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Research paper

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THE STRENGTH AND LOSSES OF NADIR SHAH'S ARMY IN THE DAGESTAN CAMPAIGN OF 1741-1743

Abstract. A number of solid monographs are dedicated to Nadir Shah's campaign in Dagestan in 1741-1743. While reviewing these studies, one can note a significant discrepancy in the estimations of the size of Nadir Shah's troops during the invasion of Dagestan in the spring of 1741. The authors provide information that specifies the army's size ranging from "several dozen" to "one hundred and fifty thousand" men. However, they mainly cite a very limited range of sources of information provided by P.G. Butkov and L. Bazin. Meanwhile, the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Empire stores encrypted reports of the Russian residents at Nadir Shah's court Ivan Kalushkin and Vasily Bratishchev. Examination of their information provides an idea of the number of troops of the Shah's army in the war, as well as determine the number of losses of his troops: the grand total of soldiers in the Dagestan campaign reached approximately 110 thousand people. Along with the army, there were about 40,000 service personnel and women. Of the soldiers, more than 82 thousand died in Dagestan and a small number of injured men were sent home. Most of the losses were due to combat, less – to hunger and diseases. The losses among the service personnel might have been just as large. The reports of the Russian residents at the Persian court are a very informative source, from which we can learn many interesting details not only about the number of troops, losses, but also the chronology of military events, the results of battles, about Nadir Shah's tactics and strategy, about the problems of the military campaign, their solutions, international relations and lots of other historical information.

Keywords: Nadir Shah; Afsharid dynasty; Dagestan campaign of 1741-1743; Persian army.

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Исследовательская статья

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ЧИСЛЕННОСТЬ И ПОТЕРИ АРМИИ НАДИР-ШАХА В ДАГЕСТАНСКОЙ КАМПАНИИ 1741-1743 гг.

Аннотация. Дагестанской кампании Надир-шаха 1741–1743 гг. посвящено множество исследований. Ознакомление с ними показывает значительное расхождение в оценке численности армии Надир-шаха, вторгшейся в Дагестан весной 1741 г. Авторами приводятся сведения, указывающие ее количественный состав от «нескольких десятков тысяч» до «ста пятидесяти тысяч». Ссылаются же авторы в основном на весьма ограниченный круг источников информации, предоставляемой П.Г. Бутковым и Л. Базином. Между тем в Архиве внешней политики России хранятся зашифрованные донесения русских резидентов Ивана Калужкина и Василия Братищева, которые находились в ставке Надир-шаха в период военной кампании. Изучение их сведений позволяет получить представление о количестве войск армии шаха в войне, а также определить число потерь его войск: Общая численность солдат в дагестанском походе достигла примерно 110 тыс. чел. Вместе с армией прибыло примерно 40 тыс. человек обслуживающего персонала и женщин. Из солдат более 82 тыс. чел. погибли в Дагестане или, в незначительном количестве, за увечьем были отправлены домой. Большею частью потери были боевые, меньшей – от голода и болезней. Вероятно такими же крупными были и потери среди «служителей». Реляции русских резидентов при персидском дворе очень информативный источник, из них можно узнать много интересных подробностей не только о количестве войск, потерях, но и хронологию военных событий, результаты битв, о тактике и стратегии действий Надир-шаха, о проблемах военной кампании, о путях их решения, международных отношениях и много иных исторических сведений.

Ключевые слова: Надир-шах; Афшариды; Дагестанская кампания 1741–43 гг.; Персидская армия.

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A number of solid monographs of the experts in oriental history are dedicated to the rule of Nadir Shah and his violent military and political actions. However, his Dagestan campaigns are described only in several works of the Soviet and Russian historians of Dagestani origin. While reviewing the studies, one can note a significant discrepancy in the estimations of the size of Nadir Shah's troops during the invasion of Dagestan in the spring of 1741. The authors provide information that specifies the army's size from "several dozen thousand" to "one hundred and fifty thousand" men [1, p. 201; 2, p. 110; 3, p. 321; 4, p. 112-113; 5, p. 195; 6, p. 143; 7, p. 140; 8, p. 184-185; 9, p. 234; 10, p. 31, 36]. The authors cite mainly a rather limited range of sources, provided by P.G. Butkov and L. Bazin.

