

Extracts from the book by Yuriy Malikov, *Modern Central Asia: A Primary Source Reader*. Lexington Books, 2020

[These extracts] includes travel notes and reports of Russian and European travelers, ethnographers, mountain engineers, and an army officer, who visited different regions of Central Asia in the period between 1776 and 1863. These documents are essential for anyone wishing to understand the basic characteristics of the nomadic and settled peoples of Central Asia. While reading them, the reader should be aware of the Eurocentric views which distort reality, frequently depicting the natives of Central Asia as primitive peoples lacking the “fruits of higher civilization.”

Note: The terms “Kirghiz-Kaisak,” “Kirghiz,” or “Kaisak” at that time referred to the people we now call Kazakhs. “Kara-Kirghiz” was used to refer to the present-day Kyrgyz.

One of the most important observers of Kazakhstan during the prerevolutionary period was a Russian military engineer and topographer named Ivan Grigorievich Andreev, who had served for more than fifty years on the border of southern Siberia and the Kazakh steppe. From 1785 to 1790, he wrote a monograph devoted to the Kazakh people under the title “The Description of the Middle Horde of the Kirghiz-Kaisaks.” Although Andreev’s research was published at the end of the eighteenth century, the publication was incomplete and even the name of the author was not mentioned. As a result, Andreev’s monograph was long unknown to the general public. During his military service, Andreev built bridges, fortresses, churches, and various constructions along the border separating Siberia from the Kazakh steppe. He built fortresses along the Irtysh line, including those of Semipalatinsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Iamyshevo, and Bukhtorma. Andreev spent much of his life on the southern Siberian border, where he maintained close contact with Kazakhs. Andreev combined duties of service with his own personal interests as an ethnographer. He visited Kazakh auls, talked to the representatives of different nomadic groups, and studied the history, traditions, and culture of the Kazakh people. The chapters from his monograph (Document 1.1) include descriptions of Kazakhs’ religiosity, traditions, and gender roles, as well as the political and social hierarchy of the nomads.

Johann Gottlieb Georgi (1729–1802) was an ethnologist, naturalist, and explorer. Georgi studied in Stockholm, and then moved to Russia where he became a member of St. Petersburg Academy of Science. In Russia, he learned about the lives of the subjects of Empress Catherine II. Together with academics P. S. Pallas and I. P. Falk, Georgi participated in several “physical expeditions” organized by the St. Petersburg Academy of Science in 1768–1774. He visited southeastern Russia, and the Altai, Baikal, Transbaikalia, Ural, and Volga regions. On these expeditions, Georgi collected

considerable natural and ethnographic collections. He compiled his observation in a book published in German, Russian, and French in the mid-1770s. This book has retained its importance as a historical and ethnographic source up to the present day. The parts of “A Description of All the Peoples Inhabiting the Russian State, as Well as Their Daily Rituals, Beliefs, Customs, Clothing, Dwellings and Other Memorabilities” included in the reader (Document 1.2) give a detailed description of the Kazakhs’ system of sociopolitical hierarchy, army organization, relations with Central Asian khanates and Russia, as well as the status of women in Kazakh society.

DOCUMENT 1.1: IVAN ANDREEV, DESCRIPTION OF THE KAZAKHS’ MIDDLE HORDE

Chapter V: Ceremonies

1. About Divine Service, Praying, and Fasting

1. Kirghiz-Kaisaks are Muslims. Islam came to them from Bukhara during the period of rule of the ancient khan Zhanibek. Though during subsequent centuries they came into close contact with different pagan peoples, they esteemed them more as slaves and treated them scornfully, thus forcing them to abandon their beliefs and become Kirghiz-Kaisaks’ co-religionists. They have no *akhuns* (religious heads) or mullahs for divine services, and regard any literate person as a mullah. Since none of them is literate, they choose mullahs from the Tashkentians and Bukharians. Moreover, upon the request of many notable sultans and elders, the Russian authorities send literate service Tatars and Bashkirs to the steppe to serve as scribes, whom they consider enlightened people. They have neither temples nor mosques anywhere, and consider the city of Tashkent in Turkestan the only holy place, because it houses the tomb of an ancient Khazriat sultan, whom they deem sacred.

