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## The Ural Cossacks in World War I and the Civil War: a Demographic Aspect

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*The article is devoted to the Ural Cossacks' demography in the first half of the XX century. The major focus is given to the periods of World War I and the Civil War as well as to the post-war years as the most significant changes in the Ural Cossacks' demography took place at this time. Starting from 1914 the Ural Cossacks were drawn into the hardest demographic catastrophe, resulting from a sequence of politico-military and social conflicts. The catastrophe had led to a virtually complete disappearance of this social group. The article dwells on the analysis of the whole complex of social and natural factors, which influenced the Ural Cossacks' demography in 1914 – 1922.*

*During World War I the Ural Cossacks suffered relatively few losses. As for the Civil War, the losses of the Cossacks were significant, especially during the final stage when the front line was on the territory of the Ural Cossacks' Host and the civil population started suffering from the losses. The Cossacks' housekeeping economy also bore damages. This seriously effected the Cossacks' demography. However, the post-war period, when the Cossacks' population was influenced by a whole set of negative factors, such as political and economical repressions, drought, crop failure, and epidemic, was the period of major losses for the Ural Cossacks. It was the post-war time when, having born huge demographic losses, the Ural Cossacks stopped their existence as a social group.*

*Thus, the death of the Ural Cossacks at the beginning of the XX century was a result of a whole set of negative factors, connected, first and foremost, with home policy processes.*

*Keywords: the Cossacks, World War I, Civil War, revolution, demography, repressions, economy.*

*Research area: History.*

### Point

The Ural (Yaik) Cossacks are one of the ancient Cossacks' communities in Russia. Formed in the XVI century at the border of the Slavic and Turkic worlds, the region with complex natural-and-climatic and military-and-political conditions, it had long been strongly influenced by the negative factors, connected with these conditions. The Cossacks'

population turned out to be safe and got an opportunity for the rural economy development only after the second half of the XIX century when the Russian border was moved deeper into Central Asia and the nomads stopped their attacks on the Cossacks' lands. This favoured the improvement of the Ural Cossacks' demographic situation, resulting in a significant growth of their number.

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### Statement to the problem

At the beginning of the XX century the Ural Cossacks experienced a negative influence of political factors, connected with the complication of the home policy in Russia and, above all, with 1905 – 1907 and 1917 revolutions. Foreign policy factors, the Russo-Japanese War and World War I being the major ones, played no less negative role in the Ural Cossacks' fate. The period of 1914 – 1922, connected with the Cossacks' participation in World War I, revolutionary events of 1917, the Civil War, and subsequent repressions, was the most unfavourable in the Ural Cossacks' history. As a result, by the middle of the 1920-s the Ural Cossacks virtually stopped their existence as a social group. Moreover, they were physically destroyed in essence.

### Methods

The article attempts to consider the influence of external factors on the Ural Cossacks' demography in the first quarter of the XX century. Political, economical, natural-and-climatic and other factors, which determined the dynamics of the Ural Cossacks' population during the period under the study, are viewed upon in a chronological order. The military-and-political factors and the influence of World War I and the Civil War on the demography of the Cossacks' population above all will be given the most intent attention as specifically significant. A special focus of attention will be given to the combination of factors and their integrated impact on the demography of the social medium considered.

Extensive scientific literature is devoted to the Ural Cossacks' history of the beginning of the XX century. The most notable recent works are the following ones: M.Zh. Abdirov "Istoriia kazachestva Kazakhstana (The history of the Kazakh Cossacks)" (Abdirov 1994), S.V. Kartaguzov "Ofiterskii sostav chastei Ural'skogo kazach'ego voiska. 1914 –

