



AMĪN-AL-DAWLA, MĪRZĀ 'ALĪ KHAN

AMĪN-AL-DAWLA, MĪRZĀ 'ALĪ KHAN (1260-1322/1844-1904), high ranking official in the service of the Qajar king Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah (r. 1264-1313/1848-96) and grand vizier under Moẓaffar-al-dīn Shah (r. 1313-24/1896-1907). His father, Mīrẓā Moḥammad Khan Maǰd-al-molk Sīnakī Lavāsānī, was a prominent court official. At the age of fourteen Mīrẓā 'Alī Khan became a secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (E'temād-al-salṭana, *Mer'āt al-boldān-e Nāṣerī*, Tehran, 1294-97/1877-80, II, p. 239). Twelve years later he was appointed Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah's private secretary (*monšī-e hoẓūr*). In 1291/1874, he was named minister to the shah for private correspondence (*wazīr-e rasā'el-e kāṣṣa*; Mīrẓā 'Alī Khan Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt-e sīāsī*, ed. Ḥ. F. Farmāyān, Tehran, 2nd ed., 1356 Š./1977, p. 42) and gained the new title Amīn-al-molk; in the same year he was also given the office of the chairman (*modīr*) to the reorganized consultative assembly (*dār al-šūrā*, now called the independent council of ministers (*majles-e wozārā-ye moḳtār*). By royal decree, he was awarded the profitable contracts of managing both the mint and the postal system (*Kāṭerāt-e sīāsī*, p. 51). In 1295/1878 he arranged Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah's second journey to Europe. When the shah after his return decided to introduce certain changes into the monetary system which involved the debasement of coins, Amīn-al-molk refused to concur and the impatient shah gave the operation of the mint to [Āqā Ebrāhīm Khan Amīn-al-solṭān](#). The shah continued to have confidence in him and in 1297/1880 granted him the title Amīn-al-dawla (*Kāṭerāt-e sīāsī*, p. 83). He was known as one of the few



Europeanized Iranians of his day, a reputation which was based more on his outward behavior and his westernized style of life than on his writings or political ideas. His Tehran mansion, designed on European pattern, was completed by 1297/1880 (D. 'A. Mo'ayyer-al-mamālek, "Mīrzā 'Alī Khan Amīn-al-dawla," *Yağmā* 9, 1335 Š./1956, p. 36). There he held parties in the Western style for prominent foreigners, included European ladies among his guests, and introduced Western music and dancing (E'temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 2nd ed., 1350 Š./1971, p. 852). Gradually Amīn-al-dawla became known as a progressive, liberal leader, and during the constitutional period he was venerated as such by a young generation of Iranians.

Amīn-al-dawla was persuaded that his position was vastly more important than that of mere royal secretary; he yearned to become minister of foreign affairs, convinced that he was qualified through his accumulated knowledge of politics, his social familiarity with the diplomatic corps, and his mastery of political correspondence (*Kāṭerāt-e siāsī*, p. 108). In 1300/1883 Mīrzā 'Alī-Asğar Khan Amīn-al-solṭān became *wazīr-e a'zam* or "prime minister" at the age of twenty-five (E'temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt*, p. 246). Amīn-al-dawla found that he was no match for the younger man, and from 1302/1885 to 1313/1896 did not challenge him. Likewise, Amīn-al-solṭān seemed to learn that among all the ministers Amīn-al-dawla enjoyed a special place with the shah, so he changed his rivalrous attitude to one of patronage. Amīn-al-dawla continued to hold him in contempt, but resigned himself to the situation.

The last major event of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah's reign was the episode of the tobacco concession, which the shah was forced to cancel in December, 1891 (see N. R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892*, London, 1966; A. K. S. Lambton, "The Tobacco Regie: Prelude to Revolution," *Studia Islamica* 22, 1965, pp. 119-57). Amīn-al-dawla could not avoid the controversy, and he submitted the petition of the tobacco merchants protesting the concession to the shah (F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914*, New Haven and London, 1968, pp. 253-54); his memoirs give the impression that he had mixed feelings about the issues involved. His belief in the benefits of foreign capital investment and the promotion of industry, along with his hatred of the 'ulamā', put him on the side of the shah; but the fact that cancellation of the concession promised to become a monstrous problem for Amīn-al-solṭān did not displease him. From Raġab, 1310/January, 1893, to Ramażān, 1313/February, 1896, his diary takes a personal tone in



attacks leveled mainly at the shah and his courtiers. Only after the assassination of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah in 1313/1896 do the memoirs return to their earlier elegance of style.

