

## Ch. Marvin.

*British writer. Today we would call Marvin a highly influential political analyst. He has personal contacts with major actors of the «Great Game», as the Russian-British rivalry in Central Asia is called, both Russians and British, and is well informed, even though he has some admiration for A. Vambery, which this fellow does not deserve.*

*Marvin has, most of the time, a fair view of the Russian behavior in the area. But he is a patriot, frustrated by what he sees as blindness of the Foreign Office for obvious Russian views on Sarakhs, Pendj-deh and especially on Herat, an ideal base for any future Russian offensive against British India, an idea which especially general Skobelev is indeed trying to sell to the Tzar.*

*Unfortunately Marvin has little interest for ethnology and even less for rugs. Turkmen, Persians and Afghans are for him little more than pawns in the Grand Game.*

*His books contain extensive interviews and quotes interesting articles written by leading Russian officers active in Transcapia, such as Annenkoff, Skobelev, and Petrusevich, or by the engineer-explorer-spy Lessar. He also quotes Alikhanoff's (future Russian governor of Merv) highly interesting letters to his superior, sent during this officer's daring undercover mission in Merv.*

## Ch. Marvin. The Russians at Merv and Herat. 1883.

<http://archive.org/details/russiansatmerva00marvgoog>

Page 9: «...Few knew that Nur Verdi Khan, the dual khan of Merv and Akhal, who dyed in the spring of 1880, was one of the happiest warriors of the nineteenth century, completely trashing the Khivans in 1855, the Persians in 1861 and finally the Russians in 1879....»

*(Note : Factual error! Nur Verdi Khan was the successor of Kushid Kuli Khan, the Teke's dictator, their Buonaparte so to speak, who died in 1877. Nur Verdi ruled only three years and had no particular charism. But his widow was the political head and the «macho» of the family. Her great sympathy for Alikhanoff played a role in the building of the strong pro-Russian party which allowed the easy conquest of Merv in 1884.)*

Page 15: A Turkmen saying: «Adam driven from den, never found a finer place for settlement than Akhal»

Page 15: «...The northern piedmont (Akhal) as well as the valley of the Sumbar and Tchandeer is really one of the richest countries in the world and could easily sustain a million people...»

Page 129: About Lessar: His career and personality. His mission: reconnoitering the strategic route to Sarakhs and beyond, to Herat.

Page 134: The first steps in creating a Russian party in Merv. Contacts are taken on the market of Ashkabad, the new capital of the conquered Akhal.

### Marvin quotes Lessar's 1881 report to his superiors:

*(My notes concentrate on Turkmen, which are very secondary for Lessar, but some of his comments are interesting).*

Page 135-139: Lessar's first (open and undisguised) survey, starts shortly after the victory at Geok Tepe, traveling among Turkmen still in a state of shock. His main goal is to find an easy route to India, if possible suitable for a railroad, in case of a conflict with England. Lessar is a railroad expert, but also a fine politician.

Page 138: The district between Ashkabad and Sarakhs is known as Atak « the skirt of the mountain». Lessar is the only explorer who has made a survey of the Atak, from the Russian frontier to Sarakhs.

«...In the Atak there are only two points Luftabad and Shilghan which are occupied by Persians...The rest are peopled by Turkomans:

- Khaka, Kuren and a part of the Kuren dagh by the **Alieli** tribe

- The remaining district by **Tekes** from Merv...»

«...The whole of the population is quite recent. In the middle of the last century (around 1750) part of Akhal (the northern Piedmont of the Kopet dagh of which Atak is the easternmost part), as far as Durun was occupied by the **Emrali** and the **Kara-dashly** tribes and to the southeast, near Yangi kala, Geok tepe and Ashkabad, wandered the **Alieli** Turkomans.

At that period the **Tekes** transferred their settlements from Mangyshlak to Kizil Arvat, a fifty years struggle ensued between them and the other Turkomans. At the commencement of the present century ( around 1800), the Tekes got the upper hand. The Kara-dashly retiring to Khiva, the Emrali to Mesna and Chacha, the Alieli to Persia (partly to Chinarat and partly to Kyazir) and the remainder to Kuren and Abiverd...»

«...Fifty four years ago (1827) Allah Kuli, Khan of Khiva, beat the Turkomans and carried the **Göklans, Alielis and Emralis** to Khiva and the **Tekes** gave him hostages and tribute...»

Page 139-140: «...After the death of Tedaili Khan (Khan of Khiva) who was killed at Sarakhs in 1855, the **Göklans** returned to their former homes from Khiva. The pressure of the Persians, however compelled the **Alielis** to go back again to Khiva and it was only in 1873 after the capture of Khiva by general von Kaufmann, that they removed to the Atak and constructed a new fortress at Kahka....»

«The immigration of the **Tekes (in Atak)** is of quite recent date, the restricted area of cultivable soil and the insufficiency of water compelling the Merv Tekes to quit their oasis and settle on the banks of the streams flowing from the Daman-i-kuh... »

« .. In the Atak there is abundance of virgin soil and plenty of water. The evil is the proximity of the Persians of Dergez and Kelat who have plucked-up courage since the conquest of the Akhal Teke tribe. The people of the Atak dwell partly in clay structures and partly in kibitkas (**Yurts**). Only the most suspicious Merv Tekes visiting the Atak at the seed- and harvest time, leave their families at Merv. The majority have settled down in the Atak altogether....»

Due to the closeness to the Persians, the Turkmen plant their kibitkas or their mud houses inside the mud forts left by the previous owners.

