



# FREEMASONRY II. IN THE QAJAR PERIOD

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Persians made their first acquaintance with Freemasonry outside Persia, in India, and more importantly in Europe, and it was not until the first decade of the 20th century that a lodge regularly affiliated to one of the recognized European obediences appeared in the country. Freemasonry nonetheless played a role of some importance in the 19th-century history of Persia, largely because of the linkages to foreign powers that inevitably accompanied the initiation of Persian diplomats in European capitals. In addition, a segment of the Persian elite seems to have been genuinely fascinated by Freemasonry as a form of ideology and organization that was both reminiscent of indigenous types of association and a harbinger of the European world view on “progress.”

The earliest evidence of Persian contact with Freemasonry is found in *Toḥfat al-‘ālam*, memoirs of India written by Mīr ‘Abd-al-Laṭīf Šūštarī (d. 1220/1805). He describes Freemasonry as widespread among Europeans but open to all, irrespective of religion, and remarks that it is known “among the Indians and the Persian-speakers of India as *farāmūšī* (forgetfulness), which is not inappropriate, given that their answer to any question (concerning



Freemasonry) is: ‘I cannot remember’” (Šūštārī, pp. 258-59). This observation implies that Persians (probably merchants, like Šūštārī himself) were among the numerous Muslim initiates of the Calcutta lodge, which had been founded by the British in 1730, although Šūštārī himself does not appear to have been one of them. It suggests also that the term *farāmūšī*, for long current in Persia as a popular appellation for Freemasonry, as well as *farāmūš-kāna* (house of forgetfulness) designating a Masonic lodge, originated in India, passing from there not only to Persia but also to Central Asia; the words are used by the Bukharan statesman and writer Ahmad Dāneš (q.v.; d. 1314/1897) when describing the lodges of Europe and India (additionally, he uses the word *farāmūš-kāna* to designate an initiate; Donish, pp. 38-41; Mīrzāyev, p. 411). Another Persian visitor to India in the first decade of the 19th century to report both on the existence there of Masonic lodges and of Persian interests in them was a certain Abu’l-Fatḥ Solṭān-al-Wā‘eẓīn (Ḥā’erī, 1988, pp. 454-55).

The first Persian to encounter Freemasonry on its native European soil was Mīrzā Abū Ṭāleb Khan Eṣfahānī (q.v.), who visited a lodge during his stay in London from January 1800 to June 1802 but declined an offer of initiation because of the riotous and licentious proceedings he allegedly witnessed among the masons (Abū Ṭāleb, p. 454). By contrast, ‘Askar Khan Afšār, Fatḥ-‘Alī Shah’s envoy to France in 1808, accepted initiation into the mother lodge of the Philosophic Scottish Rite in Paris at a ceremony attended by Regnault de Saint-Jean d’Angély, Napoleon’s minister of state. He became thereby the first in a whole series of Persian diplomats to be inducted into Freemasonry under the auspices of their hosts. The ceremony was also the earliest of many similar occasions on which the allegedly “Oriental” origins of Freemasonry were invoked in order to present it to Persians as a lost tradition of their own which they ought to revive (Hutin, p. 103). The French example was followed two years later by the British when Mīrzā Abu’l-Ḥasan Khan Īlčī Šīrāzī (q.v.), ambassador to London, was proposed for membership of a lodge by Sir Gore Ouseley, his official host. Ouseley accompanied Mīrzā Abu’l-Ḥasan Khan on his return journey to Persia with an appointment as British ambassador and authorization to pay the Persian neophyte one thousand rupees a month if he conducted Persian foreign policy to the liking of Britain (Rā’īn, 1968, pp. 36-37, citing Public Records Office, London, F.O. 60/118). Ouseley was also granted a patent as provincial grand master of Persia, but there is no evidence that he in fact established a lodge in Tehran.

