



## AMĪN-AL-SOLṬĀN, ĀQĀ EBRĀHĪM

**AMĪN-AL-SOLṬĀN, ĀQĀ (MOḤAMMAD) EBRĀHĪM** (d. 1300/1882-83), influential court minister of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah and father of 'Alī-Aṣḡar Khan Amīn-al-solṭān. His father Zāl Khan, a Christian convert, is said to have been either the son of a Georgian captured during Āqā Moḡammad Khan's campaign of 1795 (Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt-e sīāsī*, ed. Ḥ. Farmānfarmā'īān, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, p. 31; cf. report of Ḥasan-'Alī Khan Nawwāb, F.O. 60/581, App. 2, December, 1895, cited in F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914*, New Haven and London, 1968, p. 192) or a humble Armenian from the Salmās (later Šāpūr) region in Azarbaijan (E'temād-al-salṭana, *Kalsa mašhūr ba k'vāb-nāma*, ed. M. Katīrā'ī, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969, p. 65; cf. G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, London, 1892, I, p. 426). The Georgian noble birth claimed by 'Alī-Aṣḡar Khan Amīn-al-solṭān on the basis of a letter allegedly written by 'Abbās Mīrzā has been considered fictitious (K. M. Sāsānī, *Sīāsatgarān-e dawra-ye Qājār*, Tehran, 1337 Š./1958, II, 143, n. 1). Brought up in the household of the Qajar noble Moḡammad Qāsem Khan Qovānlū and later his son Amir Solaymān Khan E'tezād-al-dawla, Ebrāhīm spent his childhood as a page (*golām-bačča*) before being assigned along with his three brothers to the service of Qāsem Khan's daughter Malek Jahān Kānom Mahd 'Olyā, Nāṣer-al-dīn Mīrzā's mother.

In spite of his association with the court, Ebrāhīm's early youth was spent in dire poverty, partly as an apprentice to a cobblery in the Tehran citadel



(E'temād-al-salṭana, *Kālsa*, p. 66; cf. idem, *Rūz-nāma-ye Kāṭerāt*, ed. Ī. Afšār, 1345 Š./1966, p. 236). In 1263/1847 he left for Tabrīz as an assistant to his elder brother Eskandar in the crown prince's butlery (*ābdār-kāna*). On the occasion of Nāṣer-al-dīn's accession to the throne (1264/1848) Ebrāhīm became the deputy-chief water bearer (*nā'eb saqqā-bāšī*), apparently to the disgust of Amir Kabīr, who seems to have despised Ebrāhīm's intimacy with the young shah. Throughout the 1850s and early 1860s he served as deputy and purchasing agent (*nāzer-e karīd*) under his brother, now promoted to the position of chief butler (*ābdār-bāšī*). The premature death of the latter in the mid-1860s paved the way for Āqā Ebrāhīm, now with the title of Arbāb, to take over the royal butlery. Established in his new post and acting as intermediary between the shah and government officials, Āqā Ebrāhīm worked his way up in the court hierarchy; in 1286/1869-70 he received the newly coined title Amīn-al-solṭān. A year later the shah's pilgrimage to the 'atabāt gave Amīn-al-solṭān fresh opportunities to outmaneuver the head of the royal transport (*šāḥeb jam'*, who was criticized for poor management; eventually he took over his post (1288/1871-72; Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 34; cf. Momtaḥan-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, ed. H. Q. Kānšaqāqī, Tehran, 1353 Š./1974, p. 105). In the following decade, Amīn-al-solṭān brought more than ten offices, both in and out of court, under his tutelage (E'temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma*, p. 57); by 1293/1875-76 he gained control of the royal treasury (*kezāna-ye mobāraka*) and in 1296/1878-79 of the royal mint (*žarrāb-kāna*). By 1299/1882 he was at the height of his career and Iran's de facto first person (*šakṣ-e awwal*; *Žell-al-solṭān, Sargodašt-e Mas'ūdī*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1362 Š./1983, p. 306; cf. E'temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma*, p. 213), though he never attempted to assume the premiership.

As joint minister of the court and finance (1299/1882-83) he was in control of an extensive network: the royal household (*kalwat* and *darb andarūn*), royal guards (*qarāvōlān-e kāṣṣa*), customs (*gomrokāt*), construction and maintenance of royal buildings (see the list of buildings in E'temād-al-salṭana, *al-Ma'āter wa'l-ātār*, Tehran, 1306/1888-89, pp. 54-85), trusteeship of the shrine of Shah 'Abd-al-'Azīm, supervision of tribes in the district of Tehran, governorship of the village of Tajrīs, and control of the building material industry around the capital (for a detailed description of the court departments under his control see Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī-e man* I, pp. 380-420). A reference by E'temād-al-salṭana (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 127, s.v. 1298/1880-81) to Amīn-al-solṭān's "seventy-four posts" either includes all minor offices under each department or, more probably, is an exaggeration. His death in 1300/1882-83 of tuberculosis during the shah's second journey to



Khorasan put an untimely end to his career.

The rise of Amīn al-solṭān in the last quarter of the 19th century demonstrates the gradual ascendancy of a new type of court official, often with humble background, over the established *dīvānī* elite. In the Nāṣerī period the borderline between court and government was becoming increasingly blurred; in the case of Amīn al-solṭān the shah made a deliberate attempt to use the court apparatus to restrain the independence of the administration, much to the discontent of the established officials. Concentration of diverse functions under Amīn al-solṭān was intended to maximize the monarch's personal gains, both material and political, rather than rationalize the government machinery. Amīn al-solṭān was shrewd enough to capitalize on such intentions as well as on the shah's weaknesses, his profligacy and greed, his mistrust of his ministers, and his growing impatience with any independent voice, whether reformist or conservative. Illiterate and culturally unsophisticated (see E'temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma*, p. 57; cf. Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, pp. 31, 68), the promoted butler was a natural refuge for a monarch who despised the pompous utterances of his ministers and enjoyed ridiculing those who looked down on his undeserved favor toward inferior court servants. Amīn al-solṭān's skill lay not only in acting as the shah's confidant, but also in indulging his love for extravagance and entertainment and his willingness to raise money by tapping unexplored resources. E'temād-al-salṭana notes the shah's praise for Amīn al-solṭān for generating 200,000 tomans income from the customs and spending it on the decoration of the new Mirror Gallery (Tālār-e Ā'ina) and the construction of a race course (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 182).

