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 269–270.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>13</sup> Hintze, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy*, pp. 127–128.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

formulate and embody truth in a ritual context, and on the efficacy of this process in making truth real and present.<sup>15</sup> Jamison and Brereton also discuss the phenomenon of homological truths that transect and interlink disparate spheres of reality:

The Vedic mental universe is structured, in great part, by a web of identifications or equivalences among elements in the ritual realm, in the cosmic realm, and in the realm of the everyday... [T]he poets assume that they share with their audience a web of associations, and this shared knowledge allows the poet to substitute one element for another without overt signalling... [T]he ritual ground itself is often identified with the cosmos, with the ritual fire a pillar connecting heaven and earth and any movement on the ritual ground implicitly compared to a vast journey across or around the cosmos... [T]he reader must be alert to, and open to, this overall substitution principle, and also recognise that these homologies are not mere poetic embellishments, imagery for its own sake, but an implicit statement about the way things *really are*, the pervasive underlying connections unifying apparently disparate elements.<sup>16</sup>

In the vision of the ancient Indo-Iranian peoples, correspondence and interactivity between the human and the divine realms were not unusual. So turning our attention back to Yt 13.16, given its prominent placement as the culmination of the cosmogonic sequence described in the opening *karde* of *Yašt* 13, it is certainly plausible that the poet of *Yašt* 13 envisioned the contest between the unnamed poet-sage (who made 'his words heard at the ceremonial gatherings') and his rival Gaōtəma as consequential for the fate of the cosmos, and that he did so by subtly associating it with the primordial cosmic struggle between the life-giving spiritual force and the evil spiritual force (Yt 13.12–13). The inclusion of Yt 13.16 as the culmination of the cosmogonic phases indicates to the listener that once the macrocosm and the microcosm had been wondrously unfurled into corporeal existence, and the primordial struggle between the two spiritual forces had resulted in a beneficial outcome due to the 'affirmative choices' of the 'righteous', the well-being of the cosmos continued to be maintained by the words, the discernment, and the compelling eloquence of a truly worthy interlocutor. Given the significance of this stanza, it certainly seems possible that the poet of the *Yašt* might be speaking about himself here, and referring to actual ceremonial gatherings during which he made 'his words heard' and emerged triumphant over Gaōtəma, while conscientiously and fully attributing his triumph to the *frauuāši*-s of the *ašauuan*-.

The next two stanzas (Yt 13.17–18) of the first *karde* tell of how the *frauuāši*-s of the first teachers, and those of the as-yet unborn saviours who shall bring about perfection, are the strongest of all, but how among the other *frauuāši*-s, it is the *frauuāši*-s of living men that are stronger than those of the righteous dead. Therefore the living man, who shall sustain the *frauuāši*-s of the *ašauuan*- as well-sustained, shall become a most successful ruler of people, whoever he may be, and thereby he also sustains the Zoroastrian divinities Miθra (concord, alliance) and Arštāt (correctness, rectitude). Assuming again that the unnamed poet-sage who surpasses Gaōtəma in Yt 13.16 is our poet himself, these two stanzas might be a skilfully worded appeal for endorsement and patronage, directed towards the young princes present at the ceremonial gatherings. After recounting his significant triumph over Gaōtəma, and duly paying his respects to the *frauuāši*-s of the first teachers and those of the saviours, our poet, as a living man with his own strong *frauuāši*-

<sup>15</sup> S. W. Jamison and J. P. Brereton, *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India. Vols 1, 2 and 3* (New York, 2014), pp. 22–25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

might be informing the young princes at the ceremony that whoever among them also chooses to sustain his *frauuaṣi-* as well-sustained, shall become a most successful ruler.

### Gaōtāma: a basic analysis of the name

The Avestan stem *gaōtāma-* is the etymological cognate of the Vedic stem *gótama-* (richest in cattle) with the Vedic *-o-* deriving from the Iir. *\*-au-* which is in full grade. While Avestan *gaōtāma-* has preserved the diphthong *-au-*, in Vedic this has been monophthongised into *-o-*. Unlike Vedic *gótama-*, which shows full grade in the first syllable, the related Vedic patronymic *gautamá-* (one who belongs to Gótama) derives from the lengthened grade Iir. diphthong *\*-āu-*, which is continued as *-au-* in Vedic, but preserved as *-āo-* (that is, *-āu-*) in Avestan. It is therefore important to note Avestan *gaōtāma-* is not the exact etymological equivalent of the Vedic patronymic *gautamá-*, but rather of the Vedic *gótama-*. Nonetheless, given that the lengthened grade *gautamá-* (one who belongs to Gótama) is the patronymic of the Buddha, various scholars have commented, though briefly and inconclusively, on who exactly this Gaōtāma in *Yašt* 13 might have been, and asked whether there might be a connection with the Indo-Aryan religious innovator. In addition to being the patronymic of the Buddha, the name *Gautamá* is also the patronymic of the important Rig Vedic poet-sages Nodhas *Gautamá* and *Vāmadeva Gautamá*. *Vāmadeva* in turn becomes the name for another family clan of Vedic poet-sages.<sup>17</sup> The exact etymological cognate of the Avestan name *Gaōtāma* is found in the name of the Rig Vedic poet-sage *Gótama Rāhūgaṇa*.

The identity of *Gaōtāma* thus raises a range of intriguing questions. Was this man an influential and charismatic poet-sage within the tradition of the *Avesta*, or was he rather an influential and charismatic poet-sage of the Vedic tradition on whom the *Avesta* comments? Or is this a reference to a particular emissary or follower of the Buddha, or rather to several emissaries or followers of the Buddha who were advocating for the Buddhist Dharma at ceremonial gatherings during that time? Since the form *viāxman-* in *Yt* 13.16 is the locative plural of *viāxman-* (ceremonial gathering), could the plural number suggest that there might have been several such ongoing encounters, rather than a single one, at which our unnamed poet's entreaty surpassed that of *Gaōtāma*? At the outset, let us be clear that, given the sparse evidence we have at hand, it is impossible to arrive at any definitive answer to these questions. But this should not prevent us from examining a little more closely the likelihood of different scenarios.

### Gaōtāma: a brief summary of some prior observations

Martin Haug seems to clearly see this Avestan name *Gaōtāma* as being a reference to none other than the Buddha himself, and simply notes that there is sufficient evidence for the presence of Buddhism in *Balkh*.<sup>18</sup> But he does not go any further into exploring this proposition. Bartholomae seems to think that a connection with Buddhism cannot be proven, and that it is also unlikely, although he refrains from making a proposal himself.<sup>19</sup> Lommel, in his work on the *Yašt*-s, comments that if this is indeed a reference to the Buddha, then it would be the only Avestan reference to the Indian cultural condition.<sup>20</sup> This is not a fully accurate statement by Lommel, as there are many references to the

<sup>17</sup> Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, p. 555.

<sup>18</sup> M. Haug, *The Parsis: Essays on Their Sacred Language, Writings and Religion* (Bombay, 1878; reprint New Delhi, 1978), p. 208, fn. 1.

<sup>19</sup> C. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Straßburg, 1904; reprint Berlin, 1961), column 481.

<sup>20</sup> H. Lommel, *Die Yašt's des Awesta* (Göttingen, 1927), p. 113, fn. 3.

*daēuuu*-s and to *daēuuu*- worshippers in the *Avesta*. The Avestan word *daēuuu*- (false god) is cognate with Vedic *devá*- (god, divinity).<sup>21</sup> Lommel goes on to suggest that the name *Gaōtāma* might also simply be the Iranian cognate of its Indo-Aryan equivalent. Sanjana proposes that the *Gaōtāma* of *Yašt* 13 is the poet-sage Nodhas Gautamā of the *Rig Veda* (RV), though he makes no substantial argument to support this hypothesis, and his attempt to phonetically link the name Nodhas with the Avestan adjective *nāidiiah*- (weaker, inferior), which is used to describe *Gaōtāma* in *Yt* 13.16, fails to convince.<sup>22</sup> Let us more systematically survey the possibilities.

### **Gaōtāma: an Avestan identity**

In the case that *Gaōtāma* was a poet-sage in the Avestan tradition, we can say little more of him than what we already know from *Yašt* 13. Given *Gaōtāma*'s prominent place in the opening *karde* of *Yašt* 13, and the interesting allusion through which the poet of *Yašt* 13 seems to be comparing the triumph of the unnamed poet-sage over *Gaōtāma* with the primordial cosmic victory of the life-giving spiritual force over the evil spiritual force, it is unfortunate that if *Gaōtāma*'s identity was indeed Avestan, we do not find any mention of him anywhere else in the Avestan literature. While there is a possibility that *Gaōtāma* was an Avestan poet-sage, we should also bear in mind that at this stage in the development of the Zoroastrian spiritual vision we do not know of any truly significant internal schisms, or of any fundamentally divergent factions, whose overcoming would be noteworthy enough to merit being incorporated into *Yašt* 13, and that too, in terms of a cosmic triumph.

