



FRANCE III. RELATIONS WITH PERSIA 1789-1918

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After more than sixty years of half-hearted diplomatic maneuverings, permanent relations were finally established between the France and Persia in 1855. They remained mutually strong and balanced until 1871, becoming thereafter low-keyed and lukewarm while purely cultural links continued to develop regardless.

1789 TO 1849

Despite the hostility of Catherine the Great of Russia towards both Persia and the French Revolution, the ascendancy of the Qajars in Persia and the changes brought about by the French revolutionary government in 1789 did not at once lead to any closer ties between the two countries, except for the scientific mission of the physicians Jean-Guillaume Bruguières and Guillaume-Antoine Olivier (Amini, pp. 20-21, p. 31). In 1804, Fath-ʿAlī Shah hoped Napoleon might help him recover Georgia, while the latter thought closer ties with Persia might facilitate the defeat of Russia and open the way to India. Preliminary contacts in Constantinople were followed by an exchange of letters between the two states (Voogd, p. 249). In September 1805 and June 1806, the French envoy Pierre Amédée Jaubert and the army officer Antoine Alexandre Romieu



presented letters from Napoleon in Tehran; and the favorable Persian response to these was delivered to Napoleon through Mīrzā Moḥammad-Reżā Qazvīnī in March 1807. An exchange of ministers followed. Claude-Mathieu de Gardane (Hurewitz, I, pp. 186-88; see GARDANE MISSION) and 'Askar Khan Afšār, who was initiated into Freemasonry in Paris soon afterwards (Wright, 1985, p. 170), were appointed ministers plenipotentiary in April and August 1807 respectively. The Treaty of Finkenstein, a political alliance against England and Russia, in line with an envisaged commercial treaty, was signed on 4 May 1807 (de Clerq, II, pp. 201-3, tr. in Hurewitz, I, pp. 184-85). But Napoleon's volte-face in signing a peace treaty with Russia at Tilsit (7 July 1807) and the delay in conveying instructions to Gardane, who had arrived at Tehran in December 1807, combined with some adroit diplomacy by the British in Persia rendered the Finkenstein treaty ineffective (Savory, p. 39). Gardane negotiated a commercial treaty, but this was regarded as unfavorable by the French authorities, and their subsequent inaction encouraged Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah to turn to the British as allies instead (AMAE, CP Perse, vol.10; Hedāyat, *Rawzat al-ṣafā* IX, pp. 454-55). With the announcement of the arrival of Sir Harford Jones in February 1809, Gardane, who was later blamed for this debacle, left Tehran, and Joseph Marie Jouannin, and later Félix Lajard, as French chargé d'affaires, had to face British intrigues (AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 11; Voogd, p. 259). In February 1810, 'Askar Khan Afšār was recalled from Paris; Georges Outrey, his interpreter in France, was assigned to accompany him to Tehran as a future chargé d'affaires in the capital (AMAE, Personnel, 1ère série, 247) but Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah refused to receive him (AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 13, p. 188). In 1811, official relations were broken off. For a while French contacts with Persia were through informal channels via intermediaries without diplomatic status, including the Armenian Dāwūd Khan Malekšāh Naẓar (Mīr Dāwūd-Żādūr or Mir Dawoud-Zadour de Melik Chah-Nazar), who was born in Isfahan and served both the Persian and the French courts between 1802 and 1818 (Abdolhamd and Pakdaman II, p. 379; AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 15, p. 121, p. 247, Afšār, pp. 5577-5610), the French officers instructing 'Abbās Mīrzā's (q.v.) troops in Tabrīz (AMAE, M and D Perse, 3), and Madame de La Marinière, the French tutor at the court (AMAE, ADP Perse, 12; CP Perse vol. 20, p. 229).

The Restoration (1815-30) began with some low level and inconsequential diplomatic activities: Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Īlčī (q.v.) stayed briefly in Paris in 1819 on his way to England, and Debassyns de Richemond, on his way to India, passed through Persia and made some commercial proposals to the Persian government in 1825 (AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 16, p. 269), to no effect.