P. Butkov writes that "Nadir in the year of 1741 turned to the eastern side of Dagestan, his army numbering 100 thousand men, and came here from above Kuba, through the place called Gavydshan" [11, p. 211]. The author – Peter Grigorievich Butkov (1775-1857) – was a Russian serviceman and a scholar, who during his chancellery duties in the Caucasus had access to the archive information [12, p. 90; 13, p. IX-X]. Another author is a Jesuit by the name of Louis Bazin, who was in Derbent in 1741, at the time when Nadir's army stationed there. He writes that "his troops increased in this military expedition and amounted to 150 000 soldiers" [14, p. 288-289].

Another source, cited by the researchers in their works, is the materials from the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Empire (further as "AVPRI"). Among these are coded messages of a Russian resident at Nadir Shah's court Ivan Kalushkin. His reports were used by M. Arunova and K. Ashrafyan. They point out that the size of Nadir's army reached "52 thousand men, and after the campaign to Avaria – no more than 27 thousand". The source in question is a report of I. Kalushkin №25 of September 28, 1741. However, there are corrected Relations №26 of October 8 and №30 of November 4, 1741. The latter reads as follows:

"Annex to Report №26 of October 8, 1741, with indications of strength of the Persian army and their losses in Dagestan, namely:

An army of soldiers from different Persian provinces and recruits, which participated in the Dagestan campaign – total of 52 thousand.

Encountered during Shah's retreat from Dagestan¹ – 2545.

Total army strength – 54545.

During Shah's stay in Dagestan, in various regions² Lezgins³ killed, captured and seized: military men – 29805;

domestics of various ranks, service personnel and women – 12473;

camels, mules, horses with luggage – up to 55940.

During Shah's stay in Derbent, men of Rustom-bek, who stationed in Tabasaran, killed, captured and seized:

military men – 2200;

1. 2,545 people headed to replenish the Shah's troops during the Andalal battle, but did not have time to reach it and were met by Nadir during his retreat.

2. Losses during the Andalal battle and after it, when the troops of Nadir Shah retreated to Derbent in different routes.

3. Up to the 20s of the 20th century Dagestanis were called Lezgins. The etymology is unclear, but it probably goes back to the name of the early medieval state Lakz, located in the Eastern Caucasus. The ethnonym "Lezgins / Lezgis" entered the Russian and European languages through the Persian and Turkic traditions of naming the Dagestan peoples. Accordingly, the ethnonym "Lezgins / Lezgis" should be understood as Dagestanis. For more details, see V.G. Gadzhiev [15, p. 185].

deaths from wounds – 536;

domesticsof various ranks, service personnel and women – over 400;

mules and horses with luggage – 806;

During Shah’s stay in Kara-Kaytag, of those sent to ravage the village, killed, captured and seized:

military men – 1165;

service personnel – 934;

mules and horses with luggage – 2847.

At the same time, of those sent to release the abovementioned, captured and killed:

military men – 2000;

military men sent to clear the road killed – 1000.

Total killed and captured Persians – 50513 men.⁴

Military men – 36706;

Service personnel of various ranks and women – 13807;

Camels, mules, horses with luggage killed and seized – up to 59593⁵.

I. Kalushkin in his reports separates “military men” from “service personnel”, shows losses in each category. At the same time, he precisely indicates the number of “military men”, but does not mention the number of “service personnel of various ranks” who were the part of the army. Based on the number of losses provided by the resident, the ratio of one category to another is approximately 2.4:1 or 2.7:1.⁶ With such a proportion, when the number of “military men” reaches 54.5 thousand, the total number of the army has to be 75 –77 thousand people, of which 20.5 – 22.5 thousand were “domestics of various ranks, service personnel and women”.

According to the Russian resident, as a result of military operations from August to October, Nadir Shah lost 50513 people. He still had 17839 military men and, according to our calculations, approximately 6.7 – 8.7 thousand service personnel. At the same time, it is pointed out that “there are many sick people among them and those who die of hunger”.⁷

This calculation method to determine the total number of Nadir Shah’s troops during his campaign in Dagestan is the only possible one due to the absence of other data.