In their prayers they follow their parents and any *aul* or village has a respected old man, who knows Islamic law and ceremonial customs better than his tribesmen. This man leaves his dwelling and sings or rather shouts prayers—that happens five times a day. Upon hearing this singing, everyone according to the custom of Mohammedans (Muslims) should kneel down and pray, leaving everything that he was doing. They, however, are not firm in following the Muslim law. Due to the absence of literate people among them, they perform pagan rituals and have adopted some ceremonies from their pagan neighbors. Similar to a Kalmyk ceremony, they burn bones and, making torches and covering them with oil, they set them alight, and worship them and make sacrifices. Others, having received some punishment from God, for example, if their children die, if they are unhappy with bad weather such as storms, thunder, or lightening, or when in the winter frosts are extreme, they become angry, curse their God, violate religious dogma, and avoid fasting, which they do not do anyway, being free and unsettled people, constantly wandering from place to place. They do not celebrate

the holidays prescribed by Muslim law. They do not even know them; and festivals and celebrations occur during marriages and funerals, and they consist mostly of eating, drinking, and horse racing. Everyone should carry a page from the Quran given to him by a mullah. This page they sew in their dresses. They also wear it on their backs and across a shoulder under the right armpit. They call this item a *baitumar*, and believe that having it will bring them happiness and will help them to find their way if they get lost. Mullahs take advantage of this superstition and sell them to Kirghizes at high prices.

2. About Customs and Behavior

2. (Kazakhs') do not take off their caps when greeting their sultans and elders. Instead, when meeting their superiors on the road riding a horse, they descend from the horse and kneel down in front of them. Then the sultan places his hand on the commoner's shoulder. If [the Kazakhs] are in a *yrta*, they greet each other in the same way and, then, they sit down in a circle, usually without any ceremony; the only way they demonstrate respect is that upon leaving, they never turn their backs to other people. In other ways they are so impudent and shameless that, when they catch sight of something, they will ask the owner to give this item to them, even if they actually do not need it. They are garrulous and there are many eloquent people among them. If their sultan says something with which they disagree, they immediately mount their horses and leave and, not having even the slightest authority over them, the sultan is unable to stop such impudent behavior, and nobody will listen to him. When there are requests for the sultan to dispense justice, the sultan sends for the suspect, his subject. If he wants to come, it is good, but if the suspect does not wish to come to him, the sultan cannot bring him by force. If the case is of particular importance, the sultan uses deception to bring the suspect to his camp.

When Kirghizes meet, they greet each other by shaking each other's hand and hugging each other.

When it is possible [for a Kazakh] to steal horses in another volost and drive them to his *aul*, it often happens. In such cases, the victims organize a pursuit and, if they catch the offenders, the act of stealing is esteemed to be a theft. But if the offender managed to reach his *aul*, and added the stolen horses to his herds, the act cannot be prosecuted, and they consider the offender a courageous and brave man. Those Kirghizes, whose horses were stolen, try to take revenge in the same way. This mutual theft is called a *baranta*. A *baranta* has negative consequences on the livelihood of those who are involved in it. A *baranta* may last for a very long time, sometimes for ten or more years. But finally one side brings the other to extreme ruin and poverty by driving away all the herds they have. Then those who are destitute go to the sultans with a request, presented by their most eloquent and respected people; and then the sultan convenes a great congress. Having listened to the case, the congress discusses the arguments of both sides and decides how to establish peace between them. Then the

sultan orders the offender to return some horses and cattle to the offended side. This decision is final and nobody can change this. If a *baranta* is accompanied by murder (and that happens quite often), then congresses of notable sultans and elders are convened. After consideration of all the circumstances, the offender is supposed to pay *kun*, which includes paying nine times as much as what was stolen, and this verdict must be carried out. If the father (or mother and brothers) of the deceased agree, he (or they) takes the *kun* in Kalmyk slaves, armor, horses, cattle, and other items, and sometimes forces the murderer to give him not only his property, but also his wives and children. If the victims disagree over the *kun*, they may demand that the murderer be hanged or, having fastened him to horses' legs, painfully executed. The convicted thief should also pay nine times as much as he had stolen, under strict supervision. If a respected person knows the thief who has stolen and can prove it, he should take revenge on the criminal, using *baranta* as the only means of taking revenge.

