



DAGH BARY

DAGH BARY, an important part of the colossal Darband defensive complex erected in the eastern Caucasus during the reign of Ƙosrow I (r. 531-79). This defensive system included two principal components. The first was the city of [Darband](#), with its citadel (now called Naryn-kala) and two city walls (northern and southern), splitting off from the citadel and going down more than 150 m to the sea (on the sea walls of Darband, see Gadjiev [Gadžiev] and Kudrjavcev), dividing the narrow (3.5 km) strip of coastal plain lying between the Caucasus foothills and the [Caspian Sea](#). The second was Dagh Bary (Turk. *dağ* ‘mountain’ and Pers. *bāru* ‘barrier, wall’, lit. “Mountain Wall”), which stretched from the southwest corner tower of the citadel to the mountains for many kilometers and had numerous fortresses and towers.

The name Dagh Bary was first mentioned by Alexander A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky in 1832 (Marlinsky, p. 161). In 1842, [Il’ya N. Berezin](#) noticed the use of that name by the inhabitants of Darband, yet he himself called it “Alexander’s wall” or “Caucasian wall” (pp. 25-28). It is difficult to say how authentic and ancient the name Dagh Bary is. In the 7th-century *Geography* (Arm. *Ašxarhac’oyc’*) of Anania Širakac’i this defensive line appears under the name *zparispn Darbanda* “the double walls of Darband” (Ananias of Širak, tr., p. 122; Moïse de Corène, p. 37). Ḥamza Ešfahāni (10th century) mentioned the name *sadd Darband* “wall/barrier of Darband” (p. 57). [Mas’udi](#) (d. 956) also named this defensive line *sadd* (ed. Pellat, II, chap. 18, p. 2; cf. *Ta’riḵ Bāb al-abwāb*, tr. Minorsky, 1963, pp. 202, 209, 212). The Persian name *Gāvbāra* ‘Bull wall,’ as well as the earlier one, was used by [Ebn Esfandiār](#) (p. 154). This name



is possibly connected to the name of the Caucasian mountains used by the late antique and early medieval authors – the Greek Ταυρος, Latin *Taurus* (Procopius, *De bello Persico*, 1.10.1; Iordanes, *Getica*, p. 68; cf. Ar. *ṭawr* ‘bull’); and in this case it can be synonymous to “Caucasian wall” which had been used by some European authors since the 18th century (D. Cantemir, Th. Bayer, etc.). In the Middle Ages, [Alexander the Great](#) was credited with having blocked the Darband pass against the tribes of Gog and Magog advancing from the north (cf. Ezekiel 38-39; John 20.7; Yājūj and Mājūj of Qur’an 18:93, 94, 97), hence the identification of the Darband defensive complex with the legendary “Alexander’s wall.” Neẓāmi (1141-1209) in his *Eskandar-nāma* (tr., pp. 219-20) was among the first who made such an identification. For European authors, the legend about the construction of the Darband defensive complex by Alexander the Great became known in the middle of the 13th century, reported by [William of Rubruck](#), who visited the city in 1254 (chap. 50). At the end of the 14th century Johannes de Galonifontibus, the archbishop of Solṭaniya and the author of *Libellus de notitia orbis*, saw the remains of the mountain walls here, “constructed by Alexander the Great for being fenced off from the peoples Gog and Magog” (tr., p. 15). In the 1560s to 1580s, the English merchants [Anthony Jenkinson](#) and [Christopher Borough](#) also observed the ruins of Dagħ Bary and heard the legend about its construction by Alexander the Great (in *Angliiskie puteshestvenniki ...*, pp. 202, 278; see also, Bruce, p. 284). At the beginning of the 19th century, Abbas-Kuliaga Bakikhanov (‘Abbāsḡoli Āqā Bākiḡānuf; 1794-1846) in his *Golestān-e Eram* (pp. 32-33) noted that “among the people of Darband it is still known as Alexander’s wall.” In *Resāla-ye Bābiya* (16th century) the Darband defensive complex, along with Dagħ Bary, is called *al-sadd al-a’zam* “Great wall/barrier” (apud Alikberov, 2003, p. 48). In the chronicle *Darband-nāma (Derbend-Nāmeḡ)*, pp. 90, 100 and note 2; tr. in Shikhsaidov et al., p. 38), the text of which was most probably authored by Shaikh Abu Ya’qub Yusuf Bābi Lakzi Darbandi (d. before 1089; Alikberov, 1998, pp. 63-64), there was one more name for the designation of the Darband defensive complex and Dagħ Bary: *Darpuš* (Pers. *dar* ‘gate’ and *puš* ‘barrier, barrage, shelter’; cf. MPers. *pušt* “support, protection, back,’ *darpušt* ‘fortress, stronghold,’ *darpuštīh* ‘fortification’; Nyberg, pp. 49, 188; MacKenzie, p. 69; Alikberov, 2003, p. 47).

