



# DAWLATŠĀH, MOḤAMMAD- ‘ALĪ MĪRZĀ

---

**DAWLATŠĀH, MOḤAMMAD-‘ALĪ MĪRZĀ** (1203-37/1789-1821), eldest son of Fath-‘Alī Shah (1212-50/1797-1834) and powerful prince-governor of western provinces of Persia. He was born in the resort village of Navā in Māzandarān to Zībā-čehr Kānom, a Georgian (Čūš) slave girl of the Tzicara Chwili family owned by Fath-‘Alī Shah, and was senior by seven months to ‘Abbās Mīrzā. Proximity in age between these and other princes later contributed to a prolonged succession crisis in the Qajar house.

Upon his father’s accession in 1212/1797 Mo-ḥammad-‘Alī was appointed nominal governor of Fārs and soon after, at the age of twelve years, governor of Qazvīn, Kāmsa, and Gilān. His military gifts soon surfaced in confrontations with ‘Alī Pasha, the *mamlūkwālī* of Ottoman Iraq, whose appointment in 1220/1805 was made without Persian consent, which had customarily been sought by the Ottoman court (Bāb-e ‘ālī). The new *wālī*’s hostile attitude encouraged the shah to give refuge to ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Khan Bābān of Šahrazūr, the most powerful Kurdish frontier chief, and his numerous tribesmen. ‘Alī Pasha viewed this move as a breach of frontier protocol and caused a rift in relations between the two powers. When, in 1221/1806, ‘Alī Pasha attacked ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Khan inside Persian territory Moḥammad-‘Alī Mīrzā responded by crossing into Iraqi Kurdistan, accompanied by other military chiefs, and capturing Solaymāniya, taking prisoner the Ottoman governor and a large body of troops (Hedāyat, *Rawzat al-ṣafā* I, pp. 426-30;



E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Montaẓam-e nāṣerī* III, pp. 1478-79, 1482-83; Kormūjī, p. 13-14). In this campaign the young prince revealed valor and political skill, but his success was also facilitated by the *wālī*'s retreat, in compliance with the Ottoman sultan's desire to maintain peace with Persia in hopes of forging an alliance against the common Russian threat. 'Alī Pasha dispatched the celebrated Arab Shi'ite jurist Shaikh Ja'far Najafī, author of *Kašf al-ġeṭā'*, to negotiate with Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā in Kermānšāh; he persuaded the deeply religious prince to advise his father to cease hostilities and release the captured prisoners in exchange for reinstatement of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān in Šahrazūr.

Following the age-old tradition of assigning frontier provinces to senior sons, in 1224/1809 the shah formally appointed Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā governor-general (*wālī*) of the entire frontier region from Kermānšāh, Zohāb, and Songor to Hamadān, Lorestān, Baḳtīārī, and Kūzestān; he served in this post unchallenged for the rest of his life. He was also given the title *dawlatšāh*, which embodied a subtle reference to regal prospects. Assignment of so large a territory to Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā, who governed with a miniature version of the Tehran court, represented Faḥ-'Alī Shah's policy of creating semiautonomous princely governorships in hopes of lessening rivalry among his sons; he supplemented the appointments with numerous gifts of concubines and jewelry. Governing a strategically important region on the Ottoman frontier posed fresh challenges to the ambitious Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā. The disputed sovereignty over the Kurdish frontier tribes was further complicated by the shifting loyalties of the Bābān chiefs, who tried to play the neighboring states off against each other. Moreover, the security of Persian pilgrims to the holy cities of Iraq, which was frequently violated, and obstacles to the flow of overland trade between Baghdad and Kermānšāh were thorny issues that prevented conclusion of a defensive treaty between the Persian and Ottoman empires against Russia, a treaty that Great Britain strongly favored. In 1227/1812 'Abd-al-Raḥmān was defeated in skirmishes with Ottoman troops of a new *wālī* in Iraq, 'Abd-Allāh Pasha, and again took refuge with Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā, who then attacked Ottoman territory at the head of a large force, advancing to the vicinity of Baghdad. Mediation by Shaikh Ja'far Najafī put an end to Persian looting and destruction in exchange for reinstatement of the Bābān chief as governor of Šahrazūr. Despite the appointment in 1231/1816 of Dāwūd Pasha, a more forceful *wālī* of Baghdad, the Persians retained this advantage for nearly a decade (Hedāyat, *Rawẓat al-ṣafā* I, pp. 481-82; E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Montaẓam-e nāṣerī* III, pp. 1504-05).