Page 143: «...During our work between Ashkabad and Gjaurs we met caravans of Tekes along the road returning to Akhal from Merv and the Tejen. These Tekes fled thither during the war, but when Tokme Serdar visited Merv in July they received assurances from him...».

They were in an extremely destitute condition. In many cases one camel sufficed to carry the properties of several families. The Akhal Teke refugees had been badly received by the Merv Teke.

Page 145: «...As with Persians, so with Tekes, the plunderers and plundered were distinct classes...»

Page 146: The bazaar at Kuren: a relatively rich market for the region, but beyond fodder and food the products are poor. Needless to say, no rugs for sale and no dyestuffs for wool, only for nails and hair (**Henna**, I guess).

Page 150: Khaka: Near the town there are about 500 kibitkas of Alielis (settled Turkmen, not warlike). (**Note: Vambery found in error, once again**).

There is a recent mud fortress. About 600 houses peopled by Alielis who fled Khiva after its capture. A raid of the Merv Tekes on Khaka is feared by the Alielis.

Page 153-154: Upriver near Dushak and Chardeh: scattered & settled Tekes.

Page 154: Mehna, two new forts with a numerous population (250 houses of Emrali Turkmen).

Page 155: Chacha, on the Tejen River: a small mud fortress with 20 families of settled Tekes and cotton fields

Page 156-157: «...Altogether, between the Russian frontier at Baba Durmaz and the Persian fortress of Sarakhs- not included Luftabad and Shilghan inhabited by Persians- dwell 7 000 Alielis and Tekes. This population varies from day to day, since it is only at Kuren and Kahka that the population can be regarded as all settled...».

«...The population of the Atak is entirely engaged in agriculture, producing wheat, barley and clover. Cotton is only found at Chacha. Immense numbers of sweet melons and water melons are raised ...the staple food of the population. From Khaka to Sarakhs there are no trees whatsoever. On the whole, the poverty of the people is very great. It is obvious that it is not the rich people who migrate from Merv....».

«...The wants of the Turkomans are in general few, and owing to their poverty they cannot afford to buy even what is indispensable for them... »

Page 157-158: Sarakhs: «...the continual scene of the exploits of the Merv Tekes, ...the Persians of the fortress (on the left bank of the Tejen), 700 Persian infantry dared not to show themselves outside the fortress...The garrison has never rescued a caravan pillaged within sight of the walls...Merv Tekes move to this place to cultivate the soil... »

(**Note: right under the garrison's noses**).

Page 161: Between Sarakhs and Shadichah, thirty families of Salors, refugees from Merv, have lately settled. Extremely poor. Have nothing to fear from the Merv Tekes, but the Persians having lost their fear of Turkmen are now encroaching.

Page 213- : Lessar's journey from Sarakhs to the outposts of Herat.

Page 213: After having demonstrated that a railway project is feasible as far South as Sarakhs, Lessar's next mission is now to determine whether the line could be laid between Sarakhs and Herat in Afghanistan (200 miles).

«.... The country on the right bank of the Tejen / Heri rood (over which Russia considers that Persia has no claim of ownership) is, for most of the distance between Sarakhs and Herat a no-mans-land desolated by the ravage of the Saryks and Merv Tekes, which are however too weak to occupy it themselves, since by so doing they would draw upon their heads the counter attacks of the Persians and those of the Herat tribesmen....»

Page 218: The Merv Tekes did not receive well the refugees from Akhal Teke. At first reluctantly and among many fears, then relying on assurances given by Tokmar Serdar, these Akhal Tekes have started returning home as early as September 1881.

Page 222: After the fall of Geok tepe to Russian troops, Merv Tekes, received the authorization to occupy land near Sarakhs.

Page 220: In a region (the Tejen banks) where tribes are intermixed and small band of robbers can be found in each tribe, an escort is still required. Lessar is escorted by twenty well armed Alieli Turkmen.

Page 223-224: On the left (Persian) bank of the Tejen up-river of Sarakhs, Persians farmers are encroaching and cultivating the soil, taking advantage of the inability of **Salors** to whom the area belongs, to assert their rights to it.

«...This part of the country is one of the richest along the Tejen / Hari rood from Kusan downward.

The whole of the valley hill sides are clothed with pistachio trees and mulberry trees are encountered.. The river water, though muddy, is wholesome to drink...»

Page 226: «... settlements of the Saryk in Yolatan, Pendj-deh and Bala Murgab.... further south on the Murgab dwell the Jemshidis and the Timuris... »

(Note: The Jemshidis and the Timuris are 2 major members of the loose Aymak confederation which re-groups clans of various ethnic origins, including Arabs, Persians, Turks, Mongols etc.. )

« ...The Saryks of Yolatan are unable to carry on open warfare with the Tekes of Merv, on account of their close proximity to them. The Saryks of Pendj-deh and Bala Murgab on the other hand constantly rob the people of Merv. This treatment the Mervis pay back with the same coin and both tribes raid against the settlements of northern Afghanistan and Khorassan..At the present the forays of the Mervis are the work only of distinct bands and the Saryks are the only tribe openly pursuing border raids.... The Alielis accompanying me were extremely frightened... they had open accounts with both the Mervis and the Saryks.... The Tekes admit that the Afghan are braver than they are, ...»..

Page 232: It is interesting how rarely pure water is found in the region. Rivers and springs are mostly brackish, and /or strongly salted, with high water hardness and often high concentration of epsom salt as well. To the point that sometimes even horses and camels refuse to drink. This is again the case in the region explored by Lessar.