### **Gaōtāma: a Turanian identity**

Another option might be to consider a Turanian identity for *Gaōtāma*, and thus envision the rivalry depicted in *Yt* 13.16 as one between an Avestan poet-priest and a Turanian poet-priest. The composers of the Young Avestan texts present themselves and their lineage as Aryan, as does the Persian King Darius the Great. In the Young Avestan texts the Aryan peoples are differentiated from Turanian peoples (*Yt* 13.143), while according to academic linguistic classifications, the Iranians (*īrān* < *\*ariīānām* 'of the Aryans') are identified as 'speakers of Iranian languages' and thus both: the Aryans and the Turanians of the Avestan texts are subsumed under the linguistic category, Iranian.<sup>23</sup> A long-standing adversarial quality is generally ascribed to the relationship between the Aryans and Turanians in the Young Avestan and Pahlavi literature, and the two peoples often seem to be engaged in battles with each other. Yet, in *Yt* 13.143–145 when the *frauuaši*-s of *ašauuan*- men and women of five specific peoples are worshipped (just before the *frauuaši*-s of *ašauuan*- men and women of all peoples are worshipped), the first in this list of the five specific peoples are the Aryans, but the second are the Turanians. This is certainly an important and clear indication that, superseding both gender and ethnicity, it is indeed the quality of a person's *frauuaši*- (affirmative choice) that mattered to the Avestan people and resulted in its worship. It also demonstrates that Turanians

<sup>21</sup> While there were *daēuuu*- worshippers among the Iranian peoples, it is a stretch to assume that all the references in the *Avesta* pertain only to them, and not to the Indo-Aryan *devá*- worshippers as well.

<sup>22</sup> D. P. D. Sanjana, 'Gotama in the Avesta', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1898), pp. 391–394.

<sup>23</sup> M. Mayrhofer, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, vol. 1, fascicle 1–3 (Wien, 1979), p. 81, and H. Humbach and K. Faiss, *Zarathushtra and His Antagonists: A Sociolinguistic Study with English and German Translations of His Gāthās* (Wiesbaden, 2010), p. 1.

could be seen in a very favourable light by the Avestan people. There is another potentially interesting and favourable depiction of Turanians in Y 46.12 of the *Gāθās*:

Y 46.12 *hiiat us ašā naptiiaēšū nafšucā*  
*tūrahiīā uzjān friiānahiīā aojiiaēšū*  
*ārmatōiš gaēθā frādō θβaxšarjā*  
*aṭ iš vohū hēm aibī.mōist manarjā*  
*aēibiīō rafədrāi mazdā sastē ahurō*

When through righteousness he comes up among the noteworthy children and grandchildren of Tūra Friiāna, with the energy of Right-mindedness which promotes the living beings, then the Wise Lord changes them through good thought, to appear to them for support.<sup>24</sup>

The hymn then goes on to list the inner circle of Zaraθuštra's first and closest supporters, including his foremost patron, Prince Vištāspa. If indeed, the name Tūra Friiāna is an indication of the ethnic affiliation of Zaraθuštra's earliest supporters, then this complicates our understanding about why the Zoroastrians of the Young Avestan texts and the Pahlavi literature so often see the Turanians as one of their adversaries. Rather than get too diverted into these questions, for our purposes here it shall suffice to say that between the time of the *Gāθās* and the Young Avestan texts centuries had passed, and by then the Turanian people were seen as adversaries of the Avestan people, who in turn clearly identified themselves and their forebears as Aryans, but nonetheless worshipped the 'affirmative choices' of righteous Turanian men and women.

The major difficulty we face when considering a Turanian identity for Gaōtəma is that we have no further textual material available to explore the particular identity of this hypothetical Turanian poet-priest, and we know relatively little about the Turanians and their religious beliefs and practices. If we were still to make an argument, then we might nonetheless support our hypothesis based on the appearance of Turanian antagonists in the narratives of the *Yašt*-s and also in the later Pahlavi literature. For instance, in the *Zamyād Yašt* (Yt 19.55–64) the Turanian villain Fraṅrasiian futilely attempts to seize the *xʷarənah-* (Glory), which is in the Vourukaša Sea and which belongs to the born and unborn Aryan people and to righteous Zaraθuštra as well. He makes three dramatic attempts to seize the Glory, by dashing into the Vourukaša Sea, but he emphatically fails in each attempt and the Glory totally evades him. In *Yašt* 5, Fraṅrasiian worships the goddess *arəduui- sūrā- anāhitā-* (the [water], proficient, flourishing with life force, unbound). He asks her to grant him the Glory which is flowing in the middle of the Vourukaša Sea and which belongs to the born and unborn Aryan people and to righteous Zaraθuštra as well, but the goddess denies him his request (Yt 5.41–43). However, we learn that just as it had once accompanied great Aryan rulers before him, the Glory accompanies the bright-eyed Aryan Prince Haōsrauuah who is greatly praised by the poet of *Yašt* 19 and is even regarded as an *ahura-* (lord) who is victorious in all respects over the Turanian villain Fraṅrasiian (Yt 19.73–77).

It seems somewhat reasonable to infer that if Avestan and Turanian rulers and princes were in contest and conflict, and if their significant rivalries were incorporated and memorialised into the *Yašt*-s, then maybe even the poet-priests of these two Iranian cultures were sometimes in contest and conflict. It is plausible that here, in the case of Yt 13.16, we might just have one such rivalry incorporated and memorialised into *Yašt* 13. The power,

<sup>24</sup> Translation: Hintze (2022), personal correspondence.

prominence, and relevance of the poet-priest with regard to the overall functioning of the religious, political, and cultural domains of Indo-Iranian and other Indo-European societies needs to be kept in mind.<sup>25</sup> In the case of long-standing political rivalries between ethnic groups such as the Aryans and the Turanians, it is rather likely that the poet-priests of these two groups were absorbed into and engaged with the rivalry as well.

In the Pahlavi text of the *Dēnkard* (Dk), for instance, Turanians are depicted as being opposed to the idea of worshipping Ahura Mazda and seem to be portrayed as supporters or patrons of *daēuua-* worshippers (Dk 7.4).<sup>26</sup> Most interestingly, in Dk 7.4.14, Zaraθuštra is depicted specifically asking the Turanian Urwāitāsang to ‘scorn the *daēuua-s*’ and to ‘profess himself a *mazdā-* worshipping Zaraθuštrian’. That Zaraθuštra himself is depicted asking the Turanian Urwāitāsang to profess himself a *mazdā-* worshipping Zaraθuštrian demonstrates that it was possible, and even desirable, that a Turanian become a *mazdā-* worshipper. This draws our attention back to Y 46.12 and ‘the noteworthy children and grandchildren of Tūra Friiāna’ and to the *frauuaši-s* of *ašauuan-* Turanian men and women worshipped in Yt 13.143. The evidence from the *Dēnkard* demonstrates that along with their conflicts in the political sphere, the Avestan and Turanian peoples also might have held conflicting religious views. The evidence from Y 46.12 and Yt 13.143 indicates that maybe some of the Turanian men and women did indeed choose to scorn the *daēuua-s* and worship Ahura Mazda, and in turn their ‘affirmative choices’ were worshipped by the Avestan people.

Was Gaōtəma a Turanian poet-priest whose followers and/or patron(s) became *mazdā-* worshippers after attending ceremonial gatherings where the compellingly eloquent poet referred to in Yt 13.16 made his words heard? Given the frequency of interaction between Avestan and Turanian peoples, as depicted in the *Yašt-s* and in later Pahlavi literature, it seems plausible that at ceremonial gatherings of the Avestan people, a neighbouring Turanian poet-priest might be present. While certainly more attractive than the Avestan hypothesis, a Turanian identity for Gaōtəma nonetheless still remains mostly speculative.

### Gaōtəma: a Buddhist identity

There are various theories about the time of the Buddha’s birth, some placing it as early as 623 BC, with the start of his ministry at 588 BC and his death at 543 BC. However, scholarly consensus now seems to be that he was born around 480 BC, that he began to spread his teachings at around 445 BC, and that he lived until around 400 BC.<sup>27</sup> Most Avestan scholars would agree that the *Yašt-s* were probably composed centuries prior to that date, and that they sometimes refer to content that originates even earlier, deep in Indo-Iranian times. Therefore, in the more likely scenario that the redaction of *Yašt* 13 that has been passed down to us was completed prior to 445 BC, we must—if we accept the scholarly consensus regarding the time of the Buddha—reject the hypothesis that this Avestan attestation of Gaōtəma refers to the Buddha. But if for some reason the redaction of *Yašt* 13 in the form in which it has come down to us can be reasonably dated to even a century or two later than 445 BC, and/or if for some reason an earlier date for the life of the Buddha is later supported by new evidence, then the hypothesis for a Buddhist identity of Gaōtəma begins to look more plausible. For now, let us consider the case based on what we know.

<sup>25</sup> C. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (New York, 1995), pp. 68–84, and M. L. West *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (New York, 2007), pp. 29–31, and Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>26</sup> See M. Molé, *La Légende De Zoroastre: Selon Les Textes Pehlevis* (Paris, 1967), pp. 42–45.

<sup>27</sup> R. Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford and New York, 1998), pp. 7–34.