Moẓaffar-al-dīn Shah reaffirmed Amīn-al-solṭān as grand vizier, but the political scene in Tehran changed swiftly because of the sudden prominence of Prince ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Mīrzā Farmānfarmā, who was made commander-in-chief of the army and minister of war. Using his influence with the shah and supported by almost all of the courtiers, he quickly engineered Amīn-al-solṭān’s removal from power. In a matter of weeks he took over the government, not as an official grand vizier, but as a self appointed premier. His position was further strengthened by his blood relationship with the shah and the support he received from the ‘*olamā*’. Intrigues gradually blossomed, and Amīn-al-dawla, who had resigned from his post in Azarbaijan and was already in Tehran, was made *wazīr-e a’ẓam* or prime minister in Šawwāl, 1314/March, 1897; yet he was not able to function as such as long as Farmānfarmā, who wielded great influence, remained in office. Farmānfarmā’s exercise of authority had caused the resignation of the respectable minister of interior ‘Alī-qolī Khan Mok̄ber-al-dawla, and it was generally expected that Amīn-al-dawla would immediately seek the dismissal of Farmānfarmā. But he chose not to do so until Rabī’ I, 1315/September, 1897 when he persuaded the shah to dismiss him and eventually to send him away to Fārs (Afzal-al-molk, *Afzal al-tawārīk*, pp. 142-46; F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain*, pp. 302-06). From a political viewpoint, Amīn-al-dawla now stood without challenger. He had the shah’s full confidence and was in a position to bring the entire machinery of the government under his own control. But he confesses that he “. . . moved about with reluctance, as if he was not responsible for the affairs of government . . .” (*Kāṭerāt-e siāsī*, p. 234; cf. Afzal-al-molk, *Afzal al-tawārīk*, p. 145; Curzon, *Persia* I, p. 428). He had asserted that Iran’s most necessary reform was reorganization of the financial systems and the introduction of modern education, and Moẓaffar-al-dīn Shah supported his projects. Amīn-al-dawla had inherited a depleted treasury; troops and officials had gone without pay for months, and there was fear that riots would break out in the streets. The only course open to the government was to negotiate a foreign loan. Amīn-al-dawla preferred a loan from a country not directly involved in Persian affairs, and secret negotiations were conducted in Paris. However, the British and the Russians reacted as soon as they heard of the negotiations and effectively frustrated the efforts of the Persian government; in his desperation Amīn-al-dawla turned to a privately-owned British



enterprise, the Imperial Bank of Persia, first for a loan of 400,000 and then of 250,000 pounds. As security the Bank asked for the control of the customs of Bushire and Kermanšāh and then gave him an advance of only 50,000 pounds pending the negotiations, which was sufficient to pay only a part of the government's debts (Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain*, pp. 307-15; AmĪn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, 1st ed., 1341 Š./1962, pp. 258-68). But neither the pending loan nor the title *ṣadr-e a'zam* (grand vizier), which had been bestowed upon him just a few months earlier (*Afzal al-tawārīk*, p. 153), could secure his tenure in office. His efforts to effect financial reforms, which would have entailed a more direct control on government spending and the dispensing of wages and grants, had alienated officials at every level. He had even tried to put a limit on the expenses of the shah (Kasravī, *Mašrūta*², pt. 1, p. 31; Maḥbūbī, *Tārīk-e mo'assasāt* II, p. 33). His support for modern education was detested by the 'olamā', whose meddling in everyday state affairs he was trying to stop. Meanwhile his old rival AmĪn-al-solṭān was conspiring with the Russians to sabotage the British loan and pave the way for his own triumphant comeback. Enemies at the court, headed by Maḥmūd Khan Ḥakīm-al-molk, Ḥosayn-qolī Khan Neẓām-al-salṭana Māfī, and Moḥsen Khan Mošīr-al-dawla, finally succeeded in convincing the irresolute, sick monarch to dismiss the grand vizier, whose own lack of strength and determination also contributed to his downfall (AmĪn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, 1st ed., pp. 236-39, 242-44, 247-49, 250-54, 258, 265f.; Afzal-al-molk, *Afzal al-tawārīk*, pp. 232-45; Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī* II, pp. 21-25; Kasravī, *Mašrūta*², pp. 29-33; Ḥājj Sayyāḥ, *Kāṭerāt*, pp. 495-500; F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain*, p. 318). He was removed from office on 15 Moḥarram 1316/5 June 1898, and he soon withdrew to his estate in Gīlān. After a nine-month pilgrimage to Mecca of which he has left a memoir (*Safar-nāma-ye AmĪn-al-dawla*, ed. E. Kāẓemīya, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975), he settled, in poor health, into a sedentary existence which he regarded as exile and imprisonment (*Safar-nāma*, intro., p. xxxvii). He died of kidney disease on 22 Šafar 1322/8 May 1904 at the age of sixty-two, remaining cynical and discontented to the end.

A man of letters, Amin-al-dawla knew the French language and, unlike many of his contemporaries, was acquainted with the state of affairs outside Iran. He has been praised for his honesty and unpretentious, polished manners, while his inertia, irresoluteness, and relative lack of effectiveness in carrying out his administrative plans have been criticized. He came to power at a time when the government was on the verge of total bankruptcy and the episode of the tobacco concession had given the 'olamā', whom AmĪn-al-dawla considered the



greatest obstacle to reform and progress, unprecedented power and prestige. Before him the government in Tehran used to pay its employees by drafts drawn on provincial governments, a practice that led to irregularities and dishonesty. Amīn-al-dawla decided that such payments should be made directly out of the central treasury, and his minister of finance, Nāṣer-al-molk, took measures to do so. Believing that the country should become self-sufficient (Mostawfī, II, p. 25), Amīn-al-dawla had already provided for the foundation of a match factory in Elāhīya and a sugar factory in Kahrīzak, both near Tehran, and as grand vizier he hired three Belgians to modernize the administration of the Persian customs. But his most lasting reformist effort was his patronage of modern education (Maḥbūbī, *Tārīk-e mo'assasāt* I, pp. 369f., 375f.). A note by Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah implies Amīn-al-dawla's improper association with the British Legation at Tehran. However, this allegation is contradicted by the evidence of a letter he wrote to Sir Arthur Hardinge (Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain*, pp. 453-54) after his dismissal from office.

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