

A travers le royaume de Tamerlan. G. Capus. 1882 (in French, published 1892)

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56857382.r=turkestan+.langFR>

French scientist in mission in Russian Turkestan in 1881-1882. He travels with Bonvalot (see excerpts of his report below), through Samarkand, Bokhara, middle- and lower Amu darya, Khiva and further West, over the Üst-Yurt plateau. His text is of limited interest, except for Capus' eye for rugs! He describes Ata rugs and does comment on Teke- and Chodor ones. He notes that Armenian merchants are in charge of shipping to Europe the huge carpet booty seized from the vanquished Akhal Tekes at Geok Tepe.

Page 91: Meeting Ersari Turkmen from the Afghan piedmont, formerly tributary of Bokhara, who have switched allegiance and migrated on Afghan territory. Illustrates a normal behavior of Turkmen.

Page 333: At Chardjoe: Tekes, Ersaris and Saryks barter their crops and carpets against Russian manufactured products & textiles products on the market.

(Note: this is 3 years before Merv accepted Russian rule).

(Note: Capus illustrates one of the apparent contradictions of Turkmen behavior: One day they raid their neighbor, the next day they go shopping in their cities, hardly a logical behavior, but accepted by both sides.)

Page 338: Downriver from Chardjoe: The left bank of the Amu-darya is cultivated, the right bank is a desert. High alluvion cliffs are frequents on either bank.

Page 354 and 367: Further down the Amu-darya toward the Khiva khanate.

Near the Petro-Alexandrovsk Russian post: On both banks of the lower Amu-darya, live semi-settled Ata Turkmen. There are other Ata willages in other parts of the Khanate as well. They are not warlike and do weave good and sturdy rugs of a dark color. Their villages are mixed with those of Karakalpaks, who are mostly settled farmers.

(Note: the Ata Turkmen from the right bank of the lower Amu-darya came under direct authority of the Russians, immediately after the fall of Khiva. The Atas of the left bank remained under the Khivan Khan's nominal authority.

A temporary situation, changed when Russia took-over Merv as well, in 1884).

Page 363-364 & 378: A party of pro-Russian (Merv-) Tekes visits the commanding officer at Petro-Alexandrovsk, the real master of the Khiva oasis. Later they also pay a visit to Caput, during his stay at Khiva-city. The Tekes make a very good impression on the author («*proud, self-confident, intelligent*»). Much better for sure than the «degenerated» Khivan Uzbeks and Sarts.

Page 380. Karakalpak villages are mostly situated north of Khiva, Yomud's camps are on the Northwest. The Khan's corruption, greed and pillages are a major cause of poverty: Wealth, whenever it exists, must be dissimulated. Khivan citizens would much prefer a direct take-over by the Russian administration than the rule of their puppet Khan.

The Khiva bazaar is extremely dirty, with very little interesting items on sale. Luxury products would find no buyer for fear of the Khan's rapacity.

Page 379-380: At Khiva: the author and a group of visiting Akhal Tekes share the same scorn for the degenerated and weak Khivans. The time of the Timurids is long gone. Most Khivans wish to be integrated directly into the Russian empire, the protectorate situation leaves all the problems of corruption unchecked.

Page 381: Few rugs are on sale at the Khiva bazaar: very few beautiful but expensive Tekes and some coarse, less densely woven Chodors of lesser pile quality and less harmonious shades.

The author mentions that after the storming of Geok tepe and the thorough pillage of the population, the Akhal Teke rugs were introduced in high number in Europe, mostly shipped by Armenian merchants and started to be popular there.

Page 383: In 1882 Khiva (-city) had about 30 000 inhabitants. The town was poor, extremely dirty, without any monument even remotely comparable to those of Bokhara or Samarkand (*mainly of Timurid origin*).

Page 389-396: Travel from Khiva to the Caspian Sea, leaving the Uzbek-settled territory and entering the Yomud territory, «*who have been for a long time the (sometime rebellious) Khiva subjects*». These Yomuds were only partially settled and were living from cattle, sheep- & horse raising and from farming. Most Khivan Yomuds are still nomads.

(Note: Which confirms contemporary Russian sources, including Governor von Kaufman, who describe the dual structure of Yomud clans.)

The first Yomuds met by the author are settled ones, living in farms in the oasis, in adobe buildings, but with two or three yurts nearby, which still are their preferred residence.

Northwest of Khiva, at the fringe of the oasis, live the semi-nomad and nomad Yomuds , «*..allied since a long time with the Khan of Khiva, but revolting frequently, especially when taxes got too heavy...*».

Many «iamas» (temporary clay-lined pools) are found in the desert near the Khiva oasis. They contain soft, drinkable water in winter and spring only.

(Note: The water-hardness is a factor of importance for dyers, especially when dyeing with cochineal)

Page 396: Chodor Turkmen are living on the northwestern border of the Khanate and on the Üst-Yurt plateau.

The author estimates a total population of about 600 000 Turkmen in the Khanate.