While it is well known that the royally decreed and enabled spread of Buddhism under the direction of Emperor Aśoka began shortly after his conversion and coronation in or around 270 BC, it is easy to overlook the earlier diffusion of Buddhist teachings. Since its inception the Buddhist tradition was strongly proselytising in nature. This imperative was underscored by Gautamá Buddha himself, who sent out wandering monks to spread his teachings and spent 45 years of his own life teaching and imparting his message with great success, even intentionally using the language of the ordinary vernacular rather than the more formal Sanskrit to do so.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the 45 years of active ministry and the spreading forth of the Dharma during the life of the Buddha, the propagation of the Dharma further expanded and amplified after his death. Just a mere three months after his death, a group of 500 *arhat*-s (ones who are worthy), who, under the direct tutelage of the Buddha had attained perfect understanding of his teachings, together codified his message in an oral form and performed a communal recitation.<sup>29</sup> In that age, and in that particular religious and cultural setting (as also in the Vedic and Avestan contexts), an oral codification was the precise manner in which texts and teachings were remembered and passed along, often with significantly more success, resilience, and scope, than in later manuscript traditions.<sup>30</sup>

While the immediate geographic and cultural sphere in which this message would have spread is that of the Indian subcontinent, we also know that during these centuries, there was significant trade and travel along the Silk Roads. The presence of a Buddhist emissary in Bactria in the second century BC is already documented in the well-known Buddhist text *Milinda Pañha* ('The Questions of Milinda'), which chronicles the dialogue between the Buddhist preacher Nāgasena and the Bactrian-Greek King Menander 1 ('Milinda' in Pali), who came to embrace Buddhism.<sup>31</sup> Given the strong proselytising imperative of early Buddhism, it is not entirely unlikely that there might have been other Buddhist monks making similar missions westward to Central Asia prior to the time of Nāgasena. The contact between Zoroastrian and Buddhist thinkers at some point between the start of the Buddha's ministry and Aśoka's coronation, though unlikely, cannot be decisively ruled out, just as such contact cannot for now be decisively proven.

From a purely philosophical point of view, the contrast between 1) the life-affirming and world-perfecting ethos of Avestan thinking, as portrayed in *Yašt* 13, and 2) the life-relinquishing and world-renouncing ethos of Buddhist thinking makes for an interesting juxtaposition that would evoke a rich and consequential debate, which if taking place at ceremonial gatherings at the time, might certainly qualify as significant enough to be recorded and memorialised into a stanza of *Yašt* 13. In *Yašt* 13, the poet sings of the wonders of creation, of the propagation of life, and of the furthering of the cosmos towards the ultimate perfecting of existence itself. But these descriptions of the creations as being beautiful, and of the propagation of the cosmos towards perfection, and of the lushness, wonder, and fertility of the waters and the earth, as well as of the rich diversity of plant and animal life and the miracle of biological reproduction, all seem to be at odds with the Buddhist perspective that a preoccupation with such things, however pleasing they might be, is ultimately an incidental digression or possibly even an entrapment along the path to the end of suffering. The Buddhist concern is not with the wonder of creation and the healing of the corporeal world, but rather with the entrapments of creation and corporeality, and thus the goal of relinquishing the world. It is not so much fascinated by the

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7–58.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35–58.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

miracle of birth processes, but rather its very goal is the termination of birth processes forever.

In the Pahlavi text of the *Bundahišn* (Bdh), during the creation of creation (Bdh 3.26–27), the *frauuāši-s*, before entering the corporeal world and while still in the spiritual realm, are endowed by Ahura Mazdā with *xrad ī harwišp-āgāh* (all-aware discernment). In their prescience they can foresee the evil and suffering that will befall them should they choose to enter corporeal existence, but they are also assured of the ultimate defeat of evil and their own restoration and immortality. Ahura Mazdā offers them the option to remain protected, safe, and removed from evil forever, but they nonetheless choose to enter the realm of corporeal existence in order to help Ahura Mazdā in his struggle, and to strive towards the ultimate defeat of evil and the perfecting of all existence.<sup>32</sup> The Zoroastrian motivation and choice to enter the world stands in contrast to the Buddhist motivation and choice to exit the world.<sup>33</sup> Clearly there is much more nuance, substance, and intricacy underpinning the divergent outlooks. These cannot be encapsulated by pithy simplifications and are undeniably deserving of much deeper and richer contemplation. But for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that, along these lines, there is at least some significant and fundamental contrast in the Zoroastrian and Buddhist ethos.

So hypothetically 1) Buddhist monks could have encountered Zoroastrian poet-priests prior to Aśoka's coronation, and 2) the Buddhist monks and Zoroastrian poet-priests would certainly have had interesting philosophical disagreements, especially given that their worldviews were so divergent. But are these hypothetical possibilities sufficient to indicate that the Gaōtəma in stanza Yt 13.16 refers to the Buddha, and that Buddhist emissaries really were present at the ceremonial gatherings, debating against the compellingly eloquent unnamed poet-sage in Yt 13.16?

Without more evidence, this question cannot be answered affirmatively. While three of the potential identities of Gaōtəma—Avestan, Turanian, Vedic—do not pose any chronological challenges, the only potential identity that does pose a significant challenge of chronology is the Buddhist one. Even if we extend our hypothetical encounters into the earliest days of Buddhism, it nonetheless seems unlikely that Avestan poets were still able to compose new Avestan texts or stanzas in grammatically correct language in the fifth century BC. By around 400 BC we know the Old Iranian languages were changing, as the grammatical case system collapsed and the languages were developing towards their Middle Iranian forms. If we stretch ourselves by rejecting the scholarly consensus about the time of the Buddha and instead accept the theory for the earliest possible date for the start of the Buddha's ministry—588 BC—and if we then assume the latest possible date for the redaction of *Yašt* 13 that has been passed down to us, then maybe one could still make a thin argument for a Buddhist identity of Gaōtəma. But this seems very unlikely—and we do actually have another more viable explanation for Gaōtəma's identity.

### Gaōtəma: a Vedic identity

So far we have considered options for a possible identity of Gaōtəma that is either chronologically plausible (Avestan, Turanian) and/or that might entail religious differences

<sup>32</sup> F. Pakzad, *Bundahišn: Zoroastrische Kosmogonie und Kosmologie*, vol. 1, critical edn (Tehran, 2005), pp. 52–53, and D. Agostini and S. Thrope, *The Bundahišn: The Zoroastrian Book of Creation* (New York, 2020), p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> The Zoroastrian orientation towards caring for and perfecting the world finds strong resonance in Christianity. Among many other possible examples, the love and care that God has for the world is prominently evident in John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whomsoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.'

relevant enough to have merited being incorporated into a stanza of Yašt 13 in order to memorialise how the Avestan worldview might have prevailed over a rival and competing worldview (Buddhist, Turanian). Let us now turn our attention to our final option. This is the option of a possible Vedic identity of Gaōtəma, specifically that of a poet-sage who was a proponent of the worship of the Rig Vedic divinity Indra.

### *Deep roots and related branches*

Based on the striking and examined correspondences between the language and literature of the ancient Iranian and Indo-Aryan peoples, it is now accepted by most scholars that these two groups were once a single group of Indo-Iranian people, who, based on the relative time horizon of the evolution of their reconstructed language within the overall scheme of the Indo-European language family, most likely lived during the middle to the late third millennium BC, after which, in the early second millennium BC, they began to bifurcate into the Proto-Indo-Aryans and the Proto-Iranians. Discussing the correspondences between the two Old Iranian languages (Avestan and Old Persian) and their Indo-Aryan cognate (Vedic Sanskrit), Hintze notes that systematic correspondences are found 'not only in the sound, form and lexicon of ordinary words and phrases, but also in ritual terms..., in poetic phrases, and in technical terms for abstract concepts, thus pointing to a shared system not only of language but also of ritual, poetry and values'.<sup>34</sup>

This linguistic time horizon correlates relatively well with archaeological evidence, which in turn matches with evidence from texts. Evidence from the sites of settlements and cemeteries dated between 2100 BC and 1800 BC and located southeast of the Ural Mountains, between the upper Ural River on the west and the upper Tobol River on the east, has convinced many archaeologists of a distinctive Indo-Iranian presence, particularly given how precisely the architecture of grave pits at Sintashta correlates to the textual descriptions in RV 10.18, and how excavations of horse sacrifices in Sintashta correlate with the textual description of horse sacrifice for royal funerals in RV 1.162.<sup>35</sup> Hintze observes that such specificity in the correlation of textual and archaeological evidence provides us with what might be 'the earliest attested traces of Indo-Iranian material culture and even of Indo-Iranian beliefs'.<sup>36</sup> Anthony goes so far as to call the Sintashta culture the 'best and clearest candidate for the crucible of Indo-Iranian identity and language',<sup>37</sup> and offers an interesting conjecture that the public feasting and celebration that would accompany the impressive sacrifices at these Sintashta sites 'played an important role in attracting and converting celebrants to the Indo-Iranian ritual system and language'.<sup>38</sup>

Anthony demonstrates how the location of Sintashta societies on the eastern border of the Pontic-Caspian Steppe brought them into contact with the thriving urban centres of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC). The BMAC, whose native population did not speak Indo-European languages, was a flourishing civilisation that first began to manifest in Margiana along the Murgab River in 2100 BC–2000 BC, and subsequently in Bactria along the upper valley of the Oxus River (Amu Darya) in 2000 BC–1800 BC. It shared strong relations with a wide network of ancient civilisations that ranged from Mesopotamia, Elam, and the Arabian Gulf, all the way to the Indus

<sup>34</sup> A. Hintze, M. Kümmel and B. Peschl, 'Avestan', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Ancient Indo-European Grammars*, (eds) G. Keydana, S. Dalpedri and S. Skopeteas (Cambridge, forthcoming).

<sup>35</sup> D. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton and Oxford, 2007), pp. 375, 409, 371–457.

