

Dudin 1901 (Quoted by Tzareva)

« ... The regions arranged down the **middle section of the Amu Darya**, which formed until the 1920s the Kerki and Charshangu vilayets of the Bukhara Khanate, were the main production centers of the Bukhara carpet market in 19th - early 20th century. The population of these regions at the present time is mostly Turkoman and belongs to different subdivisions of the Ersari, Salor and other tribes. It represents in itself a very complicated ethnic formation, including along with relatively new peoples, the remnants of ancient aboriginal groups of this territory.»

«...The great number of groups, some of them having definite ancient traditions of carpet weaving, seemed to display a great variety of ornamentation and styles of weaving. The reality, however, was even more complicated than one could suppose. The main occupation of Amu Darya Turkomans was sheep breeding combined with agriculture. This gave them enormous quantities of wool for carpet weaving. Wool of the local sheep was extremely fine and elastic. Carpet weaving in this territory was not only of a domestic nature but also commercial. It is obvious that the production of rugs for sale existed here long before the Ersaris arrived. Only in this way can one explain the ease with which the Ersaris adapted their carpet weaving to commercial production. Later, beginning in the 1870s and until World War I, practically all the southwestern territories of the Transcaspian province became involved in making carpets for sale, especially in the former Kerki and Charjew regions. From 1914 to 1925 carpet weaving survived a period of hard depression in this territory after which it never returned to full volume. Hence, in **Beshir**, rugs were woven only by some families. According to evidence from elders, all the carpet weaving population of the Khojambas region migrated to Afghanistan and to the Surkhan Darya Province of Uzbekistan. It seems that the Kanich group migrated entirely from the Beshir region and thus production of rugs of the Beshir type was stopped completely....»

(Note: This is to my knowledge about the only « first hand » mention of Beshir I have ever encountered. No 19th century visitor known to me mentions it. Dudin does not give the source of this information. Imho he is contradicting himself in these sentences: He mentions the ethnically very mixed population of the middle Amu-darya, their very old rug-weaving traditions, the variety of motifs and palette (still evident in so-called Bestir rugs) and the relatively late arrival of the Ersari Turkmen in the area, but seems to attribute to the latter an exclusive or at least a dominant influence, without really motivating this dominance, except by the fact that they are raising many sheep. Weren't the other tribes raising sheep then? Was their asserted very old tradition for rugs based on polyamide fibers, by chance? One could wish some support by true historians here.)

Mrs. Tzareva's comment: «....Besides the Ersari, there were numerous other groups living on the territory of the Amu Darya which were engaged in carpet weaving. These were Salors (Kizil Ayak and Khojambas regions), Sakars (former Charshangu region), Karkins (Halaj region), Kanitch (Kelif region), Atchars (Sayat region), and Olams (central area of the former Kerki region -- Khojambas, Kizil Ayak, and others)....The Alans in the past inhabited the northern part of Khorezm, moved in the first centuries A.D. to the Urals, and later migrated to the middle Amu Darya where they mixed, in the course of centuries, with various groups of the local population. Ethnographically, they differ greatly from the surrounding Turkomans and the same is true of their carpet ornamentation.... »