Combat actions continued at the end of 1741. The highlanders regularly attacked positions of the Persian troops. At the very beginning of January 1742, the Russian resident already wrote that “Shah lost 39304⁸ military men alone”. This suggests that there were losses even among the personnel who served the army. Thus, for the last two months of that year, the losses amounted to at least 2,598 people, and most likely exceeded 3 thousand, since human damage is indicated only regards to soldiers. We calculate the losses of “service personnel of various ranks” within the minimum threshold, since the battles of the end of 1741 were of defensive nature for the Persian forces and took place in the immediate vicinity of the fortified Derbent.

4. This number includes 3,700 wounded military men, whom Nadir Shah “due the injury” let go upon their arrival in Derbent (Report №26 of October 8, 1741 r. // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 7. 1741. P. 423).

5. Report № 30 of November 4, 1741 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. F. 7. 1741. PP. 472-473.

6. 29805: 12473≈2.4; 36706: 13807≈2.7.

7. Report № 25 of September 28, 1741 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 7. 1741. P. 395.

8. Report № 2 of January 5, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 4.1742. P. 22.

Interestingly, there is information from the reports of the Dutch East India Company, which states that “Nadir was said to have lost 80,000 men against the Lezgis and to have only 50,000 able men left with whom he had withdrawn into Darband”. The report is dated January 17, 1742, and was written by Aalmis, who was head of the company’s factory in Isfahan [16, p. 98].

A devastating defeat in the Andalal battle in September, huge losses, cold and hunger resulting from mistakes in the logistics of planning the campaign did not force Nadir Shah to flee. He, “who swore on al-Quran to exterminate the Dagestanis,” continued to persist. Having stayed for the winter in the Derbent region, the shah counted on replenishment of his army. Judging by the reports of I. Kalushkin, Nadir “regularly sends decrees to various cities for the recruitment of his troops, for he is dealing with a serious matter with the Dagestanis against whom he has made a decision to use all his forces”.⁹ The resident writes the following about the reinforcements:

1. At the beginning of February I. Kalushkin “met a thousand Afghans, heading to the Shah, half on foot and all in a poor state. They had been in the Balbas expedition”. At the same time, he adds that there were reasons to believe that more troops would arrive, since in his reports to Persia, Nadir Shah declared “about the vengeance for all his subjects.”¹⁰

2. At the end of February, the resident reported on the arrival of 7 thousand Afghans, who were then supplemented by a thousand men from Shirvan, Mugan and Ardabil auls. According to the resident, this was a part of the army from the Balbas expedition, including 20 thousand troops under the command of Ashur Khan. He further clarifies that “out of the remaining 12 thousand, 4 thousand have already arrived at the Samur River, and the rest are dragging behind.”¹¹

3. At the end of April, Kalushkin reported that “up to 25 thousand people arrived in the Persian camp from the Azerbaijan province, of those who served there and newly recruited, ready for service”.¹²

From these reports it appears that in February-April of 1742 Nadir’s troops in Dagestan were replenished by approximately 45 thousand people. Considering that in 1741 an army of 55 thousand men invaded Dagestan, the total military forces of Nadir Shah amounted to 100 thousand people. Taking this number into consideration, it becomes clear that P.G. Butkov’s precise indication of the strength of Nadir Shah’s troops was based on archival reports from the Russian residents in the Persian camp. At the same time, this number does not take into account the service personnel, who, most likely, exceeded a third of the army’s size.

Indirectly, the information of I. Kalushkin, who died on June 9, 1742, is confirmed by the reports of his successor Vasily Bratishchev, who had previously been a translator for the

9. Report № 2 of January 5, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 4. 1742. P. 23.

10. Report № 7 of February 18, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 4.1742. P. 133.

11. Report № 9 of February 28, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 4. 1742. P. 161.

12. Kalushkin’s report № 16 of April 30, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 4.1742, P. 246; Bratishchev’s report of May 5, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 43.

resident. The acting resident reported on June 25 that Nadir Shah “yesterday, having made it as light as possible for their maneuverability, with an army of 40 thousand military men and 4 thousand footmen with him, started the campaign”.¹³ At the same time, 8 thousand men under the command of “Shah’s brother-in-law Fath Ali Khan for the sake of feeding horses with grass” were sent to the South Caucasus.¹⁴ Meanwhile, all the sick Afghans were transferred to a separate camp near Boynak¹⁵, and, presumably, some of the troops were guarding other camps of the Shah. It must be noted that in the June battles the Persians suffered serious losses, and, as already mentioned, would die of disease. Considering the above, we could estimate the number of the Shah’s troops by July 1742 at 60 thousand men; in this regard, the Shah’s army since February 1742 was replenished by 55 thousand people¹⁶, and not 45.

