

## Sir Percy Sykes. Persia. 1922

<http://archive.org/details/historyofpersia02sykeuoft>

*British general and historian. Author of a history of Persia, clear and concise. Worth reading, although he rarely mentions the Turkmen, his focus being Persia. But they are some pearls worth reading. Sykes lived many years in Persia from the turn of the century to the end of the Great War, with high functions.*

Page 46: «.....Contrary to general belief, the Zoroastrians were not extirpated. Far from it, for we read of Fars in the tenth century of our era as possessing many fire-temples and of important Zoroastrian families. Probably at first there was much loss of life and confiscation of property, but gradually a modus vivendi was introduced which left the Persian nobles free to reassume their superiority over the lower classes, and to live very much as they did before the Moslem conquest... »

*(Note: IMHO this statement increases a bit the credibility of the Zoroastrian origin of the 12th century rug illustrated in Kirchheim's Orient Stars.*

*Another information brings further water to this mill: Tabaristan (around rivers Atrek and Gurgien, later to be inhabited by Göklan- and Yomud Turkmen) and Mazanderan (Southern shore of Caspian Sea, north of Elburz range) were Zoroastrian strongholds which resisted Sunni conversion, and never were politically controlled, for any significant period of time by the Arab conquerors, nor by later Iranian rulers, until the early sixteenth century when Safavid Shahs ruled Persia. Tabaristan & Mazanderan passed then directly from Zoroastrianism to the Shiite form of Islam. O'Donovan (and several other travelers) even describes a still active temple of fire-worshippers in Baku (Northwest of Mazanderan). In Eastern Persia, the Zoroastrian were apparently still strong enough around 1720 to be able to contribute to the capture of Kerman by the Afghan ruler Mahmud (page 86.)*

Page 51-54: «...The coming of the Seljuks swept away the comparatively small dynasties which had ruled Persia, more or less, as independent powers, but yet anxious to be acknowledged by the Caliph. More than this, the Seljuks revitalized Islam and created an empire which included Central Asia on the east and Asia Minor on the west. The Seljuks were Turks by race, and formed a branch of the Ghuzz (Turkmen-) tribe. Their founder was Tukak, father of Seljuk, who crossed into Transoxiana from Turkestan, and with his tribe embraced Islam. The new-comers soon realized their strength, and under Toghril conquered practically the whole of Persia. Like the Buwayhid conqueror, Toghril visited Baghdad in A.H.447(1005).

*When brought before the Caliph, who wore the mantle of the Abbasids and grasped the staff of Mohamed in his right hand, the nomad chief fell on his face and kissed the ground. He was then conducted to a throne and was appointed vice-regent of the Caliphate. After remaining at Baghdad for about a year, Toghril continued his successful campaigns until, in Georgia and Iberia, he met the armies of Byzantium. He even sent an envoy to demand tribute from Constantinople.*

*His successor, Alp Arslan, was also a great warrior, who wisely left the affairs of his great state to Nizam-ul-Mulk, a statesman famous in the East, whose system of accounts is still used in Persia. Under Alp Arslan the boundaries of the empire were extended, the annexation of the Herat- and Jand provinces in the east, and the holy cities in Arabia in the west, materially increasing his prestige. In A.H.464 (1071) he defeated a numerically superior Byzantine army in Asia Minor, capturing the emperor.*

*The Seljuk empire reached its zenith under Malik Shah. In the west Syria and Egypt were conquered, and Bokhara and Samarcand in the east. Under Nizam- ul-Mulk the internal prosperity of the empire was greater than ever before, and his financial arrangements were so good that, to prove them to his master, he paid the ferrymen on the Oxus by bills on Antioch. Moreover, both he and his master fostered science, founding an observatory at Nishapur, in which Omar Khayyam laboured with other men of science to compute the new era which Malik Shah inaugurated. Among Persians it is to be noted Omar Khayyam is celebrated as a philosopher and scientist, and not as a poet. Sultan Sanjar was the last Great Seljuk. His successes appeared to be more brilliant than those of his predecessors, and then suddenly he fell. According to the chronicler, during the forty years of his rule in Khorasan, before he ascended the throne, he made nineteen conquests. After he became Great Seljuk his successes continued, although there were risings to be put down in Khwarazm, Samarcand, and elsewhere. But a new dynasty appeared in the horizon. It was founded by a near relation of the Kara Khitai emperor of China, who, collecting a force, gained possession of Chinese Turkestan, and built up a powerful empire. In A.H.536 (1141) the Kara Khitai invaded the empire of Sanjar. His great army was defeated, and the enemy occupied Merv and Nishapur, but finally returned to Chinese Turkestan. A decade later Sanjar was defeated and captured by the Ghuzz (Note/ Oguz, thus Turkmen too) tribesmen. He finally escaped and died heart- broken....»*

