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ĀQĀ KHAN III. ĀQĀ KHAN III

Solṭān Moḥammad Šāh Ḥosaynī Āqā Khan III (1294-1376/1877-1957), the "existent and present" (*mawǰūd wa ḥāzÎʷer*) imam of the Nezārī Ismaʿilis for more than seventy years, also well-known as a *bon vivant*, racehorse owner and close associate of British imperial policy, both in India and beyond. Āqā Khan III was born in Karachi on 2 November 1877/25 Šawwāl 1894, and was only eight years old when his father, Āqā Khan II (Āqā ʿAlī Šāh), died, and he was installed in his place in Bombay as head of the community. His nominal guardian was an uncle, Āqā Jangī Šāh (murdered in Jedda in 1326/1908 under circumstances that gave rise to an unsuccessful lawsuit against other members of the family), but the most important influence on his upbringing was that of his mother, a woman of strong character who not only supervised his rigorous, multilingual education but also invested the family wealth widely and shrewdly. The Āqā Khan's first exercise of a public role came in 1893 when he successfully mediated a dispute between Hindus and Muslims over cow slaughter in Bombay; this was followed four years later by his involvement in efforts to promote cholera inoculation among a reluctant populace. (This essay in public hygiene was undertaken in collaboration with Dr. Hafkin, a Russian Jew who later persuaded the Āqā Khan to sponsor a project of Zionist settlement in Palestine in 1898; see Aga Khan, *Memoirs: World Enough and Time*, London, 1954, pp. 185-86). In 1898, he embarked on his first journey to Europe, which soon became his chief place of residence. After lengthy stays in France and Britain, he paid the first of several visits to his followers in East Africa before returning to India. A second European journey followed in 1900, which included visits to Kaiser Wilhelm in Berlin

and Sultan ʿAbd-al-Ḥamīd in Istanbul. Two years later he was back in London, as a guest of Edward VII at his coronation. A further sign of the favor in which the British held the Āqā Khan came in November, 1902 when he was appointed to a seat on the Regency Legislative Council of India.

The Āqā Khan's closeness to the British gained him some standing among Indian Muslims, and, encouraged by Nawab Moḥsen-al-molk, a prominent member of the Aligarh movement, he began to involve himself in Muslim affairs. He was chairman of the first All-India Muslim Educational Conference, held at Bombay in 1903, and president of the second one, held at Delhi in the following year. In October 1906, he headed the Muslim delegation that visited the viceroy, Lord Minto, at Simla, and the following year, he joined in founding the Muslim League, of which he remained president until 1913. He also lobbied energetically for the elevation of the Anglo-Muhammadan College at Aligarh to university status, a measure that came about in 1912.

In 1914, the Āqā Khan paid a visit to the Ismaʿili community in Rangoon, advising its members to adopt Burmese dress and Buddhist names (M. Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*, Wiesbaden, 1972, p. 46). The outbreak of Word War I, however, found him again in Europe, where he made himself useful to the British cause in a number of ways. Already during the Balkan Wars, he had sought to dampen Indian Muslim feelings of solidarity with the Ottomans (*Memoirs*, p. 159), and now, after fruitless attempts through the Ottoman ambassador in London, Tevfik Paşa, to dissuade the Ottomans from entering the war, he did his utmost to counteract their declaration of *ǰehād* against the allies. Addressing himself to all Muslims living under colonial rule, he proclaimed that it was their religious duty to aid their British, French, and Russian masters in the war against the Ottomans (*Memoirs*, pp. 163-67). In addition, the Āqā Khan strove to consolidate the position of the British in Egypt after their deposition of the khedive, ʿAbbās Ḥelmī (*Memoirs*, pp. 170-73), and instructed members of his community to gather intelligence for the British behind Ottoman lines in Syria and Iraq (H. J. Greenwall, *His Highness the Aga Khan, Imam of the Ismailis*, London, 1952, p. 65). For all of these services, the Āqā Khan was awarded the status of a ruling prince, akin to the other native rulers of India, despite his lack of a territorial principality.

