

## Vambery. Voyages d'un faux derviche dans l'Asie Centrale. 1865.

<http://archive.org/details/voyagesdunfauxd01laungooq>

*Well known but overrated explorer of Turkestan. Praised by some, especially in the salons of London, heavily criticized by others, including by his principals at the Foreign Office. One of them calls him « our pimp », while the leading Russian historian of the time, Grigoriev, calls him « a fraud, a cheat and an incompetent ».*

*Vambery is a gifted linguist, specialized in Turkic idioms and a connoisseur of Moslem civilization. However, his informations are often imprecise and probably partly based on poorly digested or obsolete second hand sources, which he never bothers to credit properly.*

*He is a quite arrogant navel-gazer, writing ravingly and at length about himself and about the admiration which his outstanding personality generates everywhere during his daring trip.*

*He is clearly the focus of his own books. He claims, falsely, to be the first occidental having traveled through this region, superbly ignoring dozens of them and contradicting for example de Blocqueville's and Mouraviev's observations. His anecdotes are often embellished.*

*He travels disguised as a wandering holy man and explains that this precludes him from asking questions or from taking notes, which makes good sense indeed, but may also explain why his report contains mostly banal informations, already published by others well before his trip and worse still, many factual errors, some of truly amazing magnitude.*

*Although there are evidences that he did indeed make part of the risky journey which he describes (since O'Donovan does mention that the Yomuds of the Atterek remember his visit), one is justified to have some doubts about at least part of his adventure..*

Page 30: Achurada : Russian port in the South of the Caspian Sea, base of three steamers which presence is progressively decreasing the frequency of Yomud pirate's attacks. However, some Persians and even Russian slaves, were still brought to Gumush tepe, the large Yomud settlement near the Atterek and the Giurgen rivers.

Page 36-37: About the Turkmen:

The Turkmen are very particular with their tribe, they all know to which tribe, clan and sub-clan they belong. There is solidarity inside these groups.

**Göklans:** Civilized and friendly, subject of Persia. Divided in 10 branches. About 12 000 evs. They settle the Khorassan border between the upper Atterek and the Tejen.

*(Note: **False information**, all other visitors indicate that the Göklan Turkmen lived on the lower Atterek and Giurgen, but up-river from the Yomuds, in a hilly and fertile area, far from the region indicated by Vambery.)*

**Yomuds:** Out of four branches, one has accepted Persian rule. The Yomuds live on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea and in the steppe between the Caspian and the northern Amu darya. Population 200 000 (40 000 evs).

**Chodors:** Settle the northeastern shore of the Caspian, the Mangyshlak peninsula and toward Khiva. Population 12 000 evs.

**Tekes:** Between Tejen and the Amu darya (?)

*(Note: This is again an incomplete and even misleading information: Vambery ignores the facts that:*

- at the time of Vambery's (alleged-) exploration, one main group of Tekes (the Akhal Tekes), occupies the string of little oases in the northern piedmont of the Kopet dagh range and its northern valleys. Their final victory over the Persians which lived previously there, and the full destruction of the Persian city of Ashgabad, took place around 1820.*
- the second main branch of the Tekes already had displaced the Salor and the Saryk from Merv in 1855 and now occupies the oasis..)*

**Salors:** About 8000 evs, they were settled near Merv. They are the most feared raiders.

*(Note: **Wrong again**. At the time of Vambery's alleged journey, the Salors (and the Saryks) had already been expelled from Merv by the Tekes,. Many Salors (again with the Saryks) moved up the Murgab river to Yolatan, and Pendj-Deh, displacing the Jemshidi, a few families remaining as tolerated guests in Merv, others moving back to Sarakhs.*

**Saryks:** Living near Pendj-deh and the upper- (?) Murgab. Population about 10 000 oys. Divided in 4 branches. Neighbors of the Jemshidi, at war with most Turkmen.

*(Note: **Wrong information again**, Not the 'upper Murgab', but the 'middle Murgab', The upper Murgab is situated deep into Afghanistan).*

**Karas:** Between Merv and Andkoy (thus in the Afghan piedmont). About 1500 evs. Brigands.

**Alielis:** Near Andkoy. Three branches and 3 000 oys.

*(Note: Most visitors mention most Alieli settled South of the Kopet Dagh, far from Andkoy)*

**Ersaris:** On the left bank of the Amu darya until Balkh. 20 branches. 50 000-60 000 oys.

Vambery's estimates the Turkmen population closer to 1 million than to the 2 millions guesstimated by Mouraviev. 40 years before.

*(Note: Vambery's informations on Turkmen abodes do collide nearly always with those of all other visitors, including those of the few people he quotes. For example M. de Blocqueville who was a prisoner of the Merv Tekes only 5 years before Vambery's alleged journey.*

*To me, the bloke was either dreaming up all these informations or using (without crediting them) observations of much earlier visitors).*

Page 38: Vambery mentions a belief shared by many Turkmen and confirmed by recent historians: Their long stay in the Mangyshlak peninsula before a dispersion throughout the whole region.