<sup>36</sup> Hintze, Kümmel and Peschl, 'Avestan'.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language*, p. 410.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

Valley Civilisation.<sup>39</sup> This sophisticated urban civilisation contained large planned towns with impressive citadels and temples, and its craftsmen produced beautiful artefacts of bronze, lead, silver, and gold.<sup>40</sup> Anthony notes that the 'brick-walled towns of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) in Central Asia connected the metal miners of the northern Steppes with an almost bottomless market for copper'<sup>41</sup> and that 'during the classic phase of the BMAC, 2000–1800 BCE, contact with Steppe people became much more visible'.<sup>42</sup> It is presumably during this particular window of time (2000 BC–1800 BC) that Indo-Iranian speakers from the north, interacting more regularly and systematically with the impressive culture of the BMAC, first began to absorb some important loan words into their language from the non-Indo-European language of the BMAC.<sup>43</sup>

The Andronovo culture of the eastern Steppes emerged between 1900 BC–1800 BC, and spanned an extremely wide-ranging area from the Ural Steppes: reaching eastward to the Altai mountains and extending southward along the Oxus River in Central Asia. According to Anthony 'the source of the Andronovo horizon can be identified in an extraordinary burst of economic, military, and ritual innovations by a single culture—the Sintashta culture'.<sup>44</sup> After 1800 BC, as Andronovo mining and pastoral camps developed around the middle and upper Zeravshan valley, other groups of the Andronovo people (known as Tazabagyab) spread into the lower Zeravshan valley and the delta of the lower Oxus River, as irrigation farmers.<sup>45</sup> This brought them in very close proximity to the urban culture of the BMAC. After 1800 BC, these Indo-Iranian speakers from the Steppes, being in more intensive contact with the people of the BMAC, and well within its cultural and political sphere, absorbed into their language even more non-Indo-European loan words from the BMAC population.<sup>46</sup> After 1800 BC, as the BMAC civilisation began to decline, the Andronovo-Tazabagyab culture concomitantly rose in prominence and power, and seemed to be integrating to some degree with the fading BMAC culture.<sup>47</sup> Between 1800 BC and 1600 BC, Anthony observes that 'control over the trade in minerals (copper, tin, turquoise) and pastoral products (horses, dairy, leather) gave the Andronovo-Tazabagyab pastoralists great economic power in the old BMAC oasis towns and strongholds, and chariot warfare gave them military control. Social, political, and even military integration probably followed'.<sup>48</sup> According to Anthony, it is these Andronovo-Tazabagyab pastoralists who gradually migrated eastward into the Punjab as the Indo-Aryans.<sup>49</sup> Lubotsky's important analysis of the occurrence and distribution of loan words before and after the Indo-Iranians split into two branches suggests that of the original Indo-Iranian speakers, the Proto-Indo-Aryans absorbed many more loan words from the new cultures they encountered, as they led the southward migrations ahead of the Proto-Iranians, and first began to migrate southeast through Central Asia and towards

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 421–427.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456, p. 428, and A. Lubotsky, 'The Indo-Iranian substratum', in *Early Contacts between Uralic and Indo-European: Linguistic and Archaeological Considerations*, Papers presented at an international symposium held at the Tvärminne Research Station of the University of Helsinki, 8–10 January 1999, (eds) C. Carpelan, A. Parpola and P. Koskikallio (Helsinki, 2001), pp. 301–317.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language*, p. 450.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>46</sup> Lubotsky, 'The Indo-Iranian substratum', and Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language*, pp. 455–457.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language*, pp. 452–454.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent (a small group also migrated southwest, reaching as far as the Mitanni kingdom).<sup>50</sup> It was only thereafter that the Proto-Iranians also began migrating southeast, and moved into those Central Asian Indo-Iranian borderlands, where they remained, before later spreading into the Iranian plateau.<sup>51</sup>

The archaeological timeline for this migration coincides well with the linguistic evidence that places the dates of the earliest attestations of Iranian and Indo-Aryan languages (the Old Avestan texts and the *Rig Veda*) at approximately around the middle of the second millennium BC. Clear references to any identifiable geographical entities are absent in Old Avestan texts (though there is an indirect hint of a reference to the Turanian lands, through the mention of Tūra Friiāna in the *Gāθās* (Y 46.12), in a hymn that begins with Zaraθuštra asking Ahura Mazdā about which land he should go to in order to gather the requisite support and following for his new spiritual vision). However, in the Young Avestan texts, which variously date from several centuries after the Old Avestan texts and which refer to content from the Old Avestan texts and also contain mythic material that reaches into an even deeper past, a much clearer picture begins to emerge. Particularly, it is the texts of the *Yašt*-s and the *Vidēvdād* (Vd) that provide us with very specific place names, which point to southern Central Asia. As noted by Hintze:

Places such as the *Vourukaša* Sea, Lake *Kqsaōia* (the modern Lake Hāmūn) and the river *Haētumant* (the modern river Helmand in Sīstān) play significant parts in the epic and theological imagery in the Avesta. Some of the beliefs, such as the birth of the 'victorious' *Saošiiant*, or world saviour, are especially connected with the land of Sīstān.<sup>52</sup>

Trying to trace the paths of the Young Avestan followers of Zaraθuštra, Grenet examines the names of geographic features and places as they are recorded in the Young Avestan texts, especially in the *Vidēvdād*, and reconstructs four sequences of migration originating in what the texts refer to as the *airiianəm vaējō vaṅhuiiā dāitiiaiiā* (the Aryan rapids/springs of the Good River), which according to Grenet corresponds 'rather well to the water system of the Pamirs and the pre-Pamirian highlands'.<sup>53</sup> The first sequence originates in the Pamirs and moves through Sogdiana and into Margiana along the Oxus River (which he identifies as the 'Good River' of the Avestan texts); the second sequence again starts near the Pamirs and moves through Bactria and reaches Herāt; the third moves through what is most likely the Kābul region, and eventually through Arachosia and into Sīstān; and the fourth and final sequence moves through Rāgh in Badakhšān and eventually into the Hapta Həndu region (which, following Gnoli, he recognises as the *Sapta Sindhava* [seven rivers] of the *Rig Veda*) in northern India.<sup>54</sup>

While conceding a few remaining uncertainties in this proposition, Grenet notes that they 'do not break the logical construction of the list: it is a group of four sequences each starting from the same area and each arranged according to the principle of continuity'.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Lubotsky, 'The Indo-Iranian substratum', pp. 4–7, and Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language*, pp. 455–457.

<sup>51</sup> Lubotsky, 'The Indo-Iranian substratum', pp. 4–7, and Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language*, pp. 455–457.

<sup>52</sup> A. Hintze, 'Zarathustra's time and homeland: linguistic perspectives', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, (eds) M. Stausberg and Y. Vevaina with A. Tessmann (West Sussex, 2015), p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> F. Grenet, 'Zarathustra's time and homeland: geographic perspectives', in *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21–29.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

He also further notes how the southwestern migrations from the Pamirs eventually stop at the arc of Merv-Herāt-Sistān, therefore forming a western boundary just before the Iranian plateau, and that the initial phase of the migration sequences in this list of the *Vīdēvdād* 'bears witness to a period when the main focus of the Zoroastrian priests, or maybe rulers, was still along the Indian border, with combined or alternating phases of defence and encroachment'.<sup>56</sup> Could some of these Central Asian borderlands be the places where Avestan and Vedic poet-sages interacted?

While the picture that emerges might still not be in perfect focus, it is interesting how much of the linguistic, archaeological, and textual evidence begins to approximately come together. Another academic discipline now participating in the discussion by analysing extracted DNA samples from ancient humans to reconstruct patterns of population migration is that of genetics.<sup>57</sup> Analysing the DNA data, Narasimhan et al. (whose study utilises genome-wide ancient DNA data, mostly from Central Asia and northernmost South Asia) demonstrate that BMAC communities, whose DNA reveals no evidence of Steppe pastoralist-derived ancestry before 2100 BC, began regularly interacting with people carrying Steppe pastoralists ancestry between ~2100 BC and 1700 BC.<sup>58</sup> Based on their analysis, they declare: '...our data document a southward movement of ancestry ultimately descended from Yamnaya Steppe pastoralists who spread into Central Asia by the turn of the second millennium BCE'.<sup>59</sup> Then, using DNA from northernmost South Asia, they go on to demonstrate how Steppe ancestry spread further southward. They note how a distinctive *Central\_Steppe\_MLBA* cluster, which also included DNA samples of individuals associated with the Corded Ware, Srubnaya, Petrovka, and Sintashta archaeological complexes, 'was the primary conduit for spreading Yamnaya Steppe pastoralist-derived ancestry to South Asia'.<sup>60</sup> They note that: '...the chain of transmission into South Asia has been unclear because of a lack of relevant ancient DNA. Our observation of the spread of *Central\_Steppe\_MLBA* ancestry into South Asia in the first half of the second millennium BCE provides this evidence...'.<sup>61</sup> The overlap of these findings with the archaeological, linguistic, and textual evidence considered so far is rather remarkable.

Without going too much further into the details, an abundance of strong linguistic evidence, growing archaeological evidence, and recent studies in the field of ancient DNA and genetics, when taken together and analysed cautiously and thoughtfully with the evidence of the geographic names mentioned in the Young Avestan texts and the Vedic texts, now gives us a means to carefully overlay, compare, and piece together some clearer, though approximate, patterns and phases of Indo-Iranian migrations, as well as sequential chronologies and geographies for when and where the two groups—the Iranians and the Indo-Aryans—started to emerge more distinctively as separate but related and interacting entities.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> D. Reich, *Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past* (New York, 2018), and V. M. Narasimhan et al., 'The formation of human populations in South and Central Asia', *Science* 365 (2019), eaat7487, doi: 10.1126/science.aat7487.