The next Persian to be initiated into British Freemasonry was Mīrzā Ṣāleḥ



Širāzī, one of the five students sent to England in 1231/1815 by ‘Abbās Mīrzā (q.v.). In his memoirs he records the initiation that took place on 4 November 1818, and he appears to have taken his Masonic vows seriously, for he offers few details of the ceremony: “to write more concerning this matter is not permissible” (Mīrzā Šāleḥ, pp. 189, 372, 374). One of Mīrzā Šāleḥ’s companions, Mīrzā Ja‘far Khan Farāhānī, is also said to have been recruited into British Freemasonry. These two students were followed in 1835 by three sons of Ḥosayn-‘Alī Mīrzā Farmāfarmā (q.v.), who had unsuccessfully sought the throne after the death of Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah in 1250/1834. All three, Reżāqolī, Najafqolī, and Teymūr, were brought to England by James Fraser, formerly at the British embassy in Tehran, and were initiated into a London lodge under his auspices in July 1835 (Fraser, I, p. 233). The British presumably regarded the Masonic link to the princes as potentially useful if it ever proved necessary to use them as a means of pressure on the Persian government. Four years later, another Persian was initiated into Freemasonry while visiting London: ‘Abd-al-Fattāḥ Garmrūdī, who was accompanying Ḥosayn Khan Moqaddam Ājūdānbāšī on a diplomatic mission to Britain, France, and Austria. The head of the mission himself had, however, a low opinion of Freemasonry, atypically for a Persian diplomat of the Qajar period (Rā‘īn, 1969, I, pp. 281-85).

Of greater long-term significance for the development of Persian Freemasonry than these scattered initiations was the induction of seven members of the mission headed by Mīrzā Farroḡ Khan Ġaffārī that had been sent to France to regulate, under French auspices, the consequences of the Anglo-Persian War of 1856. The seven initiated into the lodge *Sincère Amitié* at the Paris headquarters of the Grand Orient on 10 December 1857, consisted of Ġaffārī himself, Mīrzā Malkom Khan, Mīrzā Zamān Khan, Narīmān Khan, Moḥammad-‘Alī Āqā, Mīrzā Reżā, and ‘Alī-Naqī (Algar, 1970, p. 28). Several of these remained active in Masonic circles in later years and it is no exaggeration to speak of a Masonic network, linked to the French Grand Orient, having come into being among Persian diplomats in Europe during the second half of the 19th century; the Masonic lodges provided a venue where they could congregate with European statesmen as well as with each other. A second ambassadorial initiation into the lodge *Sincère Amitié* took place on 28 February 1860. Those initiated on this occasion were the ambassador, Ḥasan-‘Alī Khan Garrūsī, Mīrzā Moḥsen Khan (later ambassador in Istanbul), Mīrzā Šādeq Āqā, and Naẓar Āqā (later himself to become ambassador to France). The initiation of Mīrzā Farroḡ Khan two years earlier was recalled, and his devotion to Freemasonry praised as inspiring his contribution to the



regeneration Persia was allegedly undergoing “through impregnating itself with the spirit and genius of France” (*Bulletin du Grand Orient de France* 15, 6850 [=1860], pp. 396-97). From this statement can be derived the conclusion that the motive underlying the French propagation of Freemasonry among Persian diplomats was not so much political as cultural, an expression of the megalomaniacal *mission civilisatrice* that was proclaimed by both imperial and republican France. This is confirmed by the account of a meeting of Sincère Amitié in July 1873 that was attended by Mīrzā Reżā Khan and Narīmān Khan; in a welcoming speech, Masonic initiation was depicted as the culminating stage in the Persians’ assimilation of French culture (*Le Monde maçonnique* 15, 1873, pp. 174-81).

