

The Emir of Bokhara and his country. 1896-1897 and 1898-1899 visits. O. Olufsen.

<http://archive.org/details/emirbokharaandh00olufgoog>

O. Olufsen, a danish geographer, leads several official expeditions in the Pamir area and stays for long periods in the Bokhara Khanate, about 30 years after its conquest by the Russian. The Khan is little more than a Russian puppet.

The author speaks fluently Djagatai (the Uzbek dialect) and Russian and is allowed an unusual degree of liberty by the authorities, he criss-crosses the region and interviews many people.

His book, rarely mentioned as a source by rug specialists, has outstanding ethnological value, albeit limited to the Bokhara Khanate. Although he gives little information about the Turkmen living in the Khanate, he describes location and segmentation of rug weaving, backed by some pretty good B&W pictures of rugs. His report contradict in part Rugdom 's accepted theories:

Olufsen states that there is large carpet production in «Bokhara-city» itself and in at least two other cities of the Khanate, with styles and qualities distinct from Persian-, Turkmen, Kirghiz, or Afghan rugs.

He also makes what is easily the most extensive description of Bokhara and the other cities of the Khanate, down in part to mere villages. The conspicuous absence of any mention of a rug-hub called Beshir should perhaps generate some questions in Rugdom too.

Page 204. A journey to **Khiva**: « ...The bazaar is supplied with many good carpets by the Yomuds who nomadize south and west of Khiva. The best carpets in the world are said to be the Tekinian (*sic*) from Merv, woven by the Turkoman tribe of Trekins (*sic*). Those of the Yomuts come after these in quality.... This classification is at any rate the adequate one in central Asia, where I had opportunity of seeing thousands of these carpets. Those who have not seen the real tekinian **silk carpets** (!), have still something to live for. The beautiful patterns and the fine juxtaposition of colors and splendid workmanship are great delight to the eyes... »

(Note: O'Donovan mentions also these mysterious Teke all-silk carpets, sometimes of very large size, and fetching huge prices when sold. Apparently ten years after the final Russian victory over the Tekes, these rugs are still woven, or at least they still can be purchased. I can't remember having ever seen any such a carpet.)

Page 230-231. «...now (*about 1898*) it sometimes happen that a (*Yomud*) carpet is dyed with the bad aniline dyes...», «...the best carpets are always bought by the Khan, only second class specimens are disposed of in the bazaar...».

Page 281-301. **The inhabitants of the Bokhara Khanate:**

Tadjiks are not the original inhabitants in all the towns of Central Asia, as sometimes claimed, but probably fought with alternating domination- and subjection periods, over many centuries, against turco-mongol tribes in the Bokhara area. They are the oldest agriculturists of the Khanate and they represent the intelligence and culture in the region. They probably adhered originally to the Avesta faith and traces of this ancient faith remain. Most teachers, mollahs, statesmen of Bokhara are Tadjiks. Most Tadjiks speak djagatai, the language of the ruling Usbeks, while Usbeks rarely speak Tadjik, a Persian dialect. Tadjik is the official language of the clergy and cultivated people, while djagatai is spoken more by the ruling class and the lower classes. Tadjik women are well treated by their husband (unlike Usbek ladies) and kids are taught to be respectful with their parents. They are Sunni moslems.

However, all former Persian slaves (thus former Shiites) call themselves Tadjik too. In Bokhara itself, Tadjiks are at least 25% of the population.

Mountain Tadjiks are peaceable peasants or, seldom, semi-nomads. They keep some Avesta traditions and are not strict Moslems.

The low-land Tadjiks are of less pure race, but still the Iranian stock dominates. They are more polite and talkative than the Usbeks, but shrewd, very materialistic and untrustworthy. They are not strict Moslems either but, owing to their higher level of education, they nevertheless hold most spiritual offices and keep up the fanaticism of the population as a way to keep political importance.

Usbeks are the dominant race in the Khanate, they keep up strictly the old tribal divisions. They tend to be more straightforward, natural and honest than the other populations of the Khanate. They are fond of jesting and rather disciplined, which makes them the best Bokharan soldiers, together with the brave Turkmen. They are officers, settled agriculturists in the oases, half-nomads in the mountains of eastern Bokhara and nomads in the steppe where they live like the Kirghiz or the Turkmen. Their (turkish) language, Djagatai, is the main language of the Khanate.

Kirghiz live mostly as nomads on the Bokharan territory, both North of Bokhara and on the Amu-darya banks North of Chardui. They love to travel long distance and routinely wander from one pasture to the other.