1918. Bibliograficheskie spravochniki (Officer personnel of the Ural Cossack Host's military units. 1914 – 1918. Bibliography)" (Kartaguzov 2012), V.F. Kurokhtin "Ural'skoe (Yaitskoe) kazach'e voisko (The Ural (Yaik) Cossack Host)" (Kurokhtin 2011), V.A. Moiseev "Novoe v sovremennoi kazakhskoi istoriografii politiki tsarskoi Rossii v Kazakhstane (The new in modern Kazakh historiography of the tsarist Russia's policy in Kazakhstan)" (Moiseev 2003), D.A. Sapunov "Uchastie kazachestva Urala i Sibiri v prisoedinenii Srednei Azii k Rossii 40 – 90 gg. XIX v. (The Ural and Siberian Cossacks' participation in the alignment of Central Asia to Russia (the 40-s – 90-s of the XIX century))" (Sapunov 2001). Among foreign authors' works on this issue it is worth while mentioning M. Khodarkovsky's "Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500 – 1800", analyzing the Ural Cossacks' specific character and their relations with the nomads from Central Asia (Khodarkovsky 2001), A. Morrison's "Revoliutsiia naoborot. Tsentral'naia Aziia mezhdur padeniem tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR (A revolution in reverse. Central Asia between the fall of the tsarist empire and the USSR formation)" (Morrison 2009). Ch. Bachner's doctoral thesis "Das Vordringen des zaristischen Rußlands nach Zentralasien und der Aufbau der russischen Verwaltung bis 1890 (Tzarist Russia's penetration to Central Asia and Russian system of administration up to 1890)" is of a peculiar interest. The researcher studies the Cossacks as a special military, police and administrative force in Central Asia at the end of the XIX century, that is also topical for the analysis of the events of the beginning of the XX century (Bachner, 2001). The peculiarities of the interaction between the Russians, the Cossacks including, and the Turkic population of Kazakhstan, that determined the relations of the Cossacks and the Kazakh people at the

beginning of the XX century to a large extent, are considered in G. Aldashev and C. Guirkinge's article "Deadly anchor: Gender bias under Russian colonization of Kazakhstan" (Aldashev, Guirkinge 2012).

### Discussion

At the beginning of World War I the number of the Ural Cossacks was nearly 166 thousand people. Their financial conditions were quite satisfactory. At the beginning of the XX century the Ural Cossacks were one of the most well off cossack armies. Thus, in 1904 they had 31,1 tithes of good land and a total of 95,4 tithes of inarable land per a male Cossack. Only the Semirechinsk Cossacks owned a bit larger plots of land (95,3 tithes per a male Cossack) (Vorob'ev 1906, p. 23). Large allotments ensured a high standard of the Ural Cossacks' living. This, evidently, resulted in the dynamics of the Cossacks' population number. In 1913 the birth rate in the cossack environment was twice higher than the death rate (Sdykov 2004, p. 165).

Good socio-economical and demographic situation of the Ural Cossacks at the beginning of the XX century was destroyed by eternal factors, and chiefly military and political ones. The Russo-Japanese war didn't have a serious negative influence on the Ural Cossacks' demography. A relatively low number of the Ural Cossacks (a bit more than 2 thousand Cossacks of the Ural Cossacks' regiments 4 and 5), participating in military actions, and a comparatively short duration of these actions resulted in insignificant losses among the Cossacks.

World War I, in contrast to the Russo-Japanese war, had the most negative impact on the Ural Cossacks (Istoriia kazachestva Aziatskoi Rossii..., Vol. 2, 1996, p. 73). The reason for this is considered to be a much longer duration of the war conflict, in which a considerably greater number of Cossacks were involved.

It is already in July 17, 1914 according to Order No 647 special regiments of the second- and third-rate importance were mobilized from the Ural Cossack Army. These included the headquarters of a newly formed Ural cossack regiment and management of the brigade, regiments 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, spare squadrons 1, 2 and 3, the first, second and third departments of the horse stock (Ural'skie kazach'i vedomosty (The Ural Cossacks' vedomosti (journal)). July 20, 1914). Thus, in total the Ural Cossack Army engaged 9 mounted regiments, 2 artillery batteries, 1 artillery squadron, 6 separate and special squadrons (10 squadrons according to other data) and 2 convoy fifty for the needs of the front (Grazhdanskaia voina i inostrannaia interventsia v SSSR (Civil war and international intervention in the USSR) 1983, p. 591; Istoriia kazachestva ... T. 3 (The history of the Cossacks... Vol. 3) 1996, p. 24).