It was one of the first batch of initiates to Sincère Amitié, Mīrzā Malkom Khan (d. 1326/1908), who established the earliest *farāmūš-kāna* on Persian soil; it must, however, be regarded as a pseudo-Masonic institution given its lack of affiliation to any of the European obediences. The *farāmūš-kāna* was founded by Malkom after its return to Tehran in 1274/1858; its nominal head was Malkom’s father, Mīrzā Ya‘qūb Khan, an Armenian convert to Islam, and it met in the house of Jalāl-al-Dīn Mīrzā, one of the numerous offspring of Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah. The extent of its membership is uncertain, although definitely inferior to the thirty thousand that Malkom once claimed. Among the known initiates were Solṭān Oways Mīrzā Eḥtešām-al-Dawla and Sayf-Allāh Mīrzā, both Qajar princes like Jalāl-al-Dīn Mīrzā; Majd-al-Molk, author of the reformist treatise *Resāla-ye majdīya* and father of Mīrzā ‘Alī Khan Amīn-al-Dawla (q.v.), who was briefly chief minister to Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah; Reżāqolī Khan Hedāyat, littérateur and first director of the Dār-al-Fonūn, where Malkom himself had been one of the instructors; the chroniclers Mīrzā Moḥammad-Taqī Lesān-al-Molk Sepehr and Mīrzā Moḥammad-Ja‘far Ḥaḡā‘eqnegār Kormūjī; the poet laureate, Mīrzā Maḥmūd Khan Šabā; the philosophers Mīrzā Ja‘far Ḥakīm-Elāhī, Mīrzā Ḥasan Jelwa, and Shaikh Hādī Najmābādī; and two members of the clerical class, Sayyed Šādeq Ṭabāṭabā‘ī and Hājī Mīrzā Zayn-al-‘Ābedīn, Emām-e Jom‘a of Tehran. (Algar, 1973, pp. 49-50) This impressive roster may be taken as proof of the sympathetic curiosity about Freemasonry that was evidently widespread among the Persian elite; it is unlikely that the initiates should have been particularly devoted to Malkom, who was considerably younger than most of them and had never occupied any important post in Persia.

Malkom’s purpose in assembling these dignitaries was varyingly presented by



himself and interpreted by others. In a treatise written apparently while the *farāmūš-kāna* was still functioning, he defended it against actual or anticipated charges of subverting religion; if secrecy characterized its functioning, he explained, this was precisely because prudential concealment (*ketmān*) was a well-established principle of Shi'ite Islam, and the goal of masonry was nothing other than establishing fraternity among the believers (*Resāla-ye farāmūš-kāna*, cited in Rā'īn, 1969, I, pp. 545-54). Malkom had no need to assert this alleged conformity of the *farāmūš-kāna* with Islam when he described its goals to the Azarbaijani playwright and essayist, Mīrzā Fath-'Alī Ākūndzāda (d. 1295/1878, q.v.), during a visit to Tiflis in 1872, for his host was a convinced atheist. Instead, he ascribed to Freemasonry straightforward worldly purposes such as the fostering of modern learning, civic virtue, and social solidarity (Ākūndzāda, pp. 294-95). The statement Malkom gave to Wilfred Scawen Blunt in London a few years later is replete with egoistic hyperbole, but informative in that Malkom relates having learned "the organization of the secret societies and Freemasonries" and conceiving "a plan which should incorporate the political wisdom of Europe with the religious wisdom of Asia" (Blunt, pp. 82-84). From this, and from the content of treatises on governmental reform that Malkom wrote during the years when the *farāmūš-kāna* was operating, it may be deduced that his purpose was to gather together under his leadership members of the Persian elite who might be disposed to some degree of westernizing reform.

Although Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah had undoubtedly known of the existence of the *farāmūš-kāna* despite the secrecy surrounding it and may even have approved of what he imagined to be its goals, the life of the institution was brought to an end by royal decree in October 1861; anyone who so much as uttered the word *farāmūš-kāna* was threatened with condign punishment (E'temād-al-Salṭana, p. 118). Conditions were unstable in the capital, and rumors were rife that the Shah had died. It was therefore easy for courtiers hostile to Malkom to persuade the ruler that all potential sources of subversion had to be blocked. Moreover, suspicions persisted that the *farāmūš-kāna* was hostile to Islam and even harbored Bābīs, despite the presence in it of a handful of 'olamā' and Malkom's own protestations of religiosity. The episode was thus short-lived, and only a few initiates of the *farāmūš-kāna* went on to pursue seriously either Masonic or reformist interests.

