



CONSEQUENCES AND UNRELIABILITY IN HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 30 th March 2026 Accepted: 26 th April 2026	This article examines the textual discrepancies, omissions, and translational divergences found within the modern Uzbek, Russian, and English translations of the "Avesta", with a specific focus on the Videvdat section. Through a comparative analysis of James Darmesteter's English translation, Asqar Mahkam's Uzbek translation, and the Russian edition by E.V. Rtveladze et al., the study explores how variations in translating religious hierarchies (such as the typography of priests and the role of the Zaotar) and socio-economic elements (such as the classification and symbolic purity of dogs) can lead to unreliable historical conclusions. The findings emphasize the critical need for meticulous philological analysis when utilizing translated ancient sources for historical reconstruction.

Keywords: Avesta, Videvdat, historical source criticism, translation divergence, Zoroastrian priesthood, Zaotar, cultural heritage, textual omission.

INTRODUCTION. Today, the profound contribution of the peoples inhabiting the transnational region between the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers (Transoxiana) to world civilization and the spiritual evolution of humankind remains unquestioned. The "Avesta"—the sacred scripture representing the monumental intellectual and spiritual heritage of our ancient ancestors—serves as a foundational primary source for illuminating the earliest epochs of Central Asian history. However, recent source-critical studies reveal significant problematic discrepancies between the original conceptual framework of the "Avesta" and its various modern translations into Uzbek, Russian, and English. These textual variations often lead to divergent interpretations of ancient socio-religious structures. This article examines specific lexical, structural, and numerical differences across these modern translations and assesses their impact on historical reliability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS. This study employs a comparative philological and historical-source criticism approach. The primary sources consist of three modern translations of the Videvdat: James Darmesteter's English translation, Asqar Mahkam's Uzbek translation, and the Russian edition by E.V. Rtveladze, A.X. Saidov, and K.V. Abdullayev. The analysis focuses on two thematic categories: Representation of the Zoroastrian priestly hierarchy; Descriptions of dogs and their socio-religious functions.

RESULTS. The comparative analysis revealed substantial differences among the examined translations. Darmesteter's translation preserves eight distinct priestly offices, including Zaotar, Havanán,

Atarevaxša, Fraberetar, Áberet, Asnatar, Ráđwiškar (Raspi), and Sraošávarez. Each office is associated with specific ritual responsibilities. In contrast, Mahkam's Uzbek translation refers to these figures collectively as "eight respected religious leaders" without preserving their individual functional distinctions. Furthermore, sections 17–18 of the seventh fargard are omitted entirely.

DISCUSSION. Textual hierarchies and discrepancies in the Videvdat. One of the core books of the "Avesta", known today as the Videvdat, was historically recognized under the name Vendidad, with certain subsections traditionally categorized as part of the Korda Avesta ("Little Avesta"). In contrast to the archaic linguistic layer of the Gathas, the language of the Videvdat exhibits a diverse range of lexical shifts and textual layers. Consequently, philological consensus—aligned with the chronological framework proposed by I. Gershevich—places the relative dating of this final redaction into the late Achaemenid period [1, p. 24]. A prominent area of divergence manifests in the socio-religious typology of the Zoroastrian clergy. One of the earliest authoritative English translations was executed by James Darmesteter in 1898 [2, p. 6]. Utilizing Darmesteter's translation of the Videvdat, researchers subsequently developed a structural typology of priests through the "YOMITX" method [3, p. 3]. According to this framework, detailed data regarding the priestly classes appears in the fifth fargard (sections 57–58) and the seventh fargard (sections 17–18) of the Videvdat. These texts delineate the specific functions of the priests who managed Zoroastrian rituals and sacrificial ceremonies.



Nº	Priest Title / Ruhoniy unvoni	Ritual Functions / Marosimdagi asosiy vazifasi
1	Zaotar	Chief serving priest. He is the main celebrant who chants the sacred hymns (Gathas) and recites prayers. He directs the entire ritual execution.
2	Havanán	The priest of the morning/pressing. He is specifically responsible for straining, preparing, and consecrating the sacred Haoma juice during the ritual.
3	Atarevaxša	The keeper of the fire. His primary duty is to feed, tend, and maintain the sacred ritual fire (Atar), ensuring it never goes out.
4	Fraberetar	The bringer/carrier. He is responsible for bringing all the necessary ritual utensils, firewood, and consecrated implements to the sacred precinct.
5	Áberet	The water-bringer. He is charged with fetching and preparing the ritually pure, consecrated water required for the lustrations and mixtures.
6	Asnatar	The purifier priest. He performs the structural washings, cleans the ritual vessels, and ensures the absolute physical and spiritual purity of the space.
7	Ráðwiškar (Raspi)	The assistant priest. He acts as the direct helper to the Zaotar, managing the physical aspects of sacrificial offerings and maintaining liturgical rhythm.
8	Sraošávarez	The enforcer/disciplinarian. He ensures that every part of the ritual strictly adheres to religious law, maintains spiritual order, and expels evil forces (Drujs).

