



AMĪN-AL-DAWLA, ‘ABDALLĀH KHAN

AMĪN-AL-DAWLA, ‘ABDALLĀH KHAN ŞADR EŞFAHĀNĪ (1193-1263/1779-1847), chief revenue accountant (*mostawfī-al-mamālek*) and later prime minister (*şadr*) under Fath-‘Alī Shah (r. 1212-50/1797-1834). He was the eldest son of Ḥājjī Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khan Şadr Eşfahānī (see *Şadr al-tawārīk*, p. 69, for his paternal ancestry); his mother seems to have been the daughter of a minor Baḳtīārī chief. Born in Isfahan in the year of Karīm Khan’s death, he grew up during the struggle for power there between the Zands and the Qajars (1193-1210/1779-95); during this time his father began as a minor bailiff (*mobāşer*) and became the *beglarbegī* of Isfahan (1212/1797-98). When Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khan became chief revenue accountant in Tehran and received the title Amīn-al-dawla (1221/1806), ‘Abdallāh Khan was appointed Isfahan’s acting *beglarbegī* and then its governor. During his long term of office (1221-40/1806-24), he further consolidated his father’s base in the province. He expanded the family’s land holdings (both *toyūl* and private) throughout ‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam and revitalized agricultural land around Isfahan, thus exercising considerable control over the grain supply of most major cities of central Iran. Amicable relations with the prominent *mojtaheds*, the tribal chiefs, and the *lūṭīs* allowed him to keep Isfahan firmly in his grasp. A large revenue from land and property gave the Şadrs the means to satisfy Fath-‘Alī Shah’s thirst for extravagance, to buy the support of the notables, and to guarantee their own popularity amongst their subordinates. During the early decades of the 19th century Isfahan prospered, at least partly because of the



direct measures adopted by the Ṣadr̄s to enhance trade, agriculture, and the urban situation. Visiting Isfahan in 1811, William Ouseley attributed the “rapid advances” of the city to “the mild and judicious” administration of the local government (*Travels* II, p. 22); reporting at the same time Mīrzā Ṣāleḥ Ṣīrāzī considers Amīn-al-dawla “the chief instrument in the growing prosperity of Esfahan” (Bodleian, ms. Ouseley, fol. 159).

In 1228/1813 ‘Abdallāh Khan was summoned to Tehran to cooperate with his father as acting chief revenue accountant, though he still held the governorship of Isfahan; he was given the title Amīn-al-dawla. In 1234/1818-9 the death of Mīrzā Ṣafī ‘Alīābādī removed the last obstacle to Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khan’s premiership, and ‘Abdallāh Khan succeeded his father as chief revenue accountant. The two of them maintained an almost undisputed monopoly over the central administration until Ḥājji Moḥammad-Ḥosayn’s death in 1239/1823-24. Certain major provinces, including Azarbaijan, Fārs, and Khorasan, remained in the hands of powerful princes of the royal family, but ‘Abdallāh’s supervision of the revenue registry (*dīvān-e estīfā*) made provincial ministers and *mostawfis* answerable to him; acting by royal decree, he occasionally exerted considerable pressure upon princes to settle their arrears.

The challenge of rival factions after Ḥājji Moḥammad-Ḥosayn’s death was not sufficient to deter ‘Abdallāh Khan’s swift promotion to the premiership; he was now given his father’s title Neẓām-al-dawla. According to *Ṣadr al-tawārīk*, his appointment “was actual and not merely nominal” (p. 78), but the shortness of his term of office may indicate a decline in his influence. This was to the benefit of the ruling princes and members of the Qajar aristocracy, who, at the expense of high officials, gained greater independence in their provincial rule. Lacking his father’s sagacity and skill, Amīn-al-dawla soon fell out of royal favor over an incident involving his notorious uncle Hāšem Khan Baḳtīārī, the acting governor of Isfahan. Complaints regarding the latter’s “injustices” and “oppressive conduct” provided the necessary pretext for the shah not only to blind Hāšem Khan but also to hold ‘Abdallāh Khan liable and dismiss him from both the premiership and the governorship of Isfahan (1240/1824-25). Allāhyār Khan Āṣaf-al-dawla, “the most powerful man in the kingdom” (Watson, *History*, p. 221) and Amīn-al-dawla’s archenemy, was appointed premier, though with reduced responsibilities. But Amīn-al-dawla soon reemerged in the political arena. During the second round of Russo-Persian wars (1241-43/1826-28) he was instructed by the shah to play host to



Sayyed Moḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī Moḡāhed, the chief figure in the *'olamā*'s call for jihad against Russia. Close ties with high ranking *moḡtaheds* provided Amīn-al-dawla with an additional source of support and made his mediation indispensable to the shah. In the political crises which followed the Persian defeat in the war, he took advantage of the monarch's distrust of other officials, who were divided among themselves over the continuation of war with Russia. After the conclusion of the treaty of Torkamānčāy, he returned to favor and replaced the discredited Āṣaf-al-dawla (1243/1828). He remained in office until the death of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah (1250/1834). The period was marked by a "decline in the authority of the premier" and the growing autonomy of the provincial governors. Yet Amīn-al-dawla's influence over the aging monarch gave him enough maneuverability to remain the main figure behind the court intrigues; he was capable of discrediting eminent ministers and notables of the rival factions "with the slightest effort" (*Tārīḡ-e 'Azodī*, p. 99; *Ṣadr al-tawārīḡ*, p. 104). In addition, personal wealth and clerical support often balanced off the pressure of rival groups. Despite 'Abbās Mīrzā's support, the Farāhānī faction led by Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qā'em-maqām did not come close to assuming power. Similarly, the grave repercussions of the financial crises of the late part of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's reign, intensified by war reparations and the reluctance of the prince-governors to pay their dues to the central treasury, did not affect Amīn-al-dawla, who successfully diverted the king's wrath towards provincial ministers. But mutual interests brought him closer to the *moḡtaheds* in the 'Atabāt; prominent among them were Shaikh Ja'far Naḡafī and his son Mūsā, who rewarded Amīn-al-dawla's bequests and pious endowments—including a large complex of buildings, irrigation channels, and city walls for Naḡaf—with generous support and flattering titles. In his mediatory role Amīn-al-dawla was able not only to register his relative independence from the shah but also to signal to the *'olamā*' the importance of his good offices in providing them with royal pensions and securing their freedom of action.

