



'AZĪZ-AL-SOLTĀN

'AZĪZ-AL-SOLTĀN, GŌLĀM-'ALĪ KHAN (1297-1359/1879-1940) better known as Malījak(-e) Tānī [II], the boy favorite of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah Qājār. He was the son of Mīrzā Moḥammad Khan Malījak Awwal [I] (later Amīn Kāqān)—himself a favored page of the private quarters (*kalwat*)—and grand-son of a Kurdish shepherd from the small village of Ḥalwā'ī in the Garrūs region. It is said that Nāṣer-al-dīn gave Moḥammad the nickname *malījak* (corruption of *melīčak* “little sparrow” in Kurdish [*melīč*: “bird, sparrow” with the diminutive ending *-ak*], later further corrupted to Manījak) when the unpolished Kurdish shepherd boy, upon seeing a sparrow exclaimed “*malījak!*” Moḥammad’s one year-old son, Gōlām 'Alī, first caught the attention of the Shah during the latter’s visits to Zobayda Kānūm Amīna Aqdas (q.v.), the trusted and influential wife of Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah and the elder sister of Malījak I (Dūst-'Alī Khan Mo'ayyer-al-mamālek, *Rejāl-e 'aṣr-e nāṣerī*, Tehran, 1361 Š./1982, p. 240). The unattractive boy suffering from chronic trachoma and acute stammer (Tāj-al-saltāna, *Kāṭerāt*, ed. M. Etteḥādiya and S. Sa'dvandīān, Tehran, 1362 Š./1983, pp. 18, 23-24), apparently became the substitute for the shah’s favorite cat, Babrī Khan, who had been put to death as a result of jealousy in the harem towards Amīna Aqdas, the honorary keeper of Babrī (Tāj-al-saltāna, *Kāṭerāt*, pp. 15, 17-18). There is little reason to doubt Mīrzā 'Alī Khan Amīn-al-dawla’s remark (*Kāṭerāt-e sīāsī*, ed. H. Farmānfarmā'īān, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, p. 87) concerning the intentions of Amīna Aqdas to bring Gōlām 'Alī—whom he calls “the essence of dirt and the extract of filth and putridity”—to the inner quarters (*andarūn*) of the court as an instrument to retain her control over the ageing, and increasingly capricious monarch. Later, also his father and the



eunuch ‘Abdallāh Khan K̄vāja, among others, would use him to further their wishes with the shah. The shah’s almost obsessive love for Ġolām ‘Alī greatly annoyed everyone at the court and in the government, most of all his own children. Gradually in the early 1880s the inner court and to some extent the government, but above all Nāṣer-al-dīn himself became subservient to the whims of Malījak II, his petty wishes and his precarious health, always in grip of some mysterious illness and in convenient custody of his caring aunt Amīna Aqdas.

From early age Malījak was treated as the most precious belonging in the royal household, living in ultimate luxury. In addition to a large retinue of pages, servants, and guards as well as a house keeper, an esquire, a tutor, and a eunuch, he also enjoyed the company of several members of his own clan, the so-called Malājeka, as E‘temād-al-salṭana calls them, including his younger brother, Malījak III, his father, his maternal grandfather Abu’l-Qāsem Bazzāz (the clothier), his maternal uncle Āqā Mardak (E‘temād(-e) Ḥažrat), and a host of playmates. A children’s music band was formed for his pleasure and a special music section was created in the Dār al-Fonūn. There was no limitation to his movements in and out of the *andarūn*, and he often intruded, together with his entourage, into formal audience. Every slight illness that affected Malījak soured the royal temper—even to the point of disrupting the shah’s gastronomic habits—and every gesture of his delighted the shah. In the presence of the high officials, the shah showed little restraint to kiss, hug, and play with the young boy, and call him with words of endearment. He even had Malījak’s milk tooth overlaid with gold and preserved in the palace museum (Moḥammad Ḥasan Khan E‘temād-al-salṭana, *Rūz-nāma-ye k̄āṭerāt*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, p. 611). Reportedly, he even promised Malījak that he would be the *sardār* (military chief) of Iran and hoped he would become his successor (*ibid.*, p. 588).

