

A Light, Satirical Sketch.

In the *Vendidad* (a YAv. text), there is a short satirical sketch about how a dog has the characters of eight different sorts of people ~ a priest, a warrior, a husbandman (herdsman), a strolling singer, a thief, a wild beast, a courtesan, and a child. Coming across it in the *Vendidad* while toiling through chapter after chapter of revolting cruelty (and zero spirituality), was quite a surprise, a relief. As a result, I found it quite amusing (at least in contrast with what precedes and follows it).

The author of this little sketch clearly had a dry sense of humor, and must have lived with a clown of a dog he was fond of, and knew well.

This sketch is embedded in a long chapter on dogs ~ the various kinds, many do-es and dont-s, including various cruel punishments for those who failed to follow these mandates ~ none of which are to be found in the Gathas.

So this sketch bears no relationship to what goes before it, or what follows it. It is totally out of character with the rest of the chapter in which it is embedded, indicating (to me at least) that it originally was a separate fragment text which later was collated into the *Vendidad* (perhaps centuries after the Arab invasion, as part of the copying and re-copying of texts), because the *Vendidad* shows the priestly establishment as powerful and wealthy, whereas the priest mentioned in this sketch was neither powerful nor wealthy.¹

Today, we have some excellent priests (many names come to mind as my friends) who pattern themselves after Zarathushtra's notion of a good priest (in the Gathas).² But (if Darmesteter's translation is accurate) the person who authored this little sketch in Avestan is dismissive of the priest. (The Pahlavi "translation"/commentary on this part, which I will footnote, shows the priest's qualities in an admirable light).

However (setting aside other differences) the fact that in both Darmesteter's translation of the YAv. *Vendidad*, and the Pahlavi translation of this text, the priest is neither wealthy nor powerful, indicates that it was likely composed (originally) in a time and place in which the religious establishment was not powerful, with the ability to enforce punishments ~ whippings, penalties consisting of goods and services, even flaying and killing those who transgressed their rules (as they were in the *Vendidad*).³

But this sketch also mentions warriors, and strolling singers, and general poverty (even the courtesan was poverty stricken), so I surmise that it likely would have been composed (originally) in a rural, herding community (one that was not opulent), and long before the fall of the Achaemenian empire (during which time priests were not a dominant, powerful establishment, warriors were a part of the community, and strolling singers were part of the ancient Indo-European and Indo-Iranian culture).⁴

Based on the style and some of the dramatic phrases in this sketch, I speculate that originally it was composed as a secular song, to be acted out while it was sung (with dramatic expressions and gestures), around communal fires in the evenings, for the entertainment and amusement of those who gathered around.

The duplicative descriptions suggest later additions by other authors (perhaps because they had forgotten parts of the lyrics, and used repetition to make up the deficiency, or perhaps to lengthen a popular performance ~ we have no way of knowing).

The translation I give you is Darmesteter's.⁵ Where he footnotes that his translation of a word is "doubtful", I have added a question mark in square brackets [?] after the word instead of quoting his footnote. The numbering of Chapter, Part, and sections, is by an early school of modern scholars as shown in Darmesteter's translation, in which Part VIII consists solely of §§ 44 to 48.⁶ I quote verbatim.

Vendidad, Chapter 13; Part VIII.

"44. A dog has the characters of eight different sorts of people: ~

He has the character of a priest,
He has the character of a warrior,
He has the character of a husbandman,
He has the character of a strolling singer,
He has the character of a thief,
He has the character of a wild beast,
He has the character of a courtezan,
He has the character of a child.

45. He eats broken food, like a priest;⁷ he is grateful, like a priest; he is easily satisfied [?] like a priest; he wants only a small piece of bread, like a priest; in these things he is like unto a priest.⁸

He marches in front like a warrior; he fights for the beneficent cow like a warrior;⁹ he goes first out of the house like a warrior; in these things he is like unto a warrior.