The Arab and Persian authors of the 9th-10th centuries and subsequent period ([Balāḡori](#), [Ebn al-Faḡīḡ](#), [Mas’ūdī](#), [Eṣṡāḡri](#), [Ebn Ḳordāḡbeh](#), Qodama, [Ebn Rosta](#), [Ebn Ḥawḡal](#), Moḡaddasi, Ḥamza, [Ṭabari](#), [Bal’ami](#), Ya’qubi, Yāḡut, [Mostawfi Qazvini](#), [Ebn al-Aṡir](#), etc.) ascribe the building of the stone Darband



fortification complex to Ҷosrow I and provide important information about Dagh Bary pertaining to the reasons of construction, extent and quantity of fortresses and basic strengthened points, military organization, system of defense, economic and political maintenance, and functioning and value of this fortification line in various times. The Arabic Kufic inscription dated 792 CE, found near one of the fortresses of Dagh Bary, mentions Kisrā (Ar. for Ҷosrow) as the builder of the Darband fortifications and Dagh Bary and gives information about the repair works on this defensive system during the reign of the caliph **Hārun al-Rašīd** (Gadjiev and Shikhsaidov, pp. 3-10; [PLATE I](#)).

The erection of the monumental fortification complex (including Darband and Dagh Bary) in the Darband pass and on the northeastern spurs of the Caucasus range at the end of the 560s or the beginning of the 570s (Gadjiev, 2008a; 2016) was directed against Sasanian Iran's powerful new political rival, the Turkic khanate. The general command was carried out by the *marzbān* (margrave) or *šahriār* (ruler) of Darband. All the defensive line Dagh Bary was divided into sites (*rustāk*, *rōstāg* 'district') commanded at places by *sarhangs* (military commanders). Persian soldiers called *siāsījiya/siāsījin/siāsīkin* and *nišāstag* 'garrisoned warrior; the settled ones; settlers' served here (Kramers, p. 616), and so did military groups from Armenia and teams of local vassal governors of Tabasaran, Filan, Lakz, Layzan, and **Šervan**, who had the honor to receive the title of *šāh* (king) from Ҷosrow I. All the soldiers who served on Dagh Bary were granted exemption from taxes and allotted plots of cultivated land (Ҳамза, p. 57).

The Arabs appreciated the organization of the Sasanian system of defense and actively supported and strengthened it. Under Arab rule, from the 8th to the 10th centuries, the forts of Dagh Bary received significance as *ribāṭs* (Piotrovskiy, p. 198; Chabbi; Rabbat), in which were placed groups of *murābiṭūn* (armed fighter-guards for the faith). The forts became a kind of Islamic center (Ar. *al-marākiz al-islāmiya*; sing. *markaz* "center"), strongholds for the propagation of Islam in the frontier zone (Ar. *taḡr*) where colonists from the central areas of the caliphate were settled. By the 11th century the transformation of the frontier *ribāṭs*, located along the length of Dagh Bary, into Sufi *ribāṭs* had begun, which substantially accorded with the structure of these fortresses' garrisons. They consisted of *ḡāzis* (pl. *ḡozāt*), who were religious warriors sacrificing their lives out of their dedication to war against "non-believers" (Alikberov, 2003, pp. 237-38, 482-83).

As has been established on the basis of the analysis of data from written



sources and archeological research, the period of active functioning of this defensive system falls from the 6th to the beginning of the 13th centuries (Gadjiev, 2006). The end of Dagh Bary's active life was connected with the invasion of the Mongols at the beginning of the 13th century and with the change of the military-political situation in the eastern Caucasus. From then on, the Dagh Bary complex fell into decay, though individual fortresses continued to function up to the beginning of the 18th century. The change of the military-political situation caused the gradual destruction of Dagh Bary, to which various authors have been testifying since the 14th century. The process of the active destruction of Dagh Bary occurred in the 19th to 20th centuries. Remains of Dagh Bary to various degrees, from trenches, formed as the result of complete pulling down of the building stone, to forts and walls rising to the height of several meters (max. 10-12 m) are still visible today.