In 1304/1886 Ġolām ‘Alī received the title ‘Azīz-al-soltān (the beloved of the sovereign). E‘temād-al-salṭana comments that by conferring a title similar to that of the chief minister, the shah made utter ridicule of Amīn-al-soltān (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 531). A year later Malījak was given the high military rank of *amīr(-e) tūmān* (head of ten thousand, q.v.) with all its ceremonial privileges. When he was eleven years of age, the shah arranged for his engagement to his own eight year-old daughter Aḳtar-al-dawla (Tāj-al-salṭana, *K̄āṭerāt*, pp. 23-24) and they were married in 1312/1894 in a pompous wedding. Shortly before the marriage, the shah eventually consented to Malījak’s circumcision. On that



occasion E'temād-al-salṭana was commissioned by the shah to write a short history of circumcision (*Rūz-nāma*, pp. 1096-97). In the same year Malījak replaced the young son of the *il-kānī* of the Qajar tribe in the prestigious office of the *mohrdār* (keeper of the royal signet) and at the same time was promoted to the rank of *amīr(-e) nowyān* (the equivalent of Field Marshal, *Rūz-nāma*, p. 1213, cf. G. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, London, 1892, I, p. 400), the second highest military rank in a largely non-existent army. He was also granted the ownership of some confiscated properties in and around Tehran. These included the village of Behjatābād (1303/1886) which initially belonged to Mīrzā Yūsof Mostawfī-al-mamālek (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 493) and the private quarters of Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Sepahsālār which was renamed 'Azīziya and later became part of the compound of the Majles-e Šawrā-ye Mellī (Mo'ayyer-al-mamālek, *Rejāl*, p. 243). The shah also transferred to him the ownership of one of his most valuable landed properties in the Varāmīn region (Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 174). After the death of Amīna Aqdas (1311/1894), contrary to the usual practice of confiscation, Nāṣer-al-dīn granted the total ownership of her vast estate, including a substantial sum in cash, to Malījak (Amīn-al-dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 178, cf. Tāj-al-salṭana, *Kāṭerāt*, p. 30). His father, Malījak I, among other privileges received the ceremonial chieftainship of the royal bodyguards, the Čaganī cavalry detachment.

The behavior of Malījak was a constant source of aggravation within and outside the palace. Most sources portray him as an enfant terrible and as a pleasure-seeking adolescent with a passion for shooting, sexual excesses, and scandalous feasts. He learned foul language in the *andarūn* and on one occasion was reported to have called Nāṣer-al-dīn “son of a pimp” (Bāmdād, *Rejāl* III, p. 31). With no more respect he treated the long-bearded Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah when he saw his portrait on the royal sword (*Rūz-nāma*, pp. 395, 404, cf. Bāmdād, *Rejāl* III, pp. 30-31). On another occasion he demanded reverence equal to that of the shah's sons. To appease him the shah authorized Malījak to “run sword” through those who failed to pay him proper respect (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 603; see *ibid.*, pp. 290-91, and cf. 'A. Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī-e man*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., Tehran, 1343 Š./1964, pp. 263-64, for Farhād Mīrzā's objection to the shah's special treatment of Malījak). It is small wonder that according to E'temād-al-salṭana, on different occasions he actually murdered five innocent people, including his own bodyguards (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 1003). A more romantic side of 'Azīz-al-solṭān and his love affair with the shah's other daughter, Tāj-al-salṭana, appears in the latter's memoirs (see, e.g., *Kāṭerāt*, pp. 40-42). His relationship with some of the concubines of the harem, including a famous



Circassian slave, forced the shah to plead with Malījak to sleep outside the *andarūn* (on his bi- and homosexual experiences see *Rūz-nāma*, pp. 1003, 1055, 1142, 1179, 1186). According to E'temād-al-salṭana, however, the shah himself had no sexual interest either in Malījak or his father (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 1053), but the rumors of the shah's sexual love for Malījak were so widespread, both at home and abroad, that the court Mollā, Mīrzā Moḥammad Du'l-rīāsatayn, composed a treatise entitled *'Aqā'ed al-moslemīn* to justify the permissiveness of the shah's infatuation (*ḡarāma*) for Malījak (Āqā Bozorg Ṭehrānī, *al-Ḍarī'a* XV, p. 285).