*(Note: See Turkotek Salon 132: [http://www.turkotek.com/salon\\_00132/salon.html](http://www.turkotek.com/salon_00132/salon.html) )*

Page 47: Carpets are only woven among the rich tribes.

*(Note: And/or in reasonably wealthy families: O'Donovan notes for example that his middle class Yomud host at Gumush tepe had only felt mats in his oy, no pile rugs.*

*Then, after this correct information, in order not to leave his reader with too good an impression, Vambery writes a perfect absurdity: «...The carpet motifs are mostly copied from European ones....».)*

Page 51-...: Vambery stays at Gumush tepe, near the mouth of the river Giurgen (where also O'Donovan spent 4 months, 20 years later). First stop in his exploration.

Page 94: He reaches the Little Balkans, a short range of hills (below 1000 m), running northwest to south-east. Behind it comes the range of the Great Balkans which runs from the coast of the Caspian Sea to yje North-East.

Page 101-102: Reaching the Caflankir (Üst-Yurt): A large plateau between two cañons (long-dried rivers that again were thought to be dried beds of the Amu darya). The plateau is a bit greener than the rest of the desert and allows therefore more wild life and cattle raising.

Page 103: At the time of this journey, the Chodor are in overt rebellion against Khiva. Vambery meets an encampment of Yomuds, then a settlement of Uzbeks, then an encampment of semi-sedentary Yomuds, where he notes the Turkmen's deep aversion for houses and for any kind authority: They are limiting their contacts with the ruling Uzbeks to a strict minimum «...even though they were living with Uzbeks since several centuries...».

Page 105-122: Arrival at Khiva: The poor-, rundown aspect of the city is mentioned. Few other interesting remarks about Khiva, but, as usual, pages after ages about himself, his cleverness, his prestige etc..

The Khiva population:

a) Lots of **slaves**, mostly Iranians,

b) **Sarts**: Population of Iranian origin, which settled Khiva long before the arrival of the Uzbeks. They do not mix very much with the Uzbeks. (In Bokhara the Sarts are called Tadjiks),)

c) **Kazakhs and Kirghiz**: a decreasing proportion of the khanate population, since they increasingly tend to switch allegiance to the Russians.

d) **Karakalpaks**: settled farmers and stock breeders (10 000 houses. Vambery says that they are perfect hillbillies, an opinion which may seem at odd with their talent as delta farmers).

e) **Turkmen**: Chodors (at this time in rebellion), some Göklens and many Yomuds. Vambery dixit, these Turkmen do not like visiting the city, in part «...because Yomuds were massacred by the populace in 1856 for their participation in a plot against the Khan and his murder.... »;

*(Note: In 1855 the Sarakhs Tekes destroyed a Khivan expedition on the Tejen River, killing the ruling khan whose head was offered to the Shah of Persia for his private collection or as a thinly veiled threat. At news of this defeat the Khivan Turkmen rebelled and at least another Khivan khan was killed.*

*It is likely that Vambery either mentions the official Khivan version, or dreamed it up.)*

«...Most inhabitants **of the khanate** are therefore Uzbeks... » (This statement again is very unlikely to be true)

Vambery's description of the Khivan's clothes is surprising and does not fit well with other travelers' reports.

Page 111: The Vizir and the Khan's brother are out of town, fighting the rebellious Chodors.

Page 130-135: Markets and products: The city of Ourgendj is the center of the commercial activity, but still only a small city of 8000 inhabitants, mostly Sarts.

Page 142: «Beng» (cannabis) is broadly used in the Khiva khanate.

Page 160: Arrival of Vambery at Bokhara: He mentions the former settlers of Merv, of Turkic origin, who moved to Bokhara after the destruction of their city by the Bokharans. This information is correct but he gives a wrong date for this event (a mere 25 years error).

According to Malte-Brun. Geogr. Univers. 1844 page 645: Bokhara has, at the time, a population of 70 000 inhabitants of which 50 000 Tadjiks, 8 000 Uzbeks, 7000 Jews, 3000 Tatars (Turko-Mongols?), 2000 Afghans.

A high number of specialized bazaars, some in stone buildings.

Page 208: Arrival at Kerki, a frontier fortress and small city, inhabited by Uzbeks and « Turkmen farmers and merchants... » . The latter Turkmen job is a bit surprising again.

Page 210: Visiting the Kizil-Ayak- and the Hasan-Menekli Ersaris, near Kerki, who, according to Vambéry, are in large part settled. Living since about 200 years in the area, they have accepted the rule of the Khan of Bokhara, about 40 years before.

Page 213: Arrival at Andkoy: About 2000 houses in the city and about 8000 tents in the oases near the city. Many Alieli Turkmen, some Uzbeks and Tadjiks.

Page 216: At Maimene: 1500 houses. Mostly Uzbeks, some Tadjiks, Heratis and other Afghans.

Carpets are produced by Turkmen and by Jemchidi tribes.

Page 221: In the upper Murgab.: Somewhat down river live Salor clans, up river live the Jemchidi (8000-9000 tents) of Persian origin.