



‘ALĪ-QOLĪ KHAN

‘ALĪ-QOLĪ KHAN (d. 1240/1824-25), the youngest of nine sons of Moḥammad Ḥasan Khan Qājār and half brother of Āgā (more correctly Āqā) Moḥammad Khan. Born in 1169/1755-56 in Astarābād (*Nāseḵ-al-tawārīḵ* I, p. 28), he was brought to Qazvīn by order of Karīm Khan after the defeat and death of his father (1172/1758-59). His childhood and early youth were spent under surveillance in Shiraz together with his other brothers. The confusion resulting from the death of Karīm Khan (1193/1779) allowed him to accompany his eldest brother Āgā Moḥammad Khan in his flight to Astarābād (*Rawżat al-ṣafā* IX, p. 128). Except for brief intervals ‘Alī-qolī remained in the service of Āgā Moḥammad Khan for the next two decades and took part in his efforts to establish control over the whole country. He seldom matched his elder brothers in military skill and never gained an independent position in the tribe. Āgā Moḥammad reportedly nicknamed him Āgā Bājī, a title which may allude to certain femininity in his behavior or to his lack of cruelty (*Nāseḵ al-tawārīḵ* I, p. 89); yet his support helped Āgā Moḥammad in the early conflicts with his brothers (1193-96/1779-82). In 1196/1781 he and Āgā Moḥammad succeeded in pushing the Kurdish and Arab tribal chiefs of northern Khorasan out of Semnān, which he was then given as a *soyūrḡāl* or “fiefdom” (*Montaẓam-e Nāṣerī* III, pp. 36-37). Shortly afterwards, ‘Alī-qolī played a major role in bringing K̄vār and Varāmīn (thirty miles southeast of Tehran) under Āgā Moḥammad’s control; this area was the seat of the rival Develū faction of the Qajar tribe, whose loyalty and support was essential for tribal unity, a fact which may explain the choice of Tehran as capital.



In 1198/1783 the continuing struggle between Zands and Qajars persuaded ‘Alī-qolī to make a bid for power. Abandoning Āgā Moḥammad, he came to terms with the Zand chiefs, perhaps in the hope of gaining control over central Iran. Āgā Moḥammad retreated to Astarābād, but the dwindling power of the Zands soon gave him a chance to restore his position. ‘Alī-qolī repented and benefited from Āgā Moḥammad’s unusual policy of clemency and reconciliation towards his brothers. As the latter’s position became consolidated in the north, ‘Alī-qolī was commissioned to fight in a series of at least six campaigns which eventually liquidated the Zands and other petty states in the south. In 1200/1785-86 he subdued the remnants of the Faylī Lors of the extreme southwest (*Rawzat al-ṣafā* IX, p. 202). In 1202/1787-88 he accompanied Āgā Moḥammad on his unsuccessful Fārs campaign. On the way back he was instructed to command a force of 2,000 stationed in Isfahan, but when outnumbered by the forces of Ja‘far Khan Zand, he retreated to Kāšān; shortly afterward he returned with Āgā Moḥammad and captured the city (*Montaẓam-e Nāṣerī* III, p. 37). In 1204/1789-90, during Āgā Moḥammad’s second assault on Fārs, he led a contingent of 7,000 and subdued the Lor tribes of Kohgīlūya; his success was largely due to their willingness to give up their loyalty to the erratic Zands and recognize the Qajars. In the Kermān campaign of 1208/1793-94 he captured Šahr-e Bābak and Sīrjān. He was later sent to assume control over the Lār region. During the invasion of the Caucasus, he was dispatched first to Šīrvān and then to Īravān (Erevan).

In the confusion that followed Āgā Moḥammad Khan’s assassination (1211/1797) and the disintegration of his camp in Shusha ‘Alī-qolī moved the forces under his control towards Tehran. As the only surviving son of Moḥammad Ḥasan Khan, he considered it his right to ascend the throne (*Nāseḳ al-tawārīḳ* I, p. 89), despite the fact that his young nephew Bābā Khan (later Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah) had for long been groomed by Āgā Moḥammad for the succession. Upon his arrival at the city gates, ‘Alī-qolī was prevented from entering and obliged to remain in the fortress of ‘Alīšāh ‘Ewaz, nineteen miles west of Tehran. When Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah entered the city, he took the advice of Ḥājji Ebrāhīm Khan E‘temād-al-dawla Šīrāzī and dispatched his brother Ḥosayn-qolī Khan II to ‘Alī-qolī, who was persuaded to come to the capital for further negotiations. He was invited to attend a royal audience “to settle the terms of the [shah’s] rule.” Separated from his bodyguards, he was physically forced to bow before Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah, all the while cursing him, and then led to an adjacent room and blinded. He was sent to exile in Bārforūš (modern Bābol), where he died in 1240/1824-25.



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