<sup>58</sup> Narasimhan et al., 'The formation of human populations', pp. 4–5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Lubotsky, 'The Indo-Iranian substratum'; J. P. Mallory, 'Archaeological models and Asian Indo-Europeans', in *Indo-Iranian Languages and Peoples*, (ed.) N. Sims-Williams (Oxford, 2002), pp. 19–42; Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel and Language*; Hintze, 'Zarathustra's time and homeland: linguistic perspectives'; Grenet, 'Zarathustra's time and homeland: geographic perspectives'; Reich, *Who We Are and How We Got Here*; Narasimhan et al., 'The formation of human populations'; and Hintze, Kümmel and Peschl, 'Avestan'.

Given the interdisciplinary evidence, it is rather likely that Iranian poets and *mazdā*-worshippers of the Avestan tradition encountered Indo-Aryan poets and *devá*-worshippers of the Vedic tradition in the Central Asian Indo-Iranian borderlands. The ubiquitous references to *daēuua*-s and *daēuua*-worshippers in Old Avestan and Young Avestan texts might point to sustained interactions over a significant duration of time. Importantly, as Hintze, referencing Sims-Williams, notes: ‘The differences between Avestan and the language of the earliest Vedic texts, the *Rigveda*, are chiefly phonetic, while most of the grammar is the same, so that Avestan and Vedic speakers would probably have been able to communicate with each another.’<sup>63</sup> Thus from a chronological, geographic, cultural, textual, and linguistic point of view, it is certainly plausible that the consequential discourse between the unnamed Avestan poet-sage and Gaōtəma, which is mentioned in *Yašt* 13.16, could indeed be an attestation of interactions between an Avestan post-sage and a Vedic poet-sage somewhere in Central Asia. But if so, what is it that they were so fervently debating?

### *Inverse perspectives on a primordial assault*

The *Rig Veda* contains many beautifully composed, mythically intricate, visually evocative, and metaphysically sophisticated hymns and stanzas on the processes and the agents of creation and cosmogenesis. Composed by poet-sages belonging to different lineages, generations, and affiliations, these do not all share precisely the same vision, perspective, or realisation, nor do they always attribute creation to the same divinities or processes. Among the various mythic formulations related to the propagation of life that are found in the *Rig Veda*, one particular myth—that of a primordial assault—prominently stands out and is variously portrayed in numerous *Rig Vedic* hymns. The protagonist of this myth is Indra, the foremost *devá*- (god, divinity) of the *Rig Veda*. The broad contours of the myth are as follows.

An enormous serpent named *Vṛtra* is coiled around a mountain within which the waters themselves are confined. By valiantly attacking and slaying *Vṛtra* in a fearsome battle that causes the earth to shake and heaven to tremble, the divinity Indra also smashes apart the mountain, thereby liberating, activating, and propagating the waters. In *RV* 1.32.4 Indra’s attack also results in the birth of the sun, the heaven, and the dawn. The elemental and symbolic factors of life are thereby unleashed by Indra. There is an intentional conceptual play on the serpent’s name, because the Vedic word *vṛtra* means ‘resistance’, and the serpent *Vṛtra* is the most sinister manifestation of ‘resistance’, one that forestalls the very propagation of life itself. Indra, on the other hand, liberates life and is aptly known by the epithet *vṛtrahán*- (smasher of resistance, smasher of *Vṛtra*). The Indra myth thus depicts the necessity of a primordial assault from the perspective of the attacker. It paradoxically requires destruction, in order to fulfil the purpose of creation. As Jamison and Brereton succinctly summarise: ‘in order for life to exist *Vṛtra* had to be destroyed’.<sup>64</sup>

The theme of a primordial assault is also prominent in the Zoroastrian literature, though it is depicted from a perspective inverse to that of the Indra myth, in that: 1) rather than being perpetrated by the hero of the myth, the assault is carried out by the villain of the myth; 2) the attacker is not liberating what is captive, but rather is jealously corrupting and harming what is pristine and perfect; and 3) through his assault, the attacker is eventually trapped within the scheme of creation and thus seals his own ultimate downfall. While this is clearly not the place for a comprehensive study of the highly

<sup>63</sup> Hintze, Kümmel and Peschl, ‘Avestan’.

<sup>64</sup> Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, p. 38.

nuanced mythic depictions of the primordial assault in Vedic, Avestan, and Pahlavi texts, the degree to which they shed light on each other (and therefore possibly on earlier Indo-Iranian imagination and on possible representations of the schisms that appear between the Avestan and Vedic religious outlooks and peoples) merits at least a brief excursion into the conversation.

Before we look at the Zoroastrian perspective, let us survey a few relevant depictions of the Indra myth in Rig Vedic hymns, some of which are transmitted under the names of Vedic poets who either bear the name Gótama or the patronymic Gautamá:

RV 1.63.1 (attributed to Nodhas Gautamá): You are great, Indra, you who, on just being born, with your tempests put heaven and earth in (the path of your) onslaught, so that all the vast masses, even the mountains, though firmly fixed, stirred like dust-motes in fear of you.<sup>65</sup>

RV 1.80.13 (attributed to Gótama Rāhūgaṇa): When with your mace you set Vṛtra and your missile to fighting, o Indra, your strength, as you sought to smash the serpent, kept pressing toward heaven.—They cheer on your sovereign power.<sup>66</sup>

RV 1.32.4–5 (attributed to Hiraṇyastūpa Āṅgīrasa): When you, Indra, smashed the first-born of the serpents and then beguiled the wives of the wily ones, then, giving birth to the sun, the heaven, and the dawn, since that time you have surely never found a rival. Indra smashed Vṛtra [/Obstacle] the very great obstacle, whose shoulders were spread apart, with his mace, his great weapon. Like logs hewn apart by an axe, the serpent would lie, embracing the earth [/soaking the earth (with his blood)].<sup>67</sup>

RV 4.17.1–3 (attributed to Vāmādeva Gautamá): You, Indra, are great. To you did Earth, to you did Heaven, magnanimously yield dominion. After you smashed Vṛtra with your strength, you let loose the rivers, which had been swallowed by the serpent. At your birth Heaven trembled and Earth flinched in fear of your turbulence and of the battle fury that is yours. The well-founded mountains throbbed, the wastelands shuddered, and the waters ran. He split the mountain, hurling his mace with his strength, revealing his power, displaying his might. He smashed Vṛtra with his mace in his exhilaration. With their bull struck down, the waters ran swiftly.<sup>68</sup>

RV 4.19.4 (attributed to Vāmādeva Gautamá): Indra made the earth shake to its bottom with his strength, as the wind does the water with its forces. He knotted up the strongholds, eager in his own strength; he cut down the peaks of the mountains.<sup>69</sup>

RV 4.19.8 (attributed to Vāmādeva Gautamá): Having smashed Vṛtra, he sets loose the rivers, welcomed [/gurgling] through many dawns and autumns. Indra drilled out the streams, which had been surrounded and hard pressed, to flow along the earth.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Translation: Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, p. 183.

<sup>66</sup> Translation: *ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>67</sup> Translation: *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>68</sup> Translation: *ibid.*, p. 582.

<sup>69</sup> Translation: *ibid.*, p. 588.

<sup>70</sup> Translation: *ibid.*

One cannot help but compare some of the themes of the Indra myth to themes from the primordial assault of the evil spiritual force depicted in the Pahlavi text of the *Bundahišn*. When read alongside, they often seem like different versions of the same story told from inverse perspectives, with a few notable modifications. Though the *Bundahišn* was compiled and written down many centuries after the *Rig Veda* and the *Avesta* were composed, it incorporates material from ancient Zoroastrian sources that were passed down and elaborated upon through the ages, in a resilient, living, and well-established oral tradition. Agostini and Thrope emphasise that the *Bundahišn* is ‘unbreakably linked to the Avestan tradition’ and that quotations and references to the *Avesta* are ‘the bricks of the book, and sometimes only the thinnest layer of narrative mortar binds them together’.<sup>71</sup> Most interestingly, ‘they include references to lost portions of the *Avesta*’.<sup>72</sup> Let us now consider the following two passages of the *Bundahišn* in light of the Indra myth:

Bdh 4.10 Then the Evil Spirit and all the powerful *daēuua*-s rose up against the lights. He saw the sky, which had already been shown to him spiritually before it had been corporeally created. He attacked it with jealous desire. The sky was at the star station, but Ahriman dragged it down into the void... He wished that, like a snake, the sky would fall down and break apart on the earth. He burrowed through at noon on the day of Ohrmazd in the month of Frawardīn; the sky feared him like cattle fear the wolf. Then he came—as I have said—to the water that had been made ready under the earth, and he burrowed through the middle of the earth and went inside...<sup>73</sup>

Bdh 6C.1–4 When the Evil Spirit burrowed through, the earth shuddered. As the earth quaked, the essence of the mountains, which had been created in the earth, at that moment caused the mountains to begin to move... At that moment, they came up from the earth like trees whose branches stretch above and whose roots reach down below, and their roots crossed each other and made a web. Afterwards the earth could no longer tremble. The route to the source of the waters lies in the mountains, below and above the roots of the mountains; that is, it flows through them, like the roots of trees in the earth, and like the blood that brings strength to the body through the veins.<sup>74</sup>

