



AMĪN-AL-MOLK, MĪRZĀ ESMĀ'ĪL

AMĪN-AL-MOLK, MĪRZĀ ESMĀ'ĪL (1284-1316/1867-98), a high-ranking official towards the end of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah's reign. Born in Tehran, he was the third son of Āqā Ebrāhīm Khan Amīn-al-soltān. While still a clerical novice (*ṭalaba*), he helped with the financial affairs of the shrine of 'Abd-al-'Azīm, which was under his father's trusteeship; soon he was transferred to the royal treasury (*kezāna-ye mobāraka*), which was also controlled by his father. After Ebrāhīm Khan's death (1300/1882-83), Esmā'īl, with the backing of his elder brother, Mīrzā 'Alī-Aṣḡar Khan Amīn-al-soltān, was promoted to acting treasurer and received his brother's old title, Amīn-al-molk. Three years later he received the title of *janāb* and entered the government consultative council (*dār al-šūrā-ye dawlatī*). When Amīn-al-soltān officially became prime minister in 1306/1888-89, Mīrzā Esmā'īl, at the age of twenty-two, became head of the treasury and chief deputy (*nā'eb-e koll*) to his brother at the Ministry of Finance and Court. Appointed minister of finance (*wazīr-e māliya*) shortly after, he annexed to his main post the direct control of at least eight other departments, including customs (*gomrokāt*), granaries (*gallāt*), museums and the royal coffer, and the trusteeship of the shrine of 'Abd-al-'Azīm near Tehran.

For this rapid promotion the young Amīn-al-molk was indebted to Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah's growing dependence on Amīn-al-soltān. Skillfully manipulating this situation, the elder brother used his patronage to bring family members into sensitive posts. Esmā'īl's was the most crucial, since control of the treasury



guaranteed the submission of all those who “in the hope of receiving pensions—either by flattery or fraud—were prepared to lay their foreheads on his threshold” (Mīrzā ‘Alī Khan Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt-e sīāsī*, ed. Ḥ. Farmān-farmā’iān, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, p. 103). Yet Esmā’īl was not merely his brother’s stooge. His success—evidently to his brother’s displeasure—in receiving a share of the swelling revenue of the mint monopoly suggests collaboration rather than subordination (Ḥājj Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Amīn-al-żarb, “Yādegār-e zendagānī,” *Yağmā* 15/5, 1341 Š./1962, p. 13). His quarrel with Kāmran Mīrzā Nā’eb-al-salṭana over the ill conduct of the Īljārī tribe demonstrates his personal initiative in using treasury resources as an effective weapon when the vested interests of the two brothers were endangered (‘Abbās Mīrzā Molkārā, *Šarḥ-e ḥāl*, ed. ‘A. Navā’ī, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1355 Š./1976, pp. 173-74). In some sources he is depicted as less dreaded than his brother, but more hated. Amīn-al-dawla holds him responsible for the fiscal confusion at the end of Nāṣer-al-dīn’s rule: “He gave priority to his own interests rather than maintaining the balance between income and expenditure” (*Kāṭerāt*, pp. 117-18). The shah responded to Amīn-al-molk’s unrestrained control of the treasury with a mixture of inhibition and connivance, a fact which did not escape the jealous eyes of E’temād-al-salṭana. Control of the customs was not only a lucrative source of income but a useful tool for pressuring the shah, whose harem depended upon customs revenues. This may explain the shah’s leniency toward Mīrzā Esmā’īl, as illustrated in E’temād-al-salṭana’s account of the mysterious loss of 850 gold coins from the royal coffer (Moḥammad Ḥasan Khan E’temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, p. 829). But the shah also had personal interests. Writing in 1306/1888, E’temād-al-salṭana tends to confirm the claims of Sidney Churchill, secretary of the British embassy, that long delays in pension payments benefited Amīn-al-molk and Amīn-al-solṭān at the rate of 1,000,000 tomans a year, from which the shah received 100,000 tomans as hush money (E’temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma*, p. 680; cf. p. 1099).

Through his brother’s power, Mīrzā Esmā’īl kept unchallenged control of the treasury until the end of Nāṣer-al-dīn’s life. In the transitional period after the shah’s assassination (Du’l-qa’da, 1313/April, 1896), Amīn-al-molk immediately came under attack both from reformers who criticized him for his incompetence and alleged dishonesty and from the power-hungry Tabrīz faction—the entourage of the new shah, Moẓaffar-al-dīn—who had long waited to lay their hands on the wealth of the outgoing administration. Excesses during Amīn-al-molk’s term of office, the notorious wealth he



accumulated, his European-style house, and the lucrative monopolies provided ample evidence for his critics to charge him with misappropriation of customs revenues, receiving bribes, participation in the copper coins scandal, and fraud. Except for Bāmdād, who refers, without documentation, to Amīn-al-molk's well-regulated records and the validity of his seal (*Rejāl* I, p. 129; II, p. 418), most contemporary sources agree on the soundness of these charges; but these were motivated not only by dissatisfaction and greed, but also by the attempt to bring down Amīn-al-soltān. Amin-al-molk was an easier target than his brother, who had shrewdly stood clear of direct financial involvement, often at the expense of Mīrzā Esmā'īl. In the following months, attacks on Amīn-al-molk paid off somewhat when a scandal ruined his chances for survival. The shah was informed that a group of musicians in Amīn-al-molk's house had entertained his guests with a popular song that ridiculed the ruler and referred to him as Ābī Moẓaffar, a nickname common in the capital (V. A. Kosogovskii, *Iz tegeranskogo dnevnika*, ed. G. M. Petrov, Moscow, 1960; tr. 'A. Jalī, *Kāṭerāt-e Kolonel Kāsakofskī*, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976, pp. 142-43; 'A. Mostawfī, *Tārīk-eedārī va eġtemā'ī-e dawra-ye Qājārīya*, Tehran, 1321 Š./1942, II, pp. 9-10). Amīn-al-molk was strongly reproached, and his property was confiscated pending an investigation into his financial affairs. The efforts of 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Mīrzā Farmānfarmā and 'Alī-qolī Khan Mok̄ber-al-dawla to charge him with the embezzlement of several million tomans came to no real consequence; in spite of considerable pressure during interrogation, Amīn-al-molk was able to render his accounts with some 50,000 tomans to his own credit. Though Amīn-al-dawla accused him of manipulating the accounts and forgery (*Kāṭerāt*, p. 241), the source of Amīn-al-molk's income—and hence the reason for his escape from prosecution—seems to have been the hard-to-trace commissions of up to thirty percent that he was said to have subtracted from pensions and other treasury payments, often with the consent of the desperate recipients (Kosogovskii, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 186). The investigation faltered, particularly when Amīn-al-dawla, in spite of earlier enmities, opted to remain neutral. As a last resort, former subordinates of Amīn-al-molk were commissioned to discover hoards of money hidden in the walls of Amīn-al-molk's house.

In spite of humiliation and financial losses, Amīn-al-molk made a brief attempt to regain his prestige. After the fall of Amīn-al-dawla in Moḥarram, 1316/May, 1898, the Interior Ministry (*wezārat-e dāḳela*) was allocated to Amīn-al-molk as part of Amīn-al-soltān's pact with his new allies. To secure the position, Amīn-al-molk contributed one-fifth of the 150,000 tomans offered as a loan to the



bankrupt Moẓaffar-al-dīn Shah. His death at the age of thirty-two, however, put an end to his controversial career.

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