When the Turkish nationalists began moving to abolish the Ottoman Caliphate in 1923, the Āqā Khan sought, paradoxically, to preserve the institution. Together with Amīr ʿAlī, the well-known Anglophile modernist of Shiʿite origin, he addressed to İsmet İnönü a letter emphasizing the symbolic value of the

Ottoman Caliphate as a focus for Muslim unity, and warning against the unfavorable reaction that would follow in the Muslim world if it were abolished (complete text of the letter is given in Q. A. Mallick, *H. R. H. Prince Aga Khan*, Karachi, 1954, pp. 92-94). For reasons that remain unclear, copies of the letter were published in three Istanbul newspapers (*İkdam*, *Tevhid-i Efkâr* and *Tanin*), as well as one newspaper in Trabzon (*İstikbal*), before the original reached İnönü (S. Albayrak, *Türkiye'de Din Kavgası*, Istanbul, 1975, p. 158). The editors of the newspapers were arrested and charged with high treason, and the letter was used by the nationalists as evidence that the caliphate had become a tool of British policy. Atatürk was able caustically to remark, in the celebrated marathon speech be delivered in 1926, that those who wished to defend the caliphate were also those who had once fought against it, under the British and French flags, in Syria and Iraq (*Nutuk*, new ed., Istanbul, 1980, II, p. 457).

During World War I, the Āqā Khan wrote a book (*India in Transition*, London, 1918) setting forth his views on the future of India. In it he called for the gradual elevation of India to dominion status as the central link in a chain of British-affiliated territories stretching from Malaya to Egypt. The Āqā Khan also sought in dissuade Indian Muslims from participating in the *hartal* launched by Gandhi in 1919 and the Khilafat Movement. In 1928, he presided over the All-Muslim Conference held in Delhi, which guaranteed rights for Muslims in the framework of a federal and self-governing India. Three years later, the Āqā Khan was selected as head of the Muslim delegation to the Round Table Conference in London; the three years during which this and its successor conference met formed the highpoint of the Āqā Khan's career in Indian politics. Jawaharlal Nehru protested against the Āqā Khan's presence, describing him as one who had been "closely associated with British imperialism and the British ruling class for over a generation" (Nehru, *Autobiography*, London, 1936, p. 293), but Eqbāl rose to his defense (see W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, p. 135). It appears that the conference persuaded the Āqā Khan that India would fairly soon become independent of Britain, for in 1934 he petitioned the British government for a strip of territory to rule in Sind as a princely state. This would have made him more fully the equal of the ruling princes, to whose number he had been ceremonially added at the end of World War I, and enabled him to claim both exemption from taxation and legal immunity. More importantly, the rule of a princely state might have been expected to provide some assured status after the departure of the British (see the extracts from the Āqā Khan's memoranda quoted in Greenwall, *The Aga*

Khan, pp. 190-95). The Āqā Khan's suggestion that his followers approached him with the project for establishing an "Ismaʿili Vatican," somewhere in India, is unsubstantiated (*Memoirs*, p. 305). The Āqā Khan's petition was rejected, and although he submitted it again in 1938, the British government was adamant. In any event, the Āqā Khan was to find himself virtually isolated in Indian politics after World War II, since he sympathized neither with the Muslim League's demand for partition nor with the pro-Congress sentiment of other segments of Muslim opinion.