Page 72-73. The rise of the Safavid dynasty. Shah Ismail traced his descent to the seventh Imam, his family was deeply venerated.: «..... Shah Ismail owed his rise to a band of fanatically devoted followers, and his first exploit was the capture of Baku. This success increased his following, and he was able to defeat Alwand, Prince of the Ak-Kuyunlu dynasty... »

(Note: The Akh Koyunlu too are Turkmen).

« ..After this important success he marched on Tabriz, which opened its gates, and was proclaimed Shah. It cannot be too clearly realized that the rise of this family was viewed with intense emotion owing to the Persian love for the house of Ali. His followers viewed Ismail as Priest and King, and would often fight without armour so as to win martyrdom. It is, however, noteworthy that it was the support of seven Turkish tribes and not the Persians who secured the throne for Ismail. Known as Kizilbash or 'Red heads', from wearing a scarlet head-piece, they played the leading part on the stage of Persia for many generations, and one of them, the Kajar, has produced the present reigning dynasty....», «...The Persian army, almost entirely composed of mounted troops, moved rapidly and met the Uzbeks in the neighbourhood of Merv, where, by means of a successful ambush, 17,000 Turks and Persians utterly defeated 28,000 Uzbeks. Shaybani Khan was killed... »

(Note: Shaibani Khan, Uzbek ruler of Turkestan until this defeat was the strongest crocodile in the marigot. Among other feats, he kicked the future Grand Moghol Babur off his recently conquered Samarkand and off Central Asia.)

(Note: The Kizil bash: a conglomerate of tribes, mainly the « seven great uymaqs »: Ustādju, Rumlu, Shāmlu, Dulghadir, Afshār, Qājār, Takkalu).

Other tribes, such as the Turkmen, Bahārlu, Qaramānlū, Warsāk or Bayāt are occasionally listed in addition to the seven ones. No trace though of the « Shia Yomut » tribe, discovered by a well known blogger and self styled rug expert, living on the Persian bank of the Atterek while the « Suni Yomud » lived on the other bank of the river. Given the fact that none of the visitors, not even Vambery to whom the creativity never failed, ever mentioned the existence of these Shia Yomut. It could not possibly be a red herring, could it? ).

Page 79. Shah Abbas the Great, the Uzbeks and Khorassan (1590):

«...The Uzbek empire was at its zenith at this period. Eastwards it included part of modern Chinese Turkestan, and southwards Badakshan and Tokharistan. Its power was now felt in Khorasan, which province was reduced to a pitiable condition, Herat, Meshed, and Nishapur all falling into the hands of the savage tribesmen, who massacred and looted to their hearts' content. The Shah was for long delayed by illness, but finally he gained a decisive victory over the invaders in 1597, close to Herat, after which the raids ceased for many years... »

« .. As a protection to the northern frontiers of Khorasan, tribes of Kurds were settled in the Darragaz, Kuchan,

and Bujnurd districts, and, generally speaking, they have protected Khorasan by their hostility to the Turkoman, not that they entirely spared the property of the less virile Persians....».

(Note: A few strong Shahs had to bring the unruly Kurds in line, as for example, in 1832, the crown prince Abbas Mirza)

Page 79- 80. «... The Shah (Abbas the great) had realized that his army, consisting entirely of Kizil-bash horsemen who only obeyed their chiefs, would never be able to defeat the Turks. He therefore decided to reduce the tribal contingents to thirty thousand, and to organize a force of ten thousand cavalry and twelve thousand infantry, to be paid and officered by the Crown...».

(Note: Trained by a party of British soldiers led by Sir Anthony Shelley and his brother).

«...To complete his military independence, Abbas formed a **new tribe, termed Shah Savan** or \* Friends of the Shah '. Thousands of men joined it, and thus released the Shah from dependence on the turbulent and domineering Kizil-bash.... »

( Note: The Shahsavans eventually were granted territories taken back from the Ottoman in the Northeast of Persia.)