In September, Bratishchev wrote that the Shah had from 25 to 28 thousand troops left¹⁷, while only a month prior to that he reported that “all the Shah’s troops who are now with him, consisted of up to thirty thousand, in extreme exhaustion and decline, without the slightest hope for recover”.¹⁸

In early October of 1742, the resident reported that the entire Nadir’s army amounted to 20 thousand people. Of these, 7-8 thousand are with the Shah, and the rest gathered in different places¹⁹. At the end of October, Bratishchev provided updated information:

Troops on standby with the Shah – 9000;

In Shabran and Mushkur – of Afghans, Kurds and others – 4200;

In Mugan plain – Uzbeks of 8 thousand men;

In the same Mugan plain – of various kinds up to 7 thousand.²⁰

Thus, only 28 thousand military men remained of Nadir Shah’s army at the end of October.

The reason for the huge losses lies not only in hunger and cold, as it was in the winter of 1741-42²¹, but also in epidemics that would occur regularly. For example, on July 14, V. Bratishchev reported that “of Afghans and Uzbeks, 100 and even 150 people die per day” due to illness²².

Several other factors should also be attributed to the causes of high mortality:

13. Bratishchev’s report of June 25, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 150.

14. Bratishchev’s report of July 22, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 212.

15. Bratishchev’s report of July 14, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 198.

16. The losses of the Persian army in the first half of 1742 are taken into consideration.

17. Bratishchev’s report of September 5, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 334.

18. Bratishchev’s report of July 31, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742, P. 262. The huge losses in July 1742 can be explained by Nadir Shah’s two major campaigns against Akusha and Avar. In the first of them he managed to subdue the union of Akusha-Dargo communities and obtain 86 amanates. The second campaign ended without results (Bratishchev’s report of August 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 251-252).

19. Bratishchev’s report of October 9, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 416.

20. Bratishchev’s report of October 21, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 478.

21. Report № 6 of January 27, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 4. 1742. P. 107.

22. Bratishchev’s report of July 14, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 200.

1. The autumn of 1741 and the spring of 1742 were extremely rainy. In such conditions, the flint guns of highlanders turned out to be much more effective than the matchlock muskets, which were mainly used by the Persians²³;

2. The 1742 reinforcements had extremely low morale and were poorly armed. For instance, the Uzbeks who arrived in spring “had a tendency to escape” and were armed mainly with “simple poles”, and only a few of them had “muskets, sabers and javelins”;²⁴

3. The Dagestanis would wear out the enemy with guerilla warfare, constant attacks, which inflicted serious damage. They were directed not only against the combat forces, but also against the supply of troops²⁵. This led to the fact that the Persians would not feel safe even in their own fortified camps and were in alert all the time;

4. Constant failures demoralized the army. Bratishchev describes the events in which an army of 20,000 men couldn't take an Avar village of 30-40 houses by storm.²⁶ He also reports that “the Persians themselves admit that 10 of their men cannot oppose one Lezgin”.²⁷ One of Bratishchev's quotes is worth noting: “The Lezgins brought the Persians to the point that they were afraid to stand before these Lezgins; the Shah's warriors being so distressed by the sight of the highlanders that they would always lean towards flight rather than being willing to fight. The Shah tries to punish severely for this disastrous vice.”²⁸

One can notice that Bratishchev's reports are not as detailed as Kalushkin's ones. However, they give an idea of the number of the Iranian troops. In this regard, an important question arises: how trustworthy is the information of Kalushkin and Bratishchev? There are several reasons that allow us to speak about the reliability of the sources:

1. The residents were diplomatic agents, and their mission was to obtain information and report it to St. Petersburg and Astrakhan. They did not make any decisions on their own, so there is no reason to believe they were politically biased.