Despite his close relations with the British and primary interest in Indian affairs, the Āqā Khan retained some consciousness of his Iranian ancestry. He claimed always to have followed "an Iranian-Muslim pattern" in his home life (*Memoirs*, p. 30), and even considered himself a member of the Qajar family (*Memoirs*, p. 93), both his father and mother being of Qajar descent. He regarded Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah as "prudent and capable" but held Moẓaffar-al-dīn Šāh, whom he met in Paris in 1900, in much lower esteem (*Memoirs*, pp. 92-93). It was also in Paris that he made the acquaintance of Aḥmad Shah, last of the Qajar monarchs, whom he found to be likeable but reluctant to assume the burdens of rule. Reżā Shah was therefore justified in deposing him, and the Āqā Khan admired the first Pahlavi ruler for what he termed his attempts at "freeing Islam . . . from the many superstitions which had been fostered in Iran by the ecclesiastical lawyers" (*Memoirs*, p. 295). The Āqā Khan's only contact with Reżā Shah was the long telegram he sent him in the summer of 1941, urging him to submit to the allied demands that were then being made (*Memoirs*, p. 297). In 1949, the Āqā Khan requested the Iranian government to grant him Iranian nationality, possibly for reasons connected with the partition of India a year before; a positive response was given on October 10 (Greenwall, *The Aga Khan*, p. 201). Two years later, he paid his only visit to Iran, as a guest of Moḥammad Reżā Shah at his second wedding. From Tehran he went to inspect the ancestral lands at Maḥallāt, where, gratified to see that the Ismaʿili women were not wearing the *čādor*, he promised to found a cooperative bank (*Memoirs*, pp. 344-45; Mallick, *Prince Aga Khan*, pp. 96-98). After the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry by Dr. Moḥammad Moṣaddeq, the Āqā Khan publicly espoused the British side in ensuing dispute, an act for which he was vociferously denounced by the Iranian press.

For all the international ramifications of the Āqā Khan's career—including a term as president of the League of Nations assembly in 1937—its most lasting effect was the financial and institutional consolidation of the Nezārī Ismaʿili

community, both in India and in East Africa. The annual income of the Āqā Khan, derived from payments by his followers and investments, was estimated variously at 10 million dollars (M. Ḡāleb, *Taʾrīḵ al-daʿwa al-Esmāʿīlīya*, p. 296) and 12 million pounds (Greenwall, *The Aga Khan*, p. 1); he is said to have kept ten percent of this vast income for his personal use (S. Jackson, *The Aga Khan, Prince, Prophet and Statesman*, London, 1952, p. 137), and assigned the rest to communal purposes. Thus a network of schools, sports clubs, hospitals, dispensaries and economic enterprises came into being under his auspices, resulting in a closely knit and prosperous community; the jubilee weighing against precious metals that took place in Bombay, Karachi, Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam were a symbol expressing the affluence both of the community and of its leader (albeit at different levels). Nonetheless, the dissident voices that were raised during the imamates of his father and grandfather did not entirely fall silent. Several thousand people seceded from the community in 1901, in protest against its tenets and organization, and embraced Twelver Shiʿism. Other dissidents stayed within the community, forming the Khojah Reformers' Society, with headquarters in Karachi. In August 1927, one of their number, Karim Goolamali (sic), addressed an open letter to the Āqā Khan, and five years later sent to ʿAlī Khan, then heir apparent to the Imamate, a detailed critique of the history and doctrines of Nezārī Ismaʿilism (*An Appeal to Mr. Solomon Aly Khan*, Karachi, 1932).

It is remarkable that neither the effective transference of the imamate to Europe nor the high level of prosperity and education that many reached in the Ismaʿili community occasioned any sustained questionings of doctrine. The mixture of extremist Shiʿite and Hindu—chiefly Tantric—elements that had come to constitute Nezārī belief remained unchanged. The Āqā Khan was regarded simultaneously as a deity and a reincarnation of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb (see the Persian poem by Fedāʾī Ḵorāsānī discussed by A. A. Semyonov in "Ismailitskaya oda posvyashchennaya voploshcheniyam Aliya-boga," *Iran* (Leningrad) 2, 1928, pp. 1-24), and the homage to him that formed the core of Ismaʿili ritual always required a complete prostration at the mention of his name (see *Duʿa: Arabic text with English and Gujarati transliteration and meaning*, Shia Imami Ismailia Associations for Africa, Karachi, 1956, pp. 1-5, 8).

The Āqā Khan died in Switzerland on July 11, 1957, and was buried eight days later in a mausoleum overlooking the Nile at Aswan. The succession went not to ʿAlī Khan, his eldest son, but to Karīm, ʿAlī Khan's son.

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