Persian Masonic activity continued, therefore, to be centered outside the country, primarily in London and Paris, but also, to quite a significant degree,



in Istanbul. The earliest lodges to appear in the Ottoman land had been patronized primarily by foreign residents and members of the non-Muslim minorities, but by the middle of the 19th century high-ranking and reform-minded Ottoman officials had also begun to participate in Masonic activity; they were, indeed, attracted to Freemasonry at least as strongly as their Persian counterparts. The lodges of Istanbul thus came to serve as one venue where Persian diplomats stationed in the Ottoman capital came together with the men responsible for the reforms (*tanẓīmāt*) introduced into the administration of the Ottoman Empire. Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Sepahsālār, the Persian ambassador at the Ottoman court from 1858 to 1870, is said to have owed much of his success in promoting Persian interests to such Masonic connections, but firm evidence of Masonic activity on his part while in Istanbul—indeed, even of his ever having been initiated—is lacking. A Neʿmat-Allāhī dervish popularly known as Hājī Mīrzā Ṣafā, informally attached to the Persian embassy during Sepahsālār’s tenure, is also reputed to have been active in Istanbul Masonic circles; what is certain is only that he, like the ambassador, was on close terms with Ottoman statesmen such as Meḥmed Emīn-ʿAlī Pasha and Keçecizade (Keçejīzāda) Meḥmed Foʿād Pasha who were indeed fully fledged masons (Algar, 1993, pp. 34-36).

Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan’s successor as Persian envoy, Ḥasan-ʿAlī Khan Garrūsī, had been initiated into the lodge Sincère Amitiéin 1860, and it may be safely assumed that while in Istanbul he associated with Ottoman Freemasons also owing their allegiance to the French Grand Orient. The record is more substantial with respect to the next ambassador, Mīrzā Moḥsen Khan Moʿīn-al-Molk, whose Masonic affiliations went back to the same Paris ceremony of 1860. By the time he arrived in the Ottoman capital in 1873, he had behind him more than a decade of Masonic experience, in London as well as in Paris, and he lost no time in establishing contacts with the Masonic circles of Istanbul. The first lodge with which he is said to have been associated was Ser, which seems, however, to have been exclusively Armenian in its composition and to have conducted its work in the Armenian language. More significant was Moʿīn-al-Molk’s association with the lodge I Proodos, which owed its obedience to the French Grand Orient and had been inaugurated on 28 March 1868 (Dumond, pp. 188-90). As its name suggests, this lodge was initially Greek in terms of both membership and language of operation, but its scope was broadened to include non-Greeks in 1870, when its leadership became vested in Cleanthi Scalieri, a Greek money changer and commodities broker. It was under the auspices of Scalieri that the Ottoman heir-apparent, briefly to reign



as Sultan Morād V in 1878 before being deposed as mentally incompetent, was initiated into Freemasonry, evidently as part of a plan to create a Masonic nucleus within the Ottoman royal family. Moʻin-al-Molk may have been present when Morād took the Masonic vows on 28 October 1872, under conditions of the utmost secrecy in the house of a French lawyer resident in Istanbul; it is certain that he was on hand when two other Ottoman princes, Nūr-al-Dīn and Kamāl-al-Dīn, were initiated in September 1873 and August 1874, respectively. He also attended the initiation in August 1873 of Mīrzā Abuʻl-Qāsem, secretary to the Persian heir apparent, Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Mīrzā, and Mīrzā Najaf-ʻAlī, first secretary at the Persian embassy (Dumont, p. 190). A full panoply of Persian masons was on hand at I Proodos when the lodge met in December 1873 to initiate Mūsā Antippa, Persian consul in Antioch. Among those in attendance were Moʻin-al-Molk, Mīrzā Najaf-ʻAlī, and Mīrzā Malkom Khan, who was en route at the time from Tehran to his ambassadorial post in London. Scalieri praised the Persians for their services to Freemasonry and appealed to them to work still more energetically “to kindle anew in Persia, homeland of Zoroasters [sic], the torch of this philosophy to which we fondly refer the origins of our order.” Malkom responded on behalf of his countrymen with a pledge that Moʻin-al-Molk would continue to be at the service of his brother masons in Istanbul (*Le Monde maçonnique* 15, 1873, pp. 382-86).