Some particularly noteworthy parallels are: 1) the upward gesture of the evil spiritual force and the *daēuua*-s as they rise up against the lights in the sky in order to attack (Bdh 4.10), compared with how Indra’s strength also ‘kept pressing toward heaven’ as he ‘sought to smash the serpent’ (RV 1.80.13); 2) the vivid image of smashing down or breaking a serpent upon the earth, which occurs in both myths: in the *Bundahišn* the evil spiritual force attacks the sky and drags it down, wishing that ‘like a snake’ it would fall and break upon the earth (Bdh 4.10), while in the Indra myth the enormous serpent Vṛtra is smashed by Indra (RV 1.32.4–5, RV 4.17.1–3) and ‘like logs hewn apart by an axe, the serpent would lie, embracing the earth’ (RV 1.32.4–5); 3) the description of how ‘Indra made the earth shake to its bottom with his strength’ and ‘cut down the peaks of the mountains’ in the *Rig Veda* (RV 4.19.4) as well as the stirring (RV 1.63.1) and throbbing (RV 4.17.1–3) of the mountains, compared with the shuddering and quaking of the earth caused by the assault of the evil spiritual force (Bdh 6C.1–4) and intriguingly

<sup>71</sup> Agostini and Thrope, *The Bundahišn*, p. xxii.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

<sup>73</sup> Translation: *ibid.*, p. 30. (For ease of cross-identification, I render into Avestan: *daēuua*-.)

<sup>74</sup> Translation: *ibid.*, p. 47.

contrasted with the courageous raising up of the mountains by the ‘essence of the mountains’ in order to help stabilise the earth in the *Bundahišn* (Bdh 6C.1–4); 4) in the *Bundahišn* the adversary burrows through the earth to reach ‘the water that had been made ready under the earth’ (Bdh 4.10), while in the *Rig Veda* ‘Indra drilled out the streams’ (RV 4.19.8); 5) the *Bundahišn* imagines the route to the source of the waters lies in the mountains (Bdh 6C.1–4) which is compared with how, in addition to slaying Vṛtra, it is also by splitting the mountain that Indra releases the waters (RV 4.17.1–3); 6) in the *Bundahišn* the sky fears the evil spiritual force like cattle fear the wolf (Bdh 4.10), while in the *Rig Veda* heaven also trembled in fear of Indra’s turbulence and battle fury (RV 4.17.1–3); 7) in the *Bundahišn* the day and month of the confrontation align with the two main cosmogonic entities of the Avestan *Yašt* 13 (Bdh 4.10). Finally, to top it all, the attackers who accompany the evil spiritual force in the *Bundahišn* are unambiguously identified as the *daēuua-s*.

As we have seen earlier, this primordial assault of the evil spiritual force is alluded to in *Yašt* 13, and the decisive role of the *frauuāši-s* in the favourable resolution of the situation is prominently mentioned (Yt 13.12–13). In Yt 13.45, the *frauuāši-s* of the *ašauuan-* are depicted with helmets, weapons, and armour, fighting in battles against the *daēuua-s* and surrounded by light. The role played by the *frauuāši-s* in the primordial battle is described in some more detail in the *Bundahišn*:

Bdh 6A.1–4 When the Evil Spirit burrowed through the sky, and he saw the usefulness of creation, the supremacy of the *yazata-s*, and his own impotence, he wanted to scurry back out the way he came. But the spirit of the sky arrayed himself against the Evil Spirit like a brave warrior clad in metal armour—that is the very description of the sky itself—and vowed to remain until Ohrmazd constructs around the sky a stronger defence than the sky itself. He set the *frauuāši-s* of the *ašauuan-* warriors, with valiant horses and spears in hand, around the fortress like hair crowns the head, like righteous men guarding a fortress; that fortress, in which the righteous dwell, is called the awareness of the righteous. But the Evil Spirit did not find a way to scurry back; he saw the destruction of the *daēuua-s* and he himself made impotent, just as clearly as Ohrmazd saw his ultimate victory and the achievement of the Restoration of his creations forever and ever.<sup>75</sup>

The realisation and apprehension that dawns upon the evil spiritual force in the *Bundahišn* after his assault, and his anxious desire to flee, also finds resonance in a unique stanza of the iconic Indra hymn RV 1.32, which unexpectedly but similarly tells of the fear that creeps into Indra’s heart and of how he flees across 99 flowing rivers when he beholds the consequences of his assault—a mysterious ‘avenger of the serpent’:

RV 1.32.14 (attributed to Hiranyastūpa Āṅgīrasa): Whom did you see, Indra, as the avenger of the serpent, when fear came into your heart after you smashed him, and when you crossed over the ninety-nine flowing rivers, like a frightened falcon through the airy realms?<sup>76</sup>

This interesting stanza of the *Rig Veda* has caused confusion for some Vedic scholars. Jamison and Brereton describe it as a most mysterious conclusion to the hymn it belongs to.<sup>77</sup> Why is the divine protagonist of the hymn suddenly depicted fleeing in fright?

<sup>75</sup> Translation: *ibid.*, p. 45. (For ease of cross-identification, I render into Avestan: *yazata-*, *frauuāši-*, *ašauuan-*, and *daēuua-*.)

<sup>76</sup> Translation: Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, p. 136.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

RV 1.32 does not answer the mysterious question of who Indra saw, but characterises this entity as ‘the avenger of the serpent’. Bdh 6A.1–4 leaves no mystery: the evil spiritual force sees the usefulness of creation and the supremacy of the *yazata*-s<sup>78</sup> contrasted against his own impotence. After he is trapped by a multitudinous array of *frauuaši*-s of *aṣauuan*- warriors, the evil spiritual force foresees the destruction of the *daēuua*-s, and his own impending impotence, just as clearly as Ahura Mazda foresees his ultimate victory and the final restoration of his creations. The evil spiritual force wants to scurry back the way he came, but being trapped, does not find a way out. In Bdh 6A.1–4, the image of the countless *frauuaši*-s keeping guard over ‘that fortress, in which the righteous dwell’ is reminiscent of Yt 13.59–62, where we learn that 99,999 *frauuaši*-s keep watch over: 1) the radiant Vourukaša Sea (the source from which the waters disperse across the seven regions of the world—Yt 8.30–34, and in which flows the divine Glory that belongs to the born and unborn Aryan people and righteous Zaraθuštra—Yt 5.41–43, Yt 19.55–64); 2) the stars of the Haptōiringa constellation (the celestial general commanding all the northern stars—Bdh 2.6, the north being strategically important because in Zoroastrianism evil often resides and originates in the north); 3) the body of Kərəsāspa (the valiant curly-haired mace-carrying hero—Y 9.10, who accomplishes many heroic deeds during his life—Yt 19.38–44, and who shall be the first to be resurrected at the time of the final restoration, and play an important part in the final battle against evil—Bdh 33.42); and 4) the semen of Zaraθuštra (alternatively described as his *xʷarənah*- [Glory], preserved as lights shining in the waters of Lake Kāsaōiia, from which the future saviours shall be born—Bdh 33.43–45, especially: Astuuat,ərəta [(he) who embodies the Truth], son of Vīspa.tauruuairī [(she) who overcomes all], who shall raise the dead, drive away the creatures of evil origin, make the entire corporeal world incorruptible, and incapacitate the evil spiritual force, who will retreat, powerless—Yt 19.91–96). The *frauuaši*-s thus keep guard over aspects of reality that are essential for the perpetuation and protection of creation, and they also watch over those who shall rise up as the vital eschatological agents fighting in the final battle, when the *daēuua*-s will be destroyed, the evil spiritual force incapacitated, the corruption and harmfulness of the primordial assault completely remedied and undone, and the restoration and perfection of Ahura Mazda’s creation ultimately achieved forever and ever. In a sense, the *frauuaši*-s keep watch over the eschatological ‘avengers of the primordial assault’. While there is no way to know for sure, one is certainly provoked to imagine: does Indra also foresee an eschatological reckoning with the avenger of his primordial assault?

While Indra is hailed as the foremost *devá*- (god, divinity) in the Rig Vedic hymns dedicated to him, he is also identified as a *daēuua*- (false god) from the perspective of the Avestan and Pahlavi literature. In the Young Avestan text of the *Vīdēvdād* (Vd 10.9–10, Vd 19.43), Indra is mentioned by name and is portrayed as first in the rank of the *daēuua*-s, subordinated only to the *daēuua*- of *daēuua*-s himself: the evil spiritual force, full of destruction.<sup>79</sup> This identification of Indra as a potent and evil adversary is continued in the *Bundahišn* where, as part of the counter-creation of the evil spiritual force, he is created second in sequence, after evil thought (Bdh 1.54). He is seen as the antagonist of *aša- vahišta*- (the best Truth), who shall defeat him during the final restoration of existence (Bdh 34.27).<sup>80</sup> As a divinity, *aša- vahišta*- is the manifest presence of *aša*- the essential, all-pervading, underlying, and orchestrating ‘Truth’ of reality,<sup>81</sup> whose father is Ahura Mazda (Y 44.3) and whose Vedic cognate *ṛta*- (the Truth) is closely associated with the

<sup>78</sup> The Avestan word *yazata*- ([being/entity] worthy of worship) refers to the Zoroastrian divinities.

<sup>79</sup> Humbach and Faiss, *Zarathushtra and His Antagonists*, pp. 31–36.