Amīn-al-dawla also derived important and equally controversial support from the British, who in the earliest phase of Anglo-Persian relations had relied upon him and his father to gain access to both the shah and other influential groups. The fact that the Ṣadrs were hosts to successive British missions—Malcolm (1800-01, 1810), Jones (1809-11), and Ouseley (1811-14)—and even received irregular payments from the East India Company, may not prove an outright British loyalty as some secondary sources suggest. Yet their conduct during the French interlude (1807-09) and during two rounds of Russo-Persian wars would imply a pro-British stand.



During the Gardanne mission, 'Abdallāh Khan was governor of Isfahan and adopted an obvious non-cooperative attitude towards the French officer who had been commissioned to set up cannon works there. The failure of the project, or of the whole mission, is often blamed on the Ṣadrs (see, e.g., S. Nafīsī, *Tārīk-e eṣṭemā'ī-e Īrān* I, p. 213). Yet perhaps it is more accurate to say that their opposition derived not only from their pro-British sentiments but also from their reluctance to finance the project out of the revenue of Isfahan. The reported opposition of 'Abdallāh Khan to the renewal of hostilities with Russia in 1242/1826-27 was not incompatible with British policy. His collaboration with Sayyed Moḥammad Moḵāhed and other pro-jihad 'olamā', however, suggests an attempt to avoid being overwhelmed by circumstances. Later on his opposition to the conclusion of the treaty of Torkamāñčāy (1828), especially the clause guaranteeing the succession of 'Abbās Mīrzā and his heirs, seems to have originated in his well-founded anxiety that he might be sacrificed by the British in favor of the heir apparent and the Farāhānī faction.

In the turmoil which followed Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's death in 1250/1834, 'Abdallāh Khan took the calculated risk of forming a broad coalition of all opposition forces in the south against Moḥammad Mīrzā and his minister Qā'em-maqām. Hoping to encourage Ḥosayn-'Alī Mīrzā Farmānfarmā and his brother Ḥasan-'Alī Mīrzā Šoḵā'-al-salṭana, the governors of Fārs and Kermān, to join forces with the third brother Solṭān-Moḥammad Mīrzā Sayf-al-dawla and his mother Tāj-al-dawla, he also counted on the support of the chief *moḵṭāhed* of Isfahan Sayyed Moḥammad Bāqer Šaftī and the Isfahan rabble. In spite of its vast financial resources and some popular support, the coalition failed to make any solid achievements, partly because the British were unwilling to offer their support. Amīn-al-dawla planned to mobilize a reliable force under Šoḵā'-al-salṭana for the defense of Isfahan, but the disputes and disagreements of the princes caused fatal delays, thus permitting Moḥammad Mīrzā and Qā'em-maqām to attract British backing and embark on a campaign to subdue the south. The famous Isfahan revolt of 1835, led by the chief *lūṭī* Ramažān Shah with the full blessing of both Amīn-al-dawla and Šaftī, only temporarily hindered the advance of Moḥammad Mīrzā's forces. The collapse of the revolt forced Amīn-al-dawla to seek refuge with Šaftī. Repeated attempts by Qā'em-maqām to persuade Šaftī to lift his protection or to force Amīn-al-dawla to chose between exile and surrender came to nowhere. In 1836, the sudden downfall of Qā'em-maqām rekindled some hopes but the unexpected rise of Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī soon turned these hopes to new fears. The purge of the remnants of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's bureaucracy was a further blow to 'Abdallāh



Khan, who still looked upon his old subordinates in the central administration as potential collaborators. In a general move to reclaim the *toyūl* and *dīvānī* lands which in the hands of the old bureaucracy had been turned into private property, Āqāsī confiscated most of ‘Abdallāh Khan’s property in Isfahan and ‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam. After months of evasion, Amīn-al-dawla finally gave way to the increasing pressure from the central government and accepted the offer of exile to the ‘Atabāt. The British envoy John McNeil, who negotiated the terms with the government, guaranteed a safe passage (Rabī‘ II, 1252/July, 1835). Amīn-al-dawla spent the last years of his life uneventfully in Najaf, where he died in 1263/1847.

Amīn-al-dawla is an outstanding example of a second generation high official under Fath-‘Alī Shah who owed his power and status both to his father’s service to the Qajars and to his own ability and skill to sustain his position. Like other important families in the early 19th century, the Ṣadrs’ power base was predominantly urban and dependent on land. Though they may have enjoyed the backing of other groups or had at their disposal independent sources of income, they could hardly stand up to the monarch or the Qajar aristocracy. The power of the family declined after ‘Abdallāh Khan. None of his seven brothers held significant office, nor did his three sons show any enthusiasm for government status; one of the latter, ‘Alī-Moḥammad Neẓām-al-dawla, studied under Shaikh Moḥammad Ḥasan Najafī, the author of *Jawāher al-kalām*, and became an authorized *mojtahed* and a prolific writer.

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