

# Meeting 19: A tale of two faiths

## Comparing the Véda and the Avesta

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# Meeting agenda

- (Re)introduction to discussion group
- Today's topic præsentation
- Free discussion

# Why a Vēda discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
  - Sāṁhitā-s
  - Brāhmaṇa-s
  - Others?
- Vēda-s vs. Vedānta & Upaniṣād-s
  - Later monism (ādvāita) vs. earlier dualism (dvāitā)
- Modern (religious, scholarly) fixation upon later literature

# What is there to discuss?

- History & linguistics
- Metaphysics of religion
- Exegesis (e.g. countering western narratives)
- Moral principles
- Nuances of Śrāutá ritual

# Our plans

- Weekly meetings on Sundays at 1200 EDT
  - Followed by more in-depth literature meeting at 1330 EDT
- Different topic/aspect/angle discussed in depth every week
- Format:
  - Præsentation
  - Free-form discussion
- Eventually something more

# WhatsApp group

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/IXCQEkhfrcwHI7CNY8Fgat>

# Let's introduce ourselves!

- Name
- School (if student)
- How you found this group
- Briefly: background/interest in Hinduism & Vedic literature

## Some questions to consider

- What are some characteristics of the Avestan languages?
- What features do the Vedic and Avestan religions have in common?
- What interactions may have existed between the two?
- To what extent can the Avestan religion help us reconstruct the Vedic?



# What is the Vedic religion?

- National faith of the ethno-religious Árya-s
- Texts: Sáṁhitā-s (hymns), Bráhmaṇa-s (exegesis)
- Language: accented Vedic Sanskrit (Indo-Aryan)
- Centered around sacrifice (yajñá) to the Gods (Devá-s) mediated by fire (Agní)
- Significantly different from later Hinduism

# What is the Avestan religion?

- National faith of the ethno-religious “Arya-s”
- Texts: Yasna, Vendidad (Vīdaēvōdāta)
  - Former divided into various sections (e.g. Gāθā-s)
- Languages: unaccented Old and Young Avestan (Iranic)
- Contains sacrifice (yasna) to god mediated by fire
- Significantly different from later Zoroastrianism

# Geography

- Somewhat overlapping regions initially
- Sārasvatī vs. Harax<sup>v</sup>aitī?
  - Probably not: cf. etym.
- Aryanəṃ Vaējah
- When was the split?
- Much closer affinity to Vedic than other Indic branches have
- Dāsá, Dásyu = Dāha, Dahyu

# Language

*aibigairiia daiðē vīspā humatācā hūxtācā huuarštācā*  
abi-garyā dat<sup>h</sup>e vīspā hu-matā cā hū-'k<sup>h</sup>tā cā hv-arštā cā  
Mutually intelligible? No.

# Theology

- Monotheism vs. polytheism?
  - Not really: there are many yazata-s
- Good vs. evil
- Ásura, Devá = Ahura, Daēwa
  - Specific Gods too: Nāṇhaiθya, Indra, Vərəθrayna, Apəm Napāt, Miθra
- Other cognates:
  - Āθrauuan, бага, &c.

# Cosmology

- Aša (vs. Druj) & 𐬔𐬀𐬌: cosmic order
  - Binary good vs. evil common to both
  - Light vs. dark
- Creation myths
  - Púruṣa, gav-aēvō.dātā
  - The first mortal: Yamá (Yima)
- Others?

# Cultural practices

- Death: cremation & burial vs. daxma (root in Vendidad)
- Incest: taboo (Yamá & Yamí) vs. valued (X<sup>v</sup>aētwadaθa)
- Cattle-slaughter: taboo vs. allowed
- Role of priesthood

# Utility in Vedic reconstruction?

- Morality: not too useful (see above)
- Soma: identity, preparation, ritual
- Form of ritual in general
- Original identity of certain tribes
- Ontology?



## Some references

- Witzel, M. "The home of the Aryans." 1998.
- Witzel, M. "Early Sanskritization." *Elec. Journ. Vedic Stud.*, 1995.
- Witzel, M. "Autochthonous Aryans?" *Elec. Journ. Vedic Stud.*, 2001.

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