If a husband kills his wife, her death will be avenged not only by her father, mother, and relatives but also by the entire *volost*. Because such a murder is an act of disgrace for the whole society in which this woman was born and raised, the murderer should pay a great *kun*, which includes a woman or a maid, an armor given to the father or mother, and horses and other cattle divided among the members of the clan of the murdered woman. There are cases in which the father and brothers kill the murderer. If this happens, then there is no trial, and nobody's relatives should pay anything since blood was paid for blood. Insignificant cases and divorces are not considered by great sultans, for their involvement is quite expensive, since the victims of the crime are supposed to provide the whole community with food and drinks during the entire duration of the trial, which may last for quite a lengthy period of time. At the same time, many trials are conducted by individual elders.

They never fight long wars. Instead, they make impudent attacks and raids, which are generally directed against wild Kirghizes. With the agreement of their elders, they also gather under the leadership of some sultan and attack and plunder Karakalpaks and Khivians; these gangs also plunder merchant caravans, which travel between Bukhara and Tashkent, and further to the Russian fortresses of St. Peter and Semipalatinsk. They rob Russian merchants who participate in this trade and cause great losses and ruin to commerce.

The Kirghizes give presents to sultans only when they wish to award them for their services as judges; and sultans have the authority to take from them whatever they wish.

5. The Wedding Ceremony

Sultans and other important and rich people pick future spouses for their children when they are between three and seven years old, and commoners do it later. The groom and the bride should be brought up by and live with their parents until the *kalym* (payment for the bride) is paid in full. The *kalym* may be paid with any type of property, such as

horses and camels, and if the parents are rich and important, the *kalym* may include Kalmyk slaves. As it was said, the bride and the groom cannot marry until the groom pays the bride price to the father-in-law. He, however, can come to the *aul* of his bride and has the right to spend a night with her, but no intimacy between them is allowed before the marriage, no matter how many nights they spend together. After the payment for the bride is made, the wedding ensues, [and] maidens dress, singing appropriate songs to entertain her [the bride]. After the groom arrives [and] the bride [is] dressed in her best dress, the mullah puts a cup of pure water in front of him and, having covered it with a white scarf, reads appropriate prayers; and at last, having written something on a piece of paper, dips this into the water and gives the cup both to the groom and the bride to drink three times. After this ritual is performed, the bride goes to a special *yurta* to have rest. Then women gather there, checking the virtues of the bride and, if she is virgin, they take this with pleasure; in the opposite case, if she has sinned before the marriage with the groom, those same women tear up to pieces the bride's elegant dress, and kill and eat the horse on which the groom has ridden, and shout profanities at the young couple.

If a single woman gives birth to a child, it is not considered to be a crime or a sin. If the groom discovers that his bride is not a virgin, the groom has the right not to marry her and to take the bride money back from her father, also demanding some compensation. If she is not carrying his child, and the groom knows who her lover is, he has the right to kill both for his dishonor. He can also take away or destroy her father and mother's property, and marry her sister without paying any *kalym*, and nobody has a right to stop him. Under such circumstances, if the groom is a cruel man, he can hang his bride and her lover on a camel, without interference from a sultan, and it is not subject to court authority. The bride should bring a horse with a saddle, a gun, a dress, carpets, and other items to the groom's *yurta* as a dowry. At last, they have [the wedding] festivities, which include feasting, drinking, and horse racing.

6. Concerning the Dead

When the head of a household, or his married son dies, his body is washed and covered with a pure white cloth. They stretch the dead man's hands and, having dug out a hole, bury his body in the ground (as the Tatars do). Then the hole is covered with wooden boards and earth. But since in many places wood is scarce, they cover the bodies with stones and set wooden signs above tombs; and where there is absolutely no wood, they use only stones. During the winter many Kazakhs do not do this; and until the ground thaws in the spring, they string the body up in a tree and, then, after they bury him, they fix a black sign on a long pole by his *yurta*. Inside the *yurta*, they set an effigy of a man, dress it in a good dress, put a copper helmet on its head, and place chainmail on its body; and, as a token of remembrance, every morning and evening at sunset, wives, the man's mother, daughters, and other women sit in front of this effigy, mourn, [and] recollect his acts to glamorize his bravery, skills, and so forth.

Whenever a stranger enters the *yurta*, the wife who loved the husband more than the others should tear her face with her fingernails to demonstrate her mourning. These signs sometimes stay on their faces for the whole year. After the year passes, they remove this effigy and the black sign; also they convene a great congress, commemorating his death; they usually have horse racing; and then, after the entertainment is over, they cut the tail of the deceased's favorite horse. Then the widow has the right to marry another man, but this man should be a brother or a close relative of her dead husband. They established this tradition for the deceased's family not to lose the bride money paid by the deceased before the marriage.

