



EḤTEŠĀM-AL-SALTĀNA

EḤTEŠĀM-AL-SALTĀNA, Mīrzā Maḥmūd Khan ‘Alāmīr Qajar, also known as Mas‘ūd Davallū (b. 6 Ša‘bān 1279/27 January 1863; d. 6 Bahman 1314 Š./26 January 1936), governor, diplomat, and speaker of the Persian Parliament (Majles; [Plate I](#)). He was the youngest son of Moḥammad-Raḥīm Khan Qājār Davallū, a highly influential chamberlain (*ḥājeb-al-dawla*) under Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah. At age nine, while continuing his traditional education in Arabic and Persian, he was sent to the Dār-al-fonūn (q.v.), where he spent what he considered to be eight wasteful years of his life (Eḥtešām-al-Saltāna, pp. 9-11, 25-28).

In his first administrative position as governor of Zanjān (1889-91) he was unable to fully assert his authority in face of challenges from the region’s tribal chiefs and from the ‘*olamā*’ in the domain of legal jurisdiction. His first diplomatic appointment came when he was sent in 1311/1894 on a special mission to the court of St. Petersburg to offer his government’s condolences for the death of Alexander III. The grandeur of the tsar’s court and the modern conveniences of the Russian capital, such as electricity, made Maḥmūd Khan more aware of his own country’s material backwardness. In 1894 he received the position of consul-general (*kārpardāz-e awwal*) at Baghdad, a sensitive position in view of the religious, political, and economic importance of Iraq and the consul’s autonomy over the Persian expatriate community. Upon his return to Tehran in mid-1896, he was appointed to the important position of deputy foreign minister in charge of foreign legations and of resolving capitulation disputes between foreign nationals and Persian subjects



(Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna, pp. 190, 197-206, 234-59, 263-79).

Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna's three year service at this post coincided with his activities in the *Anjoman-e ma'āref* (q.v.), a society of reform-minded individuals who viewed education as the solution to the nation's ills and who worked to establish modern schools. In spite of the Anjoman's partial success and friction among its members, Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna considered his contribution to its inception and early performance as the most important service he had rendered to his country. In 1316/1898 he was made governor of Kurdistan, where he proved himself skillful; there he asserted the authority of the central government and obliged local notables to subsidize the high price of bread. He also secured the cooperation of the Ottoman government for stripping thousands of Persian subjects who had abused the capitulatory privileges of Ottoman citizenship (Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna, pp. 206-08, 314-47, 440-60; *Dawlatābādī, Ḥayāt-e Yaḥyā* I, pp. 185-254).

His short appointment as envoy to Berlin (June 1901-December 1905) confirmed his modernizing proclivities. One symbolic change in his life was to leave his wife in Persia and to marry a French woman, one of the earliest mixed marriages between Persians and Europeans (Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna, pp. 470-505). He returned to Persia on the outbreak of the protest movement which led to the resignation of his brother 'Alā'-al-Dawla, the unpopular governor of Tehran, on 26 December 1905, and later demands for constitutional government. During this critical period, as member of the Qajar ruling establishment, he was in the unique position of defending the cause of reform. On one occasion, he encouraged the shah to opt for a progressive constitutional monarchy based on the European model as opposed to a backward despotism similar to that in Afghanistan. As the only notable Qajar with considerable public support and long term alliances with reformers, he was able to act as an intermediary between the pro-constitutional '*olamā*' and the chief minister 'Ayn-al-Dawla (q.v.). The shah's fear of disloyalty from within the house of Qajar superseded his inclination towards reconciliation with the constitutionalists. In May 1906 Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna was assigned the position of the chief of the special mission to the Ottoman empire to resolve the latest complications in Persia's chronic border disputes with her neighbor, an act designed to keep him outside the capital (Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna, pp. 512-17, 535-38).

Eḥtešām-al-Salṭāna returned to Tehran only after the formation of the first Majles and, coincidentally, on the day of the grand vizier Mīrzā 'Alī-Aṣḡar



Khan Atābak A'zam's assassination (August 31, 1907). In the confusion which followed the assassination, Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana was elected the speaker of the Majles. In this position (10 September 1907-28 March 1908), his main contributions were to the evolution of a parliamentary system, i.e. the passage of the Supplement to the Constitution (see CONSTITUTION iii), and establishment of a state treasury. Although seen at times as authoritarian in his conduct, he helped create a sense of discipline within the Majles, including abolishment of the clergy's special privileges. This and other issues led to open confrontation with the leading *mojtahed* Sayyed 'Abd-Allāh Behbahānī (q.v.) and Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana's eventual resignation. Having alienated the conservatives, he also failed to regain the support of radical deputies, who resented his contempt for the power and independence of the *anjomans* (q.v.), and who rejected his offer for negotiating Moḥammad-'Alī Shah's abdication (Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana, pp. 601-57).

Fearing for his life, he left for Berlin, where he remained the Persian envoy until his dismissal in August 1908 for openly opposing the shah on grounds of his bombardment of the Majles. After the shah's abdication he was reappointed in February 1910. In September 1910 he was promoted to ambassadorship at Istanbul, which position he held throughout World War I. When, however, Persia's "nationalist government in exile" eventually moved to Istanbul asking for Ottoman support, he refused to provide it with any assistance. In September 1919 he was removed by the pro-British premier Woṭūq-al-Dawla from his ambassadorial post, for reasons of his alleged pro-German sentiments.

In his absence, he was elected to the second and third Majleses, but, for unexplained reasons, he chose to stay abroad. In March 1924, during Reżā Khan's consolidation of power, Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana was active in negotiating an end to the last stronghold of the Qajar rule, Tehran's royal palaces. Aside from a brief cabinet appointment in 1926, he did not play a political role under Reżā Shah. During his last years he led a modest life, mostly in Berlin, and died in Tehran on his seventy-third birthday (Bahār, p. 37; Şafā'ī, p. 607).

As a member of the Qajar ruling establishment who gradually developed reformist convictions and actively worked towards a progressive agenda, Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana, represents a unique case in Qajar history. Although toward the end of his life he grew more conservative, he was remembered by his contemporaries for his intense personality, fervor, and temperamental conduct.



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Plate I. Eḥtešām-al-Salṭana.