Page 247: Lessar travels from Herat to Meshed on his way back from his survey and notes that many new Persian villages are already mushrooming thanks to the Russian conquest of Geok tepe, which limits very much the Turkmen forays.

Page 249: Lessar visits a large and beautiful bazaar, built in bricks at Urvat-i-haidari, one of the largest towns in this part of Persia. Needless to say, carpets are conspicuously missing in the bazaar.

Page 250: Lessar dixit, the Merv Tekes and the Persians are meeting at Meshed, conspiring to let the Persians build fortresses at Old Sarakhs, on the Tejend and in Merv. The Persians thus trying to assert their rights to these territories and the Tekes preferring a weak and nominal master, like the Persians, to a strong one, like Russia. According to his informations an expedition protected by 1200 infantry and 1500 cavalry is being assembled at Merv.

(Note: Either the Russian army stopped the conspirator's attempt cold or the information was a red herring planted by the Russians to justify their advance toward Merv. O'Donovan never mentions any such Turkmen troop concentration in Merv nor any plan for it).

Page 251- : From Meshed to Sarakhs via the Hari rood / Tejen and down-river on the left (Persian-) bank.

Page 252: Lenkar, on the Hari rood is settled by Salors who moved to this place around 1852

Page 254-255: At Zur-Abad near the left bank Hari-ruud, up-river from Sarakhs. «...thither with the permission of the Persians government were settled 2000 **Salor** families which emigrated from Merv with Teke agreement a few months before Lessar visited Zur-abad.... »

« ...These Salors dwelt at Old Sarakhs, there the Merv Tekes fell upon them, carried off their cattle and compelled the greater part of the tribe to remove to the Merv oasis, no land was assigned to them there and they occupied themselves in cattle rearing or worked for the Tekes, in 1880-1881 there were 4000 Salor kubitkas at Merv.... »

(Note: This information conflicts heavily on two points with O'Donovan's:

- O'Donovan mentions only an aoul of 170 Salor families in Merv around that time

- This small Salor aoul has its own land concession on the Otamish territory, as O'Donovan's map clearly shows. These Salors were those who chose not follow the other Salors and Saryks leaving Merv during its conquest by the Teke in 1857 and who chose to help the Merv Teke beating the Persians in 1860.

It is difficult to understand this difference. Except when one remembers that Lessar may have a hidden agenda: to demonstrate that the Turkmen of the Atak (Tejen «delta) are oppressed (deprived of water at critical time) by the Persians and that the Salors and Alielis Turkmen are longing for protection by Russia against aggressive Merv Tekes. The Russians clearly intend to claim any territory settled by the Turkmen, posing as their natural protectors and pacificators).

The rest (of the Salor clans) were distributed in the following manner:

- 1000 Kubitkas among the Saryks along the Murgab (between Yolatan and Pendj-deh)

- 400 kubitkas near Charjui (village near the Hari ruud not to confuse with Chardjoe on the middle Amu darya)

- 200 kubitkas near Maimene (in the Afghan piedmont south west of the Murgab)

- 100 kubitkas near Pul-i-Salar on the Hari ruud near Herat.

«...The Salors were (in 1881) the weakest of the Turkoman tribes... having been completely ruined when carried away from Old Sarakhs and lacking even corn to sow.... And in the mean time the remaining 2000 Salor families at Merv are anxious to join them.....»

## **Marvin quotes Alikhanov's February-March 1882 letters to his superior General Aminoff, chief of staff, in which he reports his daring mission to Merv.**

*Alikhanoff: A Russian officer of Lesghi origin and a master spy.*

*Sunni, speaking djagatai fluently, daring and charismatic.*

*His undercover visit to the Tekes, shortly after O'Donovan's departure from Merv, will play a key role in Merv surrender in 1884.*

*In 1885 he will lead the joint Teke-Saryk cavalry in a Russian victory over the Afghans at Pendj-deh.*

*He then will be promoted Governor of Merv. He is admired by all Turkmen for his bravery.*

*After a meteoric raise to the grade of general, he will go under a disguise to Kabul, where he will be arrested as a spy by the Afghans, but will manage to survive and to pursue his military career.*

*He will also become the most hated Russian in the Caucasus, after the bloody and cruel repression of a revolt in the Koutais Valley, during which his troops fully wiped out the population, women and children included.*

*He will be assassinated in 1907 at Alexandropol.*

Page 165-: Caravan to Merv in which Alikhanov is hidden undercover, playing the role of the clerk of a merchant.

Page 166: Funny anecdote which well describes the Turkmen mentality: Kara Sem, an Akhal Teke refugee at Mohamadabad, organizes an Alaman against the Merv Tekes settled near the Tejen. On his way home other Turkmen, from Dujak, fall upon his party and rob him from his booty.

Page 167: At Khaka (pro-Russian Alielis population). The Russians do not hesitate to give direct orders to the population, although this is actually Persian territory.

Page 176-179: Nearing Merv: the Khivan Fazil beg delivers a letter from the caravan head to the Merv Khans of the pro-Russian party. The caravan is met about 40 miles from Merv by members of this party led by Koshed bey.. It is decided to cross the Southwest part of the oasis ( *Otamish area*), by night.