The total number of those participating in World War I was 320 Ural officers and 13175 ordinary Cossacks or 7,8 % of the cossack population (Istoriia kazachestva ... T. 3 (The history of the Cossacks... Vol. 3) 1996, p. 216). 335 people were killed, 1793 people were injured and contused, 92 Cossacks were reported missing. 48 officers of this number were killed and missing (Kartaguzov 2012, p. 26).

Separation of a significant number of men from their families could not but influence the region's demographic situation. An overall decline in the population of Ural'skiy, Gur'evskiy, Kalmykovskiy and Temirskiy uezds (districts) of the Ural oblast (region) starts from 1916. It is significant that in 1915 the region's population slightly increased but by inertia, while its reduction started from 1916. From 1914 to 1917 the population of the above mentioned uezds reduced from 856,6 thousand people to 814,1 thousand (Sdykov 2004, p. 171). According to M. Sdykov and the reference to the State archive

of Western Kazakhstan region, in 1915 the number of the Cossacks in the Ural province was 193 779 people. Of these 23 651 people lived in urban settlements, 170 128 – in rural ones. The Cossacks together with the non-locals (without the Kazakh population and migrants) made 377 566 people. It should be noted that according to the data of general census 1897 the Cossacks were only 17,6 % of the population of the Ural oblast, and the reduction of their percentage in the region's population at the beginning of the XX century grew due to the increasing migrant movement (Sdykov 2004, pp. 173 – 174). Nevertheless, the region's population rundown was due to the Cossacks and Russian migrants who had to serve in the army.

It is also evident that not only the decline of the birth-rate, caused by the reproductive aged male majority's call-up for the active military service and direct mortality at the front, but also the decline of the Cossacks' household economies negatively influenced the demography of the region's cossack population. This was a result of the confiscation of several thousand males of the working age, a considerable number of horses from the economic life in the Ural territory, as well as of a general decline of the economic situation in the country.

This negative demographic factor was not relevant for the Kazakh population as they didn't have military duties. According to the 1897 data, the number of the Kazakh population in the Ural region was 460 173 people, or about 72 % of the region's population (*Materialy po kirgizskomu zemlepol'zovaniuu. Ural'skii uezd* (Materials on the Kirghiz land-use. The Ural uyezd (district)), 1909, pp. 40-41). Only the mid 1916, when the decree on the foreigners' recruitment for rear works was adopted, can be mentioned in connection with a negative influence of mobilization on the demography of the region's Kazakh population.

The revolutionary events of 1917, the Civil war, which followed them, and the post-war repressions resulted in almost a complete destruction of the Ural Cossacks. Initially the Ural Cossacks along with the Cossacks of other armies were cautiously optimistic about the February revolution of 1917 but negative about the October revolution. Thus, after the February revolution the Ural Cossacks returned their old army's name, which is "Yaik", demonstrating their commitment to democracy and antimonarchical spirit. However, after a long reflection, lasting from October 1917 till summer of 1918, most Ural Cossacks opposed against the Bolsheviks. In March 1918 the power in the Ural province passed into the hands of the Ural military government as a result of the armed coup d'état. That was the beginning of an armed opposition between the Ural Cossacks and the Bolsheviks (*Istoriia kazachestva Aziatskoi Rossii... T. 3. XX vek* (The history of the Cossacks of Asian Russia... Vol. 3, 1996, p. 28).

By November 1918 the Ural Cossacks formed 18 regiments of nearly 10 thousand sabers and forwarded them to the front against Red Army. Moreover, 2 regiments of the Ural Cossacks made the garrison of Ural'sk. Comparing the number of the Ural Cossacks, participating in the Civil war (more than 20 thousand people), with the number of the Ural Cossacks, mobilized to serve in the army during the years of World War I (13 thousand people), it should be admitted that the Ural Cossacks, almost one and all, were involved in the military struggle with the Bolsheviks (*Ibid.* 1996, p. 64). As a result, in the course of the Civil war and the first post-war years the Ural Cossacks bore such significant losses that it makes it possible to consider this fact as this social group's destruction.