During the reigns of Moḥammad Shah (1834-48) and Louis-Philippe (1830-48), negotiations were renewed by the Persians, whose relations with the British had deteriorated because of the expedition to Herat (1837-38). Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Ājūdān-bāšī (q.v.) Nezām-al-Dawla, sent to European courts in August 1838, was granted a formal audience by Louis-Philippe (Ḥosayn Khan, p. 129, pp. 341-45). The French agreed to supply Persia with weapons and army instructors to replace the British, and a loan was negotiated with the Parisian banker Dollfus to cover the costs (Ḥosayn Khan's letter to the Duc de Dalmatie, AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 24, p. 28). In September 1839, Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan left Paris taking with him a glassblower, a gunsmith, and nine French officers and "sous-officiers" under the command of Henry Boissier (AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 19, p. 48) and the promise of a permanent French mission in Tehran. In October, the Comte de Sercey was entrusted with this mission, conceived of as a mixture of ceremonial and fact-finding duties with no specific political aims. He was to report on the situation of the Christians and the possibility of opening the Persian market to French products. Another French agent, the archaeologist Paul Émile Botta (AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 24, p. 56) was sent to Būšehr. But in Tehran the Russians were reluctant to share their influence and Moḥammad Shah was preoccupied with the question of Solaymāniya. Kāmṛān Mīrzā gave the Sercey mission a cool reception in Tabrīz. Later the mission was received by Moḥammad Shah in Isfahan in April 1840. He in turn made no effort to retain it, refusing to accept the nomination of Botta, and failing to arrange for the regular payment of the French officers. Sercey therefore left Persia, but cultural ties remained strong between France and Persia. Persian princes were sent to France to study the main manufacturing industries (Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan's letter to Comte de Sartiges, AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 21, p. 7). Eugène Boré, sent by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, obtained *farmāns* (15 Rabī' I 1256/17 May 1840, AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 20, p. 176) authorizing him, and later the Lazarists, to open French schools. Pascal Coste and Eugène Flandin (q.v.), commissioned by the Académie des Beaux-Arts with preparing a survey of historical monuments in Persia, produced their famous reports of the archaeological riches of the country.

Relations were resumed in 1844, this time at the initiative of the French, with the aim of signing a commercial treaty with Persia and helping the case of the Lazarist missionaries who had been maltreated in Azarbaijan. Comte Étienne de Sartiges was sent to Persia as an envoy in August 1844 and succeeded in befriending the grand vizier, Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī (q.v.). He arranged for the appointment of Ernest Cloquet (q.v.), who took up his position in 1846 as



Moḥammad Shah's personal physician (AMAE, ADP Perse, vol. 30, Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī's letter of 4 Šawwāl 1261/6 October 1845 to Guizot). The count also succeeded in obtaining decrees for the protection of the Lazarist schools founded to educate the Chaldeans of Azarbaijan. The negotiations about commerce, held in Tehran in 1847, culminated in July in a draft treaty, taken ceremoniously to Paris by Mīrzā Moḥammad-ʿAlī Khan, the ambassador extraordinary. In October the French government decided to appoint Sartiges as its envoy extraordinary to Persia, but in February 1848 Louis-Philippe was overthrown. Franco-Persian relations were not a priority for the new Republican government and Sartiges' position in Tehran became less secure. An incremental series of blunders followed: the commercial treaty and the gifts for Persian officials were sent back with much delay, and Alphonse Dano, secretary to the delegation, did not arrive in Tehran until September 1848. The French condolences on the death of Moḥammad Shah were only presented in April 1849, by which time the Franco-Persian rapprochement of 1847 had already provoked the anti-French animosity of the Russian and English envoys. Mīrzā Taqī Khan, Amīr-(e) Kabīr (q.v.), Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's famous grand vizier, distrusted the Republican regime and rejected the commercial treaty on the grounds that its terms were unfavorable to Persia (Amanat, pp. 104-10). Apart from Dr. Cloquet, the rest of the French employees, i.e. Jules Richard, Joseph-Pierre Ferrier, and Général Barthélémy Semino, were not paid regularly (AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 24, p. 368; Calmard, 1997, p. 21), and Sartiges left Persia in August 1849 having failed to reach a compromise solution.