*«...The aouls (or obas) consisted each of about 200-300 tightly packed tents, without any clay dwellings among them, and were situated a mile or two from one another. The entire country between them was covered with crops....The nearer we got to the centre, the more numerous clay structures became. Low walls enclosing gardens...we traversed complete labyrinths of irregular canals, muddy roads and inundated fields. Tents and walls and fields and canals succeeded each others in rapid succession....after a while we came to the interminably long and wonderful walls of the fortress of Merv (Note: *Koushid Khan kala*), this is a gigantic structure, compared with which the fortress of Geok tepe is a mere bagatelle...».*

Thanks to a pro-Russian Merv Teke guide, they reach undetected a guest house, in the middle of the night, (a walled area with a cluster of tents) and met Fazil beg there.

Page 181-182: The Russian caravan is well received by most, a few hostile elders are actually only jealous of Fazil beg playing host, expecting that he would reap most benefit.

O'Donovan who left Merv just months before, had *«.. literally sown the oasis with gold watches ...».*

*(Note: These gold watches are actually Russian gifts to other Turkmen tribes, who bartered them with O'Donovan, since they could not fathom how they could possibly be used. The Turkmen have a difficult relationship with time. This episode probably shows again that O'Donovan was in fact a moneyed Foreign Office agent and not just a daring newsman. For sure the Russian authorities thought so).*

Page 183: The latest state of affairs at Merv, changes which occurred only 2 weeks before Alikhanoff's arrival with a short summary of its recent history:

*«....The last possessors (of the oasis) were the Saryks, who were driven from it in 1857 by the Tekes arriving from Sarakhs under the control of Koushid Kuli Khan... who was selected as chief for this particular foray... his authority was extended until it became without limit...he established for his support a body of 2000 disciplined Naukers. He died in 1877 and the Mervis invited from Akhal Noor Verdi Khan to succeed him, who was far of having the iron will of his predecessor in spite of his immense popularity...»*

*« ...After the death of Noor Verdi in 1880 the title was given to Kadjar Khan, then to Baba Khan, the latter son of Koushid. Neither of them being fitted, they were both overthrown in succession and for a time no decision could be taken as to a new Khan. The matter ended in November 1881 by each clan choosing its own representative. The Vekeel choose Makdum Kuli Khan, son of Noor Verdi, the Begs, Kara Kuli Khan and the Bakshis and Satchmaz ( *the Otamish*) Maily Khan. The selection of the latter took place only a fortnight before the caravan arrival. In the hand of this triumvirate rests the nominal control of Merv. Each Khan has his councillor and a hundred paid naukers.... ».*

*«...The assembly of Khans and elders was composed of 15 persons almost equally representing the different clans...»*

Kosikh the merchant and his pseudo-secretary and interpreter Alikhanoff are invited by the assembly.

Page 184-185: The Merv triumvirate, as described by Alikhanoff:

Makdum Kuli Khan: Skobelev's opponent at Geok tepe. Age 27, clever and sympathetic. Dressed in an ordinary khalat, sits in the place of honor.

Kara Kuli Khan: Age 40. Chinese physiognomy. Energetic. Famous as a foray leader.

Maily Khan: Lad of 20. Clownish but less of a fool than he looks like. Educated in Bokhara. Acquainted with Persian literature, elected Khan on account of being son and nephew of greatly beloved Khans of the Otamish.

Page 186-189: Alikhanoff's speech: He describes the mission as exclusively commercial and a mere counterpart to the now daily presence of Tekes at the Ashkabad market. Russia would not understand that only Russian merchants would be kept from dealing at Merv, while Bokharians, Khivans, Persians and Afghans are all accepted.

The Khans agree to let the caravan stay for three market days. It would have then to return to Ashkabad with a Merv Teke envoy. The discussion is mostly a farce for the benefit of the Teke population, the Khans having already informed secretly Alikhanov of their final answer.

Page 190: An Alieli Turkmen brings to Alikhanoff a message from his superior. The messenger is terrorized to be in the Teke oasis.

Alikhanoff praises the penetration of the Tekes. They are far from being naive.

*(Note : contrary to the Uzbeks who are judged a bit limited by several travelers).*

Page 192-193: Description of Gyoul-Djamal, the widow of Nur Verdi Khan and mother of Yusuf Khan «...who exercises more influence over the Vekil than Kuli Khan himself...».

*(Note: Her sympathy for Alikhanov was to become a key factor in the success of the pro-Russian party in Merv)*

Page 193: Disguised as a Teke, Alikhanoff visits the oasis, starting with the fortress «Koushid Khan kala» which the eponymous Khan started building in 1873 after the fall of Khiva. Construction was later interrupted and started again in 1880 after the fall of Geok Tepe. It is still unfinished. An aoul of 300 yurts is pitched inside, the rest of the fortress ground is under cultivation.

Page 195: «...The oasis is far from being as well cultivated as for instance the oasis of Khiva. The fact of the matter is the Teke Turkomans do not know how to put three bricks on one another, they are not such skillful gardeners, they are awkward in handling tools, and, more than anything else, they are far from being so industrious as the Khivans... »

*(Note: Khivan Sarts / Tadjiks, Uzbeks and especially their many slaves)*

Page 196: «...At the entrance of the river into the oasis is constructed the immense dam of Kushid Khan, which diverts the water equally in two main canals each of these canals distribute water throughout forty eight arteries (four more are being built) which in turn feed hundreds of irrigation canals.....»

Amidst such conditions dwell the semi-settled population, occupying aouls of 200-300 kibitkas each..... »

Alikhanov estimates the population at about 230 000 souls (46 000 kibitkas).

