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'Notes on the Persian Army'

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About this record

The memorandum outlines the size and composition of the Persian Army; this includes a list of the regiments currently in service. It also outlines the remuneration provided to both officers — of various ranks — and private soldiers. In addition, the armaments in use by both the infantry and the artillery are also detailed.

It is briefly explained how the commanders of regiments are appointed and how those appointed are able to make money from the position. The memorandum also includes a British perspective on the quality of both Persian officers and the soldiers that serve under them. Other subjects touched on are leave arrangements and the provision of uniforms.

The recent activities of Austrian and Russian officers within the Persian Army are also noted; this includes a list of pay and allowances for Austrian officers — of various ranks — in service with the Persian Army.

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Notes on the Persian Army.

The Persian Army consists of about,—

65,000 infantry,
30,000 irregular cavalry,
5,000 artillery.

The force employed on active service is composed of about,—

20,000 infantry,
10,000 irregular cavalry,
1,500 artillery.

The number of guns of all kinds, which are stored in the various Government arsenals in Persia has been stated at over 1,000, but there are only 200 mounted in a fairly serviceable condition. Of these 50 could be horsed and turned out of the arsenal at Tehran at any time within a few days' notice.

The regular infantry consists of 73 regiments, nominally of 1,000 men, but more commonly of 800 each, and the whole force is formed into 10 divisions, as follows:—

1st Azerbaijan Division, 11 regiments, each 1,000 strong.

1st Behadaran.	7th Karadagh.
2nd Khasseh.	8th Karagozloo.
3rd „	9th Afshar.
4th Nosret.	10th „
5th Mozuffur.	11th Shekak.
6th Tabreez.	

2nd Azerbaijan Division, nine regiments, 1,000 strong.

1st Khoi.	6th Shekak.
2nd „	7th „
3rd Ikbal.	8th Khelkhal.
4th Maragha.	9th Makoo.
5th Karadagh.	

3rd Toork and Koord Division, nine regiments, 1,000 strong.

1st Kahramanieh.	6th Ardebeel.
2nd Geroos.	7th Shekak.
3rd Afshar.	8th Karagozloo.
4th Maragha.	9th „
5th Amirieh.	

4th Division, eight regiments, 800 strong.

1st Kamran.	5th Looristan.
2nd Tehran.	6th Serhendee.
3rd Khelej.	7th Savadkoh.
8th Boozheloo.	8th Kezaz.

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5th Division, eight regiments, 800 strong.

1st Semnan.		5th Gulpaijan.
2nd Melayer.		6th Khemseh.
3rd Larijan.		7th "
4th Kamarah.		8th Zerend.

6th Division, eight regiments, 800 strong.

1st Afshar.		5th Fereiden.
2nd Kazveen.		6th Chehar Mehal.
3rd "		7th Arab Ajam.
4th Bekishloo.		8th Firoozkoh.

7th Division, eight regiments, 800 men.

1st Demavend.		5th Karaghan.
2nd Koom.		6th Kerman.
3rd Nehavend.		7th "
4th Bendepai.		8th Derejzeini.

8th Division, five regiments, 800 men.

1st Zooran.		4th Zingeneh.
2nd Kerrind.		5th Koordistan.
3rd Kelkoor.		

9th Division, five regiments, 800 men.

1st Karagozloo.		4th Sehdehee.
2nd Omraee.		5th Toorsheez.
3rd Beiranvend.		

10th Division, two regiments, 800 men.

1st Kain.		2nd Tonekebani.
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Kerai regiment of 800 men almost entirely annihilated by the Turkomans at the Merv defeat of 1861, now being reorganized.

The 1st regiment of each division and the 1st company of each regiment are composed of grenadiers, "Behadaran," and the last of each, of chasseurs, "Mokhberan." All regiments are known by the number they hold in their respective divisions. Each is under separate command and administration, being formed into companies of 100 men; and on the colours is borne the name of the district to which the battalion belongs, with its regimental number and division.

Persian regiments are usually commanded by chiefs belonging to the tribe or district from which they are furnished. These appointments are seldom conferred on the score of merit, or without fee or payment. The amount ordinarily given for them varies from Ts. 3,000 to Ts. 5,000. The privileges thus purchased are remunerative. They consist mostly of contributions levied for exemption from service, recruits being enlisted or substitutes accepted according to their ability to pay, and hundreds of soldiers being allowed to absent themselves altogether, or partially, from parade and regimental duty to seek employment elsewhere, in consideration of their sharing with their commanding officer the profits arising from their labour. The amount thus gained by an officer in command of a Persian regiment may be computed at from 1,200*l.* to 1,600*l.* a year. In a regiment of 1,000 men, as many as 300 or even 400 are often permitted, on their renouncing pay and subsistence allowances, to absent themselves entirely from duty. They disperse in the neighbouring districts and villages and appear no more

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on parade while the regiment remains in garrison. They engage a large number of them as butchers or vendors of fruit, or they obtain employment as day labourers, receiving one kran a day while so employed. Others pay a smaller sum, and are allowed to absent themselves immediately after parade for the rest of the day, or are only required to take their places in the ranks on special parade days.