<sup>80</sup> Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, p. 89; Humbach and Faiss, *Zarathushtra and His Antagonists*, pp. 31–32; and Agostini and Thrope, *The Bundahišn*, p. 182.

<sup>81</sup> For a detailed discussion of the term and concept *aša*-, see Hintze, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy*, pp. 53–58.

divinity Varuṇa in the *Rig Veda*.<sup>82</sup> So, according to the Zoroastrian tradition, Indra will indeed have his eschatological reckoning, and it will be with the Truth.

So far we have witnessed interesting thematic similarities in these myths of primordial assault, although from differing points of view, which often situate the Avestan Iranians and the Vedic Indo-Aryans on opposite sides. When it comes to serpent/dragon slaying, we find yet other parallel with a subtle inversion of perspective. Jamison and Brereton note that Indra's greatest enemy, the giant serpent Vṛtra, is sometimes classified as a Dāsa in the *Rig Veda* (RV 1.32.11, RV 2.11.2, RV 4.18.9), thus attesting to the occasional super-human meaning that the word Dāsa could be imbued with, and that in RV 10.99.6 Indra 'subdued the mightily roaring Dāsa with his six eyes and three heads'.<sup>83</sup> Though this particular Dāsa is not specifically identified as Vṛtra, one certainly wonders if this six-eyed and three-headed Dāsa adversary of Indra has anything to do with the six-eyed and three-headed adversary in the Avestan literature: the dragon Dahāka. The Avestan term *aži-* (dragon, serpent) used to describe Dahāka is cognate with Vedic *āhi-* (serpent) used to describe Vṛtra. In *Yašt* 19, the dragon Dahāka is slain by the *vaēda-* (missile) brandishing Avestan hero *Θraētaona* (Yt 19.36–37, Yt 19.92). *Θraētaona* is praised as *mašiiānaṃ vərəθrauuanaṃ vərəθrauuastamō ahiio zarađuštrāt* (of mortals endowed with *vərəθra-*, the most endowed with *vərəθra-*, apart from *Zarađuštra*) (Yt 19.36). In this case, being endowed with *vərəθra-* (resistance), and therefore having the ability to resist and ward off an attack, is depicted in a positive sense.<sup>84</sup> While in the Indra myth it is the *āhi-* (serpent) who personifies the quality of *vṛtra-* (Avestan *vərəθra-*) and is defeated by the hero, in *Yašt* 19 it is the hero who exemplifies the quality of *vərəθra-* (Vedic *vṛtra-*) and defeats the *aži-* (dragon, serpent). In the Indra myth, the slaying of the *āhi-* is an essential part of the primordial assault, but in the Zoroastrian myth the slaying of the *aži-* is not part of the primordial assault. It is a different myth.

Just as one finds interesting parallels across 1) the theme of the primordial assault as depicted in the Indra myth and the *Bundahišn* (and also in the wider Zoroastrian literature); and 2) the theme of serpent/dragon slaying as depicted in the Indra myth and the narrative of *Θraētaona* (Yt 19.36–37, Yt 19.92), one must also take note of the well-known correspondence between 3) the epithet *vṛtrahán-*, which is used to describe Indra, and the name of the Avestan divinity *Vərəθrayna*, to whom *Yašt* 14 is dedicated, and who is the very deification of the notion of resistance smashing and of being victorious. But in the Avestan literature, *Vərəθrayna* does not slay the dragon and he is not the protagonist of a primordial assault. The ancient Indo-Iranian heroic concept of being victorious over resistance and obstacles seems to have taken different forms and associations in Vedic and Avestan narratives. There are also some salient similarities and differences in the depiction of 4) the theme of the liberation of the waters as portrayed in Indra's myth of primordial assault, and in *Yašt* 8, which is dedicated to the celestial divinity *Tištriia* and where the theme of the liberation of the waters is portrayed in a seasonal or cyclical context with clear reference to the annual coming of the monsoons, and not in the context of a primordial assault. Although, in the *Bundahišn*, the story of *Tištriia* driving *Apaoša* away

<sup>82</sup> In RV 2.28 the 'rivers move to the *ṛta-* of Varuṇa', the poet seeks to reach 'the wellspring of your *ṛta-*, Varuṇa', and Varuṇa is called the '*ṛta-* possessing universal king'. See Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, p. 442.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>84</sup> In Avestan poetry, both: 'resistance' and 'resistance smashing' can be seen as positive, depending on the context. In *Yašt* 1, which is dedicated to Ahura Mazda, the name of Ahura Mazda and of the life-giving immortals is described, among other things, as being both: that of the life-giving mantra which is *vərəθrauuastama-* (most endowed with resistance) and, that of the life-giving mantra which is *vərəθrayniōtama-* (most resistance smashing) (Yt 1.3–4). The two superlatives at either extreme of a conceptual inversion are intentionally used by the poet to represent a greater completeness and totality: all the way from the pinnacle of possessing resistance, to the pinnacle of being resistance smashing.

from the Vourukaša Sea and releasing the waters is subsumed and adapted as a part of one of the various battles that take place during the primordial assault.<sup>85</sup> Maybe with the passage of time and the realignment and refinement of religious visions, common mythical archetypes were being infused with new meanings and insight, adapted and ascribed to new realities, used to memorialise different heroes and divinities, and repurposed to endorse alternate perspectives of a shared history.

### *Contending for allegiance*

RV 10.124, one of the most striking hymns in the *Rig Veda*, might depict some aspects of the realignment of political and religious power in the Indo-Iranian world from the Vedic perspective, portrayed as taking place before the attack on Vṛtra. It is a hymn that describes the shifting of allegiance, prior to the primordial assault. As already pointed out by Jamison in the introduction to the hymn, in the fourth stanza the divinity Soma ‘chooses Indra’ and ‘leaves the father’ and the verse ends with the resounding proclamation: ‘the kingship has made a revolution’.<sup>86</sup> Jamison notes how in the second stanza the divinity Agni (the Fire) also agrees to go ‘from my own fellowship, to an alien lineage’ and in the third stanza there is also the mention of ‘Father Asura’ or ‘Lordly Father’ (the Vedic word *ásura-* is cognate with the Avestan word *ahura-*) who is presumably the one from whom power is shifting across to Indra, and in the fifth stanza Indra declares that the *ásura-*s have lost their magical powers.<sup>87</sup> Jamison perceptively notes how the transfer of power is uncharacteristically peaceful for the *Rig Veda*.<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, even the divinity Varuṇa, who elsewhere in the *Rig Veda* is himself addressed as *ásura-*, abandons Father Asura. After Agni, Soma, and Varuṇa have deliberated and made their choice, Indra summons Soma forth and proposes that they jointly ‘smash Vṛtra’. The defection is thus the prelude to the primordial assault.

A similar theme also seems to be depicted from the inverse perspective in the *Gāṇās*. In the well-known stanza Y 30.6, the *daēuua-*s make their choice between the two primordial spiritual forces. From the perspective of the *Gāṇās*, the choice made by the *daēuua-*s is shrouded in deception and in their failure to discriminate rightly. After the choice is made, the *daēuua-*s ‘rushed into violence’, by which they ‘sicken the existence of the mortal’.

Y 30.6 *aiiā nōiṭ ərəš vīšiiātā daēuuācinā hiiat iṣ ā.debaomā*  
*pərəsmanēṅg upā.jasaṭ hiiat vərənātā acištəm manō*  
*aṭ aēšəməm hēnduuārəṅtā yā bənaiiən ahūm marətānō*

Between these two (spiritual forces), the *daēuua-*s failed to discriminate rightly, because as they were deliberating with one another, Deception came over them so that they chose the worst thought.

Thereupon they rushed into violence, by which they sicken the existence of the mortal.<sup>89</sup>

Note the narrative arc in both depictions: 1) a gathering or congregation; 2) the deliberation over a defining choice to be made between two opposing options/sides; 3) a choice

<sup>85</sup> For an interesting discussion on Indra, Tištriia, and Vərəθraγna, refer to A. Panaino, *Tištṛya: Part II, The Iranian Myth of the Star Sirius* (Roma, 1995), pp. 36–45.

<sup>86</sup> Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, p. 1597.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1597–1598.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1598.

<sup>89</sup> Translation: A. Hintze, ‘Change and Continuity in the Zoroastrian Tradition’, Inaugural Lecture, SOAS University of London, London, 2013, pp. 32–33.

being made; and 4) the choice being followed by violence. The side portrayed as being weakened and betrayed by the choice in RV 10.124 are the *ásura*-s, and the side portrayed as being deceived into making the wrong choice in Y 30.6 are the *daēuua*-s. In both cases it is the *daēuua*-s/*devá*-s who proceed with violence after making their choice. The identity of Father Asura remains indeterminable, but the divinities of the *Gāθās* are called *ahura*-s, evidenced by the expression *mazdāscā ahurāñhō* (the Wise One and the [other] Lords) in Y 30.9 and Y 31.4. Ahura Mazda is identified as the father of the divinity *aša-* (the Truth) in Y 44.3 and of the divinity *vohu- manah-* (Good Thought) in Y 31.8. Even the divinity *ārmaiti-* (Sound-Mindedness) is identified as Ahura Mazda's daughter in Y 45.4. In *Yašt* 19 (Yt 19.46) and in the *Sīh-rōzag* (S 1.9), the divinity *ātar-* (the Fire) is also identified as the son of Ahura Mazda. In Yt 13.83 (= Yt 19.16) the seven *aməša- spənta*-s (life-giving immortals) are described as all having the same father—Ahura Mazda. My intention is not to speculate on the identity of Father Asura, but rather to point out structural parallels.

