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FISH AND FISHING IN EASTERN TURKESTAN A CONTRIBUTION TO CENTRAL ASIAN ETHNOICHTHYOLOGY

[Araştırma Makalesi-Research Article]

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Abstract

This article provides some glimpses into the importance and many uses of fish in Eastern Turkestan in the late 19th, early 20th century and today. Apart from a few scholarly articles, mainly dealing with the Loplik and Dolan, little has been published on fish among the Turkic speaking Muslims of Eastern Turkestan. According to a common perception among foreign observers in Central Asia, the sedentary Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan, i.e. contemporary Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, were underutilizing the available fish resources. Despite the fact that fishing and the local population's knowledge about fish is poorly documented, fish seems to have been used for more than food, especially along the rivers of the region. This essay reviews the historical use and economic importance of fish in Eastern Turkestan in areas like food and traditional medicine. Other aspects discussed in the text are naming, folk taxonomy, mythology and additional facets of the importance fish among the Uyghurs today. Finally, the article will also present examples from oral literature such as folktales, proverbs, poetry, folk songs and riddles mentioning fish.

Keywords: Fishing Equipment, Food Culture, Ichthyonyms, Local Economy, Uyghur Folklore.

DOĞU TÜRKİSTAN'DA BALIK VE BALIKÇILIK ORTA ASYA ETNOİHTİYOLOJİSİNE BİR KATKI

Öz

Bu makale 19. yüzyılın sonları, 20. yüzyılın başları ve günümüzde Doğu Türkistan'da balıkların önemi ve birçok kullanım alanı hakkında bazı bilgiler sunmaktadır. Birkaç akademik makale dışında, çoğunlukla Loplik ve Dolan dışında Türk dili konuşan Doğu Türkistan Müslümanları arasında balıkla ilgi çok az yayın yapılmıştır. Orta Asya'daki yabancı araştırmacılar arasındaki yaygın bir algıya göre Doğu Türkistan'da yaşamakta olan yerleşik Türk Müslümanları, yani çağdaş Sinciang Uyghur Özerk Bölgesi, mevcut balık kaynaklarından yeterince yararlanmıyordu. Halkın balıkçılık ve balıkla ilgili bilgileri yetersiz bir şekilde belgelenmesine rağmen balık özellikle nehre yakın bölgelerde yemekten daha fazlası için kullanılmış gibi görünmektedir. Bu makalede Doğu Türkistan'da balığın tarihsel kullanımı ve ekonomi, gıda ve geleneksel tıp gibi alanlarda önemi araştırılmaktadır.

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İsimplendirme, halk taksonomisi, mitoloji ve günümüzde Uygurlar arasında balığın önemi üzerine tartışılan diğer görüşler ek yönleridir. Son olarak, makalede halk hikâyeleri, atasözleri, şiir, türküler gibi sözlü edebiyat ürünleri ve balıklardan bahseden bilmece örnek olarak sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Balıkçılık Malzemesi, Yemek Kültürü, İktiyozis, Yerel Ekonomi, Uygur Folkloru.

Introduction

According to a common perception among foreign observers in Central Asia, the sedentary Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan, i.e. contemporary Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, were underutilizing the resources in lakes and rivers of *baliq* 'fish' in Eastern Turki and *béliq* 'fish' in Modern Uyghur as nutrients (Le Coq, 1916: 38; Jarring, 1998: 8). With the exceptions of the Loptuq people in the Lower Tarim and Lop-Nur area, who were specialized fishermen, and Dolan villagers along the Yarkand river near Maralbashi, fishing does not appear to have been a common livelihood (Ståhlberg & Svanberg, 2010, 2017; Svanberg, 1996). The few articles written by missionaries working in the Tarim area in the early twentieth century also reflect this view. The Turki oasis peasants and town dwellers were even commonly seen as reluctant to fish as food.

The Swedish Turkologist Gunnar Jarring (1948, 1998) gathered some data and translated an early twentieth century text about fishing among Eastern Turki peasants in the Kashgar-Yarkand area. In addition, Le Coq (1916) and Skrine (1926) provide us with a few ethnographic hints of fishery among the oasis peasants of Eastern Turkestan. Despite the fact that fishing and the local population's knowledge about fish is poorly documented, fish seems to have been used as food, especially along the rivers. We would like to bring forward a few examples, which may alter a prevalent view of Eastern Turkestanian as disinclined to eat fish. Hopefully, these examples also can teach us more about fishing as a profession in the region.¹

1. Purpose

Although economists, ethnographers and fish biologists studying the importance of fish emphasize their utility aspects, ethnobiological research shows that pre-industrial societies also stressed cultural, social and cognitive approaches to aquatic biodiversity. Fish were not just edible or non-edible, they also provided for instance bones, glue, medicine and skin (Hauenschild, 2003: 53; Vávra, 2020). The relationship to fish also included knowledge about their characteristics, physical properties and ecology (including spawning season), myths, personal stories and experiences, sensorial aspects such as color or smell, and awareness about their seasonal presence in the waterscape. Within this intricate relationship, naming was also important (Svanberg, & Locker 2020).

The aim of this essay is to review the historical use and economic importance of fish, but other aspects such as naming, folk taxonomy, and mythology will also be explored. In addition, some aspects of the importance fish among the Uyghurs today will be taken up for discussion.

¹The translations from Eastern Turki and Modern Uyghur in the present text have been made by Zulhayat Ötkür and Patrick Hällzon. We spell Uyghur words according to the established Internet standard, *Uyghur Latin Yéziqi* 'Uyghur Latin Script'. Uyghur Latin Script). Quotations in Eastern Turki are rendered according to Turkological principles. The authors would like to express gratitude to Jonatan Habib Engqvist, László Károly and Eric Schluessel for providing valuable feedback in the preparation of the article.

2. Material and Methods

In preparing this article, we have undertaken an intense literature search for references that mention the utilization of fish, especially from late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These include ethnographical records, linguistic material, travelogues and Swedish missionary reports from Eastern Turkestan and adjacent areas as well as material recorded in Eastern Turki and modern Uyghur. With regard to western sources, Swedish missionaries such as John Törnquist (1926) provide valuable information about fish among the Eastern Turki population. Moreover, it should be mentioned that several photographs of fish and fishery as a profession are found in Gunnar Hermansson's (1895–1962) collection at The Eastern Turkestan Collection, also called *The Fränne Collection*, in The Swedish National Archives in Stockholm, Sweden. It should be noted that Samuel Fränne (1908–1999) is the person behind this valuable collection of photographs.

The visual records are important for a number of reasons including the process of identifying various fish species and fishing equipment. For a number of different reasons, several previously common species have disappeared from the waterways of Eastern Turkestan.

Turkologist Gunnar Jarring published an important text on river fishing in in the Kashgar and Yarkand area in 1998. It is mostly devoted to agriculture in the region but Jarring also chose to include a section on fishing, which the local resident Abdu Vali Akhon wrote sometime in 1905–10 (Jarring, 1998: 7).

Recent publications from the region dealing with fish demonstrate that the topic is not isolated to historical material. In an article in Uyghur, we learn that the locals have made use of various types of fishing equipment and fishing methods suitable for the specific environmental conditions. Regarding fish and its role in society, we see that there are a number of beliefs and understandings connected with fish. Fish are also present in the folklore of the Uyghur people, for instance in folk stories, proverbs, riddles, and poetry. Regarding folkloristic sources, we have for this article traced both historical and contemporary material.

3. Distribution of Fish in Eastern Turkestan

Lakes and rivers are important features in the landscape in Eastern Turkestan. Traditionally the main waterways used for fishing in Eastern Turkestan have been rivers such as the Yarkand River (يەركەن دەرياسى), Tarim River (تارىم دەرياسى), Aksu River (ئاقسۇ دەرياسى), Kashgar River (قەشقەر دەرياسى), Qaydu River (قايدۇ دەرياسى), Tiznap River (تىزناپ دەرياسى), and Ili River (ئىلى دەرياسى) as well as lakes like Lop Nur (لوپنۇر كۆلى) and Baghrash Lake (باغراش كۆلى) (also called Bosten Lake).