In 1878, when Morād V was deposed almost three months to the day after succeeding to the Ottoman throne, Scalieri loyally plotted to restore him, but with no success. The sole result of his intrigues, apart from his own precipitate flight to Greece, was that I Proodos fell into disrepute and was temporarily abandoned by all its non-Greek members. By the early 1880s it had, however, re-acquired “a small Turco-Persian nucleus” of some five or six people, which almost certainly included Moʻin-al-Molk (Dumont, p. 193). The Persian ambassador’s activities were not, in any event, restricted to I Proodos. In 1874 he had been promoted to the rank of Chevalier Rose-Croix and appointed to a Masonic chapter intended to act as a supervisory body for all Istanbul lodges affiliated to the French Grand Orient. Moreover, Persians continued to be initiated into Istanbul lodges, examples being Abuʻl-Ḥasan Mīrzā Šayḡ-al-Raʻīs, whose initiation in 1886 took place on the recommendation of Moʻin-al-Molk; Mīrzā Faraj-Allāh and Šādeq Āqā, both secretaries at the embassy, inducted into the lodge *Étoile du Bosphore* in 1887; and Mīrzā Amān-Allāh, vice-consul, initiated into the same lodge in 1890. Moʻin-al-Molk continued to reinforce his prominence in Istanbul masonry until his return to Persia in 1889. He became



involved in the affairs of yet another lodge, the Italia Risorta, which was affiliated to the Italian Grand Orient. By May 1888 he had evidently rendered such service that he was awarded the thirty-third degree by a delegation headed by Geraci, representative of the Italian Grand Orient, that came to visit him at the Persian embassy (*La Chaîne d'Union*, 8 June 1888, p. 244). It appears, in fact, that Moʻin-al-Molk was the grand master of the Italia Risorta, for he is referred to as such in a report describing the reception given to two visiting Persian masons at the Étoile du Bosphore (*La Chaîne d'Union*, 1 January 1888, pp. 13-14). Another Persian, Hājj Moḥammad-ʿAlī Sayyāḥ Maḥallātī, was also a member of the Italia Risorta; it is unknown whether his initiation on 12 April 1872 took place under the auspices of Moʻin-al-Molk (Sabatiennes, p. 422., n. 26).

This Persian diplomat's lengthy and conscientious involvement in Masonic activity came to the notice of a fellow diplomat and mason, Sir Arthur Hardinge, British envoy to Persia from 1900 to 1905. In a dispatch dated 6 September 1901, Hardinge reported that Moʻin-al-Molk had been "the worshipful master of a Moslem lodge" during his years in Istanbul (there were, however, no exclusively Muslim lodges in the Ottoman capital), and that after his return to Persia in 1890 he had organized a Masonic lodge in Tehran while serving in succession as minister of justice and minister of foreign affairs. The members of this Masonic group, which, according to Hardinge, had ceased to constitute a regular lodge after the death of Moʻin-al-Molk in 1317/1899, were Maḥmūd Khan Ḥakīm-al-Molk, Nāṣer-al-Molk Hedāyat, Qawām-al-Dawla, Mīrzā Naṣr-Allāh Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla, and ʿAlī-Naqī Khan Moḵber-al-Dawla. It numbered among it, Hardinge censoriously proceeded, "certain persons who take advantage of their connection with it for purposes utterly alien to the principles of Freemasonry and seek to use it as a bond of union between the aristocratical discontents of the Opposition and Court parties and Mahommedan fanatics whose views and objects are entirely different" (Public Records Office, London, F.O. 60/637). It is unlikely that Moʻin-al-Molk did establish a formal lodge in Tehran, but probable that the individuals named did cluster around him, partly on the basis of shared Masonic loyalties, and conceivable that they played the political role Hardinge attributed to them. That Hardinge was aware of the political influence of Persian Freemasons is shown by his forwarding to London their request for affiliation "to our own Grand Lodge." The British Masonic authorities declined the application, to Hardinge's obvious disappointment: "One prominent Persian statesman, the Anglophile Nasr-al-Mulk [Nāṣer-al-Molk] had been



initiated at Oxford, and might, I think, have made a good beginning as Grand Master” (Hardinge, pp. 77-78).