By 1920 the total number of the Cossacks and the non-residents (foreigners excluding) in the Ural province reduced by 61,1 % up to 145 016 people (Sdykov 2004, p. 174). In 1916 the Ural

region was inhabited by 166 365 Cossacks, in 1925 they were only 73 300. There were almost no adult males in Cossack villages (Ibid. 1996, p. 115).

The Cossacks' active participation in the armed anti-Soviet movement both in the course of the Civil war and after it had negative consequences for the Ural Cossacks. Repressive Soviet authorities managed to bring down a wave of insurrectionary movement in the Ural region only by the mid of 1922. In the course of struggle with the cossack insurrectionary movement, accompanied by active military actions and the bitterest repressions by the Bolshevik authorities, including the hostage system application, the region's cossack population suffered significant losses. The fact of anti-Soviet revolts' coincidence with the most severe starvation of 1921-1922 dramatized the situation even more.

Hunger of 1921 was caused by crop failure, resulting from drought. It reached its peak in winter of 1921 – 1922, when there appeared cases of cannibalism and corpse-eating. The desire to avoid starvation caused the Russian population's mass migration, also including the Cossacks of the region (Otchet Ural'skogo gubernskogo ekonomicheskogo soveshchania... (The report of the Ural governorate (district) economical meeting...) 1923, p. 2, 308). Hunger and, consequently, the region's population reduction were caused not only by crop failure because of the extreme weather situation, but also by the regional economy's total collapse, food reserves depletion, destruction of the population's social protection mechanisms, etc. Specifically, from 1915 to 1924 the number of horseless households in the Ural province increased from 7,4 % to 57,4 %. The consequence of the working cossack population and the total number of horses' livestock the gross grain harvest in the Ural province in 1924 was only 13 % to that of 1915 (Istoriia kazachestva... T.3. (The history of the Cossacks...

Vol. 3), 1996, p. 115)). In 1920 the Ural province's land under cultivation reduced by 59,5 % in comparison to 1917 (from 410,5 thousand tithes to 165,9 thousand tithes (Otchet Ural'skogo gubernskogo ekonomicheskogo soveshchania... (The report of the Ural governorate (district) economical meeting...), 1923, pp. 198, 309; Sdykov 2004, p. 181). As a result, only during 1921 in the countryside (cities excluding) of four uezds (districts) 47 289 people starved. As for the Ural province, 19 085 country people, or 20,4 % of total population starved. In Ilek'skiy district the number of those who died with hunger was 17 544 people, or 16,5 %, in Dzhambeitinskiy district – 7 699 people, 8,4 %, in Kalmykovskiy one – 2 961 people, or 5,3 %. Besides, 20 581 people left the province in 1921 in order to pull through starvation. All in all, the population number of the uezds mentioned was reduced by 67 870 people, or 19,6 % from the total number. Hunger was worsened by the epidemic of plague and typhoid fever, which caused the deaths of thousands of people (Ibid., p. 310). It's significant that starving cossack population was not given any food aid, distributed by local authorities. It was done so for political reasons. It should be noted that the region's agricultural population – peasants and Cossacks – suffered from the greatest losses at this period (Ibid., 312). Considering the greatest vulnerability of the cossack population, loss of food reserves during their escape (migration) to the east, and subsequent repressions, it can be assumed that it was the cossack population who suffered the greatest losses during starvation.

By January 1, 1922 the number of starving population was 378 816 people. 112 thousand people of the Ural province were in need of food aid even in August 1922. In the report by Kuzhanov, a head of the province land administration, on the joint congress of the Soviets of the Ural and Bukeevskaya provinces it was said that the Russian male population of the

Ural province reduced by 81,7 %, and the Russian female population of the province reduced by 71,7 % in relation to 1916. The reduction rate of the region's cossack population was evidently even higher. As for the Kazakh population of the province, for the period mentioned it reduced by 52,5 % and 54,7 % respectively (Sdykov 2004, p. 182). All in all, during the period from 1917 to 1923 the population of the Ural province reduced from 655 097 people in 1917 to 360 058 people in 1923, or by 55 %. (Sel'skoie khoziaistvo KASSR... (Rural economy of the Soviet Social Autonomous Republic of Kazakhstan...), 1924, pp. 8, 103). It should be assumed that the reduction was to a considerable extent at the cost of the Ural Cossacks.