The fish fauna has changed considerably during the twentieth century. In contemporary Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan) there are ninety fish species in eight orders, twenty families and fifty-five genera. Fifty species are native and twenty-eight native and twelve alien species are commercially important (Walker & Yang, 1999: 247). Due to natural conditions such as high mountain passes surrounding the region, the waterways in the southern part of the region are rather isolated from outside water systems, which in turn has hindered contact with aquatic fauna from neighboring countries.

Before 1958, the Tarim River had around fifteen different native fish species, including *Aspiorhynchus laticeps* and *Shizothorax biddulphi*. Nowadays these have been supplanted by introduced species such as Bighead carp (*Aristichthys nobilis*), Black carp (*Mylopharyngodon piceus*), Common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), Prussian carp (*Carassius gibelio*), Grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon nobilis*) and Silver carp (*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*) (Walker & Yang, 1999: 260).

4. Fish Naming

Baliq (*béliq* in modern Uyghur) is a common Turkic word for fish, known already in eighth century Ancient Turkic (Hauenschild, 2003: 52). Although there are several zoological investigations of fish species in Eastern Turkestan's rivers and lakes, we have very few documented fish names, and most of these names are hard to identify scientifically (Hällzon et al. 2019).

Terms related to fish and fishing activities are mentioned in records written down a millennia ago such as Mahmud Kashgari's eleventh century book *Divan-i Lughat-it Türk* 'Lexicon of the Turkic dialects'. This is a valuable source for both linguistic and ethnographic research on the region. For example, there are a number of expressions related to fish and fishing such as *baliq* 'fish', *baliq suda közi taştin* 'fish is in the water and its eyes are outside', *baliqliğ ögüz* 'river with fish', *baliqsadi* 'someone eager to eat fish' (Hauenschild, 2003: 54).

Russian explorer Pevtsov recorded the ichthyonyms *otur baliq*, *minlay baliq*, *tezek-baliq* 'Dung-fish', *eger-baliq* 'Saddle-fish' and *it-baliq* 'Dog-fish' in Karakoshun Köl.

Sven Hedin mentions *asman*, *loqu*, *tasek* and *tina* 'small fish' (Jarring, 1997: 39, 276, 452, 464), Nikolai Przhevalsky also cited fish species as black fish, *paqa bašliq baliq* 'Frog-head fish' and *čim baliq* 'Sod-fish'. He described blackfish as very active and fast, *čim baliq* 'Sod-fish' has a short belly (Schlyter in press).

Skrine (1927: 78) has "*asman-belek*" [*asman baliq*] 'Heaven-fish' identified as *Diptychus gymnogaster* (Schlyter in press). Abdu Vali Akhon lists *šimal baliq*, which belongs the category white fish, while black fishes are *bek jan-baliq*, *paqa baš-baliq* 'fish with a frog's head', and *čim baliq* 'Sod-fish'. He also mentions the *jarğaq baliq* 'Leather fish' (Jarring 1998: 64). Attempts to identify some of these species have been done by Jarring (1998) and Svanberg, Hällzon & Ståhlberg (2019).

5. An ABC Book with Information on Fish

If we delve a bit deeper into the literature and material found in alternative indigenous sources, missionary sources as well as artefacts in museums and photographic collections, a new dimension emerges where there actually exists more material on this subject. The reason for scarcity not only being scarcity but also that some sources have never previously been consulted. For example, we will here provide information from an ABC-book in Eastern Turki that was printed in Kashgar in 1936. The text in question is about how the fish lays eggs and how to fish (methods). The text also contains an illustration of a fish, which most probably is not a domestic species. It resembles a salmon. However, we must not forget that the Swedish missionaries sometimes retrieved material such as illustrations from Swedish textbooks. While the information found is of value, it is also interesting to see that it would appear in textbook. The text mentions a few species such as the white fish, the black fish and the frog faced fish. It is however difficult to establish what species these might be. Jarring writes that "[t]he *šima:l*-fish is white" and also mentions so called "black fishes". Among those are mentioned "the *bek sza:n*-fish and the *paqa baš*-fish", the latter also appears in the ABC-book. Furthermore, he mentions "The dry fish and the leather fish" whose physiognomy is "thin and straight" (Jarring, 1988).

Baliq daryāda bar dur. Aq baliq qara baliq wä paqa baš baliq degän bir näččä qism baliq bar ikän. Ārtä-yaz waqtida suwniñ doñ yärläriğä barib toħum saladur. Toħi toħumlarini basqandek aftāb baliqniñ toħumlarini issiq saqlab balalarini čiğaradur. Baliq tutmaq asan bir iş emäs dur. Baliqčilär tor bilän qarmaq işlätib ularni tutadur. Andin keyin bazarğa alib barib satadur.

The fish are found in the river. There are a number of different fish such as the white fish, the black fish and the frog faced fish. In springtime, the fish go to the shallow parts of the river and lay their eggs. Just like the hen sits on her eggs, the sun keeps the fish's roe warm and then the fry hatch. To catch fish is not an easy job. The fishermen use nets and fish-hooks to catch them. After this, they take the fish, go to the bazaar, and sell it (Moen & Moen, 1936: 20).

6. Modern Uyghur Fish Terminology: A Clue to the Past?

By looking at modern Uyghur language sources, it is easier to understand the historical data. Some words refer to species not found in the region such as *barracuda* and other salt-water species. However, before dismissing these words as foreign, we should remember that certain marine species might have been imported earlier – as food or as an ingredient of local Uyghur/Eastern Turki medicine. Other words relate more to fishing as a profession. Some of these are of a later date. These words show that there is and has been a fishing industry in the region. Here we can assume that many terms are new, concurring increased numbers of alien species introduced into the waterways. Similarly, new concepts such as *béliq baqmaq* 'to raise fish' have emerged through the establishment of fish farms (Schwarz, 1992: 61). This indicates that the contemporary practices of the fishing industry did not exist before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.

7. Fishing as a Profession

We know little of the status of fishing as a profession in the Tarim basin. According to Swedish missionary L. E. Högberg (1858–1924), fishing was not a common occupation in the region. However, in the rivers and other water sources fish were plentiful (Högberg, 1907: 12–13). Fishermen were called *baliqçi* (Jarring, 1998: 68). According to Albert von Le Coq, fish was often available in the bazars of larger cities, such as Kashgar, Aqsu and especially in Kucha, but it was an underutilized food source, given how much fish there was in the rivers. Besides the Lop Nur area, there was also larger scale fishing in the vicinity of Korla, especially in Baghrash Lake (باغراش كۆلى), contemporary Bosten Lake. One mainly fished with *čangal* 'large hooks', and used fish and meat as bait (Le Coq, 1916: 38-39). Furthermore, near the town of Maralbashi fishing was important among the Dolans (Svanberg, 1996). They used large fishing nets (Le Coq, 1916: 38). He noticed that the Dolans captured the big Wels catfish (Le Coq, 1928: 38) for valued food.

8. Fishing Equipment and Methods

According to indigenous sources and western observations a wide range of fishing methods were used in the region. While anglers would use fishhooks, *qarmaq*, onto which they placed a piece of dough, meat, cricket or locust as bait (Le Coq, 2016: 39; Jarring 1998). Other ways of fishing included the use of poison, nets and other methods. The Uyghur scholar Sabit (2008: 46) informs that the inhabitants in Lop Nur used *gölme* 'fishing nets', *changghaq* 'a type of hook', *sachghaq* 'spear' and *qarmaq* 'fish hook'. They also used a special tool called *manja*. The *manja*, a sack-like fish trap apparently not used nowadays, woven from willow twigs in the shape of a cone (Jarring, 1997: 287). A contemporary Uyghur language source provides a more detailed description of the tools used.

Uyghurlarning béliqchiliqqa a'it huner buyumliri

Béliqchiliq saymanliri töwendikilerdin ibaret: Uyghurlar béliq tutushta asasen, gölme kéme, saymanlardin manja, sachqaq, ilgha (gilma), mantu qatarliq saymanlardin paydilinidu. Mantu: bu torqu yipida toqulidu yawa kendir, lopnur kendiri chigining bir xili). Torqu yipi, ewrishim yumshaq, puxta, suda asan chirimeydirghan xususiyetke ige. Kéme: toghraq yaghichidin ichi oyup yasilidu (uni yerlik xelq kongtey, deydu. Sachqaq: uzun yaghach sapqa békitilgen, ikki teripige tetür til chiqirilghan neshter shekillik tigh. Ilgha: uzun yaghach sapqa

békitilgen qarmaq shekillik tigh. Mantu: mexsus béliqning béshigha urup ölturidighan yaghach toqmaq (Rahman, 2012: 22).