1850 to 1871

The following two decades were a period of understanding and friendly exchanges between the two countries with the two legations, French and Persian, firmly established in Tehran and Paris. From 1850, Dāwūd Khan, the chief interpreter (*motarjem-e awwal*) at the Persian court, renewed contacts with the French in Constantinople (AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 24, p. 347). In 1852, the prime minister, Mīrzā Āqā Khan Nūrī E'temād-al-Dawla (q.v.) was in need of a mediating power to help him revive the alliance with the English, and accepted the commercial treaty proposed by France in July 1855. The terms were similar to those of the 1848 treaty, but they did not include the political guarantees desired by Persia. A year later, Mīrzā Farroḳ Khan Ġaffārī Amīn-al-Molk, later Amīn-al-Dawla (q.v.), the Persian delegate in Paris, finalized the alliance between France and Persia, signed a peace treaty with the English



(Amanat, pp. 306-37) and, in October 1858, brought back a French military mission to Persia (SHAT, 7N, 1664). In January 1859, Ḥasan-ʿAlī Khan, Amīr(-e) Neẓām Garrūsī (q.v.) was appointed Persian minister to Paris. He was also responsible for arranging the education in Europe of over sixty Persian students, mostly graduates of Dār al-fonūn (q.v.; AMAE, CP Perse, vol. 34, p. 118; Maḥbūbī, *Moʻassasāt* I, pp. 320-53). After his resignation in 1867 he was followed by two chargés d'affaires, Mīrzā Yūsof Khan and then Naẓar Āqā Yamīn-al-Salṭana, a Chaldean originally from Urmia (Nāṭeq, 1996, p. 171) in December 1869. The Persian diplomatic representation in France was now quite substantial, with a military attaché as well as several consuls in Paris and the provinces. In Tehran, Mīrzā Saʿīd Khan, who held the ministry for foreign affairs for twenty-two years, issued directives and wrote policy guidelines (Amanat, p. 287) and generally did his best to handle the British and to safeguard the western frontiers against the Ottomans. He also sought French advice and assistance. Napoleon III, emperor from 1852, responded by ordering the establishment of a legation in Tehran in July 1854. Prosper Bourée (July 1854), Baron Pichon (August 1857), Arthur de Gobineau (January 1862), Jacques de Massignac (October 1864), and R. E. de Bonnières (March 1867) were the first ministers appointed to this post, regarded as a junior position in Paris. They were therefore in no great hurry to take up their posts, as is shown by the generous length of vacations and the gentle pace of return journeys of the four chargé d'affaires: Gobineau, Henry de Bellonet, Julien de Rochechouart and Comte de Maugny. Their instructions, too, were somewhat uninspiring, mainly advising restraint, for Tehran was considered an observation post with limited commercial interests. Although dissatisfied with such a minor assignment, these ministers laid the foundations of four important pillars of French influence in Persia before 1870: as protectors, teachers, court physicians, and military advisors. Unofficially, they assumed the protection of the Catholics, a cornerstone of French influence. In Tehran, Tabrīz (where the consulate was opened in 1866), and Isfahan, French envoys offered protection to Lazarist missionaries, the Chaldeans of Azarbaijan, and the Catholic Armenians.

On the other hand, the treaty of 1855, which turned out to be the last official attempt in the 19th century by the French government to arrive at a commercial understanding with Persia, included a most-favored-nation clause and recognized the legal status of French citizens and protégés in Persia for seventy years. In 1864, Jean-Baptiste Nicolas (d. in Tehran in 1875, AMAE, PA-AP, Ducrocq, vol. 36), was in charge of the Consulate in Rašt and particularly



