



‘AẒOD-AL-DAWLA, SOLṬĀN- AḤMAD MIRZĀ

‘AẒOD-AL-DAWLA, SOLṬĀN-AḤMAD MIRZĀ (b. Tehran, 1239/1824; d. Tehran, 1319/1902; [PLATE I](#)), Qajar prince and official as well as author of a history known as the *Tāriḵ-e ‘āzodi* (also discussed in this entry). Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā, also called Mučul Mirzā (Bayani, p. 33), was the 49th son of [Fath-‘Ali Shah Qājār](#), probably born on 19 Du‘l-Qa‘da 1239/16 July 1824 (according to ‘Azod-al-Dawla, ed. Navā‘i, p. 325; Bayani, p. 33; cf. E‘teżād-al-Salṭana, p. 236). His mother, Ṭāvus Kānom Tāj-al-Dawla, was Fath-‘Ali Shah’s favorite wife (*sowgoli*), and features prominently in the *Tāriḵ-e ‘āzodi*. By his own account (‘Azod-al-Dawla, ed. Navā‘i, p. 10), Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā was ten years old at the time his father died, and he witnessed the events of the royal household firsthand during the reign of his father as well as during the reigns of three of his father’s successors, Moḥammad Shah (r. 1834-48), Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96), and Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah (r. 1896-1907).

During his long life, ‘Azod-al-Dawla held various governing posts, including the governorships of Borujerd, Malāyer, Tuyserkān, Hamadān, and Qazvin. He also served as the trustee (*motawalli-bāši*) of the shrine and endowments of the Imam Reżā in Mashhad (see [ĀSTĀN-E QODS-E RAŻAWI](#)). He had four children; one daughter and three sons. His daughter, Princess Šams-al-Dawla, was one of the prominent wives of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah. His three sons were [Solṭān-‘Abd-al-Majid Mirzā ‘Ayn-al-Dawla](#), who was a favorite son-in-law of Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah and served in various positions under him and his



successor **Aḥmad Shah**, including the post of grand vizier (*atābak-e aẓam*); Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā Sayf-al-Dawla, who was married to the daughter of Mirzā Moḥammad Khan Qājār Davallu Sepahsalār Aẓam, grand vizier under Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, and was therefore known as Āqā-ye Dāmād (“Mr. Son-in-Law”); and Wajih-Allāh Mirzā Sepahsālār, who functioned several times as Persia’s special envoy to the courts of St. Petersburg and St. James. Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā ‘Aẓod-al-Dawla is the ancestor of the ‘Aẓodi family (Bāmdād, II, pp. 73-74, 93-102; IV, pp. 396-405).

Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā was known for his prodigious memory regarding the details of life at the court of his father half a century earlier. He was a much sought-after storyteller, and it was this talent that attracted the attention of his grand-nephew, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, who requested of him, through the intermediary of **Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E’temād-al-Salṭana Sani’-al-Dawla**, to record these vignettes for posterity. Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā complied with this request in 1886, and began dictating his memoir to his secretary (‘Aẓod-al-Dawla, ed. Navā’i, pp. 10-11, 176 n. 8).

Manuscripts and editions of the “Tāriḳ-e ‘aẓodi.” Several manuscript copies of the *Tāriḳ* are preserved in Iran. One, by the scribe Abu Ṭāleb Ḥosayni Hamadāni, is kept at the Melli (National) Library in Tehran (Monzavi, p. 4259). It states that the text was scribed “in Jomādā I while Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā was governor of Hamadān” (Eskandari-Qajar, p. xxiii). It further states that it was produced by imperial decree of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah conveyed through E’temād-al-Salṭana, and it is dated 1300 (1883). Given the indication by Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā that he “wrote” the memoir in 1304 (1886), the date given for this manuscript must be an error. A second manuscript, in 251 pages, copied by the scribe Moḥammad-Ḥasan b. Ḥosayn-‘Ali Fariḳi Kamara’i and dated 1319 (1901), is kept at the University of Tehran Library in Tehran (MS no. 7478). Another manuscript is preserved at the Collection of the Central Library Documentation Center of the University of Tehran (Monzavi, p. 4259). It states that it was produced on the order of Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E’temād-al-Salṭana and Mo’tamed-al-Ḥaram Āqā Mirzā Dā’i, and the date of the composition of the work is given as 1304 (1886) “while [the author was] governor of Hamadān.” However, the date of the manuscript itself is 1324 (1906), and it states that it was begun on Tuesday 13 Sha’bān 1324/2 October 1906 and completed on Sunday 2 Ramaẓān 1324/20 October 1906. It is in *šekasta nasta’liq* script (see [CALLIGRAPHY](#)) by the calligrapher Moḥammad-Reẓā Šarif b. Ḥasan-‘Ali Širāzi, produced on orders of Mo’tamed-al-Ḥaram Āqā