«...Of this number about 36 000 kibitkas belong to the Teke whom Kushid Khan brought with him from Sarakhs to conquer the present oasis... As conquerors they exercise authority over the whole of the land and canals. The remaining 10 000 kibitkas consist of casual arrivals from the Akhal Teke tribes, the Saryks, the Salors, the Atas, the Mahtems, the Yomuds, the Midjiors (O' Donovan's Mjaours), the Khodjas, the Shiks and, lastly twenty-six Jewish families. All these, except the Jews, hire land and water rights from the sovereign tribe... »

« ..The principal activities are agriculture and cattle rearing if we omit foraying which until recently was their chief pursuit... »

*(Note: Alikhanov confirms O'Donovan's information: There are Salor tribesmen still living in Merv and a high number of Turkmen from other tribes as well. He reckons that these « foreigners » make about 20% of the population! Contrary to certain bloggers fantasies, these Turkmen are not enslaved but free and renting land from the Tekes)*

«...Hospitality was regarded as a sacred duty by the Merv Tekes, but apart from this and their wonderful bravery there is no other sympathetic trait in the people....»

« ...They are cruel with their Persian slaves, of which there are several hundred in chain, some since the Persian rout in 1860, waiting in vain of being ransomed. They never respect an oath if it suits their purpose to break it. The license of individual will is carried to an extreme. They are greedy, envious, liars and gluttons, they love sweets more than children do. Eternal quarrels exist between the branches of the various clans. In short they are morally the worst Turkomans.... »

*(Note: Alikhanoff agrees with O'Donovan and also with the opinion of all other Turkmen about the Tekes).*

Page 198:

«.....The Merv Tekes bitterly regret the wane of the alaman.. and on that account look upon the neighborhood of the Russians as a savage dog regards his muzzle....»

Page 199: Alamans have much decreased in number but still small raids are being organized.

During Alikhanoff's stay, he sees alamans coming back from plundering Saryk Turkmen, Khivans and Persians.

Page 200: Alikhanov believes that the influence of the Khans is almost nil. They are unable to eradicate alamans.

« ...There are persons of influence here, but they are not Khans, they are fanatic ecclesiastics... »

« ...Merv is considerably richer than even the Akhal Teke were. The population owns about 160 000 heads of sheep, 7800 camels, 11500 horses, 23000 donkeys and 46 000 cattle.

Only little silk is produced, but cotton is exported to the extent of 100 camel loads... »

«... these figures are tolerably accurate because the Turkomans know the number of flocks and herds of each clans..., they reckon on an average, one horse for every four kibitkas, a donkey to every two, and a head of horned cattle to every one....».

Melon and water melon serve as food to the poorer part of the population.

Page 201: A detailed description of the bazaar: Nearly identical with O'Donovan's, so I won't repeat it here in-extenso

«...Those who wish to sell and those who wish to buy assemble twice a week in the market square near the fortress. Seven or eight thousand people assemble in the market, without a single woman among them... »  
« ...People are very fond of red cloth.... »

« ...With the exception of a few covers and carpets there is nothing original or valuable for sale.... »

(Note: First and probably only note about carpets offered for sale at the bazaars during the pre-Russian period).

Without warning, a mob attacks the Russians, but their Turkmen escort clears the situation. The tumult has only the scope of robbing some merchants from their goods.

Page 208: Return of the caravan to Ashgabad: Alikhanoff notes that the Tejen oasis (Where this river loses itself in the desert ) is even larger than the Merv oasis, but it had been neglected for too long.

«...Until 1857, 20 000 families of Merv Tekes dwelt in the Tejen oasis, the raids of the Persians however rendered further existence impossible then, and the whole population migrated to Merv in 1857, the consequence was the dam fell into ruins, the canals dried up and the oasis became a wilderness..... After the fall of Geok tepe, the raids of the Persians became no longer possible and the Tekes again began to migrate from Merv to the Tejen, at present six canals have been embanked and, from these, issue a thousand irrigation channels.... The population consists of 3 600 kubitkas dispersed over the country...»

## Ch. Marvin. The Russians at the gates of Herat. 1885.

<http://archive.org/details/russiansatgateso00marvuoft>

Page 4-7: About Alikhanoff:

« ...This Russian was a very remarkable man. He was born at Baku, and by birth was a Lesghi Daghestani. He received a good education and developed a remarkable talent for drawing. At an early age he entered the army and after serving in the Khivan expedition, as a captain of the cavalry under Skobelev, he received the appointment of aide-de-camp to the Grand Duke Michael, Viceroy of the Caucasus.

At the close of the Turkish war he suddenly fell into disgrace. A quarrel occurred between him and a superior officer, and he challenged him to a duel. Alikhanoff was court-martialed, deprived of all his appointments and decorations, and reduced to the condition of a common soldier. He fell into disgrace about the time when General Lomakin returned to the Caspian from an unsuccessful attack upon the Teke stronghold in Akhal (Kopet dagh). He elected to be sent to Tchikislar (Russian camp at the mouth of the Atterek River), to join the expedition which general Lazareff was leading against the tribesmen. During this campaign Alikhanoff attained the highest rank as a noncommissioned officer.... »

Throughout the greater part of the siege of Geok Tepe, Alikhanoff, who was now a cornet of the Pereslaff Dragoons, was employed in foraging operations, or in reconnoitering that portion of the fortress facing the desert which was not invested by the Russians... »

Page 7-13: The battle of Geok tepe

«...Retreating from their line of settlements, stretching along the Akhal frontier, from Kizil Arvat to Geok Tepe, the Tekes collected to the number of 40,000 families at the latter place, and forming a camp, with tents pitched closely one against the other, built round it a huge clay wall, reminding the Russians of an immense railway embankment. The defense was mainly controlled by two chiefs, Makdum Kuli Khan and Tokme Serdar. The latter had submitted to Russia the year before, but being badly treated by Lomakin, had fled the camp and joined his countrymen afresh. There he instructed in the art of building rapidly large earth-works, after the manner he had observed practiced by the Russians during their advance.....»