7. About Men

The men of the Kirghiz-Kaisaks, as a rule, have strong, corpulent bodies. They may be of different heights and so strong, that it is difficult to push them off a horse. They cannot run fast, for they spend most of their time on horseback. That is why everyone has curved legs. The number of their wives depends on their wealth. They may have up to seven wives or more. Each has her own *yurta*. They wander to different places in order to find enough food for their livestock. A man supervises his wives by staying between their *yurtas*, [and] frequently visiting his wives, especially the younger ones. These people are not jealous at all. There are no conflicts between the wives, and the senior wife is treated as the real mistress, or mother. In addition to their wives, Kirghizes have female Kalmyk slaves and, if there is no one to marry them to, they treat them as concubines. These concubines give birth to children, and the legitimate wives are not allowed to create any obstacles or to voice any objections to such practices.

8. About Women

The women have some beauty; but as Asian people, mixed from different tribes, they look like Kalmyks with strong bodies, rather capable of rearing children. Their hair is generally black and long, they arrange it in two braids, and decorate them with rings and pieces of silk cloth, which almost reach the floor, and attach silver decorations to them, which they buy from the Tashkentians. They have the same decorations on bibs. Some women wear a small silver ring in their noses, which is the sign of a father's favorite daughter. They wear many rings on their fingers and earrings in their ears. These earrings have pearls and are very long. They wear long dresses with jackets made of velvet, and different European silk fabrics according to their wealth. The boots that they wear are made of different kinds of leather: red and black with sharp heels, so walking in them is rather difficult. They also wear trousers for they always ride camels, horses, and bulls; and they are great riders. A woman never calls her husband by his name, since it is considered to be a sin. Instead she calls him *murza*, that is, master. The woman cannot see her father-in-law before she gives birth to a baby; and if she happens to see him unintentionally, he should give her a valuable gift. When moving from one place to another, the wives' obligation is to pack up and transport *yurtas*, to saddle a

horse for the husband and to help him mount the horse. They also are obliged to spin and weave wool, to sew different clothes, to make saddles, to roll felts, to take care of the household, and to raise their children.

15. Concerning Their Food and Drink

Their principal foods are horsemeat, camel, and other livestock, including the meat of animals which died of some unknown illness. They also eat different kinds of bread. They do not bake it, but put flour into boiling water together with barley and meat, and then fry it in oil. They do this predominantly in the winter. In summertime, they eat very little meat with the exception of such gatherings as commemorations, weddings, and other reunions. They drink *kumys* made of fermented mare's milk; and from cow and sheep milk, they make kurt, which resembles cottage cheese. Then they dry it; and when they plan to use it, they add warm water to it. They do not drink cold water either in the summer or the winter. They always warm it up. When their boiled food is too hot, they add cold water or snow to their bowls. This does not cause them any health problems. They do not use spoons, but drink liquid food from bowls. They cut meat and eat it with their hands. They also eat fish when they acquire it from Russians, and some of them catch fish with nets and fishing rods. They drink Russian vodka and wine but, generally, their favorite Russian drink is beer.

(Source: Ivan Andreev, *Opisanie Srednei Ordy Kirghiz-Kaisakov* [Almaty: Ghylym, 1998], 55–71.)

DOCUMENT 1.2: JOHANN GOTTLIEB GEORGI, ABOUT TARTAR PEOPLES

Kirghizes

Nobody remembers when or why Kirghizes got divided into three hordes, one of which is called the Great, the other Middle, and the third Younger. Each horde has its own khan and its territory, which is subdivided among several uluses.

Kirghizes' appearance is no different from that of the Kazan Tatars. Their eyes are smaller, probably, because they keep them half-closed because of the blinding snow. They are cheerful and non-menacing. They are endowed by nature with fair minds. They like the wasteland, are cool, affectionate, curious and, therefore, not bloodthirsty.

Their robberies, cruelty, and injustice are more the consequences of their severe and uncontrollable way of life, an absurd quest for vengeance and false notions of honor and courage, rather than of a natural inclination to such actions. That is why the

increasing trade with Russia influences them, correcting their mores. Their women are good housewives, known for their kindness and sympathy to captives, whom they often help to escape, thereby risking their own lives.

They do not have schools, which is why so few of them can write in their own language. Their language, according to knowledgeable people, represents a Tatar dialect, which is not surprising because they are surrounded by the Tatars and have no relations with any other peoples.