The Etat Major is composed of the Minister of War, two Sirdars, several Generals of Division, and a number of Serteeps, of whom there are three classes. The number of officers appointed to it varies frequently, according to caprice of the Shah and the Minister of War. It generally numbers from 80 to 100, being in excess of what is required for the army. Some of the officers belonging to it can neither read nor write. They have few opportunities for illicit exactions, and this branch of the service is, therefore, by no means popular.

The salaries allowed by the Persian Government to military officers are as follows:—

Sirdars	-	-	3,000 tomans to 5,000 tomans.
Generals of Division	-	-	3,000 tomans.
Serteeps, 1st class	-	-	1,500 "
" 2nd "	-	-	1,200 "
" 3rd "	-	-	1,000 "
Colonels	-	-	500 "
Majors	-	-	150 "
Captains	-	-	50 "
Lieutenants	-	-	30 "
Doctors	-	-	80 "
Surgeons	-	-	60 "
Sergeants	-	-	10 "
Corporals	-	-	8 "

In addition to the above, each receives a subsistence allowance payable in money or in food, which varies in amount from 250 tomans, the allowance of a Colonel, to 8 tomans a year, that of a Corporal.

The pay of private soldiers is 7 tomans* a year, besides which each man

receives a subsistence allowance of about three shillings a month in cash, with 3½ lbs. of bread daily, or its equivalent in money. Persian soldiers while on active service also receive an annual allowance from the villages or districts to which they belong, varying according to the wealth of the locality from 80 to 100 krans. When this is not paid in money, the villagers either support the man's family or cultivate his plot of ground or orchard, if he has these. A soldier or labourer can exist upon 8 shahais, or fourpence a day, but this is just sufficient to procure enough to sustain life. With 12 or 14 shahais, however, that is with sixpence or sevenpence a day, he would consider himself uncommonly well off, and could provide himself not only with food, but with tobacco as well and with fire and light in the winter. Each serbaz receives two uniforms every year when on service, one for winter made of a thick coarse material of native manufacture, which costs 14 krans, and the other for summer of lighter texture, also of native manufacture, which costs only 9 krans. A cloth uniform costs 35 krans (28s.) but these are usually kept in store and are only used for special parades, though exceptions to this rule are made in the case of a few of the best regiments commanded by influential persons. There are about 10,000 uniforms made of cloth, worth 8 krans a yard, in the Tehran bazaar, but of very inferior quality, in the Government stores. These are given out for special occasions only, when, for instance, the troops have to muster at the palace for state receptions, or when the Shah is himself present on the parade ground, and they are returned to the depôt as soon as the muster for which they have been issued is over. Soldiers' shoes and hats (sheepskin) cost about 3 krans each. The cross belts formerly used cost 8 krans, but the waist belt now in use costs only 3½ krans.

All Persian officers below the rank of Colonel receive 35 krans (28s.) a year, and have to provide their own uniforms.

The inhabitants of all villages belonging to the Shah as well as peasants employed in cultivating crown lands are exempt from military service. The

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Persian soldier is engaged for life, and he is seldom able to obtain his release unless he or his friends can pay something to his General or to the chief of his tribe for exemption. Nearly all the officers are selected from the tribe from which the regiment is recruited, and they therefore possess great power over their men. No difficulty is found in arranging amongst themselves, when the soldier can afford to pay for it, for allowing one man to go and a friend or relative to take his place or for his being called out in his stead even when the regiment is on active service.

Persian soldiers, in the event of their being allowed to quit the service owing to ill health, or age, or from any other cause, have no pension or claim whatsoever upon the Shah's Government. They may thus at any time, after years of hard service, find themselves destitute, when unfitted for work, and unable otherwise to earn a livelihood.

Infantry regiments are usually allowed to return to their homes for three years after four years' active service. They are nominally placed on half pay while on leave, but they seldom receive any pay, while on the other hand, they are required to attend district parades for drill during that period, and they scarcely ever do so. They are allowed to take their muskets with them, and the uniforms in their possession, when the regiment goes on leave.

There is little or nothing to be said in favour of the officials of the Persian army. They are thoroughly ignorant of all military science, and the higher the rank they hold the less efficient they seem to be. Nearly all below the rank of Major are entirely without education, and they have no social position such as Europeans would be disposed to accord to them in view of the rank which they hold in the army. The Persian serbaz, however, possesses all the qualities needed to make a good soldier. He is courageous, intelligent, and sober, always cheerful and ready for work; obedient, and possessing powers of endurance of fatigue only equalled by his endurance of ill treatment. He is seldom driven to open resistance of ill usage, and in the event of his occasionally showing a mutinous spirit in order to obtain justice, he is satisfied with the mere semblance of redress, and is ready to return to duty on receiving a few vague promises of better treatment.

A regiment of infantry, 1,000 strong, cost the Persian Government about 20,000 tomans, or 8,000*l.*, annually.

A regiment of irregular cavalry of the same strength costs about double that amount.