«...The expedition the previous year had been despatched up the Atterek river, from its mouth at Tchikislar. Skobelev changed the base to Krasnovodsk, or more properly to Port-Michaelovsk, a small harbor on the south-east side of Krasnovodsk, and considerably nearer Akhal.....»

«...Skobelev pushed on a force to Bami, the first stronghold of any size in the Akhal oasis, and there gradually accumulated the munitions of war and food supplies essential for the siege. When everything was ready he advanced to Geok Tepe, and, seizing a fortified point close to the walls, commenced attack upon the fortress..... The artillery made no impression with the huge clay rampart. Step by step, however, Skobelev pushed his way until he got close enough to sink a mine, which was carried to the foot of the rampart. At the same time, his 69 guns fired daily from 100 to 500 shots into the place, and the expenditure of ammunition by the infantry ranged from 10,000 to 70,000 rounds a day...»

«... At length the day of the assault arrived. More than a ton of gunpowder was laid at the head of the mine, immediately under the rampart, and, on being fired, laid bare a broad entrance into the enemy's defenses. Through this, and another breach made by the artillery, the Russians rushed into the place, and perpetrated all the horrors usual when orders are given to infuriated and semi-barbarous troops to give no quarter to either sex.....»

«...Even when the Turkomans, no longer offering resistance, streamed out in a disorderly mob across the desert in the direction of Merv, men, women, and children mingled together, no mercy was shown to them....»

until darkness put an end to the pursuit. During that short few hours' chase the 1000 pursuing Russians slaughtered 8,000 of the fugitives. Hundreds of women were saved. 6,500 bodies were also afterward found under the fortress....»

«...The total loss of the Turkomans during the siege was estimated by Skobelev at 20,000...»

*(Note: According to O'Donovan, Makdum Kuli Khan estimated the loss at about 10 000 ).*

«...The two leaders, Tokme Serdar and Makdum Kuli Khan, escaped, and fled to Merv.

Pushing on their rear, Skobelev occupied Ashkabad, the capital of the Akhal Tekes, twenty-seven miles east of Geok Tepe, and despatched Kouropatkin, thence almost half-way to the Merv oasis...»

#### Page 16-17: **The immediate aftermath of Geok tepe:**

After O'Donovan had left the oasis, the Russian authorities decided they would thoroughly establish their influence there. Tokme Serdar, one of the two Akhal Teke chiefs who defended Geok tepe, had already surrendered, and had been sent to St. Petersburg to be tamed by a sight of Mighty Russia.

They tried to win over the second, Makdum Kuli Khan, O'Donovan's friend, through their secret agents, but failed.

One of these secret agents was Fazil Beg, a «russianized» Khivan. He used to go backward and forward between Merv and Ashkabad encouraging all the Tekes he could, to visit the latter place and to traffic at the bazaar which the Russians had erected immediately after having completed their fortifications.

The Russians encouraged Armenians from Baku and Tiflis to establish shops in it.

« ...Before long the Tekes of Merv, attracted by the high prices the Russians paid for their supplies, began to appear at Ashkabad too, first singly and somewhat shy, afterward in bands, when they found they were well treated.... »

« ... In course of time the richer and more influential of the Mervis followed suit. As all arrivals at the bazaar were notified to the Russian authorities at once, they extended a warm hand to every Teke who possessed any influence whatever at home, and in this manner created a strong pro-Russian party at Merv.... »

#### Page 17-18: **Alikhanoff's daring mission to Merv**

«...The authorities at Ashkabad decided to send an officer to Merv to obtain secretly a military survey of the oasis. Alikhanoff was the person chosen... To facilitate his operations a caravan was fitted out, commanded by an Armenian trader named Kosikh, representing the Moscow firm of Konshin and Co in Central Asia.

Kosikh was already known at Merv to many Tekes who had transacted business with him in the Ashkabad bazaar.... Alikhanoff played the part of clerk to Kosikh the trader, and also acted as interpreter. It was a great advantage to him in his expedition that he spoke the language of the Turkomans quite fluently....»

«...Fazil Beg, the spy, went on to Merv beforehand to secure some guides for the expedition, and arrange with the pro-Russian party for the protection of the traders as far as he could.... During the journey Alikhanoff made a thorough survey of the country, exploring parts unvisited by Mr. O'Donovan, and, entering Merv at night, encamped in the midst of the Tekes, without anybody being aware of it except the chiefs in Russian pay....»

«...The next morning, of course, there was a great hubbub at Merv. The people were not quite so staggered as when Mr. O'Donovan put in his sudden appearance among them, for many had become acquainted with the Russians in the interval; but they were more angry, and had not Alikhanoff possessed influential supporters among the chiefs, things would have fared badly..»

«... As usual, a meeting of the Khans and elders was convened the moment the presence of the Russians became known, and the latter were summoned to appear before it....»