Items Related to the Profession of Fishing among the Uyghurs

Tools used for fishing consist of the list found below. Among the Uyghur, fishing is generally carried out by making use of tools such as gölme 'a net', kéme 'canoe', manja 'fish trap', sachqaq 'spear-like tool', ilgha (gilma) 'hook' and mantu 'a club'. Mantu: this [kind of net] is made from a sort of raw hemp, e.g. wild hemp and Lopnur hemp. The raw hemp strings have the characteristics (i.e. quality) of being elastic, soft and sturdy and do not decompose when in water. Kéme 'dugout canoe': these are made by carving out the inside of a trunk of the balsam poplar (by locals called kongtey and tapan deydu). Sachqaq: This is a spear-like (tool) consisting of two scalpels that are tied onto a long wooden rod. Ilgha: this is a hook shaped knife that is attached to a wooden rod. Mantu: this is a special club used for killing the fish by striking its head (Rahman, 2012: 22).

Besides the Loptuq, the Dolans were known for their fishing skills. For fishing, they used a *sačqaq*, a spear-like weapon with a small hook on one side of the tip (Le Coq, 1928: 37). Just as the Loptuq, the Dolans used *kemä* (Uygh. *kéme*) 'small dugout canoes' when fishing in summer. Depending on season, the Dolans developed different fishing methods. In summer they would for instance light a fire to attract the fish, whereas in the winter they would shine a lamp through a hole made in a frozen lake (Éqil, 2013: 30). Fishing was conducted all year round using different methods. Sven Hedin's travel diaries provide us with numerable references to fishing, including how it was carried out during early winter. In his catalogue of Hedin's recorded toponyms from Lop Nur and Lower Tarim area, Jarring explains this kind of half freezing status as *kömül* or *kadä* (Jarring, 1997: 261). Apparently, this season was considered an excellent opportunity to fish in the Tarim River. From Jarring we learn that another fishing method in Eastern Turkestan consisted in poisoning the fish.

If there is much fish they throw out [some] drug [in the water] and make the fish unconscious. When it rises to the surface of the water they strike it with an instrument called čapma sïx [supplied] with a long handle and hook (Jarring, 1998: 63–64).

Fish poisoning is an interesting method of fishing practiced especially in Asia, Oceania and South America (Svanberg & Alison, 2020). The purpose of poisoning is to stun or bewilder the fish so they can be easily caught. Le Coq (1916: 38, 1928: 38) provides some interesting details on this fishing method. The plant used was the poisonous seeds of Indian berry, *Anamirta cocculus*, which was imported from India. This species of plant has commonly been used for fish poisoning in Asia and Europe (Svanberg & Alison, 2020).

The observations above can be supplemented by Uyghur ethnographic sources, which also point out that in some fishing areas of East Turkestan, fish poisons have consisted pomegranate seeds, bitter apricot and peach kernels that are thrown into the water. When the fish eat these drugs they temporarily become unconscious making them float to the surface becoming easy catch for the fishermen (Rahman, 1989: 97).

Dolans used large iron hooks, so-called *sačqaq*, to harvest the stunned fish (Le Coq, 1916: 39). Sven Hedin also mentions this kind of equipment. On April 4, 1899, he stayed in a little village called Kuruq asti where he ate fish from a nearby lake named Shorluq Köl. According to him, this specific kind of large fish lived in shallow lakes such as Shorluq Köl. According to Hedin, the fishing method employed by the locals consisted in preparing a long rod made from poplar (circa 5 m) onto which a long hook (*sačqaq*) was fastened at the top (Hedin, 1903: 134).

The fish he mentions belongs to the family *Aspiorhynchus laticeps*, measures 120-200 cm long and can reach a weight of 26 kg. It is solely found in the Tarim River. Today the fish in question is very rare and close to extinction (Ståhlberg & Svanberg, 2010: 430). Skrine provides other illuminative reports about fishing methods in Kashgar. According to him, the “*asman-belek*” [*asman baliq*] ‘heaven-fish,’ was a species found in the two rivers Qizil Su and the Tiimen Su in the Kashgar area and could reach a weigh equivalent to 4–5 kg.

We went out one morning with our friend the fisherman and his mate to study their methods. At 7 a.m. they called for us at the Consulate with their paraphernalia, which consisted of a large bag-shaped net on a triangular frame attached to a pole carried by one man, and a long stick carried by the other. Arrived at the canal (the Qizil Su in which they usually fished was rather a long walk from the Consulate, so the men said they would try the mill-canals of the Tiimen Su) the man with the net entered the water and submerged the net, facing upstream; his mate waded in about fifty yards above and began beating the water with his pole, gradually working down, in order to drive any fish there were into the net. When he had finished the beat the other man lifted the net out of the water to see if there were any fish in it. We watched them do this at several different points, but we evidently brought them no luck, for not one did they catch. In the Kizil Su they used to get quite big fish, eight or ten pounds (Skrine, 1926: 78–79).

9. Fish as Food

According to the Swedish missionary L. E. Högberg (1858–1924), fish was plentiful in the region but not very suitable as food (Högberg, 1907: 12–13). In an article written almost two decades later, in 1926, missionary John Törnquist (1876–1937) brings forward almost identical information about fish but his description is more detailed. Törnquist argues that apart from the muddy taste, the fish also contains a kind of parasite that makes them less attractive for human consumption. In the western sources, including missionary sources such as the one by Törnquist, it was often emphasized that the Chinese population were the main consumers of such food. Was that really the case or have old ideas been reiterated so many times that they finally become a general ‘truth’? Nevertheless, this is what Swedish missionary Törnquist, working closely with the Chinese population in Hancheng, close to Kashgar, had to say about it:

Then remains the fish [to be discussed]. It occurs in great numbers in all rivers and creeks and sends its fry into the tiniest trenches. The species are few and not very tasty. Clear water is rare and all fish attain a certain taste of mud. The meat is loose and as is the case with the bream, it has many bones. In addition, we may add that most species contain a sort of parasite, which appear as small black specks mostly found in the region around the gills. The Chinese, who, as in most other areas of cuisine are masters, are the only ones who really are capable of preparing it in an enjoyable way. They are also the main customers at the fish markets (Törnqvist, 1926: 151).²

Other sources such as those of the British Consul general in Kashgar (1922-24), Clarmont Percival Skrine, complement the picture of fish habits in the region. He too emphasized the prevalent idea that it was the Chinese who were the main consumers. According to his account, the fish dishes consumed were seldom local but also contained ingredients such as shark's fin, sea slugs, fish-entrails and seaweed assumingly imported from coastal areas. It should however be noted that the consul was not talking about a regular everyday dinner here but a feast organized by the wealthy few in society.

² Translation from Swedish.

A Chinese feast is so long and complicated an affair that it merits more detailed description than I can afford it here, and I must therefore refer the reader to a later chapter. Suffice it to say that we were as much impressed by the courtesy and considerateness of our host as by the fearful tinned and dried delicacies from China Proper such as shark's fin, sea-slugs, fish-entrails, seaweed and bamboo-root on which he appeared to pride himself most. All these plates seemed to us to consist of substances either glutinous or messy, or both, and to taste of nothing in particular (Skrine, 1926: 53).