In spite of objections from the women of the *andarūn*, most notably Anīs-al-dawla (the shah's most respected wife and an outspoken critic of Malījak; q.v.), Malījak was included in the royal retinue during the shah's third European tour (1306/1889), during which he was a subject of curiosity and criticism in the European press. He was granted an audience with Queen Victoria and other heads of state. It was later alleged that he had stolen some items during a visit to the house of the British banker Baron Rothschild.

Criticism of the relationship between Malījak and the shah was common in the later part of Nāṣer-al-dīn's rule. E'temād-al-salṭana who calls Malījak "*al-ḡannās*" [he who withdraws when the name of God is mentioned], and "blood-thirsty wicked," clearly found him and his relatives repulsive, a sentiment he shared with other officials, e.g. the premier Mīrzā 'Alī Aṣḡar Khan Amīn-al-solṭān, who used to call the shah's favorite in his absence "sheep-dung" (*pešgel*), yet used the shah's affection for 'Azīz-al-solṭān to tighten his own grip on the monarch, either by means of emotional blackmail or sheer cajolery. He apparently convinced the resident European envoys that the shah's excessive love for Malījak was a symptom of insanity (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 976). Outside government circles, the criticism of Malījak and the shah contributed to the growing general discontent. However, he was far less cursed by the public than Amīn-al-solṭān or Kārmān Mīrzā Nā'eb-al-salṭana. In 1307/1890 a *mojtahed* in Tehran, Mollā Fayzallāh Tork, alleged that this "Malījak business" (*malījak-bāzī*) was a "disgrace to the dignity of Islam" (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 796). Later, Mīrzā Reżā Kermānī, Nāṣer-al-dīn's assassin, gave the shah's devotion to 'Azīz-al-solṭān and his lavish spending for him and his entourage as one justification for the assassination (M. Nāẓem-al-eslām Kermānī, *Tārīḡ-ebīdārī-e Īrānīān*, 2nd ed., ed. 'A. A. Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, 3 vols., Tehran, 1346 Š./1967, I, pp. 102, 106). Nāẓem-al-eslām himself in a long poem entitled "Lamentation on the present state of affairs" blamed Nāṣer-al-dīn: "He did not pay attention to the affairs of his



subjects; he adored instead sometimes his cat and sometimes his Malījāk” (*Īrānīān* I, p. 182).

The rising tide of public discontent, the petty court rivalries, and the misconduct of government affairs all in one way or another stemmed from the shah’s self-interest, profligacy, and hedonistic attitude. At forty-eight, Nāṣer-al-dīn was evidently suffering a mid-life crisis, being bored, insecure, and psychologically troubled, and the passion for Malījāk no doubt gave him a welcome refuge from the troublesome world of the inner court, the state, and beyond. On one occasion he expressed his wishes that except for himself, Malījāk, some maids of the *andarūn* and a fair supply of lamb and poultry, everything else—the whole universe—should turn into stone until the Day of Resurrection (*Rūz-nāma*, p. 967). On another occasion he confessed to his own helplessness in his infatuation for Malījāk. Notwithstanding the obvious emotional undertones, the affection for ‘Azīz-al-solṭān had a subtle rationale. It may have been that the shah wished to humiliate the notables, courtiers, and high officials, towards whom he had always felt helpless and despiteful, by excessively favoring the son of a court page with humble origin.

For some time after Nāṣer-al-dīn’s death, ‘Azīz-al-solṭān led a comfortable life. He maintained connections with the court and during the reign of Aḥmad Shah received the title of *sardār-e moḥtaram* but lost most of his fortune (‘A. Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī-e man*, pp. 498-501). He died relatively poor in 1319 Š./1940 in Tehran.

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