Musulmans by name they are in fact still heathens.

Turkmen were formerly often employed as mercenaries by the Bokharan rulers. Mainly Ersari, they nomadize on the right bank of the Amu-darya near Karshi and on the left bank between Charjui and Balkh. As they are found mainly on the river banks they are called «Lebab» meaning «river» Turkmen. They live mostly as half-nomad, but also exclusively as nomads. Even as agriculturists the tent is their house.

At the time of Olufsen's visit they are already well integrated in the Bokharan society.

(Note: From other sources we know that some of them were much involved in silk-worm keeping).

Karakalpaks live in small numbers in the Khanate, « *namely on the Amu-darya above Charjui and Denau* ». Peaceable, but with a reputation of being « ..the dullest.. » Central Asian people. They are settled agriculturists or half-nomads.

Arabs descend either from the first conquerors or from captives herded to the region by Timur-Lan. They live in the Bokhara area and on the Amu-darya, mostly in clay houses and are especially engaged in carpet weaving, cattle and horse breeding. They are much respected.

Hindoos are usually temporary immigrants living in Bokhara-city or Karshi. They are mostly bankers and merchants. Oppressed, hated, but rarely molested. Together with the Jews they « *..usurped all the money affairs in Bokhara..* ».

Jews are relatively affluent artisans or dealers, unpopular, but less so than the Hindoos, and oppressed. They live mostly in the large towns, especially in Bokhara and Karshi. They are dyers or deal in rugs, wool or manufacturing goods.

Gipsies, called Masan, live in the Bokhara Khanate. They are artisans or agriculturists. They are not Moslem.

Afghans, like Hindoos are usually temporary inhabitants of the Khanate, they live in their own «saray», are mostly merchants and are well respected.

The authors mentions credible tales of a feared non Moslem tribe, the **Lakhe**, living south of Karshi who apparently has kept their Avesta traditions.

(Note: Perhaps remnants of the Lakai Uzbeks who remained independent until 1869 in the piedmont on the right bank of the Amu darya, until the Emir of Bukhara grew tired of dispatching tax collectors who never reported back and crushed them).

Page 324: « *...even the nomads were fond of carving woodworks in the tent and even now we see a few Kirghiz tribes adorn their felt tents with carved wooden door. The latter are seen with the Turkomans in Merv instead of a carpet hanging down the door, which is the original way of shutting the door and still much in use...* »

Page 325: « *...add to this the solid carpets with their somewhat monotonous patterns..* »

Page 325-326, 330: The floors of every room of mid- and upper class Bokharans' houses are covered with mats and rugs. Except for rugs, the rooms are practically devoid of furniture or any ornament other than those fastened on walls or ceiling.

Page 333: Rivers and canals in the area being nearly always yellow and clayish, (settled-) people usually own reservoirs, formed like enormous earthenware jugs, which are now and then filled in order to allow the clay to settle. Spring water is very often saline.

(Note: Nearly all travelers of Turkmenistan have noticed with sorrow that rivers and wells do yield in most cases only hard water (high concentration of calcium salts) and often high concentrations of «Epsom salt», (magnesium sulfate) as well. However, the water from Zerafshan River which irrigates the Ferghana Valley, as well as the Samarkand- and Bokhara oases is soft, which probably explains the importance of cochineal dyeing in Bokhara. Its sources are the huge Pamir glaciers).

(Note: For obvious logistical reasons, nomad people do not use this filtration system and are likely to use for all their needs, including dyeing, a more or less clayish water) .

p.373, 384, 533: Use of individual **prayer rugs** in Bokhara is confirmed. Its alternative at the mosque being either the waist-cloth holding the kaftan, or one of the kaftans itself (relatively affluent people wear routinely superposed kaftans).

The description of a standard prayer rug (collected by the author) is given page 533 « *red with a mosquepishtak in white* ».

(Note: Its B&W picture, page 373, makes it obvious that such «Bokharan prayer rugs» are what we know as a «Beshir namazlyk». This fact and the missing mention of any « carpet powerhouse » called Beshir in Olufsen's extensive listing of the main Bokharians cities and villages, should perhaps give us some food for thoughts.)

Page 453 « *...as furniture is unknown, the meals are served on a piece of colored cotton. People of quality use silk carpets specially embroidered for this purpose..* » B&W picture page 452.