While recognizing that the Taoyin's chef was a real master cook, it appears that the British Consul was not very fond of imported marine species, which had taken over five months to get there:

The Taoyin's chef was a master, and many of the above dishes were excellent, both European and Chinese: but I must confess that the three or four favourite Chinese plats leave me cold. Shark's fin consists of a tangle of absolutely tasteless pieces of white elastic, stewed with shreds of chicken; sea-slugs are dark grey gelatinous substances with an unpleasant dead sort of flavour, swimming in a salty gravy; bamboo-root in slices has a nutty flavour and is not so bad, but very indigestible; another delicacy which is, I believe, a kind of seaweed tastes of-well, of seaweed. I can quite believe that all these things have a quite different flavour when fresh, especially the marine products which seem to appeal particularly to the Chinese; the trouble is that in Sinkiang, five months' journey from the coast, they can only be obtained in the dried form, and yet the Chinese like or pretend to like them better than the best-cooked fresh local products. The fact is, I suppose, that the exiled Chinaman has the palate of faith and to him even a dried sea-slug tastes of home (Skrine, 1926: 83-84).

Essentially, from reading travel reports one might come to the conclusion that Kashgarians were reluctant to eat fish. Perhaps it did not constitute the main diet of the sedentary Turks, (not counting the Dolans and Loptuq), but it was indeed consumed in many ways. In fact, it was not among the Turks, but among the Europeans in the area, that one finds streaks of reluctance towards local (and imported) fish. According to rumour, the fish was apart from foul in taste possibly also poisonous. Percival Skrine did not seem to believe this however and gladly consumed the local varieties of fish, which were brought to the consulate by a local fisherman.

Fresh fish was an item which often appeared on D.'s menus, the best kind being the asman-belek or 'heaven-fish,' which is very much the same as the mahseer of India, and is found in both the rivers which flow past Kashgar, the Qizil Su and the Tiimen Su. D. never bought it in the bazaar, but arranged with a particular fisherman to bring along his morning catch now and again. She paid him 4d. a pound for it, straight from the river. In winter the Chinese get frozen fish by post from Ili in the north, and this is regarded as a great delicacy; it is a kind of sturgeon, which if thawed gradually is quite eatable. But we much preferred fresh "heaven-fish." There is a theory among the Europeans of Kashgar that the local fish is dangerous to eat, on account of a poisonous gland or something of the kind; this seemed to us to be a myth, for neither we nor our guests ever felt the slightest ill-effects from it (Skrine, 1926: 78-79).

10. Eating Habits

Sven Hedin reports that when he arrived at the village Toqquz Atam there were only four families left there compared to the fourteen families who lived there earlier described by the Russian explorer Przewalski. The diet of the people was rather monotonous and only consisted in four different kinds of food: dry fish, fish soup, *čalma* 'a kind of porridge made of wheat flour and water', besides a noodle soup dish (Hedin, 1902: 74). While we have some information about the local fishing methods and names of fish and fishing equipment, the data about eating habits in communities dependent on fishing are sparse. Most of them concern the Loplik and Dolan people.

Contemporary Uyghur ethnographic sources supplement the picture when they mention the Loptuq Uyghurs' eating habits in the 1930–40s. Hebibulla (1996: 45) writes that that the main dishes during this period were meat and fish together with *ujul* 'pulp of *Typha* sp.', wheat grains and [fruits of the] *jigdä* (Uygh. *jigde*) 'oleaster tree'.

The same Uyghur ethnographic source mentions that the Loptuq people traditionally prepared fish in a number of different ways, such as boiling or grilling over an open fire. The same author shows that the community traditionally used *jigdä* to season their fish soup. Another common dish among the Loptuq has been a type of porridge made with *ujul* and grain.

Among the Loptuq there are two types of grilled fish. The first is 'grilled fresh fish' while the other is *qaq béliq kawipi* 'grilled dried fish'. Dried fish can be prepared by drying it whole in the air or burying it in the sand as a means of preventing it from rotting and losing taste. Another method of preparing dried fish is by boiling it, but when doing so the Loptuq people refrain from drinking the broth. Dried fish is also used in the preparation of *béliq talqini* 'a kind of fish pudding', which is prepared by grinding dried fish into flour, which then is mixed with egg yolk. This mixture is subsequently boiled in hot water until thick in texture. The dish is eaten with butter or fish oil (Hebibulla, 1996: 45).

11. Medicinal and Other Purposes

Challenging the general idea of fish being an unpopular food source, we can conclude that fish was indeed used as a central ingredient in many Eastern Turki medical recipes. Different body parts were used for various purposes and either ingested or for topical medication. Medical prescriptions mention fish meat that is dried, smoked and roasted, the suet of fish, fish oil, fish glue, fish bones and more.

We will first provide a few examples from Eastern Turki manuscripts. These texts were compiled in southern Kashgaria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Eastern Turki texts speak of a wide range of usages. Fish acts as an ingredient in a variety of the recipes preserved in manuscripts sources related to traditional medicine. Fish meat as well as fish oil was for example used in combination with other ingredients as a remedy for several dissimilar ailments.

It could for example be medication for gases, abdominal pain, fistula, poor eyesight, or serve as preventive remedy for earning wit and becoming smarter. It was also used as a medicament for increasing potency. For a contemporary reader it is apparent that fish products also were used for problems that are mainly understood psychological today, such as insomnia driven by depression. Other recipes encompassed fish glue as an active ingredient. In an Eastern Turki manuscript source dated from the twenty seventh day of the Islamic month of *ša'bān* in the Islamic *hijra* year, which roughly corresponds to February eleventh, 1896, we can read:

ägär kišiniñ qo[r]saqiğa yel tursa baliq goštini yesä daf bolur

If someone has wind coming from the stomach and eats fish meat, the condition will go away (Prov 283. 38b1).

Recipes that include fish are also found in more recent manuscripts. In this text from the oasis town of Yarkand copied for the Swedish missionary Gunnar Hermansson, who purchased it on site in 1929, fishbone and fish oil is used as an ingredient in mixtures applied onto the skin and eyes.

ägär kişi baliqniñ ustuhwānini tewāniñ öti birlä ikki mişqāl qilib dūd qilsa wä yüzini aniñ birlä yusa fā'ida [sic. fāyda]³ bisyār turur ägär baliqniñ yağini köziğä ħall qilsa roşan bolğay

If one takes two mişqāl of fish bone and the gallbladder of a camel, smokes it, and washes one's face with this, the result will be very useful. [In addition,] if one dilutes fish-oil in the eyes, they will turn bright (Prov 24. 14b10-13).

Regarding which species of fish were utilized in Eastern Turkestan, the sources provide limited information. One passage (Prov 283. 20b11-13) however, makes a distinction between fish that is found in *aq su* 'white water' and *qara su* 'black water', since the former is categorized as *sawuq* 'cold' while the latter is *issiğ* 'hot', reflecting the local humoral theories. According to indigenous conceptions among the Turki population, the following explanation of *qara su* 'black water' and *aq su* 'white water' is put forward: "River water was known as black water (*qara su*), which was supposed to have a fertilizing effect, while spring water was called white water (*aq su*)" (Bellér-Hann, 2008: 109).

12. Fish in Language and Folklore

Besides the utilitarian purpose of active medical ingredient or food, many beliefs and customs are associated with fish. Thus, we can see that occupations such as fishing also are reflected in the folklore of the region. For example, the many expressions, proverbs and stories mentioning fish illustrate the important role that fish played in the worldview of the people of Eastern Turkestan. Fish and fishing has for example left its mark in a number of Uyghur proverbs where 'catchwords' such as fish, fisherman, bait and hook carry symbolic meaning. One such proverb is *bügün torni qurutsang, ete béliqni köp tutisen* 'If you dry the net today, you'll catch a lot of fish tomorrow'. This proverb means that if one works hard, one will also see the results of it. Another proverb, *béliq qarmaqni körmes, yemchükni körer* 'The fish will not see the hook, they will see the bait', which means that people generally do not understand the risk of some things until it is too late. The saying *béliq sugħa tartidu, toshqan saygha* 'The fish pulls into the water, the hare pulls into the valley' roughly means that everyone acts according to their own will. Finally, *béliq torgha chüshkendin kéyinla beshigha eqil kélidu* 'As soon as the fish been caught, it makes sense'. This last example signifies that there is no point in regretting something after it has already happened. Instead, one has to think before setting out to do something (Ömer Uyghuri, 2009: 38).