Their nobility is numerous. They call the lower strata “*khodzha*,” and the middle one—“*biui*.” The highest aristocracy consists of sultans. Their *khodzhas* are not the descendants of Muhammad, as is the case among Turkestanians and other nations, but commoners. *Biuis* must have heroes, and sultans, or princelings, must have chiefs among their ancestors.

Because they buy their women, they do not include them in their genealogical trees. Not only the tribes but also clans, or *aimaks*, carefully observe the mutual union and elect their elders and rulers from the richest noblemen. Their superiors do not receive any salaries, and the people do not show much obedience to them and do not respect them more than ordinary people respect any other wealthy person.

The khan himself is honored and respected because of the elders, who are frequently his brothers, sultans, uncles, or their friends. Even those decisions that are made by the common consent of all *aimaks*’ chiefs are executed only if they meet the people’s own interests. If any honest person sees that he can benefit by not following these decisions, he violates them. If the decision is made to go to war, all people capable of carrying weapons gather at a certain place, having two or more horses and arms with them.

These crowds gather and advance being led by elected commanders. Since everyone provides for himself, the army needs neither a treasury nor a system of logistics. Their armies devastate everything. The livestock that they have not eaten and the enemies who they have not killed, together with their wives and children, are taken into captivity. When they grow weary of the martial campaign, they gradually return to their encampments—that is why the size of the army diminishes daily.

When they encounter brave enemies, they do not perform very well. They are very poor archers. Their guns do not have a hammer, which is why they fire them following the ancient way—igniting the fuse of gunpowder. They cannot shoot straight from their horses, so they have to dismount, lie down, and put their rifles on stands. Sometimes they get bored waiting for an enemy [in such a position]. If their campaign is not succeeding or if they endure a defeat, then everyone hurries to the nearest road to his *ulus*. For all that, they usually beat those of their enemies who are as skillful as they are in military arts.

Because elders perform the functions of judges in *uluses* and the khan has more power in meting out justice than in direct rule, everyone supports the existing laws and demands that these laws be observed. Laws are partly based on the Quran, as well as

their customs, and in special cases, on natural justice. If one kills a man, he may be persecuted by his family for two years, during which they may kill him without any punishment. If the murderer manages to survive, he must give the victim's relatives 100 horses, one slave, and two camels. Five sheep are taken to replace one horse. The murder of a woman, child, or a slave, as well as the desecration of women, followed by an untimely birth is punishable by half the price described above. But in all cases litigants' interests are mitigated by their friends and acquaintances, and the offended frequently reduce their number of claims.

The defacement of a man is to be compensated as half a loss of life. The cutting of a thumb costs 100 sheep, of a little finger 20 sheep, while other fingers cost from 30 to 60 sheep. Missing ears is considered to be such a terrible flaw that people who endure this loss, even if it was not their fault, are unbearable to them. If someone in his anger seizes his opponent's beard or genitals he, according to the decision of judges, will be severely tortured. The punishment for stealing property is the following: The guilty should give compensation, which is nine times higher than the value of the stolen commodity and so on. No one is allowed to take an oath on his own behalf and, if a brother or a friend of the accused refuses to testify against him, then nobody can force him to do so.

All Kirghizes lead a nomadic way of life. They live in movable *yurtas* and for the sake of their livestock, they do not settle, choosing to roam the steppe instead. Livestock breeding is their principal occupation. Inasmuch they migrate in the interests of their livestock, their animals graze in the north in the summer and in winter they migrate to the south. Hunting and fishing can be considered their subsidiary occupations. They do not even think of farming, which would not be profitable in the steppe, which is mostly dry or covered in salt marshes.

Their herds consist of horses, camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. They use them as sources of food and clothing. Their welfare and social status, together with their right to participate on committees and hold privileged positions there, depend on the number of livestock that they own. An average livestock breeder rarely has less than 30 horses, 25 or 15 heads of cattle, 100 sheep, several camels, and 20 to 50 goats. The Middle Horde, as we heard, has several people who have herds consisting of up to 10,000 horses and 300 camels, 3,000 to 4,000 heads of livestock, about 20,000 sheep, and more than 1,000 goats. The Younger Horde has individuals owning 5,000 horses and a considerable amount of other animals.