Page 82-83. «...Polygamy, which is suitable to mankind in its early stages, involves many disadvantages, among them being lack of affection of the children for the father. The mothers and their families intrigue against one another, regarding the head of the family as a master rather than a husband or parent. As a result the father, on his side, regards his sons as they grow up, in the light of possible supplanters, and consequently as enemies. Shah Abbas, who destroyed his own family, also ensured the ultimate destruction of the Safavi dynasty by not permitting the princes of the blood to be trained to arms, as had been the invariable custom. They were henceforth brought up in the *anderun* or 'Women's Apartments', with eunuchs as their governors. They thus tended to become incapable voluptuaries. This policy succeeded only too well, and no capable successor sat on the throne of Shah Abbas. Unfortunately for Persia, the respect for the royal family was so great that no outside chief could overthrow it. The nation thus became effete, its virility being sapped by the effeminacy of its rulers, until it fell shamefully and paid an awful price in blood and dishonour.....»

Page 93-95. Nadir Shah: «... the Napoleon of Asia, was of very humble origin. His father was a member of the Kirklu tribe, which, owing to its weakness, united with the powerful Afshars. He lived at Kupkan, a village close to Darragaz,...and earned a poor living by making fustian or skin-coats and by grazing a few sheep and goats. In the winter he left the ice-bound uplands, and crossing the Allah ho Akbar range, descended on to the warmer plains to the north. Nadir was bred in the school of adversity. When about eighteen years of age, both he and his mother were carried off by a party of raiding Uzbeks. His mother died in captivity, but he

managed to escape, and entered the service of the governor of Abivard, the capital of what is now known as the Darragaz district. Nadir married his master's daughter, and upon his death succeeded to the governorship.

He distinguished himself in his attacks on the Uzbeks, while serving Malik Mahmud, the ruler of Khorasan, and gained invaluable experience in the use of musketry and artillery. Presuming on his success, he claimed the deputy-governorship of Khorasan, only to be beaten and dismissed. He promptly retorted by becoming a robber, gaining possession of impregnable Kalat-i-Nadiri. This success increased the number of his men, and he proceeded to seize Nishapur by luring the main body of the garrison into an ambush. Shortly afterwards he joined Shah Tahmasp and rendered the signal services already detailed ([Note: Expelling the Afghans](#)).

His reward was the rule of Khorasan, Sistan, Kerman and Mazanderan, together with the title of Sultan. Nadir did not assume the title, but struck money with his own name and paid his troops with it ; in the East this amounts to sovereignty.

After expelling the Afghans, Nadir concentrated all his energies on driving the Turks out of Persia. His first campaign was most successful. He defeated a Turkish army near Hamadan, and as a result the provinces of Irak and Azerbaijan fell to him. He was besieging Erivan when news of a rebellion in Khorasan compelled him to raise the siege and march eastwards to invest Herat, distant perhaps 1,400 miles. During his absence, Shah Tahmasp, jealous of Nadir's fame, took the field, but only to suffer defeat. So much so was this the case that he lost everything Nadir had won back and made a disastrous peace. This fatuous conduct gave Nadir the pretext he had hitherto lacked. Tahmasp was arrested and imprisoned in Khorasan, and thence-forward Nadir was the virtual ruler of Persia....»

Page 99: «...The conquest of Bokhara and Khiva was a mere corollary to the campaigns of the Great Afshar. These two petty states were ruled by separate Uzbek dynasties. From Khiva especially raiding bands annually ravaged Khorasan, one of which, as already mentioned, had carried off Nadir, who must have felt special pleasure in punishing these man-stealers. The campaign was organized from Balkh, and the rations consisted mainly of large quantities of grain transported in boats. Abul Fayz Khan of Bokhara submitted. The terms included their cognition of the Oxus as the boundary of Persia and the provision of an Uzbek contingent eight thousand strong. The treaty was sealed by a double marriage.

The campaign against Khiva was not so easy. The Turkoman nearly succeeded in destroying the grain convoy, on which the army entirely depended, but were just beaten off. Nadir then marched down the Oxus. The Khan had put to death or mutilated his ambassadors and should therefore have fought to the death. On the contrary, he tamely surrendered and was executed, with twenty of his advisers. There was no massacre of the Khivans. A number of Persians were freed from slavery, as one result of this campaign, and were given land in the village which was founded by Nadir to commemorate his birth place...»