In Uyghur folklore we also find numerous references to fishing as a livelihood in such popular *chöchek* 'folktales' like *Altun béliq* 'The Golden Fish', *Béliqchi we uning ayali* 'The fisherman and his wife', *Béliqchi Boway* 'The old Fisherman' to name a few (cf. Jarring 1973). Furthermore, Jarring's texts series *Materials to the knowledge of Eastern Turki* mentions to the waterways of Eastern Turkestan as well as fish and fishermen several times. This indicates that people were well acquainted with their natural environment and concepts such as *baliq* 'fish' and *baliqçi* 'professional fishermen'. A *baliqçi* 'fisherman' is for example mentioned in the well-known story *The Tale of Adil Khan* (Jarring, 1948: 147; 1951: 16). In the story, there is also a sea monster and a description of how to catch it with a net. Perhaps this is a reference to a large fish (Jarring, 1948: 145).

In the river was a water-dragon. The dragon ate that child who had been carried away by the water. A man set out a net to that dragon and caught it (Jarring, 1948: 145).

Indigenous sources also speak of rivers. One source in particular describes the main rivers of Turkestan:

³ Note the Arabic standard spelling of فائدة *fā'ida*, which appears here. Cf. the common spelling in Eastern Turki texts, فايده *fāyda*.

One day's journey from Shah-yar to the South there is a big river. That river is flowing and joining with the Khotan-darya, Qarghaliq-darya, Yarkand-darya, Kashghar-darya, Maralbashi-darya and the Aqsu-darya. In the time when inundations are coming, at certain places the land is under water for one or two day's journey and at certain places the water stops (only) at the height of a poplar. A month later the water of the river decreases. When it is decreasing the water returns and flows down into the river. If there are deep places, they become pools where the water remains (Jarring, 1948: 179–180).

Fish are also mentioned in popular Eastern Turki poetry. As in the following four stanzas collected by Gunnar Jarring in Srinagar in 1935 from one of his informants.

*lačīn bolup ojnæjmen
bayīṅdæki terekte
bæliq bolup ojnæjmen
bayriṅdæki jürekiṅde*

*I will turn into a falcon and play
on the poplar in your garden.*

I will turn into a fish and play

in your liver and in your heart (Jarring, 1948: 110. verse 88).

Fish also appears as a theme in Uyghur *xelq qoshaqliri* 'popular poetry'. Just as with the material collected by Jarring, the structure is arranged according to the principle of 7-8 syllables per line and a rhyming section in line two and four (i.e. *yanarmikin, qanarmikin* etc.).

*Yarim ketti yiraqqa,
Keynige yanarmikin.
Bir qétim söyüwalsam,
Yürükim qanarmikin.*

*My darling went away,
May she return again.
If I'd kiss her once again,
My heart would bleed away.*

*Ériqlargha su keldi,
Béliqlargha néme boldi?
Yari bar kishi oynaydu,
Méning yarimgha néme boldi?*

*Water has now come, filling up the streams,
What has happened to the fish?*

*If someone has a sweetheart, then someone will play
Then, what's happened to my sweetheart?*

*Tagharda tériqmidi,
Deryada béliqmidi.
Men sizge köymes chaghda,
Chirayim sériqmidi.*

*Is there millet in the mountains?
Or fish in the river?
When not in love with you,
Did my face turn pale then?*

*Deryadiki béliqlar,
Oynar sugha chömülüp.
Yarim sendin ayrilip,
Ketti baghrim bölünüp.*

*The fish in the river,
They swim and they are glad
When I from you departed,
My heart broke into pieces (URL-1)*

Besides poetry, the rich oral literature of Eastern Turkestan contains a number of riddles, in Uyghur referred to as *tepişmaq*. Also here we come across references to fish and fishing:

Qaniti bar uchalmaydu, yer yüzide mangalmaydu.

Adem uni su ichide qoghlap asan tutalmaydu.

[*Tépinglarchu bu néme?*]

[*Jawabi: béliq*]

*It has wings but cannot fly, nor walk on the ground.
In the water, one cannot catch it easily by chasing it
[Can you guess what it is?]
[The answer: It is a fish]*

Another popular Uyghur riddle goes like this:

Bir nersem bar, jéni baru, igiz uchmas,

Mangghan chaghda putliri yerge tegmes.

Yer bilen asmanghiche ot yansimu,

Tirnaqchilik héchbir yéri otta köymes?

[Tépinglarchu bu néme?]

[Jawabi: béliq]

I have something that will fly high,

His feet will not touch the ground as he walks

Even if the fire burns from the ground to the sky,

Will nothing hurt it in the fire? (URL-1)

[Can you guess what it is?]

[The answer: It is a fish]

As observed the theme of fish appears in a wide range of literary genres including oral poetry but also in *tepişmaqlar* ‘riddles’ and *xelq naxshiliri* “folk songs”. Regarding the latter, here we provide two examples of Uyghur folk songs recorded by Zunun (1982).

1.

Ah urarmen, ah urarmen,

Ahlirim tutqay séni

Köz yéshim derya bolup,

Béliqlirim yutqay séni

Ah! I am grieving! I am grieving and say ahh!

My words will catch you.

My tears will make a river,

And the fish will eat you (Zunun, 1982: 4)

2.

Béghimda qizil alma,

Su kirmey piship qaptu.

Jénim aq béliq dostum ,

Chüshümge kirip qaptu.

There are red apples in my garden

They have ripened without water

My dear white fish friend

I dreamed of you last night (Zunun, 1982: 107)

13. Fish in Various Customs

In fishing communities like the Loplik (*Loptuq*), fishing and related activities were deeply integrated into various aspects of social life. For people subsistent on fishing, material culture has had a profound impact on life cycle rituals connected with marriage and death. In local marriage customs among the Loptuq, fish played an important symbolical role. A Uyghur contemporary ethnographic source claims that such customs can be interpreted in light of the Loptuq livelihood mainly being one of fishing and hunting (Hebibulla, 1993: 239). For instance, as a marriage proposal the groom's family would send an envoy to visit the family of the bride-to-be and offer nine fish heads. Nine is considered a mystic number among different communities in the area. If the woman's family did not accept the proposal, they too would cook nine fish heads and give them back to the envoy (Hebibulla, 1993: 239). Bridal gifts also reflected the people's occupation as fishermen and frequently consisted of tools related to fishing (Hebibulla, 1993: 244). It was not only in marriage ceremonies that fish played an important role. Among the Loptuq, burial customs implied that a corpse should be buried together with the fishing equipment, such as hooks and nets, which the person had used during his or her life (Hebibulla, 1993: 405).

14. Fish and Religion

There were also several religious ideas about fish among the Uyghurs. One concern was the fact that fish is considered *halal*. According to a Uyghur ethnographer "all seafood is *halal*". While the claim that all fish is *halal* is disputable, at least with regard to other Islamic areas where several fish species and shellfish are not considered suitable for consumption, such dietary discrepancies will not be discussed at length here. We simply note that with regard to food considered *halal* or *haram*, different local interpretations exist within the Muslim world. The information presented by Hebibulla vis-à-vis fish and *halal* in Uyghur folklore is far more interesting. One legend has it that God killed the fish in heaven. Saying that its neck was cut off refers to the gills. Therefore, fish is not killed with a knife among the Uyghurs. According to local perceptions, it is instead sufficient to beat the fish twice on the head with a small stick (Mijit, 2009: 69). When it comes to hunting and fish in regard to religious submission, anthropologist Bellér-Hann refers to a Russian source:

Religious knowledge was also transmitted informally outside the organized structures. Faith and submission to God's will were among the minimal requirements of being a Muslim. Since this was regarded as obvious, our texts mention the theme only sporadically. We find indirect references to the subject in the form of cautionary tales, which may have been used in formal and informal religious instruction. In 1886, Hemer Waki, a Taranchi from northern Xinjiang, illustrated absolute submission to God and acceptance of his will with the example of the hunter. If he goes out hunting with God in his mind and is successful, he should not say that he has killed a deer, fox or wolf but, rather, that God has given him the animal in question. To think that his hunting success was his own doing would be a grave sin. Similarly, when a fisherman catches a fish in the river, he should not say that he has caught the fish himself but that God has given him the fish (Bellér-Hann, 2008: 338).