2. Kalushkin and Bratishev were in a war zone. They sometimes describe events in detail, which suggests that they were the eyewitnesses of the said events. For instance, in January of 1742, Kalushkin was nearly taken prisoner. He vividly describes the battle.²⁹ Bratishev also writes about combat actions in his reports, for example, in the report of April 4, 1742.

3. Kalushkin's detailed reports is due to the fact that he accurately collected information during September-November. He points out Iranian losses down to precious utensils. According to him, he possessed commanders' reports to the Shah.

4. On a quarterly basis, Kalushkin reported on the expenditure. It can be seen from them that he spent a lot of money on various kinds of gifts. They were most likely used to obtain intelligence.

23. Report № 26 of October 8, 1741 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 7. 1741. P. 411; Bratishchev's report of October 21, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 479;

24. Bratishchev's report of May 5, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 43.

25. In particular, the Transcaucasian Dagestanis seized food supplies delivered from Tiflis (Bratishchev's report of August 4, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 260; report № 6 of January 27, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia.” Inv. 1. File 4. 1742. P. 103). Report № 26 of October 8, 1741 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 7. 1741. P. 410-414.

26. Bratishev's report of August 4, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 251.

27. Bratishchev's report of September 30, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 382.

28. Bratishchev's report of July 7, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 176.

29. Report № 6 of January 27, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 “Relations between Russia and Persia”. Inv. 1. File 4. 1742. P. 102.

5. The residents' intelligence is verified by other sources. We have not yet found discrepancies in facts with other available information on the events in question.

In summary:

An army of 75-77 thousand people marched into Dagestan, of which 54,545 were military men, and 20.5-22.5 thousand people were "domestics of various ranks, service personnel and women";

As a result of hostilities during 1741, the Shah lost 39,304 of his soldiers and at least³⁰ 13,807 personnel serving the army, i.e. a total of 53,111 people. By January 1742, a little more than 15 thousand soldiers and a little more than 7 thousand "servants" remained under his command;

In February – April, approximately 45 thousand military men arrived to the Shah, and, presumably, another 10 thousand by the summer of 1742. At the same time, we are unaware of the number of service personnel who arrived with the army in the first half of 1742; given the ratio of 2.7: 1, their size was supposed to reach 20 thousand people.

"Military" losses, not including "personnel", during 1742 amounted to 42 thousand people. The losses of service personnel are unknown, but one can assume that they took place in a proportionally significant amount.

Thus, the grand total of soldiers in the Dagestan campaign reached approximately 110 thousand people. Along with the army, there were about 40,000 service personnel and women. Of the soldiers, more than 82 thousand died in Dagestan and a small number of injured were sent home. Most of the losses were due to combat, less – to hunger and disease. The losses among the service personnel were probably just as large.

In conclusion, 150 thousand people participated in the Dagestan campaign of 1741 - 43, and the losses exceeded 100 thousand people. This data was obtained on the basis of analysis of information provided by the Russian residents at the Persian court Kalushkin and Bratishchev.

We would surely like to have an idea of the losses of the Dagestani troops; unfortunately, it is not possible to obtain such information from archival sources. We can only assume they were probably much lower than those of Nadir Shah's. Such a conclusion can be drawn from the descriptions of military operations and some reports. For instance, on June 25, 1742, Bratishchev reported that "400-500 Persians were killed and I doubt that even one from the Lezgin side died, except for the wounded".³¹

Relations of the Russian residents at the Persian court are quite informative. One can obtain many interesting details not only about the number of the army, its losses, but also about the chronology of the military campaign, battle results, interactions in the Persian court, relations with Dagestan rulers and their interrelations; about Nadir's tactics and strategy, problems of the campaign, ways of solving them, tactics and strategy of Dagestanis, the quality and quantity of weaponry, shipbuilding, ways of supplying rations and many other things, even that Nadir Shah suffered from consumption.

30. Here, we consider the fact that the losses of the service personnel are indicated in the reports not for every battle.

31. Bratishchev's report of June 25, 1742 // AVPRI. F. 77 "Relations between Russia and Persia". Inv. 1. File 5. Part 1. 1742. P. 146.

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