Alikhanoff persuaded the elders to let the caravan stay and trade for three days, delay which he used to extend the pro-Russian party:

"Another success followed upon this. Alikhanoff, who had maintained close relations with Makdum Kuli Khan, persuaded that chief to throw in his lot with Russia, and proceed to Moscow to witness the Czar's coronation. Knowing how great his personal influence at Merv had been, Alikhanoff induced him to pay a visit there on his return, to describe to his fellow-countrymen what the glories of Russia were like. His descriptions of the sight he had seen at Moscow exercised a most depressing effect upon the anti-Russian party, while at the same time the handsome Russian uniform he wore, and the account he gave of the favors conferred upon him by the Emperor, provoked a desire among other chiefs to make the acquaintance of such generous masters...».

Page 28-45: «...The Merv Tekes scrupulously avoided attacking Russian subjects, and it was a matter of common notoriety that these man-stealers of the Asiatic steppes, finding their occupation as such gone, were becoming quiet, hard-working, industrious peasants. It is true that there were small forays now and again against the Persians of the Atak oasis (the lower Tejen), a district stretching from the Russian frontier to Sarakhs. But they were a mere bagatelle compared with the great plundering expeditions the Tekes twenty years previous had led. The Persian border from Ashkabad to Sarakhs was incomparably quieter than it had been in O'Donovan's time... So insignificant were this pilfering, that Russia has never attempted to cite them as an excuse for the occupation of Merv...».

« A small Cossack force was periodically sent to the Tejen. At first the Merv Tekes were extremely alarmed at the approach of the Cossacks so close to their country, but when, time after time, the Cossacks returned without advancing beyond the Tejen, they grew less suspicious. They were gradually lulled into a false security.

*In this manner when, at length, the Russians sent a larger force than usual to the Tejen, in the autumn of 1883, the Merv Tekes went about their ordinary occupations, and made no preparations for defense... »*

### **The fall of Merv**

*«...In 1884, acting on the orders transmitted to him by General Komaroff, Alikhanoff started off for Merv, accompanied by a few horsemen and the hero of Geok Tepe, Makdum Kuli Khan. Arrived there he put up for the night at the tent of Yousouf Khan, one of the four chiefs of Merv, and (half-) brother to Makdum Kuli. Yousouf, like many of the leading men, had already been bought over to Russia....»*

*«...The next morning a public meeting was convened, and Alikhanoff read out to the people Komaroff's ultimatum. Immediate submission was demanded and, to enforce his threats, Alikhanoff pointed to the Tejen and announced the force established there to be simply the vanguard of a greater army then advancing toward the oasis....»*

*«...Having already created a strong pro-Russian party by his intrigues, Alikhanoff experienced very little difficulty in persuading the people to accept the suzerainty of Russia. He repudiated any intention of occupying the country with a large garrison... »*

*(Note: In reality, Russia eventually sent to Merv 53 companies of infantry, 25 sotnyas of Cossacks, 54 guns, 6 mortars, 2 machine guns, 5 rocket divisions, and 19,200 camels, with a complement of about 14,000 men!)*

*«... At the bidding of Alikhanoff, the principal chiefs and elders signed a parchment deed he had brought with him, and selected a deputation to proceed to Ashkabad. On the way the party was joined by Colonel Muratoff, the commander of the Tejen force, and arrived at Ashkabad on the 6th February 1884.*

*The next morning, at 11 o'clock, the four chiefs and twenty-four notables took the oath of allegiance to the White Tsar in General Komaroff's drawing-room. General Komaroff decided to proceed immediately to Merv, and this was made the pretext for dispatching more troops as a guard of honor (to the governor) to Tejen. The whole available force was set in motion behind the returning deputation, and Fort Kari Bent (on the Tejen) being only three marches from Merv, the Russian army was already close to the oasis before its approach was known.....»*

*«...The elders were the first to arrive ( at Merv). They confirmed the reports that the Russian army was advancing (close behind), and asked the people to take out water to the troops. A tumult arose. A strong party, headed by Kajjar Khan, protested against the invasion, and threatened to kill anybody who obeyed the elders' request. They then applied themselves to the discussion of the best means of repelling the Russian advance..... The Merv oasis is not very large, and it is surrounded on all sides by barren plain or desert. Retreat from it was practically impossible. The Russians controlled three sides, and the Saryk bitter enemies of the Tekes the fourth.....To defend themselves against an invader the Tekes had built an immense clay-ramparted enclosure (Note: *Kushid Khan kala fortress*), capable of accommodating the entire population with their herds and cattle. But there was no time to assemble the people inside it before the Russians arrived. The Mervis felt that they had no course open to them, but to surrender....»*

*«....The only other thing the Mervis could do was to go out on horseback, and fire a few ineffectual shots into the column by way of a protest. (Thus), after dark Kajjar Khan, with several thousand horsemen, made an onslaught on the Russian camp, but was repelled with heavy loss...»*

*«...The next morning ( *March 16, 1884*) the Russians marched early and occupied the fortress without serious resistance. The fortress being far too large to afford security to the Russian force, General Komarov, therefore, impressed several thousand Mervis at once, and compelled them to build, under the supervision of his officers, a regular fort on the European principle. The completion of this sealed the fate of Merv...»*

In reward for his successful sloop, Alikhanoff receives back the rank of major, and all his decorations; he is also made Governor of Merv.

Makdum Kuli Khan is rewarded by being appointed head of the Tejen oasis. Komarov receives the Order of the White Eagle, his district is raised to the rank of a province equal to that of Turkestan, and he himself is made Governor-General.