15. Magic and Rituals

Among the Loplik, fish bones were commonly used in divination, i.e. to predict the future through magic ritual. According to Hebibulla (1993: 405) such fortune telling through bone reading was performed by throwing the back-bones of a fish into the fire and by judging the size, and thickness of the blisters, and the width of the spaces between the blisters, it was possible to make predictions (Hebibulla, 1993: 405). This reminds us of scapulimancy with the shoulder blade of a sheep practiced by Turkic and Mongol nomads in the northern part of Eastern Turkestan and Mongolia. Reports also speak of the Han Chinese using a turtle shell for the same purpose (Bawden, 1958). There are also symbolic connotations related

with fish. Among the Uyghur, fish are associated with “wealth, sustenance and happiness”. Correspondingly, to have dreams in which fish appear is considered auspicious and interpreted as a sign of unexpected wealth and increased profit (Mijit, 2009: 69). The Uyghurs’ relationship to fish as something propitious is also reflected in common perceptions on the animal zodiac, where it is said that a person who is born in the Year of the Fish will experience luck throughout his or her entire life (URL-2).

16. Discussion

In recent years, numbers of native fish species in East Turkestan have decreased for several reasons. Main causes are large-scale cultivation of cash crops in Xinjiang where constructions of dams have had a negative impact on the reproduction of fish. With the construction of dams, the corridors between different waterways have also been cut off thereby affecting spawning grounds negatively. Before 1958, fish production was limited and small-scale. Subsistence fishermen used simple tools to capture a few fish for their families. It was mainly farmers and herdsmen who devoted themselves to fishing, using forks and hooks. There was no aquaculture at that time. This was followed by a period of fishery development between 1958 and 1971. It was a gradual process that included the start of aquaculture, induced breeding, and the introduction of new fish species. The fishing equipment became more sophisticated and fisheries better managed. Since 1972 there has been a rapid expansion of fishpond culture, use of formulated fish feed, and an intensification of aquaculture on a large scale. Reservoir fisheries’ enhancement has entailed the introduction of fish culture methods and fertilization of some reservoirs in order to increase their productivity.

According to a recent FAO report, the present capture fisheries predominantly concentrate on Lake Bosten and Lake Ulungur (ئۈلۈنگۈر كۆلى), Irtysh River, Ili River and Tarim River. Prior to 1980, the fish captured from these waters represented 60 to 80 percent of the total Xinjiang fish production. Lake Ulungur covers 100 000 hectares. The following fish are of importance for the market: the indigenous species Perch (*Perca fluviatilis*), Dace (*Leuciscus leuciscus*), Roach (*Rutilus rutilus*), Prussian carp (*Carassius gibelio*), and the introduced species Silver carp (*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*), Bighead carp (*Aristichthys nobilis*) and Bream (*Abramis brama*). The first aquaculture farms were established in the 1960s. At present, ten of them are running well, and their production potential is 300 million fry per year. In the year 2000 there were 74 state-owned enterprises and more than 3000 households engaged in aquaculture. The total number of fishermen was approximately 18 000 (Guo, 2004). Because the native fish species require a particular spawning environment, these activities have had a number of negative consequences for the fish population – such as decreased spawning, low reproduction rates and reproductive capacity, slow growth, and other difficulties (Mijit, 2009: 60).

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented some glimpses into the many uses and importance of fish in Eastern Turkestan. Apart from a few scholarly articles, mainly dealing with the Loplik and Dolans, little has been published on fish in Eastern Turkestan. Our main source of information about fish species, fishing equipment and methods in the Lopnur region come from indigenous sources such as a manuscript prepared by Jarring in 1998 (Prov 207). While that source is vital, we have shown how dispersed accounts from missionaries, western travellers in the region, and contemporary Uyghur material also provides valuable information about this under-researched topic. As demonstrated, fish has played a minor economic yet major social and cultural role in Eastern Turkestani society. As described in the text, fish was used in day-to-day-life as food for humans, for medicine and in divination. While acknowledging many of the practical uses of the different

varieties of fish, its importance is greater. In this paper, we have not only studied the practical uses of fish. Likewise, the use of fish as a theme in oral literature such as folktales, proverbs, poetry, folk songs and riddles to name a few attests to the importance of fish in defining the collective memory of the Uyghurs today.

Appendix

The image below depicts a page of Prov 207 dedicated to fishing, which appears in Jarring's article *Agriculture and horticulture in Central Asia in the early years of the twentieth century with an excursus on fishing: Eastern Turki texts with transcription, translation, notes and glossary*. We have chosen to provide our own transcription here. The translation is the one appearing in Jarring 1998.

بلیقی نینک بیانی
 بلیقی بلیق توتقالی تور لازم قیلادور موزای باشی نی ینگیچکی
 یغخه تزیب تور نینک ایچیکه تارتیب قویادور دریا لانینگ گوم لاریغخه توغ
 لاریغخه قاینام لاریغخه تور سالیسه لار بر ادم تور سالادور یند بر ادم قویغخه
 اوزون بادار ایخاج الیب نوکی لاریغین سوی اوروب تکی که ماقوشلاب
 بلیق لاری جدید بر ادم . بلیق کیرسه تور حرکت قیلادور تور
 تارتیب بلیق نی توتوب الادور ادم که بوی بر ادم و خان توکون نینک
 نولوا لاریغخه بولاق لانینگ کول لاریغخه دریا لانینگ قاینام لاریغخه قاراق نینک
 اوچیغخه خمیر یاکه کونشت موزای باشی چیلتنکی قظارلیق نوسه لاری
 سانجیب سالیب بلیق نی سودین تارتیب توادور بلیق تولا
 بولسه وارو تاشلاب مست قیلیب بلیق سو یوزکی که لیله
 کاندو پایمه سیخ دیکان اوزون دسته ایک چانگاک بیلان
 چاییب الادور بلیق بر نچکه تسم بولادور شیمال بلیق اق
 بولادور قوا بلیق یک چان بلیق پاقا باش بلیق چیم بلیق
 قیستنه قوساخلیق بولادور ینگیچکی بیک قوروق بلیق باغات
 بلیق بولار دولار .

In order to catch a fish a fisherman needs a net. After having fastened a male cricket on a thin thread [string] he fastens it inside the net. When they [people] put out nets at deep places in a river or at dams in the river or at whirl-pools in a river one man puts out the net. Another man takes a long stake in his hands, beats the water from some distance, stirs the bottom of the water and drives the fishes forward. If the fish enters, the net moves. After having drawn in the net he [the fisherman] catches the fish. In millponds, in springs and in whirlpools of a river where it is so deep that a man does not reach the bottom they draw up fish out of the water and catch them after having fastened such things as [pieces of] dough or meat, crickets or locusts on the point of a fish-hook. If there is much fish they throw out [some] drug [in the water] and make the fish unconscious. When it rises to the surface of the water they strike it with an instrument called čapma siḡ [supplied] with a long handle and hook. Fishes are of some different kinds. The šima:l-fish is white. Black fishes are the bek dōan-fish and the paqa baš-fish. The čim-fish has a short belly. The dry-fish and the leather-fish are thin and straight (Jarring, 1997: 63-64).