.....

After the Russo-Persian war.

Page 119: «...The (Persian) defeat by Russia.... was final, and Persia realized that she was not able to fight the Northern Power. Consequently, as a salve to her wounded pride, she made strenuous efforts to recover Herat and other provinces that once formed part of the Persian Empire to balance her heavy losses in the North-west. Abbas Mirza was entrusted with the task of directing Persian aggression eastwards... »

Page 120: «...Meanwhile, Khusru Mirza had taken Turshiz in Khorassan. Quchan too submitted. The most important fortress to hold out was Sarakhs, as the Khan of Khiva had advanced to its neighborhood and had to be reckoned with. But the surrender of Quchan frightened him, and he retired to the desert, leaving the Salor Turkoman to bear the brunt of Abbas Mirza's attack

([Note: in 1832. Victory of the crown prince Abbas over the Salor Turkmen](#) ).

Sarakhs, situated at a ford on the Tejen, half-way between the cities of Merv and Nishapur, was an important frontier fortress of Persia and it was necessary to recover it, as from it the Turkoman sallied out and carried off men, women, and children to sell in the slave-markets of Khiva.

Abbas Mirza, after negotiations for surrender which came to nothing, assaulted and captured Sarakhs, massacred its Turkoman garrison, and released some 3,000 Persian prisoners...This blow resounded over Central Asia, and for a while Khorasan was free from raiders...»

Page 129: «... The Persian Government had proved itself to be incapable of repressing piratical raids by the Turkoman ([Yomud, on the Caspian sea](#)), whom she nevertheless claimed as her subjects, and in 1836 applied to Russia for naval assistance. The reply was to occupy the small island of Ashurada in the bay of Astrabad, and to develop it into a naval base. The Turkoman fought desperately to retain their right to plunder the coasts of Mazanderan and Gilan, and in 1851 surprised and captured the new base. Gradually, however, the Northern Power put down piracy, and by the end of the century it was a thing of the past...»

Page 134-135: «...The turn of Bokhara came next. In 1865 the Amir ([Title of the ruler of Bokhara](#)) took the offensive against the Russians, but was defeated decisively at Irgai. In 1868 the Bokharan army was again de-

feated and Samarcand was occupied. By the terms of the peace made with the defeated Amir, Samarcand was handed over to Russia. In 1876 the Khanate of Khokand was annexed. This advance, which brought Russia to Charjui on the Oxus, constituted the second stage of the advance.

Meanwhile, almost simultaneously, the conquest of Khiva had been taking place. With Russia established on the Sea of Aral, on the Sir Daria, and at Krasnovodsk, Khiva had no chance. Her capital was stormed in 1873 and Russia annexed all the land on the right bank of the Oxus.... »

« ..The last step of the advance concerned Persia most deeply. She had exercised vague but ineffectual control over the Turkoman, and Russia determined to supplant her. The base was, at first, the port of Chik-islar, whence Russia marched up the right bank of the Atrek, in spite of repeated protests from Teheran. In 1879 General Lomakin advanced to Geok Tepe, the entrenched camp of the Tekke Turkoman. His artillery inflicted terrible losses on the enemy, but his assault failed and he was forced to retreat with greatly diminished prestige.

General Skobeleff was now entrusted with the task of crushing the Turkoman. Thanks partly to the help of a railway line, he brought a powerful force to Geok Tepe in 1881. The Tekke fought desperately, but Skobeleff's artillery was overpowering and, helped by mining, gave the gallant enemy no chance. The Russians assaulted after the explosion of a mine, which leveled a large section of the mud wall and carried all before them. The Cossacks pursued relentlessly and the Turkoman country was won... »

(Note: in 1884 Merv submitted after the symbolic resistance of a minority of Merv's Teke, while Sharakh on the right bank of the river Tedjen and the Pendj-deh oasis on the river Murgab were annexed with the local Salor-, Saryk- and Teke Turkmen's full agreement).

« ..As a result the Persian peasantry ceased to suffer from Turkoman raids, but the frontier line was drawn most unfavourably to Persia, which power suffered not only considerable loss of territory but a still greater loss of prestige. This concluded the advance of the Russians....»