Camels are very useful to their economy. When they move their encampments, they load the camels with their *yurtas* and household items, so that they carry the weight of up to thirty *poods*. They never load more than sixteen poods on a camel if the trip is going to be long. Each camel yields ten to twelve poods of wool a year, which they both sell to Russia and Bukhara, and use themselves to make clothes and lassos. Moreover, they milk them for making *kumys* and cheese, and sometimes for oil, which

has more fat than that of cows and is not as watery as mare's milk. Kirghizes also eat their meat, and use their skin for making large milk containers.

Kirghizes occasionally capture their neighbors, or steal livestock and goods from them. Karakalpaks, Bukharans, Persians, Turkmens, more frequently Kalmyks, and occasionally Russians become their victims.

In addition to random burglaries, they occasionally cross the border, frequently forming gangs, which often include members of the nobility as their leaders. When they decide to rob a caravan inside or outside of their territory, the entire *uluses* secretly join forces for this robbery. While committing robberies many Kirghizes either get captured or killed. In the cases of small robberies, everyone keeps what he could capture. A successful raid is followed by the division of the booty.

Every thief keeps the captured livestock for himself, and inasmuch the captured women constitute the honor of a man, they keep them for themselves as well. They exchange other slaves and goods for livestock or sell them to Bukharans. They frequently do such things to captured Russian, in part, because they are afraid of possible retaliations, and because Bukharans pay large sums of money for Russian captives, highly valuing their skills and ability to do agricultural labor.

Kirghiz women perform the following functions: They milk livestock, curry leather, make fabrics, felts, and perform other similar duties. They do not weave canvas or hemp nettle, but only make thick clothes.

In comparison to other nomadic peoples of our countries, Kirghizes live very well. With their unbridled freedom and easy opportunities to acquire the number of livestock necessary for adequate living, they do not wish to become somebody's slave or servant but want everyone to treat them as his brothers. That is why wealthy people cannot do without slaves. The more slaves one has, the higher his status is, and the better care his herds get. Only slaves serve the nobility. The khan has more than fifty of them.

For people whose lifestyles are no different from those of Kirghizes, slavery is not in the least painful because an owner treats his slaves as if they were his relatives, feeds them the same food as he eats, and provides them with all necessities. For captives who are not accustomed to such life, their captivity is rather hard. Attempts to escape from captivity and conspiring with the wives of the owner are severely punished. Many died of such a punishment.

Because not everyone can have enough slaves for their herds, the rich give a part of their livestock to the destitute. The latter look after the livestock of their benefactors. If these herds quickly multiply, he considers this an act of God's grace and divides a significant part of this herd among the poor people. If the giver preserves his well-being, then the people who received the livestock from him do not owe him anything. However, if due to livestock mortality, plundering, or because of some other misfortunes, he loses his livestock, then the people who received the livestock from him should return all of it, in addition to the offspring of this livestock, no matter how little livestock they have left. Because of this practice, wealthy Kirghizes' herds became "eternal."

In terms of food and drink, they follow Islamic norms. The most common winter food is lamb and in summer they drink much kumys. All other dishes, such as meat, roots of wild plants, milk, and dishes made of flour they make for special occasions or simply for a change.

All of their dishes are rustic, not always clean, and seasoned only with salt. Inasmuch they can only purchase flour and cereals from Russia, Bukhara, and Khiva, many of them have never tried bread or porridge in their lifetime. Kirghizes distill mare's milk and turn it into arak—a milk wine. Not having a shortage of meat, they can quench their thirst in winter time with meat broth. They like animal fat so much that often they eat fat and oil with their hands. They are generally good and voracious eaters. Four of them, returning from hunting, could eat a whole lamb or a sheep in one sitting.

If any foreigner befriends a Kirghiz of either noble status or one respected due to wealth, this friendship will give him far greater security than he would have being accompanied by an armed guard on the steppe, which in no way could defend him from a large gang. The robbers immediately abandon their plan to attack a caravan as soon as the Kirghiz assures them that the foreigner is his friend and if a Kirghiz promises to provide such protection, one can rely on his word. Taking this precaution, many Russian merchants, especially of Tatar origin, make profitable trips to Bukhara, Khiva, and other countries.

Noble and wealthy Kirghizes lead exactly the same lifestyle as commoners. Because of it, their encampments differ from each other only by the number of *yurtas* for wives, children, and slaves. When they ride their horses, one can recognize a nobleman only by the number of people who accompany him.

