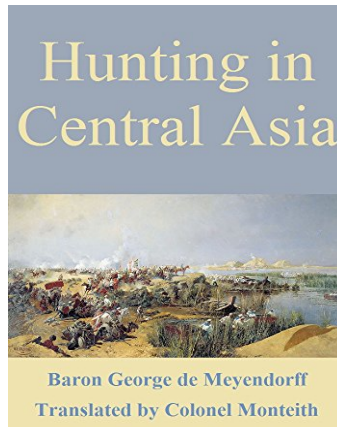


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“Hunting in Central Asia” is a translated excerpt of a book by Russian army officer and geographer George de Meyendorff (his Russian name is Egor Fedorovich Meiendorf). Meyendorff’s book described an 1820 Russian expedition to the city of Bukhara in what is now Uzbekistan.

Historically, Central Asia, was inhabited by Turkic and Persian-speaking groups, many of whom were nomadic livestock herders. These people included Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz tribes. These regions were ruled by many different empires and states over the centuries. Parts of Central Asia and Turkestan were conquered by the Persians, and by Arabs, who introduced Islam. In the 13th century they were conquered by Genghis Khan’s Mongol armies.

After the Mongols, the area was ruled by several smaller local states. In the late 19th century the Russians took control of the region, which became known as Russian Turkestan. After the Bolshevik Revolution and Russian Civil War, Russian Turkestan was incorporated into the Communist-ruled Soviet Union. The former Soviet republics of Central Asia- Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan- won their independence when the Soviet Union collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Even though the Central Asian region is dry, snow, and ice

from the Himalayas and Pamir mountains feed two major rivers that flow through the former Soviet Central Asian Republics towards the Aral Sea.

The two major rivers are Syr Darya, in the north, and the Amu Darya, in the south. In the late 20th century, the Soviet government diverted much of the water from the Amu Darya for agricultural irrigation projects. The loss of water meant that very little water from the river reached the Aral Sea, causing the sea to shrink dramatically over the course of about 40 years. The Amu Darya, in particular, now dries up before it reaches the Aral Sea, causing the southern part of the inland lake to dry up faster than the northern portion.

At the time of the 1820 Russian expedition, however, the Amu Darya, and other mountain-fed rivers flowed across the desert plains. The dense vegetation that grew along the banks of the rivers and the Aral Sea sheltered a variety of wildlife, including tiger-cats, wolves, tigers, and wild boars. This text describes how local herders lost livestock to the predators that hid near the rivers, and how they hunted and killed these threats to their livelihood. He also describes, in vivid detail, the exploits of the Cossacks who hunted wild boars along the banks of these waterways.

Wild boars, the ancestors of domestic pigs, are omnivores that are known for their intelligence and aggression when threatened. Boars' tusks can maim or kill people and animals, and horses that were seriously wounded by the boars during the hunt were sold to local nomads for meat.