



CAMPBELL, JOHN I. THE LIFE

i. The life

CAMPBELL, JOHN (1799-1870), British envoy to Persia, 1830-35. While a captain in the 2nd Madras Light Cavalry, Campbell joined the Persian mission of John Kinneir MacDonald as second secretary in 1826. During the second Russo-Persian war (1826-28) he functioned as liaison officer between MacDonald and the crown prince 'Abbās Mīrzā (1203-49/1789-1833), who led the Iranian army, and helped to arrange peace negotiations with Russia (India Office Library, extracts from Campbell's diary, included in "MacDonald to Secret Committee, Tabreez, October 1827"; and Campbell's report on his negotiations at the Russian camp of 'Abbāsābād, included in "MacDonald to Swinton, Tassooch 1 November 1827," L/P and S 41).

Although contemporary sources describe him as vain, bad-tempered, and mean (McNeill, pp. 168-69; Yapp, p. 108; Wright, p. 19), Campbell was chosen to serve as chargé d'affaires after MacDonald's death in June, 1830, mainly owing to the influence of his father, Sir Robert Campbell, who himself became chairman of the court of directors of the East India Company in 1831. He vacillated in his policies. First, he opposed the prevailing British view that Russia was an imminent threat to India. He even allowed the British military unit attached to the Iranian army to participate in 'Abbās Mīrzā's expedition to subdue Khorasan in 1247/1831. In less than a year's time he altered his position, however, and in his dispatches began to emphasize the threat of Russia's ascendancy in Iran (Public Record Office, Campbell to Secret



Committee, Tehran 4 September 1832, FO 60:33). He now came to support a policy of consolidating Afghanistan as a buffer state.

John Campbell was knighted in January, 1833, and in 1834 he was named consul general and plenipotentiary by the British government. In this capacity Campbell worked hard to promote the opening of the trade route from Iran to Trebizond (Trabzon) on the Black Sea. He attempted to reach a commercial agreement with Fath-ʿAlī Shah (r. 1212-50/1797-1834), but the negotiations foundered on British insistence on appointing consuls.

After Fath-ʿAlī Shah's death on 23 October 1834 Campbell played an effective role in securing the throne for his grandson Moḥammad Mīrzā (r. 1250-64/1834-48). ʿAbbās Mīrzā had died before his father, and a British army detachment that had arrived in Persia in November, 1833, to support his succession was then employed in Azarbaijan training the troops of the new heir apparent; nevertheless at the time of his grandfather's death Moḥammad Mīrzā was not yet ready to march from Tabrīz against the two rival Qajar claimants in Shiraz and Tehran. On Campbell's advice military assistance was provided for the advance of Moḥammad Mīrzā's troops to the capital, counteracting a similar offer by the Russians. On 10 November, less than three days after news of the shah's death had reached Tabrīz, the troops commanded by British officers set out for Tehran. It was a combination of British military leadership and an advance of 30,000 pounds sterling from Campbell to pay Moḥammad Mīrzā's troops that won the throne for him.

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Manuscript copies of Campbell's correspondence with Fath-'Alī Shah, 'Abbās Mīrzā, and other important Iranian personalities are to be found in British Museum Add. 22.707; for the years 1831-35 cf. Public Record Office FO 60/32, 33, 34, 35, 248/67 and India Office Library L/P and S/9/50.

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