Darmesteter's preservation of these distinct roles contrasts sharply with other regional translations:

The Uzbek Translation (Asqar Mahkam): In Mahkam's version [4, p. 126], these figures are mentioned twice, yet they are grouped generally as "eight respected religious leaders" rather than distinct functional classes. Furthermore, sections 17 and 18 of the seventh fargard are completely omitted.

The Russian Translation (E.V. Rtveladze, A.X. Saidov, K.V. Abdullayev): Published in 2008, this edition omits individual titles, utilizing the generic term "жрецом" (priest) [5, p. 94]. Similar to the Uzbek version, sections 17–18 of the seventh fargard were excluded.

The Russian and Uzbek translators justified these omissions by arguing that the seventh fargard merely duplicated sections 57–62 of the fifth fargard. However, Darmesteter retained these sections, highlighting a structural divergence that alters how modern historians interpret the redundancy or emphasis of ancient ritual texts.

To resolve this ambiguity, cross-referencing other avestan sections is imperative. In the Yasht section translated by Darmesteter [6, p. 31], the term Zaotar (the priest who chants hymns and recites prayers) appears fourteen times. In these texts, Zoroaster himself is depicted fulfilling the role of the Zaotar. For instance, section 8 of the Hordad Yasht states:

"The names of those (Amesha Spentas) smite the men turned to Nasus by the Drujes: the seed and kin of the karapans are smitten, the scornful are dead, as the Zaotar Zarathushtra blows them away to woe, however fierce, at his will and wish, as many as he wishes."

This passage demonstrates that the title of Zaotar carries supreme ritual authority, attributed directly to the prophet. This is further corroborated by D.N. Mackenzie's *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (1971), which defines Zōt (Zaotar) specifically as the "chief serving priest" [7, p. 203]. Following the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, the complex Zoroastrian clerical hierarchy was simplified; during the Yasna ritual, ceremonies were condensed to just two essential roles—the Zaotar and the Raspi—a liturgical tradition that persists among contemporary Zoroastrian communities in Iran today.

Domestic economy and numerical divergences: the case of the Videvdat dogs. Beyond religious hierarchies, the "Avesta" provides critical historical insights into the economic lifeways, pastoral ecosystems, and domestic realities of ancient societies. This includes detailed regulations regarding domestic animals. A comparative analysis of how dogs are represented in the Videvdat translations reveals substantial discrepancies between Darmesteter's English text and Asqar Mahkam's Uzbek text.

Information regarding the economic and spiritual status of dogs initially appears in the fifth fargard of Darmesteter's translation, where they are classified according to their social utility. In section 29 of the fifth fargard, the text dictates the degree of ritual pollution (Nasu) that enters a community upon the death of a dog:

Shepherd's Dog: Its death impacts the spiritual purity of seven individuals.

Domestic/House Dog: Its death impacts six individuals.



While this functional hierarchy matches in both versions, a critical numerical discrepancy emerges. In Mahkam's Uzbek translation, the death of a shepherd's dog causes all seven people in the immediate vicinity to become polluted. Conversely, Darmesteter's English translation specifies that seven out of eight people become polluted. This subtle mathematical divergence alters the interpretation of Zoroastrian purity laws and spatial contagion limits. Furthermore, major structural omissions occur in the Uzbek text:

Section 30 (Darmesteter): Introduces the "Vohunazga dog", interpreted as a stray or ownerless dog. While it lacked the specialized training of herding or guard dogs, it was protected due to its capacity to hunt Khrafstras (harmful, evil creatures) and its participation in the Sag-did (funerary glance) ritual. This section also mentions the "Taruna dog" (a hunting hound, defined in Pahlavi commentaries as a pup under four months old).

Sections 31–32 (Darmesteter): Delineate specific breeds or functional categories such as the "Jazu", "Aiwizu", and "Vizu" dogs, terms retained directly from the Pahlavi language without translation. Because sections 30 through 38 are entirely omitted in Asqar Mahkam's Uzbek translation, none of these socio-economic and zoological classifications are available to researchers relying solely on the Uzbek text.

CONCLUSION. The comparative analysis of the Videvdat translations demonstrates that relying on a single modern translation can result in incomplete or unreliable historical conclusions. Structural omissions (such as those in the Uzbek and Russian editions) and numerical variances regarding ritual pollution distort our understanding of ancient Zoroastrian social stratification, ritual precision, and daily economic practices. To construct a valid historical narrative of the pre-Islamic history of Central Asia, historians must adopt a critical, multilingual, and comparative approach to these foundational texts.

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