Nearly half the annual revenue of Persia is absorbed in the payment of the Persian army, which costs the Shah $3\frac{1}{2}$ crores of tomans, or about 1,600,000*l.* Included in the military department, however, are many Princes, Khans, and Mirzas, employed as civilians and in the provincial Governments, who have really nothing to do with military matters, and then all draw their pay from the army budget, which is thus made to appear larger than it actually should be.

Seven regiments of infantry have been nominally disbanded, in order to be replaced by a division being organized by Colonel Schemel, who, with 12 other Austrian officers, has been employed since the beginning of last year in the Shah's service. It is intended that this division should consist of three regiments of three battalions each, one battalion of light infantry (Jäger), and three battalions of artillery. At present it does not comprise more than 2,200 men, and the old battalions still exist, though they are not called out on service. The scale of pay having been increased, and the men belonging to this corps being lodged and fed more in accordance with European ideas, its cost to the Persian Government is relatively heavy, the annual disbursement for each 1,000 men being estimated at about 45,000 tomans.

The Austrian officers have fixed the following rates of pay for their division:—

		Officers.	
Colonel	-	-	600 tomans a year.
Lieutenant-Colonel	-	-	500 " "
Major	-	-	400 " "
Captain	-	-	300 " "
1st Lieutenant	-	-	150 " "
2nd	„	-	120 " "

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Extra allowances to officers for forage, &c., are only given when on active service in the field, and outfits on first appointment.

Men.

Sergeant-Major	-	-	-	18 shahais a day.
Sergeant	-	-	-	16 " "
Corporal	-	-	-	14 " "
Private, 1st class	-	-	-	13 " "
Private, 2nd "	-	-	-	12 " "

The regular infantry regiments in Persia are, at present, mostly armed with smooth bores, but the Persian Government now possesses,—

- 7,000 Wendel rifles.
- 6,000 Chassepots.
- 30,000 Tabatières.
- 20,000 Minie rifles.
- 50,000 to 60,000 smooth bores of various systems.

Colonel Demantovitch, a Russian Cossack officer, with three commissioned and five non-commissioned officers, has been engaged for the last 12 months in drilling a body of Persian irregular horse (Mahajerán) as a body guard for the Shah. These officers have a contract for two years. They have now 600 men under their command, and it is proposed to raise the number to 800 or 1,000. The men are dressed and equipped in imitation of Russian Cossacks, and are armed with Berdan rifles, sword, and poniards.

The rifles (1,000) were presented last year by the Emperor to the Shah. They cost the Russian Government 77 francs apiece. The swords and poniards are made in Tehran after a Russian model. They are good and cheap, a sword costing 12½ krans and a poniard 7½ krans.

This cavalry regiment, at its present strength of 600, costs the Persian Government about 45,000 tomans annually, which is considerably more than double the amount the same number of irregular horse would cost. Each man enrolled for such service in the irregular cavalry receives 25 tomans a year, with a daily allowance for food for himself and horse, when on active duty, and he provides his horse and arms himself.

The nominal strength of the Persian artillery is 22 battalions, with 8,000 men and 3,500 horses. The actual force is 20 battalions, with 5,200 men and 1,700 horses, of which only about 200 are at present trained. There is no organization in batteries or regiments. All the material is kept in the large towns, principally Tehran and Tabreez. The horses belong to a separate department, which is under the orders of a person who has nothing whatever to do with the artillery.

Persia has upwards of 1,000 guns of different calibres. About 500 are in Tehran and 200 in Tabreez. The largest is a 60-pounder, made in Isfahan. Some 48-pounders and two 36-pounders have also been constructed, but these are all worn out. The heaviest guns that could actually be brought into action are 24-pounders, but of these they have got only four. The other heavy guns are 18, 16, 14, and 12 pounders, all smooth bores, and made after different models, English, Austrian, and Russian. There are a certain number of howitzers 42, 24, and 18 pounders. The heaviest mortar is a 12-inch. The ordinary mortars are 24-pounders. The field guns consist of 9 and 6 pounders and 12-pound howitzers. The mountain guns are 2 and 3-pounders and 6-pound howitzers.

Besides this material Persia has some rifled guns cast in Persia. There are eighteen 6-pounders, constructed ten years ago, of which only three are in good order. Also forty-eight 4-pounders, Belgian model, of which thirty-three are unserviceable, and eighteen 6-pounders, of a calibre slightly different from the Belgian. These have not been tried, but they are badly cast and require a special sort of ammunition which has not yet been made.

Eighteen Austrian Uchatins, nine centimetres, form the best part of the Persian artillery, and fifty-six 2-pounders, which have been rifled, have proved to be excellent mountain guns, but the small quantity of shells made has been used up, and new shells have not yet been made.

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The three Austrian batteries are complete, and can take the field at any moment. The rest of the artillery material is so deficient and neglected that it would be difficult to send out six other batteries. It would acquire at least six months' hard labour to fit out the whole of the artillery in Tehran, and more than a year to equip that in the provinces.

Tehran,
21st June 1880.