The policy of backing Kurdish warlords against Baghdad as a guarantee for security of the Persian frontiers reached a climax in 1236/1821, when Dawlatšāh again attacked Baghdad on the pretext of protecting ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān’s son and successor, Maḥmūd Pasha Bābān, whom the Ottomans accused of disloyalty. Dawlatšāh’s operation was coordinated with a campaign by ‘Abbās Mīrzā, who, after being defeated in the first round of the Russo-Persian war (1220-28/1805-13), was seeking victory over the Ottomans on the Erzurum (Arz-e Rūm) front in Anatolia. Moḥammad-‘Alī advanced deep into Iraq but was stopped by the formidable walls of Baghdad and dissuaded from taking the city by the intervention of Shaikh Mūsā Najafī, son of Shaikh Ja‘far. This campaign ended abruptly, however, with the prince’s death from cholera at Ṭāq-e Garrā during his withdrawal. Dawlatšāh’s death led to a temporary lull in the troubled relations between Persia and the Ottoman empire; shortly afterward some of the disputed issues were partially settled in the treaty of Erzurum in 1238/1823 (Ḥedāyat, *Rawzat al-ṣafā* I, pp. 597-604).

Dawlatšāh’s military ventures were partly motivated by intense competition with ‘Abbās Mīrzā. The principles of Qajar succession had not yet been fully established, and the two brothers’ valor and military leadership seemed crucial to their nomination to the throne. Despite his seniority, Dawlatšāh’s descent from a slave was a fundamental obstacle. ‘Abbās Mīrzā was descended from the Qajar family on both sides, which favored his claim. [Āqā Moḥammad Khan](#) had supposedly named pure Qajar lineage as the prime prerequisite for succession, but it was resisted by royal princes who preferred either primogeniture or an open contest to determine the ablest candidate. Moḥammad-‘Alī Mīrzā viewed the succession as his legitimate right and resented his exclusion, particularly as he possessed superior martial qualities, a record of repeated military victories, and a robust physique, in contrast to ‘Abbās Mīrzā, who had a weak constitution and had been defeated in the war with Russia. The shah’s efforts to preserve a balance of power among his sons were further complicated by the growing involvement of European powers and their support of rival candidates. Article 4 of the treaty of Golestān (1228/1813) left the door open for Moḥammad-‘Alī Mīrzā’s succession. It required the tsar “to recognize the Prince who shall be nominated heir-apparent, and to afford him assistance in case he should require it to suppress any opposing party” (Hurewitz, p. 198). Not surprisingly, in 1233/1818 Prince Alexei Petrovich Ermolov, the Russian emissary to Persia, who was frustrated by ‘Abbās Mīrzā’s resistance to his territorial demands, began to court Moḥammad-‘Alī Mīrzā and promised support for his claim to the succession



(Atkin, p. 153; Algar, p. 83). Although this rapprochement brought no concrete results, it may have influenced MoḤammad-‘Alī Mīrżā’s aggressive policy toward Ottoman Iraq. His death removed the most formidable challenge to ‘Abbās Mīrżā’s succession and reduced the intensity of the civil war fought in 1249-50/1834-35 between ‘Abbās Mīrżā’s son MoḤammad Shah (1250-64/1834-48) and the surviving senior sons of Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah.

MoḤammad-‘Alī Mīrżā’s impressive military record was not incongruent with a certain degree of cultural refinement and political competence. Under his rule Kermānšāh and the western provinces enjoyed an exceptional period of prosperity and social calm, enhanced by trade and pilgrim traffic, as well as by the expansion of the rich agricultural base. He also tolerated ethnic and religious diversity in the province. Large communities of the Kurdish **Ahl-e Ḥaqq** residing in the Kermānšāh region served in his army, and their chiefs benefited from the prince’s patronage. Although he showed respect for jurists like Shaikh Ja‘far Najafī, the prince preferred the celebrated Arab theologian and philosopher **Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā‘ī**, founder of Shaikhism; at the prince’s invitation and with his financial support the saintly Aḥsā‘ī lived in Kermānšāh for eight years (1229-37/1814-21), providing a counterbalance to the stern legalism of the *mojtaheds*. At MoḤammad-‘Alī Mīrżā’s request he wrote a number of treatises on theological subjects, including *al-Eṣma wa’l-raja‘a* on corporeal resurrection. The prince’s interest in the hereafter went beyond eschatological conjecture, and he sought to guarantee his own salvation by convincing Aḥsā‘ī to produce a testament, comparable to an indulgence, to his good conduct in this world. On his deathbed Dawlatšāh made sure that this testament would be placed in his coffin (Algar, pp. 68, 70).

Dawlatšāh’s religious outlook did not diminish his curiosity about the West. Āqā Sayyed Aḥmad Behbahānī, a relatively enlightened son of Āqā MoḤammad-‘Alī and a resident of India, dedicated to the prince a voluminous tome on family history and an account of modern Europe and the New World entitled *Mer‘āt al-aḥwāl-e jahānnemā*. One of the earliest such works in Persian, it seems to have been a source of Dawlatšāh’s knowledge of European history and contemporary affairs, which impressed the British envoy Sir Gore Ouseley when he met him in 1224/1809. Dawlatšāh’s erroneous insistence that the Portuguese, rather than the Spaniards, had been the first explorers of the New World incensed Ouseley, however. In keeping with the fashion in the time of Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah, Dawlatšāh also composed poetry under the pen name (*taḵalloṣ*) Dawlat (Ḳayyāmpūr, *Soḵanvarān*, p. 213). In addition to his *Divān*, he



also compiled a biographical dictionary of his own contemporaries, *Ma'āser-e Dawlatšāh*, which is unpublished. His interest in astronomy and occult sciences, history, and literary theory exemplifies the Qajar princes' attachment to Persian high culture. He patronized buildings in Qazvīn, Šūštar, Dezfūl, and Kermānšāh, including the Gargar dam in Šūštar. In competition with 'Abbās Mīrzā he also tried to modernize his army along European lines, first by employing French officers from the mission of General Alfred de Gardane to Persia in 1223/1808 and soon after by commissioning British instructors.