Almost all contemporary sources agree on Amīn al-solṭān's exceptional intelligence, his familiarity with the shah's psychology, his sharp business sense, and his outstanding ability in political maneuvering; also essential for his success were his demonstrations of loyalty to the shah and care for his personal and financial well-being. Several anecdotes imply that he made pretentious displays of loyalty and honesty to the shah (Hedāyat, *Kāṭerāt o kaṭarāt*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, p.32; Momtaḥan-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 105; Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 32). His performance as a capable manager of the court should not be underestimated, though his administration of the treasury is often considered the first instance of a serious disruption in government finances. His involvement with Hājji Moḥammad Ḥasan Amīn-al-zarb in the royal mint has remained a controversial issue; debased gold and



silver tomans and excessive circulation of copper coins (*pūl-e sīāh*) provided considerable benefits for both parties and a share for the shah (C. Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, Chicago, 1971, p. 388; cf. Momtaḥan-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 105). Some evidence suggests that the original plan to reduce the amount of precious metal belonged to Amīn-al-żarb and was suggested to the shah by Amīn al-solṭān, who saw this as an unexplored source of income for an exceedingly impoverished court. Amīn-al-dawla considers this intervention in the affairs of the mint as the cause of “Iran’s ruination and eradication,” while E’temād-al-salṭana (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 84) accuses Amīn al-solṭān of reducing the shah “from a just and generous king to a murderer and a forger.” Molkārā, however, maintains that in Amīn al-solṭān’s time there was still some control over Amīn-al-żarb’s profiteering (*Šarḥ-e ḥāl*, pp. 190-91). Though Amīn al-solṭān’s critics maintain that his involvement in the scandal of the debased coins caused irreparable damage to his career (*Kālsa*, p. 67), he achieved the reputation of being the most sincere well-wisher of the Qajar house. Not surprisingly, Żell-al-solṭān writes that “after his death, the affairs (of the state) decayed and the monarchy almost died” (*Sargodašt-e Mas’ūdī*, p. 306). At the beginning of 1300/1883-84 his health deteriorated and the shah instructed Amīna-ye Aqdas, his favorite wife, to look after him, a favor which outraged E’temād-al-salṭana (*Rūz-nāma*, pp. 257-60). When the news of Amīn al-solṭān’s death reached the shah, he wrote in his travel diary “my time has turned sour,” and continued his royal visit. Amīn al-solṭān’s title and most of his posts went to his second son Mīrzā ‘Alī-Ašğar, while his considerable wealth, accumulated over years of frugality, was distributed among his heirs once Nāşer-al-dīn Shah decided against its confiscation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

‘Abbās Mīrzā Molkārā, *Šarḥ-e ḥāl*, ed. ‘A. Navā’ī, 2nd ed., 1355 Š./1976, pp. 150-52, 163, 167.

G. Afzal-al-molk, *Afzal al-tawārīk*, ed. M. Etteḥādīya and S. Sa’dvandīān, Tehran, 1361 Š./1982, p. 246.

Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt-e sīāsī*, pp. 25, 59, 86-87, 91-92, 104.



S. Bakhash, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy and Reform under the Qajars: 1858-69*, London, 1978, pp. 148, 158, 377.

Bāmdād, *Rejāl* I, pp. 2-7.

E'temād-al-salṭana, *al-Ma'āṭer wa'l-āṭār*, pp. 18-28.

Idem, *Ṣadr-al-tawārīk*, ed. M. Mošīrī, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, p. 298.

*Fehrest-e bakšī az asnād . . . dawra-ye Qājārīya dar Wezārat-e Omūr-e Kāreja*, ed. M. Bayānī, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975, pp. 92, 133.

M. A. Ġaffārī, *Kāṭerāt o asnād (Tārīk-e Ġaffārī)*, ed.

M. Etteḥādīya, Tehran, 1361 Š./1982, pp. 90, 291.

M. Hedāyat, *Kāṭerāt o kaṭarāt*, Tehran, 2nd ed., 1344 Š./1965, pp. 92, 95.

Ma'šūm-'Alīšāh, *Ṭarā'eq al-ḥaqā'eq*, 2nd ed., ed.

M. J. Maḥjūb, 3 vols., Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, III, p. 576.

'A. Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī-e man yā tārīk-e eĵtemā'ī o edārī-e dawra-ye Qājārīya*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1341/1962, I, pp. 372-73, 407.

Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah, *Safar-nāma-ye Korāsān*, Tehran, 1300/1883-84, pp. 102-06, 134, 139.

H. Nezām-al-salṭana Māfī, *Kāṭerāt o asnād*, ed. M. Nezām Māfī et al., 2 vols., Tehran, 1361 Š./1982, index.

E. Ṣafā'ī, ed., *Asnād-e bargozīda*, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976, p. 13.

Idem, *Asnād-e now-yāfta*, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 101, 176-77.

Idem, *Barghā-ye tārīk*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971, pp. 36, 97.

M. Żell-al-solṭān, *Sargodašt-e Mas'ūdī*, pp. 81, 93.