



GASTEIGER, ALBERT JOSEPH

GASTEIGER, ALBERT JOSEPH (“Gästager Khan”; b. Innsbruck, 28 March 1823; d. Bozen, 5 July 1890; [Figure 1](#)), baron of Ravenstein and Kobach, Austrian engineering officer, instructor at the Dār al-fonūn (q.v.), and the manager of all civilian and military buildings of the Persian government from 1860 to 1888. He received his early education in Innsbruck and studied philosophy in Verona and engineering at the Technical College in Vienna. In 1846 he joined the Austrian civil service, where he carried out railway installations, road layouts, and river adjustments. He also worked at the great double viaduct and several tunnels during the building of the Semmering railway, the world’s first mountain railway. He lost his job, however, when Austria sold its state railways to the French. At this time Jān Dāwūd Khan, who was in Vienna to hire Austrian specialists for the Persian government, engaged Gasteiger to go to Tehran. After intensive Persian studies, Gasteiger arrived in Tehran on 30 September 1860.

His first task in Persia was the building of the first road conforming with European standards to Saḷṭanatābād; This road connected Tehran to Tajrīš and became known as Kīābān-e Šamīrān. His major work, however, was building the road to Māzandarān (1281-85/1864-68), which involved employing 1,600 pioneers and workers and building twenty-seven bridges as well as the first tunnel in Persia. As a reward, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah appointed him as *mīr panj* (general) and conferred upon him the title Khan. Today’s motor-road essentially follows the line of this road (Gasteiger, pp. 10-12, 20-26). Gasteiger also designed plans for many buildings in Tehran, among them, the famous



Tākīya-ye dawlat, built in 1285/1868, where passion plays were performed (Salby, 1982, p. 103). Gasteiger was also a representative of the Austrian Foreign Office and Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Austrian honorary consul.

In 1870, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah decided to make a pilgrimage to Karbalā', and Gasteiger repaired and partially rebuilt the road via Hamadān and Kermānšāh to the Turkish border and also rendered the road from Kangāvar via Qom to Tehran usable (Gasteiger, pp. 29-31).

Gasteiger was among the Shah's entourage when the latter visited the World Fair in Vienna in 1873. The following year there appeared in Leipzig a parody of the account of the trip (*Das Reisetagebuch*□), which was almost certainly written by Gasteiger. Meanwhile, his corps of engineers had been dismantled, whereupon he retired and returned to Austria (1874). In 1878, when the shah was once more in Europe, Gasteiger again entered the Persian civil service and traveled to Tehran with the Austrian military mission, which was to reorganize the Persian army. He subsequently built the road to Qazvīn (Gasteiger, p. 37). A tour of inspection in Baluchistan produced a book of valuable data about the geographical, economic, and cultural conditions of that region (1881). As a result of commitments with Russia, Gasteiger was due to build the Persian part of the Mašhad-Ashkhabad road in 1886. But, according to Gasteiger's letters written to his family, some Persian officials who had embezzled the funds took advantage of his absence to accuse him of theft (Gasteiger, pp. 46-48; Slaby, 1982, p. 195). Deeply hurt, he asked to be dismissed and returned to Austria in 1888, embittered about the ingratitude of the king, who had once covered him with honors and decorations. He died after a brief illness at Bozen in 1890.

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