Mīrzā Dā’i from the (*az ruy-e*) hand-written copy composed (*ta’lif-e*) by “the late” Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā ‘AẒod-al-Dawla. The catalogue entry also includes a note regarding the publication of the book, stating: “This book was published in lithograph form in 1306 (1888-89) in Bombay (158 pages) and published in Tehran in 1328 (1910).” Another manuscript is kept at the Library of the Center for the Preservation of Islamic Culture in Qom; the catalogue there also states that it was produced on the order of Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E’temād-al-Salṭana, minister of publications (*wazir-e enṭebā’āt*), but includes no date or further references other than stating that it is in *nasta’liq* script, and that it was produced “during the lifetime of the author.”

The *Tāriḳ-e ‘āzodi* was first published in Bombay in Ša’ban 1306/April 1889 (according to a note at the end of the text) in lithograph form with 158 pages, through the patronage of Moḥammad-Karim Namāzi Širāzi and, according to ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Navā’i, “at the behest of (*ḥasab al-farmāyeš-e*) Āqā Moḥammad Šāh, Āqā Khan III” (‘AẒod-al-Dawla, ed. Navā’i, p. 5). In the introduction to his edition of the work, Navā’i further states that this first print edition of the book in Bombay “was full of errors” and that he worked from the Bombay edition, correcting its many errors, for his own edition, which was published with his notes in 1976 (‘AẒod-al-Dawla, ed. Navā’i, p. 5). A second edition, edited by Ḥosayn Kuhi Kermāni, was published in copper print in 1949. In his introduction, Kuhi Kermāni mentions that the Bombay edition was paid for (*be karj-e*) by Āqā Khan III (‘AẒod-al-Dawla, ed. Kuhi Kermāni, p. 9). In 1976, ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Navā’i published a new edition of the *Tāriḳ*, which he had supplemented with detailed notes and a list of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah’s wives, male and female children, and grandchildren (‘AẒod-al-Dawla, ed. Navā’i, pp. 301-22), based on the text itself, Sepehr’s *Nāseḳ al-tawāriḳ*, and Bāmdād’s *Šarḥ-e ḥāl*. His edition was reprinted in 1997. A translation by M. Eskandari-Qajar based on the Tehran Kamara’i manuscript was published in 2014.

The text. Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā begins by introducing the main theme of his memoir as follows:

The wives of the blessed Khaqan were of different ranks. The first rank belonged to those who were immediately related to the Imperial family, to the various branches of the Qajar tribe, and to those from the noble families of the realm. They numbered about forty, maybe more. The late Khaqan would treat the ladies of this rank with utmost respect and protocol. In their presence, there



would never be a show of interest or affection for the wives of lower ranks. The wives of first rank were entitled to a daily audience of one hour at which they would present themselves in the fashion of the official *salam* ceremonies. Those of Qajar blood would stand on one side; the rest in a different line based on the rank of honor of their fathers. This *salam* ceremony was instituted at the time of the martyred Khaqan, Aqa Mohammad Shah and was based on his *yāsā* (tr. Eskandari-Qajar, pp. 3-4).

About two hundred pages later, ‘Azod-al-Dawla concludes his reminiscences in similar fashion, by listing, almost actuary-like, the names and ranks of brides and grooms who, during the reign of his nephew, Moḥammad Shah Qājār, married the remaining children of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah and of ‘Abbās Mirzā (Eskandari-Qajar, p. xxv, 149-52). In this way, he concludes an intimate account of life at the Qajar court spanning the reigns of [Āgā Moḥammad Khan](#) and Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah, the vice-regency of Crown Prince ‘Abbās Mirzā, and finally, the ascendancy to the throne and the beginning of the reign of Moḥammad Shah Qājār. However, in between these rather dry brackets, Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā manages to open a window on the lives of the members of the royal household that, for its access to and personal knowledge of the subjects of its vignettes, is unequalled and unrivaled in the tradition of memoir writing in the Qajar period (‘Azod-al-Dawla, ed. Navā’i, pp. 6-9).

