



FATH-‘ALĪ KHAN QĀJĀR

FATH-‘ALĪ KHAN QĀJĀR, chief of the Ašāqa-bāš division of the Qajar tribes at Astarābād at the time of the demise of the Safavid dynasty. He was the son of Šāhqolī Khan and the grandfather of Āgā Moḥammad Khan Qājār (q.v.) the founder of the Qajar dynasty. He was executed for treason on the orders of Shah Ṭahmāsb II on 14 Šafar 1139/11 October 1726 (E‘temād-al-Salṭana, *Montaẓam-e nāšerī*, ed. Režvānī, III, p. 1359; Lockhart, p. 309, note 3). According to E‘temād-al-Salṭana he was forty-two years old when he died (loc. cit.), which implies that he was born around 1097/1685-86.

Much of the information about Fath-‘Alī Khan’s early career must be used cautiously as it is based mainly on chronicles from the Qajar period intent on presenting the career of the immediate forefathers of the dynasty in a flattering heroic manner. It appears that during the reign of Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn, the governor of Astarābād, Moḥammad Khan, a Turkmen, tried to check the increasing power of the Ašāqa-bāš by seizing Fath-‘Alī Khan and his brothers at their base in the Mobārakābād fortress. The attempt backfired, for although his brothers were killed Fath-‘Alī Khan managed to escape and take refuge with the Yomūt Turkmen. With their help, he managed to defeat the governor and have him executed, bringing the whole of Gorgān under his own control (E‘teẓād-al-Salṭana, p.10; Hedāyat, *Rawżat al-šafā* IX, pp. 8-9).

These events coincided with the Afghan siege of Isfahan in 1135/1722, and once again Fath-‘Alī Khan’s part in these final years of Safavid rule is a matter of dispute. One source describes how he managed to enter the besieged city of Isfahan at night with two to three thousand men and through sheer valor turn



the tide against the enemy. However, jealous courtiers managed to convince Shah Solṭan Ḥosayn that he was too bold and ambitious an ally and Fath-‘Alī Khan was forced to leave to avoid possible incarceration (Marvī, pp. 27-28). More or less the same story is repeated in later Qajar sources. However, the lack of corroborative information from contemporary sources, including Krusiński, Moḥammad Moḥsen, or Shaikh Moḥammed ‘Alī Ḥazīn, throws considerable doubt on the historical validity of this narrative (Lockhart, pp. 280-1).

Fath-‘Alī Khan’s volatile involvement with Ṭahmāsb II seems to have begun after the latter’s defeat by the Afghan leader Ašraf at Šāh ‘Abd-al-‘Azīm. Appointed governor of Semnān by Ṭahmāsb, Fath-‘Alī Khan also fought an unsuccessful battle against the Afghans before turning against Ṭahmāsb himself. He first defeated one of Ṭahmāsb’s supporters, Du’l-faqār Khan, who was engaged in mustering troops at Dāmḡān, and then advanced to Māzandarān, where he defeated Ṭahmāsb himself near Ašraf (Behšahr, q.v.) in May 1726 (Lockhart, p. 281). Soon afterwards, hearing that Ṭahmāsb was giving Turkmen tribes financial inducements to strengthen his army, Fath-‘Alī Khan again changed his tactics, went to Sārī where he submitted to Ṭahmāsb with much humility (Moḥsen, f. 211b; Lockhart, p. 304). However, he soon managed to regain control over the weak Ṭahmāsb and accompanied him to Astarābād. From there he planned to accompany the king to Mašhad and by capturing the town from Malek Maḥmūd Sīstānī, perhaps the Safavid’s weakest enemy at the time, gain added prestige and consolidate his power base. As part of this policy he made Ṭahmāsb bestow the title of Wakīl-al-Dawla on him during the journey. In the meantime, Ṭahmāsb had sought the assistance of Nāderqolī Beg (see afsharids). Perhaps Nāder’s rising military reputation and the desire to counterbalance the growing power of the Qajar khan were the motives behind this invitation. The immediate rivalry which developed between the two was to prove fatal to Fath-‘Alī Khan. He was arrested and accused of corresponding with Malek Maḥmūd, whom the Safavid prince and Nāder were now trying to defeat. Unlike two contemporary sources (Avramov and Moḥammad Moḥsen), later Qajar sources do not refer to this letter and generally regard him innocent of charges of treason (Lockhart, pp. 309-10). After Fath-‘Alī Khan’s execution, his eleven-year-old son Moḥammad-Ḥasan fled from Ṭahmāsb’s camp and took refuge with the Yomūt Turkmens and eventually became the new leader of the Qajars. According to Rostām-al-Ḥokamā (pp. 57, 174, 237), Moḥammad Ḥasan was in fact a son of Shah Solṭan Ḥosayn. His mother, a daughter of Ḥāosaynqolī Āqā Qājār,



belonged to the Shah's harem. Already pregnant, she was bestowed on Fath-
 'Alī Khan for his aforementioned bravery at the siege of Isfahan. Both
 Ṭahmāsb and Nāder were careful not to provoke the Qajar tribe further after
 the execution, and they were all pardoned although some were fined
 (Lockhart, p. 310).

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