Thus, World War I and the civil wars, mass migration and emigration in particular, repressions, and the economy decline had the most negative influence on the Ural Cossacks' demography. By 1920 the total number of the Ural province's population reduced by more than 60 %. The cossack population of the Ural province reduced from 166 365 people to 73 300 people, or by 56 % during the period from 1916 to 1925 (Istoriia kazachestva... T. 3. (The history of the Cossacks... Vol. 3), 1996, p. 115). On the whole, the population of the Ural province, Bukeevskiy uezd including, reduced by 330 thousand people from 1915 to 1926, that is from 766 556 to 436 500 people (Sdykov 2004, p. 189). It should be noted that a slight growth of the Ural region's population started from 1923, the growth being due to the stabilization of the situation in the region. Thus, the province's population number reduced by more than 330

thousand people in the course of World War I, the Civil war, anti-Soviet revolts, repressions, and starvation.

### Conclusion

A new period of the Ural Cossacks' existence started in 1914 when their population number was sharply reducing under the external factors. In 1920 – 1922 the reduction of the cossack population got its avalanche character, resulting not only in the disappearance of the cossack population as a social group but in their physical destruction. The main external factors of this were socio-political. The Cossacks' death on the fronts, reduction of the birth rate in cossack families, and the decline of cossack households, caused by the absence of males, were the main negative consequences of the Ural Cossacks' participation in World War I. When the revolutionary events of 1917 and, especially, the Civil war started, the negative factors, caused by World War I, didn't disappear. They got aggravated. It was due to the fact that military actions on the territory of the Ural Cossack army caused the civil population's death and the destruction of the cossack households. A final blow at the Ural Cossacks was delivered during the first post-war years, when a set of negative natural factors – drought, starvation, epidemics – overlapped and was multiply strengthened by such socio-political factors as repressions, economic disintegration, and physical destruction of the cossack population. As a result, by the mid of the 1920-s the Ural Cossacks stopped their existence as a certain social group of the Russian people.

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## **Уральское казачество в Первой мировой и Гражданской войнах: демографический аспект**

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*Представленная статья посвящена демографии уральского казачества в первой четверти XX в. Основное внимание уделено периоду Первой мировой и Гражданской войны, а также первым послевоенным годам, так как именно в это время произошли наиболее значимые изменения в демографии уральского казачества. Начиная с 1914 г. в результате череды военно-политических и социальных конфликтов уральское казачество было ввергнуто в тяжелейшую демографическую катастрофу, приведшую к фактически полному исчезновению этой социальной группы. Настоящая статья посвящена анализу всего комплекса социальных и природных факторов, оказавших влияние на демографию уральского казачества в 1914 – 1922 гг.*

*В ходе Первой мировой войны уральские казаки понесли относительно немногочисленные потери. В то время как в ходе Гражданской войны потери казаков были значительными, особенно на заключительном этапе, когда фронт проходил по территории Уральского казачьего войска и потери стало нести гражданское население. В это время также сильно пострадала экономика казачьих хозяйств, что серьёзно сказалось на демографии казачества. Самые большие потери уральские казаки, однако, понесли в послевоенный период, когда в течение ряда лет всё казачье население региона находилось под сильным воздействием целого комплекса негативных факторов, таких как политические и экономические репрессии, засуха, неурожай, эпидемии. Именно в послевоенное время уральское казачество, понеся огромные демографические потери, прекратило своё существование как особая социальная группа. Гибель уральского казачества в начале XX в., была обусловлена совокупностью целого ряда негативных факторов, связанных, прежде всего, с внутривнутриполитическими процессами.*

*Ключевые слова:* казачество, Первая мировая война, Гражданская война, революция, демография, репрессии, экономика.

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