Though ‘Azod-al-Dawla’s account spans the reigns of three Qajar shahs, the main focus of his narrative is life at the court of his father, Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah, but the shah himself is not its central figure. He is the fulcrum around which swirl a multitude of colorful characters, starting with a number of his notable wives. What is interesting in this first section of the account is that in listing these particular wives, ‘Azod-al-Dawla not only highlights the major personages, namely Āsia Kānom, the mother of ‘Abbās Mirzā; Mahd-e ‘Olyā, the mother of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah; the formidable Badr-al-Nesā’ Kānom, paternal cousin of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah; his own mother, the stunning Ṭāvus Kānom; or the beautiful Maryam Kānom, but also lesser known wives whose stories would have been lost to posterity but for his efforts (Eskandari-Qajar, pp. 3-32).

In addition to shedding light on the importance of these wives in the daily rituals of the court and in the private life of the ruler himself, Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā also focuses on figures about whom, as he says, no memory would remain, given that they had no children or relatives to tell their stories; for



instance, the eunuchs of the palace, namely Manučehr Khan Mo‘tamed-al-Dawla, Āgā Bahrām, Āgā Ja‘far, Āgā Sa‘id, Āgā Ya‘qub, and many others that are recorded throughout (Eskandari-Qajar, pp. 47-49).

Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā also concentrates on listing the wives of all the sons of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah and their lineages and also speaks at length of the daughters of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah, prominently among them, Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah’s favorite daughter, Šāh Begom Kānom [Ziā’-al-Salṭana](#). He also mentions, by name, all of the children of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah, both male and female, who survived infancy, forty-eight daughters and sixty sons, and is able to share vignettes about their lives to make portraits out of what otherwise would have remained a simple listing of names. This fact makes of the *Tāriḳ* an invaluable genealogical record of all Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah’s male and female descendants.

Woven into these mini biographies are then accounts of marriages, formal meals, religious and holiday observances such as the celebration of Nowruz, and family scenes, as well as encounters with various elders and nobles of the greater Qajar tribe and of the realm. Of particular interest are also the stories about the senior sons of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah, mainly the brothers [Moḥammad-‘Ali Mirzā Dawlatšāh](#), ‘Ali-Šāh [Zell-al-Solṭān](#), and the crown prince [Nāyeb-al-Salṭana ‘Abbās Mirzā](#). In fact, some of the most moving and memorable passages of the *Tāriḳ* deal with the ordeal of Zell-al-Solṭān and the news of the deaths of Moḥammad-‘Ali Mirzā Dawlatšāh and of ‘Abbās Mirzā (Eskandari-Qajar, pp. 132-38).

Beyond these accounts, Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā traces the members of the court of his father, from the influential women of the time of Āqā Moḥammad Khan to the religious and spiritual elders to the Anjoman-e Kāqān, the circle of learned men around the shah (Diba, p. 16), to the royal pages, attendants, musicians, cooks, masters of royal kitchens, and masters of a variety of ceremonies, from those responsible for the various night watches down to those responsible for serving the tea and coffee.

Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā ties together many strands of his vignettes and reminiscences with his recollection of the preparations for the transition from Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah’s rule to that of his grandson Moḥammad Mirzā. Highlights of the *Tāriḳ* are dedicated to recounting the challenges mounted by the senior sons of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah to the ascendancy of Moḥammad Mirzā as the next king, and the fate of those princes, including prominently that of ‘Ali-Šāh Mirzā Zell-al-Solṭān. The *Tāriḳ* ends with the account of Moḥammad Shah’s kindness



towards all those who were entrusted to his care by his grandfather, including some of those who ended up plotting against him, and the few concluding glimpses of protocol at the court of Moḥammad Shah mirror, in effect, the opening scenes of protocol at the court of Faṭḥ-‘Ali Shah and Āgā Moḥammad Shah earlier (Eskandari-Qajar, pp. 138-52).

The *Tāriḳ-e ‘azodi* has not been fully appreciated as an example of memoir-literature because it is mainly relating stories about the ruler of the time. It is noteworthy because of its emphasis on the women of the court, allowing them to shine and cut sharp and splendid figures. In this regard, the *Tāriḳ* challenges accepted stereotypes of women as passive characters made to submit to the dominant religious and patriarchal structure of the time.

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