The theme of breaking allegiance also comes up in *Yašt* 10, which is dedicated to *Miθra* (concord, alliance), whose Vedic equivalent, *Mitra*, is very closely associated with *Varuṇa* in the *Rig Veda*, and likewise also referred to therein as an *ásura*-. The hymn opens rather dramatically, with Ahura Mazda telling *Zaraθuštra* in the second stanza itself (Yt 10.2) that one who is deceitful/false to the concord destroys the entire nation. The poet of *Yašt* 13, reminding his listeners of their lineage and allegiance, assures them that those who sustain the *frauuaši*-s (affirmative choices) of the *ašauuan-* as well-sustained, thereby also sustain *Miθra* (concord, alliance) and *Arštāt* (correctness, rectitude) (Yt 13.17–18). Could these hymns all be alluding to the same pivotal historic event, through the language of myth?

The theme of allegiance is clearly manifest in the Zoroastrian affirmation of faith, or the *frauuarānē*, which takes place during *Yasna* 12. The verb *frauuarānē* is very closely related—etymologically and conceptually—with the substantive *frauuaši-*. Here the root *var* (to choose, to decide) is once again combined with prefix *fra-* but in this case to form the first person singular subjunctive verbal form *frauuarānē* which literally means 'I shall choose forth' or better in context: 'I shall choose in affirmation of, I shall choose in support of'. To summarise briefly the nine stanzas of this section of the *Yasna*: the worshipper is essentially declaring his or her affirmative choice to be one who joins with Ahura Mazda and the life-giving immortals, along with all that is good and true, as well as with the agents of goodness and the Truth. The worshipper, likewise, is choosing to completely reject the *daēuua*-s, along with all that is evil and deceitful, as well as all the agents of evil and deceit.

From an Avestan perspective, RV 10.124 almost reads like a narrative retelling of an inverse *frauuarānē*, a collective disavowal and breaking off from prior allegiances, and an entering into a new and negotiated allegiance with the *daēuua*- *Indra*. Was there a time in Iranian and Indo-Aryan history when groups of poet-sages from both sides were formally competing for allegiance to their visions? In many regards, the question of 'choice' and 'allegiance' underpins both Y 30.6 and RV 10.124; and the idea of a *frauuaši-* (affirmative choice) and the practice of the *frauuarānē* take on additional significance in the context of the rivalry between the two sides.

We have now examined and surveyed a few of the interesting contours and dimensions of mythic intersection and inversion between Vedic and Zoroastrian religious imagination and vision. If what we have here are indeed contrasting mythic depictions originating in a common Indo-Iranian repository, but recontextualised, enriched, and infused with new implications through centuries of religious, political, and cultural divergence, and further polarised in the aftermath of the split between the Iranian and the Indo-Aryan peoples, thus reflecting their divergent spiritual perspectives and attitudes, as is also captured by the well-known *ahura- daēuua-* and *devá- ásur-* inverse rivalry, then it becomes very

likely that in a hymn dedicated specifically to the ‘affirmative choices’ of the righteous ancestors of one branch of these two peoples, the triumph of their worldview over that of the opposing branch would be evocatively memorialised. It would further seem perfectly reasonable, given the conceptual dimensions of Avestan and Vedic imagination, that the significance of these victories at ceremonial gatherings would take on cosmic implications. The two poets would literally be contending for the cosmos. It is therefore no surprise that the poet of *Yašt* 13 associates the proximate earthly victory of the unnamed Avestan poet-sage over *Gaōtəma*, with the primordial cosmic victory of the life-giving spiritual force over the evil spiritual force. By surpassing *Gaōtəma*, the unnamed Avestan poet-sage upholds and perpetuates the primordial victory itself.

Returning to the identity of *Gaōtəma* in *Yt* 13.16, we know that some of the Indra hymns in the *Rig Veda* are attributed to the Vedic poet-sage *Gótama Rāhūgaṇa* whose name is indeed a direct etymological equivalent to Avestan *Gaōtəma*. We also know that *Nodhas Gautamá*, a descendant of *Gótama Rāhūgaṇa*, composed some of the significant Indra hymns and that he bears the patronymic: *Gautamá*. Likewise, *Vāmadeva Gautamá* is also responsible for many Indra hymns and has the same patronymic. Taken together with all the evidence already presented, this additional fact—that many important Indra hymns are attributed to poet-sages with either the patronymic *Gautamá* or the actual name *Gótama*—strongly supports the argument for a Vedic identity of *Gaōtəma*, and specifically that of a poet-sage who was a proponent of the worship of the *Rig Vedic* divinity *Indra*. From our existing theories, this emerges not only as the strongest possibility, but also as a very likely one.

## Conclusion

The table below aims to summarise the main points relating to the four possible identities of *Gaōtəma*:

	Chronology	Likelihood of encounters at ceremonial gatherings	Fundamentally conflicting religious visions	Overall plausibility
<b>Avestan</b>	Definite overlap	Likely	Unlikely	Somewhat plausible
<b>Turanian</b>	Definite overlap	Likely: the two cultures (Avestan and Turanian) are depicted in Avestan texts as rivals but nonetheless in close contact.	Likely: the Avestan-Turanian rivalry, while mostly political, might also have had religious dimensions to it. Turanians are portrayed as supporters of <i>dāēuua</i> -worship in the <i>Dēnkard</i> .	Plausible, but the textual evidence required to substantiate this theory is rather sparse.
<b>Buddhist</b>	Unlikely	If chronologically plausible, then encounters might have been likely. Buddhism was strongly proselytising, and we know of the presence of <i>Nāgasena</i> in the Bactrian court as early as second century BC.	Yes: the religious visions of the Zoroastrians and the Buddhists diverge on many fundamental and crucial aspects.	Somewhat plausible if a chronology is defensible. Implausible otherwise.

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Chronology	Likelihood of encounters at ceremonial gatherings	Fundamentally conflicting religious visions	Overall plausibility
<b>A Vedic poet-sage who was a proponent of the Rig Vedic divinity Indra</b>	Definite overlap	Likely: these encounters could have taken place in Central Asia after Indo-Iranian times, at ceremonial gatherings during which the fissures between the spiritual outlook of Vedic and Avestan traditions begin to emerge and solidify.	A rich intersection of mythic narratives are rescripted, and recontextualised, often from inverse perspectives, illustrating a growing religious, philosophical, and social divergence between the Avestan and Vedic peoples. There is also some evidence that the rival sides were competing for allegiance.	Most plausible. This seems to be the likely scenario.

In our search for Gaōtāma, we cannot be certain. But the exploration has brought forth some rather interesting material that can help us think through the situation with more clarity. The Buddhist hypothesis that has intrigued scholars seems to be the one hypothesis most easily eliminated based simply on chronology. The Avestan hypothesis does not offer much traction, as there is no other mention of Gaōtāma in all the Avestan literature. Besides, at this stage in the development of Zoroastrianism we know of no significant religious or philosophical rivalries between opposing factions. The Turanian hypothesis is a relatively plausible one. While the rivalry between the Avestan people and the Turanians was predominantly confined to the political sphere, there is also some evidence that this rivalry extended into the religious sphere and into the domain of the poet-priest. It is not implausible that Gaōtāma might have been a Turanian poet-priest who worshipped the *daēuua-s*, but in the absence of further textual evidence this is still mostly speculation. However, as argued and, I hope, demonstrated in this article, the theory of a Vedic identity for Gaōtāma, and especially that of a poet-sage who was a proponent of the Rig Vedic divinity Indra, seems to be the most tenable when all the parameters are considered together. It also seems to be the likely scenario.

Was this Gaōtāma himself, or were his emissaries, collaborators, or successors present at the ceremonial gatherings, making poetic petitions with the goal of trying to elicit the kind of disavowal and defection of affiliation that we saw in RV 10.124? If so, then we can clearly understand the importance accorded to the unnamed Avestan poet (who is also presumably the poet of Yašt 13) who made his own words heard at these very ceremonial gatherings. Due to his compelling eloquence and his discernment, it was his entreaty that prevailed over that of Gaōtāma, or of Gaōtāma's emissaries, collaborators, or successors. It would make sense that this poet-sage, who managed to persuade others to maintain and reaffirm their allegiance to their spiritual lineage, might compose a hymn of worship to the 'affirmative choices' of his divinities, his predecessors, his living collaborators, and his yet unborn successors, and include the full and exhaustive list of their names (starting all the way with Ahura Mazdā, through to the future saviours of the world) that we find in the concluding sections of the hymn (Yt 13.80–157). Thus, in addition to memorialising the defeat of a powerful and competing religious vision, represented by the person of Gaōtāma, the poet also memorialises the triumph of the entirety of his own spiritual lineage to the best of his ability. Clearly, by eliminating the threat of Gaōtāma, the poet of

Yašt 13 upholds his spiritual lineage, safeguarding it for future generations, and he also ensures that by doing so the proper cosmic order is maintained. In his humility, he attributes his accomplishment to the splendour and the Glory of the very entities that he dedicates his hymn to. Although he recognises his accomplishment as a pivotal one, he also sees it as a single event in the vast, continuous, and magnificent unfolding of the entire cosmos towards its eventual perfection, through the efforts of all the *frauuuāši-s* (affirmative choices) of the *ašauuan-* (righteous).

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