



ĀZĀD KHAN AFGĀN

ĀZĀD KHAN AFGĀN (d. 1195/1781), a major contender for supremacy in western Iran after the death of Nāder Shah Afšār (r. 1148-60/1736-47).

Āzād was the son of Solaymān of the Ġalzay (also written Ġalīčā'ī, Ġalījī) Pashtuns of Kabul. He joined Nāder Shah's army, probably after the fall of Kabul in 1738, and participated in subsequent campaigns in India and Iran. At the time of Nāder's assassination in 1160/1747 he was second-in-command to Amīr Ašlān Khan Qerqlū Afšār, the *sardār* (governor) of Azarbaijan. He defected in the field to Nāder's nephew and would-be successor, Ebrāhīm Mīrzā, thus helping to defeat Ašlān Khan's bid for power and earning for himself the sobriquet of khan (Donbolī, *Tajreba* I, p. 491). When in 1749 Ebrāhīm was in turn defeated by the forces of Šāhroḡ Shah, Āzād Khan attached himself and his 10-15,000 Afghan cavalry to Mīr Sayyed Moḡammad, the superintendent of the shrine at Mašhad, who ordered him to withdraw toward Qazvīn (Golestāna, *Mojmal*, pp. 35-36). He withdrew to the western frontier and took service with Kāled Pasha, the Kurd governor of Ottoman-ruled Šahrezūr. Āzād next aided Naqī Khan Qāsemlū Afšār to oust his brother Mahdī Khan from Tabrīz. By dint of alliances with other local Kurd and Turk leaders, and a politic of submission to Erekle (Īraklī Khan) the regent of Kartli-Kakheti (Gorjestān)—whose daughter he married—Āzād rose by 1165/1752 to control all the territory between Ardabīl and Urmia (Olivier, *Voyage*, pp. 18-19, 35).

However, Erekle's power kept Āzād from expanding north of the Aras, and in spring, 1166/1753 he seized an opportunity to annex the central Zagros



provinces and perhaps win a controlling interest in a restored Iranian monarchy. He was invited by the Baḳtīārī leader ‘Alī-Mardān Khan and his allies, who were advancing from Baghdad with a Safavid pretender in tow, to assist them in capturing the strategic fortress of Kermānšāh, then held by the de facto regent of western Iran, Karīm Khan of the Zand tribe. However, the Zand army defeated this force before Āzād could effect a junction, and the Afghans opted for a quiet retreat. Karīm Khan pursued and attacked them, but was completely routed (Golestāna, op. cit., pp. 260, 270-73; Nāmī, *Gītigošā*, pp. 35-36). Āzād swiftly marched on the Zands’ home fortress of Parī, near Malāyer, captured it by trickery, and sent seventeen Zand khans and fifty women and children—including Karīm Khan’s mother—as captives toward Urmia. However, these overpowered their guards en route, escaped, and rejoined Karīm Khan at Borūjerd (Golestāna, op. cit., pp. 279-83).

In spring, 1167/1754 Āzād and Faṭḥ-‘Alī Khan Afšār dislodged Karīm Khan from his winter base of Qomeša and, having occupied Shiraz, harried him progressively to the very edge of the Iranian plateau near Kāzerūn. But with the help of a local leader, Rostam Khan Keštī, the Zands ambushed and routed Faṭḥ-‘Alī’s forces in the steep defile of Kamārej; Shiraz was delivered to the Zands by fifth columnists on 13 Šafar 1168/29 November 1754 (Nāmī, op. cit., pp. 44-46; Golestāna, op. cit., pp. 287-90, 315; Malcolm, *History*, pp. 123-25), and Āzād’s fortunes were henceforth to decline. Threatened by the Qajars of Māzandarān under Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan, Āzād fell back from Isfahan and, by early 1756, to Urmia. In August he took advantage of an unsuccessful Qajar siege of Shiraz to reoccupy Isfahan, then pursued the retreating Qajars to the Caspian coast. But in a surprise winter attack at Rašt, Moḥammad-Ḥasan drove Āzād back into Azarbaijan. First Tabrīz fell then, after a last pitched battle in June, 1757, Urmia surrendered to the Qajars, and Āzād fled with a few followers to refuge in Baghdad (Nāmī, op. cit., p. 60).

During 1759-60 Āzād made at least one further attempt, with the encouragement of Solaymān Pasha of Baghdad and Erekle of Georgia, to regain his hegemony in Azarbaijan; but his erstwhile allies, including Faṭḥ-‘Alī Khan Afšār, combined to defeat him decisively near Marāḡa. Āzād took refuge at the court of Erekle in Tbilisi for the next two years (Ġaffārī, *Golšan*, pp. 70-73; Donbolī, op. cit., II, pp. 31-35). In 1762 Karīm Khan, having subjugated all of northern Iran, invited Āzād to surrender. The Afghan ended his days comfortably in Shiraz as an honored pensioner of the generous Zand ruler, and on his death in 1195/1781 was taken to Kabul to be buried in accordance



with his will (Nāmī, op. cit., pp. 113-14; Donbolī, op. cit., II, p. 39).

Āzād is characterized as brave and chivalrous (Ġaffārī, op. cit., pp. 111-12). He appears to have harbored ambitions to carve out a neo-Safavid, or even neo-Ġalzay, Iranian empire; but unlike his rivals for power, he remained an alien without any lasting source of support in western Iran—a Sunni Afghan with no urban or tribal-territorial base, and who was never able to acquire a Safavid scion to legitimize his authority. The Ġalzay in Afghanistan had been destroyed as a power by Nāder, and were replaced in the 1750s by the Abdālī (later known as Dorrānī). Most of Āzād's Ġalzay followers in Iran, both troops and non-combatant settlers, were massacred in 1171-72/1758-59 during his Baghdad exile—first by the Qajar governor of Māzandarān (Nāmī, op. cit., pp. 67-68) and then by the Zands (Golestāna op. cit., p. 322).

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