



DĀM PEZEŠKĪ I. IN THE PRE- ISLAMIC PERIOD

i. In the Pre-Islamic Period

Widespread and developed animal husbandry, which was a prominent feature of Iranian economic and social life in ancient times, could not have prospered as it did without commensurate veterinary practice. The horse (see [asb](#)), ox (see [cattle](#)), and [dog](#) (see also [domestic animals](#)) were venerated allies of the Iranian horseman and herdsman. The cow, as the benign source of livelihood, and the dog, as the unfailing guardian of cattle and home, were highly revered by the Zoroastrians. Therefore the care and welfare of cattle, which were patronized by the Amahraspand (see [aməša spənta](#)) Vohu Manah “Good intention,” were not only urged as a response to the exigencies of life but also imposed upon the faithful as a religious obligation.

The dignity (*sahīgīh*) and worthiness (*arzōmandīh*) of medicine in general are reflected in an ancient legend about the prophet’s wondrous resourcefulness in converting Wištāsp. The tradition, mentioned cursorily in the *Dēnkard* (ed. Madan, II, p. 639) and drawn out and ramified in a popular version in the late *Zarātošt-nāma* (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 280; Molé, p. 55; Jackson, pp. 62-64), was an account of how the prophet, in order to win his own release from prison and demonstrate the veracity of his divine mission, acted as a horse doctor and miraculously cured the favorite horse of King Wištāsp, which had become paralyzed. This story attests to the fact that veterinary medicine was



traditionally regarded as an art comparable to the art of healing human bodies.

The veterinarian was called in Middle Persian *stōrbizešk* (lit., “draft-animal physician”), which in New Persian became *peješ-k-e sotūr* and *pezešk-e sotūr* (Zamaḵṣarī, p. 316), in contrast to *mardom bizešk* (lit., “physician of men”; *Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 752; West, p. 118). In the *Dēnkard* the *stōr bizešk* “veterinary surgeon” is mentioned as an indispensable attendant in the entourage of the army (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 730; West, p. 87). It is to be assumed that some medical treatments were applied to men and beasts alike (cf. Fichtner, pp. 49-50).

In the section on the sheepdog (Av. *pasuš haurva-*, Mid. Pers. *pasušhōrw*) in the *Duzd-sar-nizad nask* (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 726; West, p. 82) care of the dog and cattle is stressed. Every day at dawn the shepherd was to inspect the flocks and apply remedies to sick, wounded, bruised, and unhealthy (*āhōgōmand*) sheep. He was the one who had to function as veterinarian, dressing the common or minor injuries of his flock.

To the suppliants who asked how to treat a mad dog (*sag ī dēwānag*) or one that bites without barking Ahura Mazda replied: “They shall put a wooden collar around his neck, and they shall tie him to a post . . . by the two sides of the collar they shall tie him” (*Vd.* 13.29-30). And to the repeated question from the faithful about how to care for a mad or apathetic (Av. *a-hqm.baō’əmna-*, Mid. Pers. *abōy* “unperceiving”) dog Ahura Mazda answered “They shall tend him in the same manner as they tend one of the faithful” (*Vd.* 13.35), which suggests that, if necessary, they were to call a veterinary physician. From the passage of the *Vidēvdād* about fees for medical treatment it follows that at that stage veterinary medicine had not yet developed into a distinct branch and that physicians treated men and beasts for the same fees: “He (i.e., a healer) shall heal the master of the house for the value of an ox of low value; he shall heal the master of a village for the value of an ox of average value . . . (*Vd.* 7.41). He shall heal the son of the master of a village for the value of an ox of high value; he shall heal an ox of high value for the value of an ox of average value; he shall heal an ox of average value for that of an ox of low value; he shall heal an ox of low value for the value of a sheep; he shall heal a sheep for the value of a meal of meat” (*Vd.* 7.43). On analogy with the manner of payment to the physician, the veterinary practitioner must have been paid after the animal had been cured (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, II, p. 751; West, p. 117). The reckoning of fees for physicians and veterinarians in terms of the values



of the domestic animals and natural products was evidently a relic of an economy based on barter.

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