concerned with protecting French interests in the silkworm industry. Finally, the tradition of having a French court physician continued, and in 1858 Doctor Joseph Désiré Tholozan, of the Corps de Santé of the French army, succeeded to the position following Dr. Cloquet's death in 1855. The French army enjoyed a short-lived renewal of prestige and, between 1858 and 1867, the twelve members of Commandant Victor Brongniart's military mission served directly under the commander of the Persian army. Joseph-Philippe Ferrier, adjutant in Boissier's military mission of 1839 extended his contract directly with the Persian government in 1846 and left Persia in 1851. Helped by his pro-British sympathies, he had an eventful time in Persia and wrote much on his travels in Persia and Afghanistan (Hambly, pp. vii-xxii). Général Buhler was employed directly by the Persian government from 1852 until his death in 1884; and Capitaine Michel Rous continued his innovative contributions to the creation of a modern arms factory (Maḥbūbī, *Mo'assasāt* I, pp. 92-93, 204-5, 272; SHAT, 7N, 1664), and French officers continued teaching in the Tehran Military College. All this came to an end with the French defeat at Sedan in 1870, the substitution of the Republic for the Empire, and the capitulation of Paris. The events shocked the Persians, and although relations were not cut off, the trust and the confidence had gone.

1871 to 1918

From 1871 to 1918, Franco-Persian relations were officially maintained, but in a low-key. A vanquished France had little attraction for Persia, where Anglo-Russian rivalries were stronger than ever. Nonetheless, Naẓar Āqā Yamīn-al-Salṭana, named minister plenipotentiary in August 1873, headed a full legation, composed of several attachés. In 1903, there were thirteen Persian consuls or vice-consuls resident in France (two in Paris and in Bastia, and one in Bayonne, Béziers, Bordeaux, Le Havre, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Nice, and Rouen). Naẓar Āqā was replaced by Şamad Khan Momtāz-al-Salṭana (Bāmdād, *Rejāl* II, p. 181) in 1905. The liberal tendencies of Momtāz-al-Salṭana brought him close to the Republican authorities; and his brother, Mīrzā Esmā'īl Khan Momtāz-al-Dawla, head of the Majles when it was shelled in 1908, was granted asylum by the French Legation in Tehran. The cordial relationship established between France and Persia by Naẓar Āqā and Şamad Khan, who were both liked by the French authorities, was further reinforced by the state visits of the two Qajar kings, Nāşer-al-Dīn Shah and Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah, to France and by Persian participation in the Great Exhibitions of 1878 and 1900. In Persia, with the notable exception of René de Balloy (1881-98) and Raymond Lecomte



(1908-19), French envoys were in office for too short a time to leave any lasting imprint. Within forty years, ten ministers (R-E. de Bonnières, Alexandre Mellinet in 1872; Arthur Tricou in 1879; Fernand Souhart, Ernest Bourgarel in 1900; Albert Defrance in 1902; Eugène Descos in 1905; Maximilien de la Martinière in 1907; besides Balloy and Lecomte) took it in turn with nine chargé d'affaires to head the French Legation. The vice-consulates of Būšehr, opened in 1879, and Rašt, which operated only intermittently, saw the appointment of six vice-consuls, including Ramire Vadala and Jules Sempé. The latter served during the time of the Jangalī movement (1914-21). In Shiraz, Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan was the consular agent in 1906. The consuls in Tabrīz were Louis Ernest Crampon, Louis Charles Marie Emerat, Emile Charles Bernay, Pierre Abel Bergeron, and Alphonse Nicolas (1906-16), who was born in Persia and spoke Persian fluently (Nāṭeq, 1996, pp. 106-7). He was replaced by Lucien Saugon in May 1916. The French chief physicians in the service of the Qajars—Joseph Tholozan, who resided in Persia from 1858 until his death in 1897; Jean-Baptiste Feuvrier (q.v., 1889); and Jean Étienne Justin Schneider (1896) in Tehran, and R. Coppin in Tabrīz (1901-9)—provided France with an informal but significant source of influence at court. The extension of the Legation's residence in Tehran in 1882 showed a desire for enhancement of prestige, contrary to the instructions of the French ministers of foreign affairs, who insisted that French political and economic interests in Persia should remain modest. From the 1890s, the French sought cooperation with the Russians; in the 1900s, the prospects of a future triple alliance which would include Britain meant that the French were also keen not to annoy the British by thwarting their ambitions in Persia (AMAE, NS Perse, vol. 38, p. 16). Despite the creation of a society in 1909, "the Franco-Persian Union," which aimed to study all questions relating to Franco-Persian Relations (Ghaffari, pp. 35, 334-35; Bast, p. 104), France still maintained that her official policy towards Persia merely followed those of her allies. The French response to repeated Persian demands for agricultural, financial, and legal advisers was limited to recommending Fabius Lafont (1907) and Eugène Bizot (1908-10), followed by Gustave Demorgny (Ġaffārī, pp. 61-67). This policy was maintained during the World War I, despite Lecomte's efforts in 1915 (Bast, pp. 91-95), the Franco-British desire to counter the Triple Alliance, and the Persian wish, in 1917, that France should support the evacuation of Russian and British troops from Persia. In September 1917 the French sent a mobile hospital ("l'Ambulance") to Russia to treat the injured Russian troops fighting the Turks. The headquarters at Tiflis sent this hospital to Urmia and after the departure of the Russians, the French unit remained behind and provided humanitarian and military