European observers judged Dawlatšāh differently. Some admired his robustness, articulacy, and assertiveness, whereas his critics judged him volatile and imperious. In 1226/1811 he allegedly threatened to stab himself if his father denied him permission to attack Baghdad (Atkin, p. 115). His bitterness at being denied the succession is clear from some anecdotes from his childhood (e.g., 'Aẓod-al-Dawla, pp. 122, 124).

Given the intense rivalry between 'Abbās Mīrzā and Dawlatšāh, Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's anxiety over their simultaneous presence in the annual military review at Solṭānīya in 1223/1808 is comprehensible, as is his careful manipulation of protocol involving the two at the court in Tehran. The seat on his right during public audiences and on other occasions was awarded alternately to Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā and 'Abbās Mīrzā, symbolizing the shah's deliberate ambiguity over the final choice of his successor. His intense grief at Moḥammad-'Alī Mīrzā's death may have reflected his loss not only of a capable son but also of a counterbalance in the complex princely politics of his kingdom.

Dawlatšāh was survived by twenty-four children, including seven adult sons, of whom the eldest, Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Mīrzā, succeeded him as governor of Kermānšāh and was himself succeeded by his brother Ṭahmāsb Mīrzā Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla, known for both literary and technological pursuits. The governorship of Kermānšāh remained in Dawlatšāh's house until the death of still another son, Emāmqolī Mīrzā 'Emād-al-Dawla, in 1292/1875.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

‘Abd-Allāh Aḥsā’ī, *Resāla-ye šarḥ-e aḥwāl-e Šayḵ Aḥmad b. Zayn al-‘Ābedīn Aḥsā’ī*, tr. M.-Ṭ. Kermānī, 2nd ed., Kermān, n.d., pp. 27-28, 34-35.

H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran. The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*, Berkeley, Calif., 1969, pp. 54, 76.

A. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal. The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-50*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1989, pp. 56, 63-64.

M. Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828*, Minneapolis, Minn., 1980, pp. 113, 115-17, 153, 156.

Solṭān-Aḥmad Mīrẓā ‘Azod-al-Dawla, *Tārīḳ-e ‘azodī*, ed. ‘A.-Ḥ. Navā’ī, 3rd ed., Tehran, 1355 Š./1976.

Bāmdād, *Rejāl* III, pp. 430-31.

‘Abd-al-Razzāq Donbolī, *Ma’āter-e solṭānīya*, Tabrīz, 1241/1825-26, pp. 184-85, 219-25, 242-62, 367.

‘Alīqolī Mīrẓā E’tezād-al-Salṭana, *Eksīr al-tawārīkò*, ed. J. Kayānfar, Tehran, 1370/1991, pp. 125, 183-85.

R. Hedāyat, *Rawzat al-šafā* IX, pp. 348, 575.

J. C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics* I, New Haven, Conn., 1975.

P. A. Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et en Perse, fait dans les années 1805 et 1806*, Paris, 1821, chaps. 23, 31.

Idem, “Histoire persane de la dynastie des Kadjars,” *JA* 13, 1834, pp. 211-13.

H. Jones (Brydges), *Account of the Transaction of His Majesty’s Mission to the Court of Persia in the Years 1807-1811*, London, 1834, pp. 248-49.

Moḥammad-Ja‘far Ḳormūjī, *Ḥaqāyeq al-aḳbār-e nāšerī*, ed. Ḥ. Ḳadīv Jam, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1363 Š./1984.



J. Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor to Constatinople*, London, 1818, pp. 195-97.

Mošār, *Mo'allefīn* IV, p. 239.

S. Nafīsī, *Tārīk-e ejtemā'ī wa siāsī-e Īrān dar dawra-ye mo'ašer* I, Tehran, 1335 Š./1956, pp. 327-28.

M.-R. Našīrī, *Asnād wa mokātabāt-e tārīkī-e Īrān (Qājārīya)* I, Tehran, 1366 Š./1987, pp. 164-65, 208-09, 233-39, 253-57.

W. Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East* III, London, 1821, pp. 347-49.

E. Pakravan, *Abbas-Mirza*, Paris, 1973, index.

Moḥammad-Taqī Lesān-al-Molk Sepehr, *Nāseḵ al-tawārīkò* I, Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, pp. 209, 225-28, 329.