They treat their people as if they were brothers. Since all of them are free people, and because any newly wealthy man is honored, common people do not revere their noblemen. Commoners come to the *yurtas* of noblemen without invitation. Noblemen and commoners eat together, [and] commoners say whatever comes to their minds and follow only the orders of the noblemen which they find expedient. Though commoners do not demonstrate strict obedience to their khan, they treat him with much respect, as if he were a sacred person.

Since a khan, following the prescriptions of Quran, cannot marry his daughters to his relatives and, due to his grandeur, refuses to marry them to a common person without a considerable bride price, many of them stay unmarried. The Kirghizes are able to see khan's women only when they change their encampment. On such an occasion, they ride good horses or camels wearing their best clothes. If a Kirghiz meets his khan on the steppe, he dismounts his horse and approaches the khan saying: "May God grant you happiness!" ("Allah Akbar!"). Then, the khan touches his shoulder lightly with his hand or a whip, and they consider such an act a kind of blessing.

Bukharians, Khivans, Tashkentians, and other neighboring peoples who practice agriculture or make crafts take livestock and camels from Kirghizes for their merchant caravans. In exchange, they provide them with the weapons that the Russian merchants

cannot sell to them. It is also prohibited for Russian merchants to sell them armor, clothing, and other things.

According to Eastern tradition, Kirghizes buy their wives. Like other Muslims, they have up to four wives. Moreover, some of them also have concubines whom they treat almost as well as their wives and consider the children born by their concubines to be legitimate. Almost all poor common people have only one wife, quite frequently captured from their neighbors.

When a man wishes to marry a Kirghiz girl for the first time, he pays for her with some 50 horses, 25 cows, 100 sheep, a few camels, a slave, and armor. I am writing here about an average price. Poor suitors pay far less, whereas wealthy ones pay several times more. Second wife is more expensive than the first; the third is more expensive than the second, and so on.

The wedding ceremony, similar to that of Tatars, takes place in the bride's new *yurta*. Before the wedding, the bride sits down on a carpet and girls carry her around the encampment for her to bid farewell to everyone. More young women follow her and sing songs. If it is discovered that the bride married without being a virgin, the guests kill a bridegroom's horse, tear his wedding attire, and blaspheme the wife the next morning. But the wife's father should give compensation to his son-in-law for this loss. If everything is fine, then they enjoy themselves with a few days of feasting, dancing, singing, telling stories, wrestling, racing, shooting, and so on. The newly married couple should reward the winners of these competitions with clothes, decorations, and sometimes horses. As the guests leave, they present the newlyweds with livestock and other commodities.

A man who has more than one wife gives each her own *yurta* for them to be able to raise their children separately from each other. She raises her children as she considers appropriate. They are proud to have numerous children, and force those wives who cannot bear children to become servants to the mothers with many children.

At the beginning of the previous century, lured by Turkestani clergy, Kirghizes switched from shamanic paganism to the Islamic faith. They respect their faith, but since they have no schools and the *uluses* do not have mullahs, they are not only ignorant, but also extremely superstitious. The low number of the mullahs living among them are Tatars that they Kirghizes captured who can read and write. Because of their literacy, these Tatars serve as both clerics and advisers to noble Kirghizes. These people have very little knowledge of their religion as they rarely possess a Quran or other holy scriptures, even those who know Arabic. Various *abdals*, or people who perform circumcisions, constantly travel along the steppe. Since they receive one sheep as a reward for the operation, they always have large herds.

A multitude of wizards live among them. The most important of them are the following: the *falshis*—stargazers who, using heavenly signs, are said to predict such trifles as lucky and unlucky days, and so on. The *diagzys*, or prophets, are the people who not only know in advance what the weather will be like, but they themselves can

cause rain, wind, heat, and so on. Moreover, they are able to stop or cast destructive spells. At least one *diagzy* lives in a court of every noble Kirghiz. *Baksys* resemble pagan shamans. They boast that they are familiar with evil spirits, summon them on occasion, sometimes using a drum, and order them to perform different tasks, such as making wives and livestock fertile, curing the sick, foretelling the future, and similar things. And those who are offended by the devil should seek their help. Many wizards are quite wealthy.

(Source: Johann Georgi, A Description of All the Peoples Inhabiting the Russian State, as Well as Their Daily Rituals, Beliefs, Customs, Clothing, Dwellings and Other Memorabilities Part 2, About Tartar Peoples [St. Petersburg: Artilleriiskii Kadetskii Korpus, 1776], 115–42.)