support (Hellot-Bellier, 1996, pp. 68-72) to help the Christian militia, which had emerged in 1918 as a local movement. This decision, taken in Tiflis and not by the French legation in Tehran, was criticized by both the Persian and French governments and resulted in unwelcome repercussions: the French members of the hospital were humiliated and fighting broke out between the Christian militia and the Azarbaijan Democratic Party (AMAE, *Asie 1918-40*, vol. 23, pp. 35, 47).

A few Frenchmen acted on their own and undertook private economic projects: Tholozan sought a shipping concession on the Kārūn River, but this was finally granted to Britain (AMAE, *CP Perse*, vol. 38, p. 133); Barral and Rambaud planned to establish sugar refineries in Gilān in 1878; gas-lighting in Tehran was carried out by Boital in 1881 (AMAE, *CP Perse*, vol. 38, p. 163), Buhler, Vauvilliers, and Pontèves-Sabran provided surveys for road building; Coppin opened pharmacies in Tabrīz and Tehran; and Deville was in charge of the customs at Kermānšāh. In 1912 the “Syndicat Franco-Iranien” founded in 1912 in Paris and represented in Tehran by Georges P. Bertrand started to exploit coal and minerals in the south of the Caspian Sea (AMAE, *NS Perse*, vol. 60, 8 April 1914) and the trading house of Gilbert and Pfeiffer planned to export supplies of cigarette paper. The Marseille and Lyon chambers of commerce also wanted to engage in commercial activities in Persia, but only the trading houses of Bonnet and Terrail-Payen of Lyon managed to maintain their business in Rašt and trade in the manufacture and export of silk (Ġaffārī, p. 35; AMAE, *NS Perse*, vol. 48, Descos’ letter). Raindre gave the Société d’Études du Transpersan a new impetus, and Banque Privée participated in financing the Jolfā-Tabrīz Russian railway line (AMAE, *NS Perse*, vol. 38, p. 256).

In spite of these commercial activities, and taking into account the important French exports of weapons and alcohol, in 1914 France ranked fifth as a trade partner for Persia. This confirmed the opinion of Louis Marin, a member of parliament, who in 1911 entitled his pamphlet “The Unacceptable Shrinking of Our Influence in Persia.” By contrast, cultural, educational, and archaeological contributions of France showed great dynamism and progress, as is illustrated in their separate entries (see [DÉLÉGATIONS ARCHÉOLOGIQUES FRANÇAISES i](#) and [france xiib](#)). Moreover, the protection given by the French authorities to Greek, Swiss, and Italian citizens, and to the Swedish officers of the Gendarmerie in 1911, was official, in contrast to the tacit protection given to Catholics in Persia. On the whole, therefore, Franco-Persian relations



remained in accordance with the guarded stance maintained by France in deference to the wishes of Britain and Russia, which expected her to maintain a reserved attitude (“l’attitude réservée que l’Angleterre et la Russie nous demandaient d’observer”; AMAE, Note rédigée au Ministère français des Affaires Étrangères, NS Perse, vol. 17, pp. 234-38).

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