

James B. Fraser. A narrative of a journey into Khorassan in the years 1821 and 1822.

<http://archive.org/details/narrativeofjourn00frasuoft>

Fraser visits mainly the Persian Khorassan.

Interesting descriptions of Kurdish-, Turkish- and Afghan settlements on the frontier of Persia, created by the Shahs and supposed to protect Khorassan against Turkmen raids. This strategy frequently backfires. The « protectors » taking advantage of the weakness of most Qajar Shahs for raiding Persia too.

Fraser's only comments about Turkmen is found at the end of his book, when he describes the Gökkan Turkmen territory. Like Burnes some 10 years later, he makes a lyrical description of the paradisiac Upper-Giurgen hills.

Page 599: «...and the scene from being one of savage desertness, became beautiful and lovely. It was a striking change in a single night; it seemed as if we had reached another world, blessed with a happier climate. Spring here claimed and enjoyed her full sway; the woods in many places lofty and magnificent, consisted of oak, beech, elm, alder; with thickets of wild cherry, and thorns, which were covered with a sheet of white and maiden blush blossoms; large luxuriant vines climbed up almost every tree, hanging in wild festoons from one to another; flowers of various kinds, primroses, violets, lilies, hyacinths, and others no less lovely though unknown, covered the ground in the richest profusion, and mingled with the soft undergrowth of green herbage.....Every step we advanced increased the charms of the landscape».

Page 601: «...the richer and more verdant districts that border the Caspian on the South; for there lay the plains in all variety of wood and pasture, stretching away, till lost in the blue haze of distance

Page 602: «...he (a Gökkan Khan) showed us to the tent, or house in which guests were received and lodged, where we seated ourselves, along with a plentiful company who had flocked together to gratify their curiosity, by staring at the strangers. We were agreeably disappointed by the tent, for it was by no means deficient either in space or in comfort..... When we entered it there were on one side women engaged in working at looms, making carpets.....».

(Note: Fraser and Burnes dare to disagree with some modern rug experts, who describe the Gökkan as being fully settled and poor hillbillies who did not even weave rugs).

Page 603: «.....the tent was thronged with people, among whom there appeared to be little or no distinction of ranks: every one came in, and sat himself down where he could, without in the least disturbing the others, and even when the Khan himself made his entry, it was done with so little noise, that we did not know of his coming, till I chanced to see him seated at my elbow; no one rose to receive him, nor was there the least bustle created, as is always the case when a man of consequence enters a Persian assembly

(Note: Again and again occidental visitors are surprised by the truly democratic ways of all Turkmen tribes. Khans and White Beards are respected but their leadership is easily challenged if they don't perform)

Page 604: «...They sung several airs, which consisted of but a few words set to simple notes, and the measure was always closed by a single line or chorus that died away in a very sweet and singular cadence, infinitely more agreeable than any music I ever heard in Persia, for the singer did not strain his voice in the way usual in that country, but taught it most curiously to follow the inflections of the tarr, imitating the sound and undulations of the wire, in a manner resembling the low warblings of an Eolian harp; and he continued this for an almost incredible time, without drawing breath ».

Page 604: «...among them (among 'guests' of the Gökkan) a Yomud, who having been taken prisoner in an attempt at stealing from the horde, is detained, ironed and bound, until his tribe should decide his fate, by either sending an adequate ransom for his release, or by refusing it, an assent to his death... »

Page 606-607: Not all Gökkan are yet settled in permanent villages in 1822. Since «...forage and pasture having become scarce in the neighborhood, the camp was to be removed this day to a fresh spot. the camp was filled with horses before their owners' doors, camels standing or kneeling down in circles at their food, with grotesque figures in the Turkoman costume, all hurrying to and fro, preparing for a march...»

Page 609: «...we passed the ruins of some huts, which were pointed out to us as those of a Gökkan settlement, which had been destroyed by a party of the Teke tribe ...».

Page 619: Fraser leaves the Gökkan hills, and enters the Yomud plains near the lower Gorgan River. «...until leaving the more wooded tracts, we entered the boundless expanse of verdure which covers the open plain.

There is no describing the beauty and richness of these pastures, all is like velvet, soft and smooth, varying only in the height, not in the thickness of the sward. Numerous camps of the (Yomud) Turkomans spotted it with their black tents, in parties of fifty, sixty, or a hundred together, in every direction ...».