In November 1906, a little more than a year after Hardinge’s recall from Tehran, the traditional primacy of the French Grand Orient among Persian masons was reaffirmed with the establishment in Tehran of the lodge Réveil de l’Iran (Lož-e bīdārī-e Īrānīān) the first regularly affiliated lodge to operate in Persia. This resulted from the initiative of a dozen French and Persian masons most of whom had already been initiated into the degree of master in the lodges of Paris (primarily the Clémentine Amitié).

The first worshipful master was Jean-Baptiste Lemaire, music director of the Persian army, but most of the founding officers of the lodge were Persians. Even before official recognition was received from the headquarters of the Grand Orient in Paris, they began initiating a large number of prominent persons, many of whom were connected to the Constitutional movement: the scholar and politician Ḥasan Taqīzāda; the writer, journalist, and lexicographer Mīrzā ‘Alī-Akbar Khan Dehḳodā; two members of the clerical class, Šādeq Mojtahed Sangalajī and Esmā’īl Mojtahed Behbahānī; Naṣr-Allāh Taqawī, chairman of the Majles; Jamāl-al-Dīn Eṣfahānī, the preacher and crypto-Azali; the politician and scholar Moḥammad-‘Alī Forūḡī Dokā’-al-Molk; Qajar princes such as Mas‘ūd Mīrzā Zēll-al-Solṭān, Amān-Allāh Mīrzā, and Ebrāhīm Khan Zāhīr-al-Dawla; and the poet Adīb-al-Mamālek Farāhānī. To the last is owed one of the few literary documents of Persian Freemasonry, a poem in 538 rhyming couplets entitled *Ā’in-e Frāmāšūn wa Farāmūš-ḳāna*, notable for its ingenious attempt to appropriate for Freemasonry numerous themes of Islamic and Persian tradition (for example, the koranic expression, *ahl al-bayt*, meaning the family of the Prophet, is interpreted by Adīb-al-Mamālek to mean “the People of the Lodge”; *Dīvān*, p. 575, verse 18 of the poem).

The royalist coup d’état of June 1908 inevitably disrupted the functioning of the lodge, but initiations on a relatively large scale resume from 1910 onwards. The failure of certain members of the lodge to pay their dues and the further dislocations brought about by World War I combined, however, to subvert this promising new beginning, and no mention of the Réveil de l’Iran occurs in the yearbook of the French Grand Orient after 1923. Several of its members, notably Ḥosayn ‘Alā, went on after the disappearance of this lodge to play important roles in the Masonic formations of the Pahlavi period.



Finally, it may be mentioned that two pseudo-Masonic organizations were active in the same years as the lodge Bīdārī-e Īrān, engaging like it in attempts to promote the cause of constitutional government in Persia. The first of these was the Anjoman-e Okowwat (q.v.), an offshoot of the Ne‘mat-Allāhī Sufi order, that owed its foundation in 1377/1899 to Mīrzā ‘Alī Khan Zāhīr-al-Dawla, a disciple of Šafī-‘Alī Shah and brother-in-law of Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah; it relinquished the traditional structure of a Sufi order in favor of one drawn from Freemasonry. The membership bore a decidedly aristocratic stamp, but also included persons simultaneously active in the lodge Bīdārī-e Īrān. The second such organization, the Jāme‘-e Ādamīyat (Society of Humanity), founded by ‘Abbāsqolī Khan Qazvīnī in 1904, can be characterized as a latter-day reincarnation of Malkom Khan’s original *farāmūš-kāna*; its immediate predecessor was, indeed, the Majma‘-e Ādamīyat (League of Humanity), a group of uncertain membership and influence organized by Malkom during the years he was publishing *Qānūn* (Algar, 1973, pp. 228-37). Active until 1908, the Jāme‘-e Ādamīyat was able to recruit more than three hundred members, primarily court and government officials, together with a few prominent merchants. Its principal, although short-lived, achievement was enlisting the support of Mīrzā ‘Alī-Ašġar Khan Atābak for the cause of reform a mere week before his assassination in August 1907 (Algar, 1973, pp. 248-51, 253-59).

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