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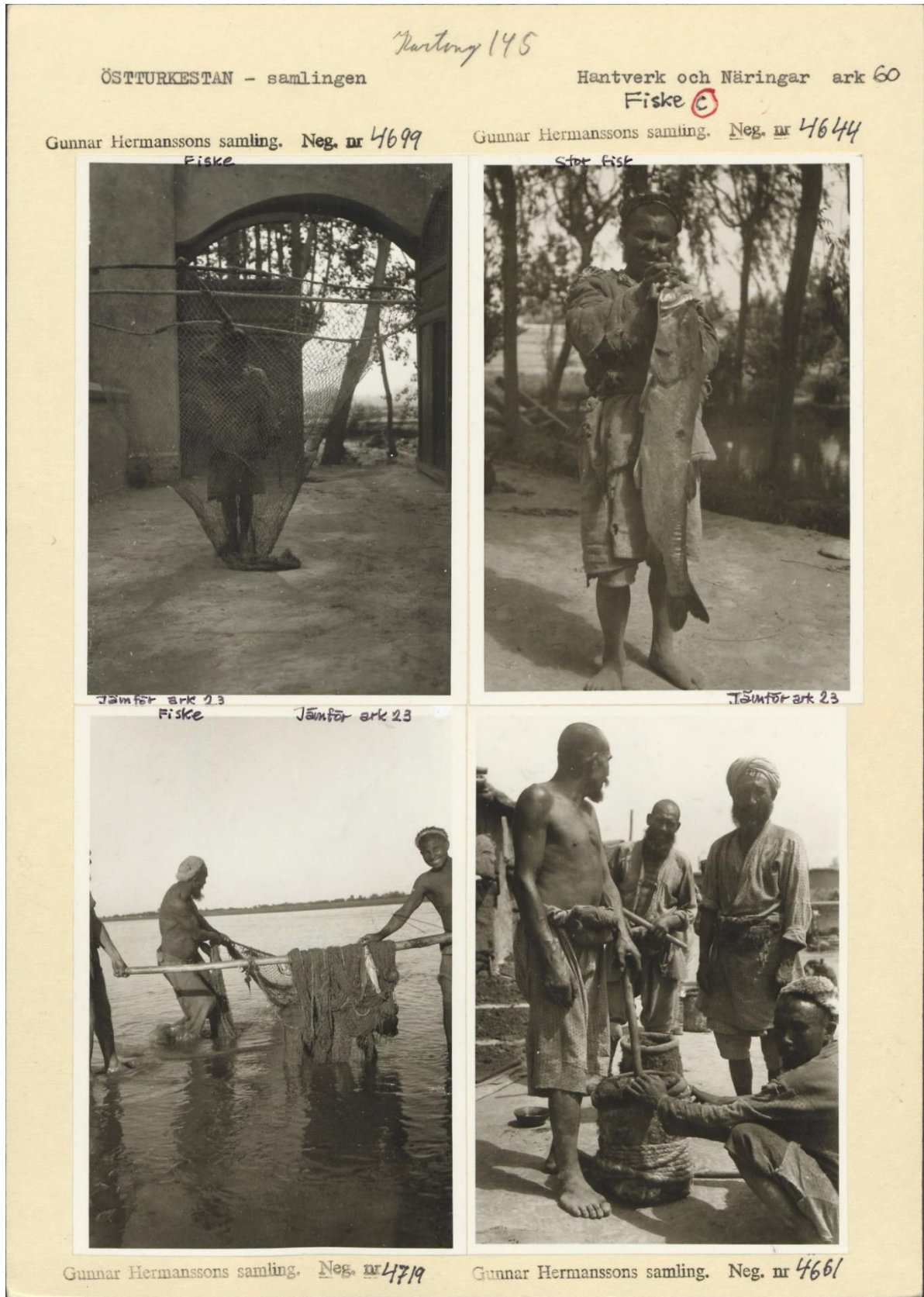
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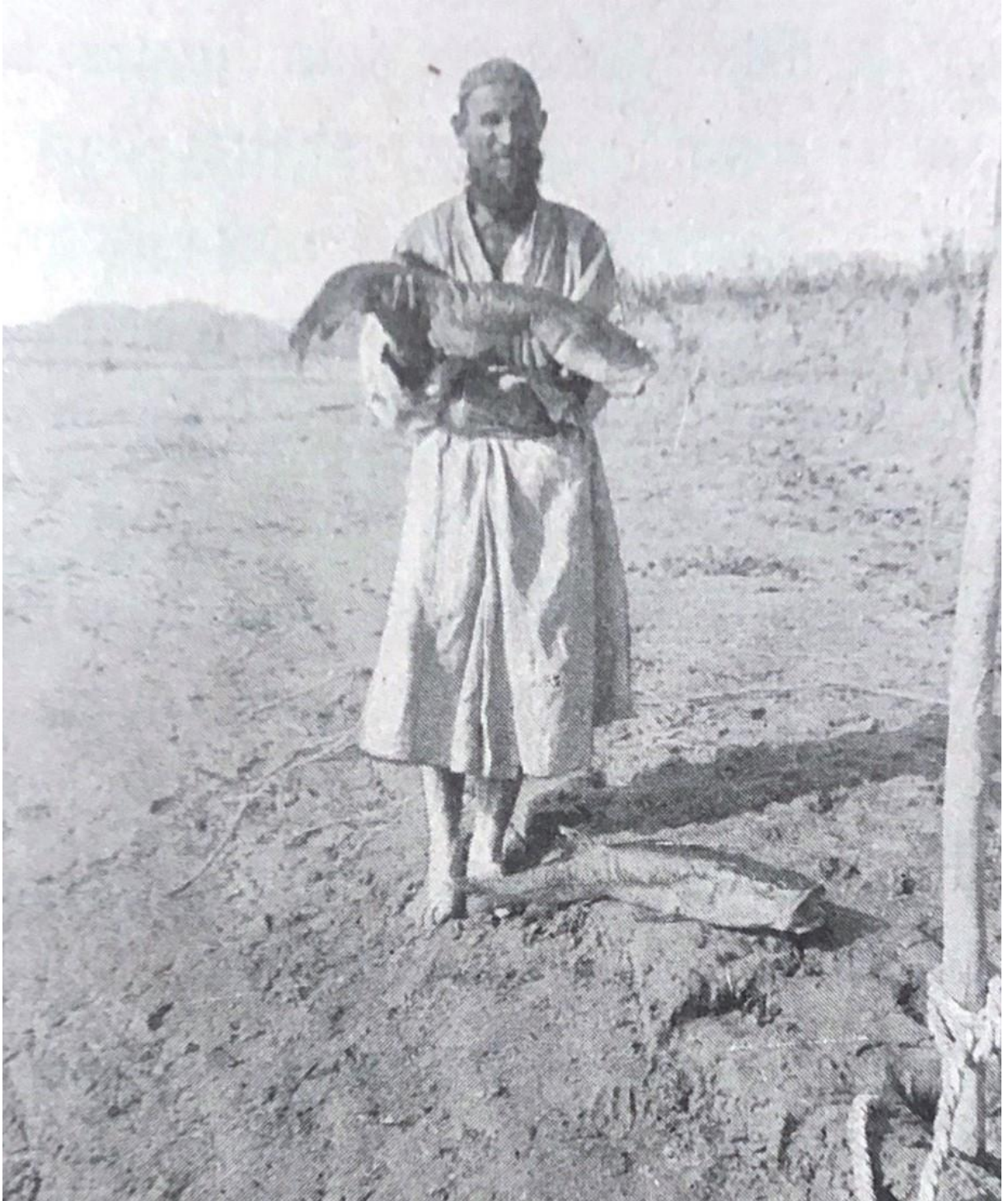
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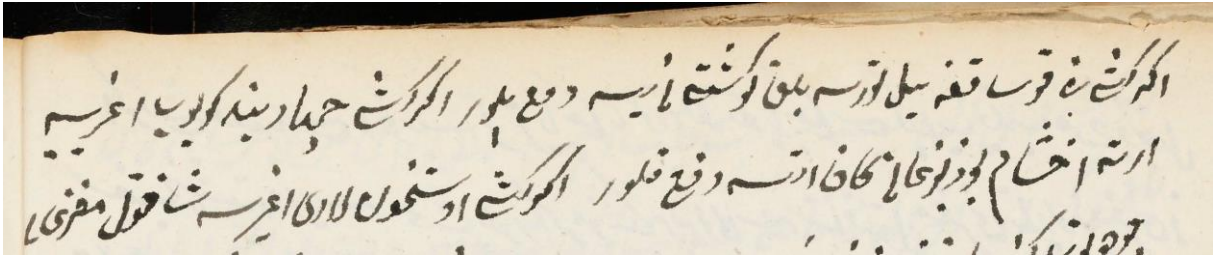
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Photograph 1: Various photographs on cardboard depicting fishing in Eastern Turkestan. The Eastern Turkestan Collection at the Swedish National Archives], Stockholm, Sweden. Gunnar Hermanssons samling: Hantverk och näringar, fiske, Kartong 145, ark 60.