Page 500: « *... From the creeping roots of the wine a red dye is made (?), but madder is also cultivated, whereas indigo is imported. Dyestuff is also obtained from a small yellow flower called es-baruk which grows in great quantities in the oasis of Karshi...* »

(Note: es-baruk is obviously Delphinium Zalil, Larkspur) which supplies one of the main natural yellow dyes used by Turkmen and found more (and more saturated) on so-called Beshir rugs. It has pretty good lightfastness, but tends to turn a bit more golden, more dullish with long exposure to light).

« *.. and from a larvae which appears on a plant called atjek-buy on the banks of the Oxus....* »

(Note: probably a local variety of cochineal, already signaled by Burnes, who thinks that the locals may not know how to use it, which seems a bit strange to me).

Pomegranate and marigold are also frequently grown in the Khanate, as well as white mulberries (growing in the mountains), but their importance as source for yellow dyes (all three of them) and for tannin (in pomegranate peel yielding black shades when mordanted with iron), is not mentioned by the author. Both cotton and silk productions are important in the Khanate.

Page 529: «...Close to the harness bazar (of Bokhara) is that of the saddle bags (kurdjum), wallets of woven carpeting laid across the saddle, so that the seat rests on the middle piece between the bags, which are pushed backward abreast of the stirrup straps. They give the Bokharan rider, when seen from behind, a ridiculous appearance, but are very practical and strong. These kurdjums are often beautifully woven in geometrical patterns in yellow, red, brown, blue and black...» . B&W pictures of saddle bags page 360.

Page 532-533: «...far out in the northern part of the town (Bokhara), the carpet dealers have their bazaar, the Tim-i Gilam, the principal part of which is made up of an open square place encircled by open shops with stores of thousands and thousands of carpets. Here we find the carpets with nap (gilam), both from Bokhara and the neighbouring countries, Persia, Turkestan, Afghanistan, Belutschistan and from the Kirghiz in Turkestan, carpets without nap (pallast) generally with a white ground and decorated with variously coloured stripes or geometrical figures and splendid red, blue and black or white felt carpets sometimes with pattern in geometric designs, all the latter made by the Kirghiz tribes. The carpet made in Bokhara, as the others on primitive looms in the open air, are long and narrow and in quality rank between the gilams of the Kirghiz and the Yomuds; they can neither, as to solidity or beauty, be compared with those of the Turkmen or Persans, but they surpass considerably the Kashgar, Afghan, Belutshee and common Kirghiz carpets...»

(Note: See pictures of rugs page 299 (on three of them the tauk nusga gul can be seen, the fourth rug has diagonal rows of heart-shaped motifs of a type which is unknown to me) and on page 289 there is a cassette rug).

« ...The colours of the Bokharan gilam are mostly brown or red with black, yellow, green or white geometrical patterns. A special sort, used as prayer carpets in the mosques are, as a rule, red with a mosque-pishtak in white.....»

(Note: Pishtak: a porch-like structure with pointed niche, looking towards Mecca. Not only the center of the mosque but also its side wings are sometimes decorated with a similar porch. Like 3-niches Turkish prayer rugs)

A few years before Olufsen in 1893, Franz Schwartz an astronomer working for the governor of Turkestan gave the following classification of the local rugs:

Schwarz claims that the people of Turkestan differentiated three main classes of rugs

- 1) The cheapest, but less resistant called «pallas», pile-less, formed by sewing together narrow woven strips.
- 2) So-called Bukhara rugs, mainly made in Karshi and Bukhara. Long and broad, the most resistant type with white, madder-red, yellow and blue stripes, common in the houses of the middle and upper class. Not clear from the text whether these rugs were in part-, mostly- or always with pile.
- 3) The most expensive and preferred rug category were the so-called 'Turkmen' ones, **mostly** made by Turkmen, **but also** in Bukhara and other cities of Turkestan, not necessarily by Turkmen.. their pattern are much more varied than those of other categories, with geometric motifs, stylized flowers, arabesques... «...the pattern seemed different for every single weaver....».

(Franz U. Schwarz . «Turkestan, die Wiege der indogermanischen Völker». 1893)

In the final pages of his book, Olufsen gives a short description of all the main cities of the Bokhara Khanate. Again, as already mentioned above, there is nowhere any city named Beshir, not to mention an important rug emporium of that name. Actually Bokhara, Karshi (p.562-564) and Chardhui (p 570) are mentioned as having this function. It takes more faith than I am able to gather for still believing in « Beshir rugs », really.)