



# FARĀHĀNĪ, MĪRZĀ MOḤAMMAD-ḤOSAYN

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**FARĀHĀNĪ, MĪRZĀ MOḤAMMAD-ḤOSAYN**, Persian diplomat and author of a *Safar-nāma* (born in Farāhān in 1264/1847; died 1331/1913; [Figure 1](#)). Farāhānī began his education under the supervision of his father, Moḥammad-Mahdī, who was chief secretary to the governor-general of Azarbaijan and a famous calligrapher. At the age of 12, Farāhānī moved to Tehran to continue his education. There he received a typical 19th century Persian schooling, which included study of Persian literature, Arabic, history, accounting, some French language and culture, and calligraphy. Of the last he became a great master, leading to his employment at the age of twenty-two in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 1869 Farāhānī went to India as a junior member of a special embassy to negotiate an amnesty for Āqā Khan Maḥallāti (q.v.) and his followers. Because of his distinguished service in that embassy he was given another diplomatic assignment in 1291/1874 in India, where he resided for several years. In 1882 Mirzā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn traveled to Khorasan as a member of the entourage of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah during the monarch's tour of the province. His assignment was to assist the well-known minister of information (*wazīr-e enṭebā'āt*) E'temād-al-Salṭana (q.v.) with his research on the history and geography of Khorasan.

In Šawwāl 1302/July 1885 Farāhānī set out from Tehran, by way of the



Caucasus, the Ottoman empire, and Egypt, on his pilgrimage to Mecca. He was encouraged by Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah to write a full account of his journey, which he did on his return in 1303/1886. His autograph copy of the *Safar-nāma*, executed handsomely in a meticulous *naskò* script, was presented to the shah in 1887. Very pleased with its content, the shah bestowed upon Farāhānī the title of Malek-al-Kottāb (“Prince of Calligraphers”). The *Safar-nāma* was first edited and published by Ḥāfeẓ Farmānfarmā’īān in 1963; it was translated into English and published by the Persian editor and Elton Daniel in 1990.

Farāhānī’s purpose for writing this travel book was to show how a Shi’ite pilgrim could successfully undertake the journey from Persia to Mecca. Consequently, he gives in his memoir a considerable number of details concerning the peoples and places he came across. The reader is informed about the quality of food and lodgings at all important stops; prices of commodities and their availability; modes of transportation; and fares for carriages, trains, steamships, and even camels. There are ample warnings concerning such hazards and annoyances as bandits, dishonest guides, and corrupt officials. Every possible currency in all regions, and the temperaments and habits of various peoples along the pilgrimage route are described. Above all, Farāhānī explains in clear language all the religious rules, regulations, rituals and ceremonies that a Shi’ite pilgrim needs to observe during the journey and upon entering the holy places. Farāhānī’s *Safar-nāma* also provides something of a counterbalance to the few, but better known, 19th century European accounts of the pilgrimage to Mecca. In it one learns much about Arabia, the Ottoman empire, and the Sunnis in general from an intelligent, educated Persian Shi’ite. Throughout the *Safar-nāma*, the reader perceives Farāhānī’s genuine love of Persia and his deep respect for Shi’ism. At the same time Farāhānī does not hesitate to criticize Persian officials at home and abroad or to speak boldly against certain established Shi’ite practices. For example, he finds the use of *taqīya* (religious dissimulation; q.v.) humiliating, and Shi’ite doctrines concerning the ritual purity of water seem senseless and impractical to him. He believes that Shi’ites and Sunnis should be tolerant of one another in the face of the rising threat from the non-Muslim West (Farāhānī, 1990, pp. 70-74).

Of Farāhānī’s other works, only two minor satirical treatises, *Ḥālāt* and *Ādāb al-sorūr*, have survived; they were published posthumously together in one volume (see bibliography). It has been said that some of Farāhānī’s possessions, among them manuscripts and personal writings, were destroyed



during clashes with local enemies in Farāhān (*Hālāt*, p. yt)Ā. Of his lost works, three have been identified (*Hrālāt*, pp. gj, lb): a *Dīvān* (collection of poems), a *Monša'āt* (collection of letters), and a *Pand-nāma* (Mirror for princes). Some fragments of his poetry appear in the *Safar-nāma* under his pen name “Golbon.” Although these indicate that poetry was not one of Farāhānī’s talents, there is no doubt that he was well-versed in Persian literature and folklore. He also collaborated with the editorial board of the *Maṭla’ al-šams* (Bāmdād, *Rejāl* V, p. 337).

Farāhānī was a man of wit and a deft and seasoned conversationalist. Although a pious Shi’ite, he was very critical of the Shi’ite ulema. The last portion of his little work *Hālāt* (pp. 109-48) is one of the most biting satires in modern Persian literature written on the Shi’ite ulema and their religious establishment. Regarding Farāhānī’s political views, as implied in the *Safar-nāma*, he believed, like many educated Persians of his class and time, in the need for political and religious reforms, provided they threatened neither the monarchy nor the Shi’ite religion. Farāhānī expressed his distaste for French republicanism and some of the republican movements then current in the Ottoman empire. The traditional enmity toward Russia and Great Britain by the Persian bureaucratic elite is reflected in his descriptions of, and commentary on, peoples and places in the Caucasus and in Egypt (Farāhānī, 1990, pp. 127-38).

Farāhānī’s *Safar-nāma* is of great value in studying the social, political, and economic life of the Middle East during the late 19th century. The book is pleasant to read; it is evocative, lively, and full of detail. It sheds light on Russian administration in the Caucasus and European political and commercial officers in Egypt, the Levant, and India. It conveys much information about the Muslims of the Russian empire and gives us information on the economy and political conditions of Turkey and Egypt. It speaks of places and conditions of Arabia, of the Arabs themselves, and also of the thousands of pilgrims who, then as now, come great distances in order to venerate the holy places in Arabia (ibid., pp. 65, 87, 93, 127, 163, 193). Finally, the *Safar-nāma* may be used as a valuable source in reconstructing the social history and intellectual atmosphere of 19th century Persia.

*Bibliography* (for cited works not given in detail, see “Short References”):



Bāmdād, *Rejāl* V, p. 337.

Mirzā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Farāhānī, *Ḥālāt wa ādāb al-sorūr*, Tehran, 1311 Š./1932.

Idem, *Safar-nāma*, ed. Ḥ. Farmānfarmā'īān, Tehran, 1362 Š./1963; tr. H. Farmayan and E. Daniel as *A Shi'ite Pilgrimage To Mecca, 1885-86: The Safarnāmeḥ of Mirzā Moḥammad Ḥosayn Farāhānī*, Austin, Tex., 1990.

Ḥ. Farmānfarmā'īān, “Ešāra’-ī bar šarḥ-e zendagī wa ātār-e Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Farāhānī,” *Yağmā* 17/1, 1343 Š./1964, pp. 18-24.

**Figure 1.** Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Malek-al-Kottāb Far 155;hānī. After M.-Ḥ. Farāhānī, Ḥ 155;lat, Tehran, 1311 Š./1932.