### **Submission of the Saryks of Yolatan and the Salors of old Sarakhs (on the right bank of the Tejen), page 72-120:**

*«...Advantage was taken of the presence of the prince Dondukoff-Korsakoff, the Governor- General of the Caucasus, to accept in May 1884 the submission of the Saryk Turkomans dwelling at Yolatan....»*

*«...The 4,000 Saryk families dwelling there.... had always been on good terms with the Merv Tekes... »*

*«...The case was different with **Old Sarakhs**, which was formally annexed by General Komarov immediately afterward Merv, early 1884....»*

He placed 200 infantry and several hundred Turkmen horse at old Sarakhs and a Cossack outpost at Pul-i-Khatun, 40 miles up-river .

*«... Around Sarakhs, on the Tejen / Heri Rood, is a certain margin of very cultivable ground, broken by a stretch of less fertile or sterile ground, higher up the river towards Zulfikar. The Salors pasture their flocks there. Once a great tribe, the Salors were shattered by the Persians in 1832 in punishment for their raids. After this they migrated for a time to the Murgab where they had been long established, and then settled at Zurabad, a district in Persia, on the west side of the Heri Rood, not far from Zulfikar. After a while they got*

tired of Zurabad, and returned to Sarakhs. Here the Tekes fell upon them in 1871, seized their cattle and property, and carried the tribe off to Merv. This was in 1871....»

(Note: These are facts taken from Petrushevitch's report which do not agree completely with O'Donovan's informations. O'Donovan who got his facts directly from the horse's mouth and crosschecked with several Turkmen elders is likely to be the best source).

Altogether, according to Petrushevitch (quoted by Marvin) the whole Salor tribe concerned did not number more than 4,000 families, of whom 2,000 only were at Zurabad, 1,000 were encamped with the Saryks on the Murgab (Yolatan & Pendj-deh), 400 were on Russian soil at Charjew.

(Note: actually on Bokharan territory, near the middle Amu darya)

« ...200 on Afghan soil at Maimene... »

(Note: East of the Murgab and Southwest of the Amu darya in the Piedmont of norther Afghanistan).

« ... and 100 at Pul- i-Salar (near Herat), for it is only since 1881 that they have been dwelling at Zurabad, excluding a very brief interval twenty years ago.... »

The author describes the Salors as poor and now mostly settled, broken by their 1832 defeats against the Persians and later against Tekes. This description is confirmed by Lessar).

«...**Pendj-deh** is 80 miles distant from Yolatan, and there is an interval of desert. The fertile ground lies behind Pendj-deh, toward Herat. Thus, geographically, Pendj-deh is to Herat what Yolatan is to Merv, and the 8,000 Saryk families dwelling there had paid tribute to the Amir (ruler of Afghanistan) for years, and were the fiercest enemies of the Merv Tekes.... »

« .... The Saryks formerly dwelt at Merv. In **1856** the Tekes migrated thither, and after a struggle compelled the Saryks to withdraw higher up the Murgab. Part of them, as I have said, stopped at Yolatan, geographically part of the Mery oasis; but the rest, numbering over 6,000 families, moved higher up, traversing the desert section of the Murgab, and drove the Jemshidis, subjects of the Amir, out of Pendj-deh....»

«...Alikhanoff was not a man to rest inactive..... The moment the Saryks of Yolatan submitted, he commenced intrigues with the Saryks of Pendj-deh..... However, had Alikhanoff advanced at once up the Murgab, the Afghan Saryks would have doubtless resisted his attempts to annex them...»

«...Aware of this, Alikhanoff sought to buy them over ... »

(Note: He did succeed, since, shortly after Marvin wrote these lines, the Merv Teke, and the Yolatan- and Pendj-deh Saryks participated actively to the defeat of an Afghan army near Pendj-deh, much to British sorrow).

«...Reports of this reaching the Afghan Governor of Herat, he marched a small force to the place, and, with the perfect concurrence of the inhabitants erected a fort at Ak Tepe to protect them from Alikhanoff.....»

(Note: This was proven wrong only months later).

Description of the bazaar of Kush, main city of the Jemshidis, patronized by the Saryks:

«...The (Saryk) Turkomans brought to the bazaar of Kush salt, rice, soap, **carpets**, horses, sheep, and found for sale in the bazaar ploughs (of cast iron) and hatchets from Maimene, ...Russian and French loaf sugar,.... Meshed and Bokhara silk and cotton goods ... The greater part of the latter was Russian, not English.....»

**Richard Wright** (who among others talents also reads Russian) quotes a 1885 report by Lessar, who confirms the fact that the Saryks of Pendj-deh do weave pile rugs:

« ....There are also hand made goods which the Saryks export. First place among them is taken by rugs; their pattern is slightly different from those of Merv, and the quality is worse than those of Merv, due to the admixture of cotton and absence of an admixture of silk. In the oasis, due to the lack of mulberry trees silk-worm breeding is not practiced. The price of the rugs is nearly the same as those from Merv.... ».

(Note: Two reports indicating that **contrary to Dudin's teaching the Saryks were weaving rugs before the Russian take-over.**

It is also highly unlikely that they would have dropped weaving after 1885, since Russia made every efforts to revive carpet-weaving and to create a new market for them).

Page 111-...: Russia sees herself as the natural protector of the Uzbek khanates and of the Turkmen tribes, now under her rule, against encroachments by Persia and Afghanistan, justifying the planned advances of the Russian army towards Herat. But this is all a lame excuse. The real target of the St Petersburg brass is British India. Seizing Herat, its strategical geographical position and its very fertile plain, would give Russia a perfect base for launching later their attack. A British nightmare.

**The remaining part of Marvin's book is highly interesting for historians, but does not fit with my main focus: The Turkmen.**