46. He is watchful and sleeps lightly, like a husbandman; he goes first out of the house like a husbandman;¹⁰ he returns last into the house like a husbandman;¹¹ in these things he is like unto a husbandman.

He sings like a strolling singer; he is intrusive [?] like a strolling singer; he is meagre, like a strolling singer; he is poor like a strolling singer; in these things he is like unto a strolling singer.

47. He likes darkness, like a thief; he prowls about in darkness, like a thief; he is a shameless eater, like a thief; he is an unfaithful keeper, like a thief;¹² in these things he is like unto a thief.

He likes darkness like a wild beast; he prowls about in darkness like a wild beast; he is an unfaithful keeper like a wild beast; in these things he is like unto a wild beast.

48. He sings like a courtezan; he is intrusive, like a courtezan; he walks about the roads like a courtezan; he is meagre like a courtezan; he is poor like a courtezan; in these things he is like unto a courtezan.

He likes sleeping like a child; he is apt to run away like a child; he is full of tongue like a child; he goes on all fours [?] like a child; in these things he is like unto a child."

[End of Part VIII].

The sketch ends as abruptly as it starts.

* * * * *

¹ Darmesteter's fts. include some Pahlavi commentaries. A reading of this whole sketch in the Pahlavi 'translation' (by Anklesaria, referenced below) shows that the Pahlavi translators/commentators were totally oblivious to the fact that this was a humorous sketch. They announce its provisions as though they were religious precepts (indicating that either they had no sense of humor, or had an imperfect knowledge of Avestan).

² Detailed in *Part One: A Good Priest*.

³ Some of these punishments are discussed in a ft. in *Part Three: The Absence of Damnation & Hell in Other Avestan Texts*; and in *Part Five: The Vendidad, And Its Lessons For Today*..

⁴ The fact that strolling (or wandering) singers was an Indo-European and Indo-Iranian cultural tradition is discussed in the *Introduction to Part Two: Puzzles & Paradigms*.

⁵ SBE 4, pp. 161 ~ 163.

⁶ Darmesteter's sections here are numbered differently from Geldner's. Both Geldner and the Pahlavi translation of Anklesaria have additional sections after § 48 (§§ 49 - 56) but these additional sections do not pertain to the sketch of a dog being like various characters.

⁷ Darmesteter in a footnote gives his opinion that the priest referred to here is "A wandering priest (see p. 157, n. 1)." But he does not support his opinion with any facts ~ neither in this this ft. nor in "note 1" on page 157.

⁸ All surviving Pahlavi texts were composed after the Arab invasion of Iran ~ a time period during which Avestan (as a language ~ its vocabulary and grammar) were not well understood (if at all) ~ because of the long, long lapse of time, and then the massive loss of knowledge following the invasion of Alexander, and (almost 1,000 years later) the Arab invasion. The Pahlavi "translation"/commentary of this part of the sketch is as follows, from B. T. Anklesaria, *Pahlavi Vendidad*, (Bombay, 1949). The "he" of course refers to the dog.

"He eats food separately like~the-athravan, ~ (that is, he sits apart): ~ he is well-contented like~the-athravan, ~ (that-is, with good cheerfulness, he becomes over-joyful): ~ he is forbearing like~the-athravan (in speech); ~ [There is-one who says: "Well-forbearing in difficulties, like-the-athravan.]." p. 293.

⁹ Darmesteter's footnote explains " 'He keeps away the wolf and the thief' (Comm.)." SBE 4, p. 162, ft. 3.

¹⁰ Darmesteter's footnote explains "When taking the cattle out of the stables." SBE 4, p. 162, ft. 5.

¹¹ Darmesteter's footnote explains "When bringing the cattle back to the stables." SBE 4, p. 162, ft. 6.

¹² Darmesteter's footnote explains " 'When one trusts him with something, he eats it' (Comm.)." SBE 4, p. 163, ft. 1.