Based on the diary records of Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723), who visited Darband during Tsar Peter I's Persian (Caspian) campaign of 1722-23, Theophilus S. Bayer (1694-1738) published the first work devoted to the study of Dagh Bary, "De muro Caucaseo" (1728, pp. 425-63; repr. 1770, pp. 94-125). Brief information about Dagh Bary and a schematic plan of its initial site are contained in the work of Eduard Eichwald (1795-1876), who in 1825 examined this site to the extent of 19 km (1834a, p. 217, tab. II; 1834b, p. 129). Interesting and important data were also reported by A. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky (1797-1837) in his essay, "Caucasian Wall," written in 1832 (Marlinsky, pp. 159-64). In 1885, general Roderich von Erckert (1821-1900) gave a report, "Die Mauer von Derbend" (1885, pp. 55-59), which was then published in his book with a plan of Dagh Bary (Erckert, 1887, pp. 216-23).

A description, brief architectural characteristics, and detailed plan of the defensive system Dagh Bary, with the names of individual fortresses, were given by John Abercromby, who in 1888 examined and recorded 43 fortresses (1889, pp. 216, 224-46, 248-51; 1890, pp. 135-45). In 1911, the plans of Dagh Bary by Erckert and Abercromby and a brief description of the defensive works were cited by [A. V. W. Jackson](#) (pp. 59-80); he was the first to point out the similarity of the specific armored masonry of the Darband defensive complex and [Taḳt-e Solaymān](#). In 1926 and 1928, P. I. Spassky and E. A. Pakhomov surveyed the ruins of Dagh Bary and made important observations about the quantity of the forts, safety, condition, and extent of the defensive system, etc. (Spassky, 1927; 1931, pp. 30-35; Pakhomov, 1930, pp. 325-31; 1933, p. 46). In 1937, the ruins of Dagh Bary were examined by M. I. Artamonov, who

published the results of his researches in a review, in which he dated the construction of Darband defensive complex to 562-71 (p. 129).

The major contribution to the study of the defensive system of Dagh Bary was made by S. O. Khan-Magomedov, who examined it during the 1950s. The results of his researches appeared in numerous publications (1966, pp. 227-43; 1979, pp. 207-27; 2002, pp. 300-376) with a number of historical statements and architectural conclusions. In particular, he marked out two stages of the construction (first of the fortresses and then the walls connecting them) and considered that the work on Dagh Bary was not completed, and the period of its function should be limited to the 6th–10th centuries. Despite a series of publications, many questions about the history of this magnificent monument of defensive architecture were not answered or reported: its exact extent, strategic sites, quantity of fortifications, their parameters and architectural features, periods of functioning, etc., were not known. A careful analysis of the data of the written sources containing information on this defensive system was carried out by the Darband Archaeological Expedition (Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Daghestan Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Makhachkala) in 1998-2005.

In 1998-2000, the excavation of fortress no. 1, situated 145 m to the southwest of the citadel of Darband, enabled researchers to distinguish three periods of its active functioning (mid-6th to 8th, 9th to the beginning of the 11th, and 11th to the beginning of the 13th centuries) and to identify this fortification with the *qal'a Şul* of the chronicle *Ta'riḵ Bāb al-abwāb* (tr. Minorsky, 1963, pp. 10, 52) and the *bāb Şul* of Ebn Ḳordāḍbeh (tr., p. 109; Gadjiev, 1997, pp. 27-28; 2006, pp. 120-252; 2007, pp. 20-22; Gadjiev and Magomedov, 2000a, pp. 213-35; 2000b, pp. 184-85; 2001a, pp. 144-46; 2001b, pp. 125-27).