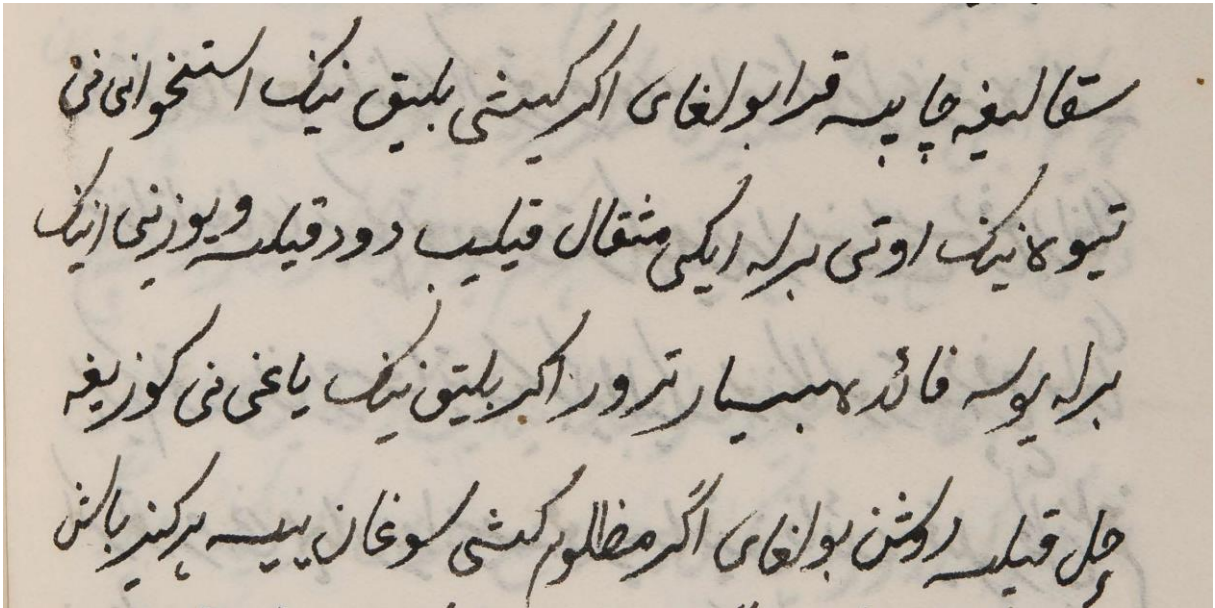
Photograph 2: "Kasim med sin fångst" [Kasim with his catch]. Source: Hedin, S. 1903: 185.



Photograph 3: Prov 283. 38b1.

ägär kišiniñ qo[r]saqiğa yel tursa baliq goštini yesä daf bolur

If someone has wind coming from the stomach and eats fish meat, the condition will go away (Prov 283. 38b1)

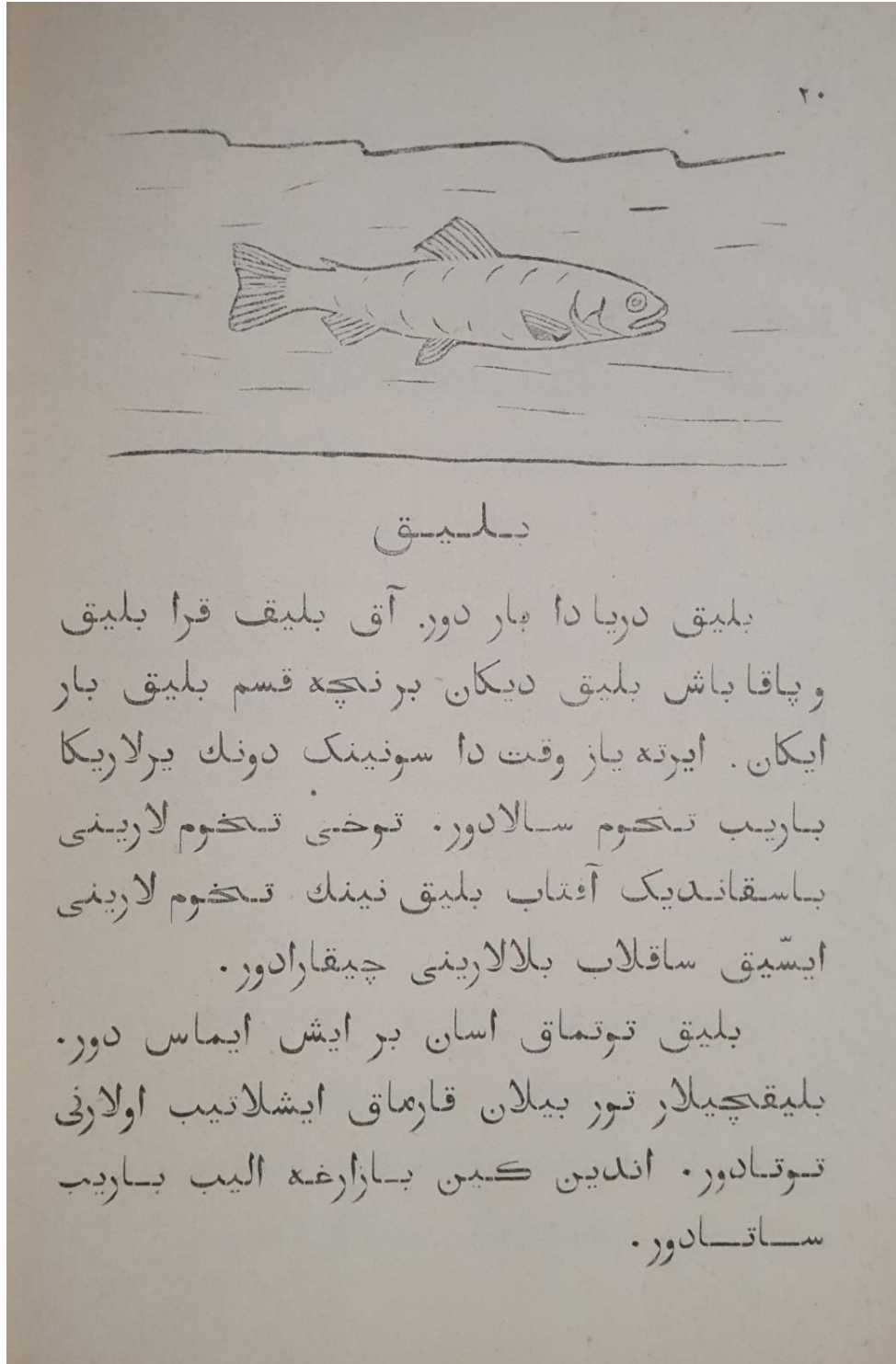


Photograph 4: Prov 24. 14b10-13.

ägär kiši baliqniñ ustuhwānini tewāniñ öti birlä ikki mişqāl qilib dūd qilsa wä yüzini aniñ birlä yusa fā'ida [sic. fāyda]⁴ bisyār turur ägär baliqniñ yağini köziğä ḥall qilsa rošan bolğay

If one takes two mişqāl of fish bone and the gallbladder of a camel, smokes it, and washes one's face with this, the result will be very useful. [In addition,] if one dilutes fish-oil in the eyes, they will turn bright (Prov 24. 14b10-13).

⁴ See comment in footnote number 3.



Photograph 5: Baliq. [Fish]. Source: Moen & Moen, 1936: 20.

Baliq daryāda bar dur. Aq baliq qara baliq wä paqa baš baliq degän bir näččä qism baliq bar ikän. Ärtä-yaz waqtida suwniñ doñ yärlärigä barib toħum saladur. Toħi toħumlarini basqandek aftäb baliqniñ toħumlarini issiq saqlab balalarini چیقارadur. Baliq tutmaq asan

bir iş emäs dur. Baliqçilär tor bilän qarmaq işlätib ularni tutadur. Andin keyin bazarğa alib barib satadur.

The fish are found in the river. There are a number of different fish such as the white fish, the black fish and the frog faced fish. In springtime, the fish go to the shallow parts of the river and lay their eggs. Just like the hen sits on her eggs, the sun keeps the fish's roe warm and then the fry hatch. To catch fish is not an easy job. The fishermen use nets and fish-hooks to catch them. After this, they take the fish, go to the bazar, and sell it (Moen & Moen, 1936: 20).