(Note: This probably includes the Southern Yomuds living on of the Caspian shores as well as those living of the right bank of the Atterek,)

Again, both tribes would much prefer direct Russian rule. Their revolts are still frequent and force the Khan to ask for Russian military help.

Page 396: Caput's theory: the human qualities of the turco-mongol nomad tribes decreased as soon as they settled down in cities or as farmers.

(Note: Surely one of these human qualities was the perfection with which the old Mongols cleaned cities from their inhabitants!)

Page 407: Meeting on the way general Gloukhovskoï and his scientific expedition, who is assessing the feasibility of redirecting the Amu darya into the «dried bed» of the Ouzboï and reaching through it the Caspian Sea.

A little later Gloukhovskoï realizes the impossibility of the project.

(Note: Conclusion confirmed by modern science).

During geological times, a large difference of level appeared between the Amu-darya, the Sari-khamish Lake and the Caspian Sea: In 1881 the Sari-khamish lake and the Amu-darya are more than 100 m below the surface of the Caspian Sea. The Gloukovskoï scientific mission reckoned that to fill the Sari-khamish depression, enough for it to fill the dry bed of the Ouzboï and make it reach the Caspian Sea again, would require all the water of the Amu-darya during more than 40 years.

When it comes out of the Sari-khamish lake, the western Uzboy dry bed meanders and ramifies in many secondary dried beds. Eventually these dry beds unify in a clearly marked one. During a previous geological period, the western Uzboy was probably the effluent of a much larger and much deeper Sari-khamish.

Page 412: Meeting again the Russian scientific mission on the Uzboy.

Both Akhal Tekes- and Yomuds Turkmen are working for the mission, living friendly together, including even an Akhal Teke Turkmen who once was « a master thief and murderer of Yomuds ».

An example of normal Turkmen behavior and logic: Long wars are not a Turkmen concept. Raids and guerilla are the norm and grudges are not kept for very long.

Page 413: Local climate: there are extreme variations of temperature between summer and winter, between day and night, between shadow and sun. The author mentions night temperatures below -5°C , while under the sun in the middle of the day temperatures reach 27°C during his trip.

As mentioned by many travelers, the soil is mostly calcareous. Hard water is the norm.

Page 421-422: Üst-Yurt wells rarely yield good water. It is mostly salt, sometimes bitter, even sulfurous.

Traveling in winter (as the author does) or in spring allows to get better water, either melting snow or taking water from the many clay-lined temporary pools.

Page 412: In 1881-1882, several thousand Ata Turkmen families migrate under Russian protection to the Northeast, to avoid Merv-Teke raids.

Bonvalot. En Asie centrale. De Moscou en Bactriane. 1882.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5689457m>

Bonvalot travels together with Capus.

His report is more «impressionist» than his friend's, with a keener interest for the little guy.

Page 117. «...Pas un seul individu n'a avoué être incapable de me fournir un renseignement. Ces réponses faites au hasard, sans le moindre souci de vérité, peignent bien le Bokhare en particulier et l'asiatique en général. Du moment que vous les questionnez, ils supposent immédiatement que leurs intérêts son en jeu, et, sans réfléchir, ils répondent un mensonge dont ils rient plus tard avec leur interlocuteur, si ce dernier leur en démontre l'absurdité. Cette tournure d'esprit n'est pas la moindre difficulté pour le voyageur dans l'Asie centrale....»

In short: People of central Asia never answer a question by saying that they don't know : they always invent something, anything.

Page 121. Meeting, near Karchi (Bokhara Khanate), with a clan of Kara Turkmen coming from Maimene (near the Afghan border, en route to Karchi to sell rugs and bags woven in winter by their women.

Page 133-135. The author considers that the Afghans (Pashtoun) are just about the only central Asians who have national pride. Like the Turkmen they deal with their rulers with simplicity, as equals.

(Note: Several travelers confirm this opinion and claim that the Afghans are as well the best warriors in the region. They make their stand even against superior forces and refuse to bow neither to the Russians nor to the British.

The Turkmen too are brave, but avoid, whenever possible, to fight against equal- or superior force, using their superior mobility instead to obtain a numerical advantage. Otherwise they refrain from attacking. When beaten they make the best of it, patiently waiting for a chance to recover their independence.)

Page 146-153. Visiting a village of destitute Turkmen, calling themselves Kara-mogoul, on the upper Amudarya near Mazar-i-sharif . They are part of a number of Turkmen who, having lost all their flocks during the severe winters 1877 and 1879, have been forced to settle.

Turkmen already under Russian rule and having lost their flocks have no way to recoup their losses since the traditional way of making a living by capturing Persians and selling them as slaves or by stealing cattle from their neighbors are not anymore tolerated by the new masters.

Even though, in this southern frontier area, there are still a few raids, for example the Kara (also a Turkmen tribe) still fall from time to time on villages, including on the destitute Kara-mogoul Turkmen.