In 2001-5, research was undertaken along all the defensive system of Dagh Bary from fortress no. 1 (200 m above sea level) to the last one, fortress no. 60 (Chukhun-kala) at the Kara-Syrt range (1060 m above sea level) in the mountains of Tabasaran (Gadjiev and Bakushev, 2002, pp. 49-51; Gadjiev, 2005, pp. 157-59; 2007, pp. 22-24; 2008b, pp. 209-11; 2008c, pp. 6-34). The conclusion was that Dagh Bary covered an extent of 42 km; the remains of the sixty fortresses (PLATES II and III), three semi-fortresses and thirty towers were precisely located and valuable historical and archaeological data were recovered. Archaeological soundings conducted in five fortresses revealed that they were functioning from the 6th to the beginning of the 13th century. Masons' marks, stepped battlements (*merlons*), blocks of the hanged loopholes



(*mâchicoulis*), and inscriptions in Middle Persian (6th century CE; on Kejerlikala fortress no. 19) and in Arabic (8th–12th centuries) were discovered in the ruins of Dagh Bary. Muslim cemeteries including carved gravestones and stelae with Arabic epitaphs of the 11th-15th centuries CE, and also cisterns (with diameters of 6-10 m) that provided garrisons with water, were found in the areas adjacent to the mountain wall. One of the most ancient Muslim official inscriptions is particularly noteworthy: a large Arab Kufic building inscription dated 176/792-3 which once formed a part of the masonry of Dagh Bary (Gadjiev and Shikhsaidov, pp. 3-10; PLATE I).

Rectangular fortresses (from a minimum of 20x10 m to a maximum of 36.4x32.6 m inside; thickness of walls is 2.0-2.6 m) have four blind corner round towers (diameters of 4.0-5.5 m); on some fortresses there is a fifth rectangular tower which flanked the entrance on the curtain line. Similar fortifications representing the rectangular or square fortress with round corner towers (sometimes semicircular towers along the walls) and with the entrance flanked by towers (or with a tower entrance) are well-known in the fortifications of Sasanian Iran (Hallier, pp. 190, 290, fig. 1, 2, tab. 44, 76; Whitehouse and Williamson, p. 34, fig. 3, pl. I B; Whitehouse, 1974, p. 8, fig. 3; Kleiss, p. 216, fig. I; Bergamini, p. 210, fig. P; Vanden Berghe, pp. 49, 53, fig. 7, a, b, c, 11, e).

The forts are situated at a distance of 150 to 500 m from each other on the dominating heights, from which the greatest possible field of view, up to tens of kilometers, opens up. On some distant sites the continuous line of the wall is interrupted. The most important strategic 5-kilometer site, between the Jalghan (Dzhalgan) and Kamakh (Kemax) ridges, was protected by 12 forts, 2 semi-forts, and 28 towers. All towers of the Dagh Bary curtains are rectangular blind (5.3-5.9x7.3-8.2 m outside) and rectangular hollow (5.3-5.6x7.4-8.8 m outside; thickness of the walls, 1.8-2.0 m) with an internal chamber blocked by the false vault and central entrance and side passageways to the curtains (PLATES IV and V). The fortifications of Dagh Bary are characterized by dry armor (header and stretcher) masonry of big rectangular blocks with lime mortar rubble filling the body.

The stone Darband defensive complex replaced the adobe fortifications in the Darband pass that were constructed during the reign of Yazdegerd II (r. 439-57 CE; Kudryavtsev, 1978, pp. 243-57; 1979, pp. 31-43; Gadjiev, 1989, pp. 61-76). The construction of this colossal complex, which included the city of Darband and Dagh Bary, became possible owing to the reforms carried out by Kōsrow I



and his active foreign policy. By 568, Iran possessed huge financial assets received from Byzantium as the contribution and payments under the treaties of 531 and 561 (Procopius, *De bello Persico*, 1.22, 2.5-6, 10, 26-28; Menander Protector, *Fragm.*, 11). They totaled about six tons of gold coins. A considerable part of this money was allotted to Iran for securing and enforcement of the Caucasian gates/passes; the first item of the treaty of 561 ran that “the Persians were to hinder the Unns (Οὔννους “Huns”), Alans (Ἀλανους), and other barbarians from penetrating into the Roman domains through the canyon, called Khorutzon (Χορουτζόν; *Tzon* in some manuscripts), and the Caspian gates (των Κασπίων πυλων)” (Menander Protector, *Fragm.*, 6).

This allowed Kōsrow I to start the creation of the grandiose Darband defensive complex, which became the acme of the fortification system of Sasanian Iran crowning the system of *limes Caspius*, frontier “long walls” belting the Caspian sea eastward and westward, on the boundary of the settled agricultural and nomadic cattle-breeding worlds.

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