



‘ALAM, MOḤAMMAD EBRĀHIM

‘ALAM, MOḤAMMAD EBRĀHIM, AMIR ŠAWKAT-AL-MOLK (b. Birjand, 1881; d. Birjand, 1944), one of the most eminent local magnates and landowners of the late Qajar and early Pahlavi period. He was the governor of Qā’enāt and the Sistān province, and minister of post and telegraph in different cabinets between 1938 and 1941.

He came from an old aristocratic family that had enjoyed power in eastern Persia for centuries. His father was Amir ‘Alam Khan Ḥešmat-al-Molk, who had ruled over the two provinces of Sistān and Qā’enāt, mustering a very large estate. After Ḥešmat-al-Molk’s death, Nāšer-al-Din Shah ordered his domain to be divided into two parts, placing one under the command of each of his two eldest sons, leaving the young MoḤammad Ebrāhim in the care of his mother.

In 1904, after the death of MoḤammad Ebrāhim’s brother, Amir Esmā’il Khan Šawkat-al-Molk, who had been governor of [Birjand](#) and Qā’enāt, MoḤaffar-al-Din Shah appointed MoḤammad Ebrāhim to the same posts, conferring upon him the title of Šawkat-al-Molk. Having inherited both a large estate from his father and a portion of his elder brother’s, MoḤammad Ebrāhim became one of the wealthiest members of the ‘Alam family (Etteḥād, II, p. 556).

During the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1909) Šawkat-al-Molk sided with the constitutionalists and made contact with some of their leaders (Mahdavi, I, p. 2). As a result, when MoḤammad-‘Ali Shah established his short-lived absolute rule in the country, Šawkat-al-Molk was dismissed from office.



After the fall of Moḥammad-‘Ali Shah, Šawkat-al-Molk was reinstated as governor of Qā’enāt and Sistān, and began introducing a number of reforms in his domain. He paid particular attention to establishing a well-organized local army with its own artillery, cavalry, infantry, and even its own military college for training officers. During World War I, the British government pleaded with Šawkat-al-Molk for assistance in order to secure the safety of Baluchistan’s borders, and he aided the British by forming a local militia stationed at Zābol and Qā’enāt, composed of troops recruited locally and commanded by British officers and financed by the British consulate (‘Aqeli, pp. 1029-30).

In 1921, when Colonel Moḥammad-Taqi Pesiān staged a rebellion against the government of the newly appointed prime minister Aḥmad Qavām (Qavām-al-Saltāna), Šawkat-al-Molk was given full authority as governor of Sistān and Qā’enāt to stamp out the rebellion, by force if necessary. But Šawkat-al-Molk was reluctant to use force against Colonel Pesiān, attempting to deal with the situation diplomatically by offering advice and establishing personal contact with the Colonel, even while preparing a military force as a last resort. However, the death of Colonel Pesiān at the hands of certain rebellious tribesmen meant further action was unnecessary (Monşef, pp. 160-83). In 1924, with the change in Persia from the Qajar to the Pahlavi dynasty, Šawkat-al-Molk resigned from office, transferring power to his two nephews, and went to reside in Tehran where he became a close confidant of Reza Shah.

In 1931 Reza Shah appointed Šawkat-al-Molk as head of a commission in Zābol to negotiate the status of the Helmand River (see [HELMAND RIVER iv.](#)) with a delegation from Afghanistan in order to secure a sufficient water supply for the irrigation of the Sistān region. In 1935, he transferred the management of his extensive estate to his son Asad-Allāh ‘Alam (q.v).

He was appointed governor of Fārs in 1937 and a year later became minister of post and telegraph during the premiership of [Maḥmud Jam](#), a post which he also held in later cabinets, including those headed by Aḥmad Matin-Daftari, ‘Ali Maṣṣūr (Maṣṣūr-al-Molk), and Moḥammad-‘Ali Foruḡi (‘Āqeli, p. 1031).

Šawkat-al-Molk returned to Birjand in 1942 where he lived without holding any official posts for two years. In 1944, he traveled to Tehran for medical treatment of a heart ailment, but in the December of that same year he suffered a fatal heart attack in Birjand.



Šawkat-al-Molk made some attempt to improve the welfare of the Birjand area. He established the first modern school there in 1907, called Madresa-ye Šawkati, as well as a hospital, and a well-equipped library. Moreover, he took the first steps to build an almshouse and introduced piped water to Birjand. He also built several modern schools in the Qā'enāt area (see [BIRJAND](#)). He was a devout Muslim who sometimes took measures contrary to the official reformist and secularist policies of the central government. For example, in defiance of the national curriculum adopted by the ministry of education and culture, he included his own religious programs in the curriculum of the schools in his region. He also ordered that all schools in his constituency must stay half closed during the month of Ramadan so that students and their teachers could observe the Ramadan fast without difficulty.

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