



ḤABIB-ALLĀH

ḤABIB-ALLĀH, amir, monarch who initiated modernization in Afghanistan (b. 1872, d. 1919). For a historical account of his reign (1901-19), see [AFGHANISTAN x](#).

When Amir Ḥabib-Allāh ascended the throne, taking the title *Serāj al-mellat wa 'l-din* (“Lantern of the Na-tion and Religion”) he inherited a country at peace. He granted an amnesty to the *sardārs* (notables) expelled by his father, Amir ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān (r. 1880-1901), and invited them to return to Afghanistan. They consisted of two major groups: the exiles in India, who were impressed by the military power of Britain, and those in the Ottoman empire, who were influenced by the nineteenth-century Tanzimat reforms. A member of the Indian group, Moḥammad Nāder Khan (later Nāder Shah, r. 1929-1933), after giving his sister Maḥbuba, “the Hindustani Queen” (*Maleka-ye hendustāni*) in marriage to Ḥabib-Allāh, became one of the his most successful generals (*sepahsālār*). At the same time, Maḥmud Ṭarzi, who had met Jamāl-al-Din Afḡāni (q.v.; Dupree, p. 438), represented the Young Turk element. Ṭarzi was a major proponent of the amir’s modernization efforts (Dupree, pp. 437-40).

The amir realized that modernization in the army and administration required educational reforms and the establishment and expansion of an industrial base. He showed his priorities by appointing his brother, Naṣr-Allāh, as minister of education, and by putting his eldest son, ‘Enāyat-Allāh, in charge of military affairs. Four secretaries (*išiq-āqāsi*) were put in charge of civil, military, court and foreign affairs respectively. He reorganized the provincial



administration and established several state councils, which included Muslim Indian experts. Although he divided the responsibilities for governing the country, Ḥabib-Allāh continued to reserve for himself the authority to make all major decisions.

Amir Ḥabib-Allāh's biggest success was in the field of education. He appointed a ten-man Education Council (*Anjomān-e ma'āref*) headed by Sardār Naṣr-Allāh, which met twice a week and submitted its decisions to the amir for approval. In 1903, he founded the Ḥabibiya School (q.v.). Originally established as a *madrasa*, it recruited students who had completed the lower levels of religious education and trained them according to a modified Anglo-Indian curriculum, which included for the first time subjects other than religion. In order to appease the ulama who had enjoyed a monopoly on education, several *madrāsas* were set up as preparatory schools for transfer to the Ḥabibiya.

In 1907, the Institute of Literary Composition (*Dār al-ta'lif*) was established to translate texts from English and produce teaching materials. In 1914, the Teacher Training College (*Dār al-mo'allemīn*) was founded to provide teachers for the new schools. It was located initially in the Royal Madrasa. The amir allocated in total about two million Kabuli rupees for education during the first ten years of his reign. Modern military education began in 1909 with the opening of the Military School (*Maktab-e fonun-e ḥarbiya*), where Turkish officers introduced the students to drill and the military sciences. General Moḥammad Nāder acted as inspector of the school, which recruited from among the sons of notables). The amir's sons 'Enāyat-Allāh and Amān-Allāh (later king, r. 1919-29; see [AMĀNALLĀH KHAN](#)) were among the first of the school's graduates, who formed a cadre of modern officers in the army. A school for Royal Orderlies (*ārdaliyān*) was opened for newly-converted Nurestānis and the sons of those *māleks* (chiefs) who had revolted but subsequently repented.

During the reign of his father, Ḥabib-Allāh Khan had been "Inspector of industries." In 1892, Amir 'Abd-al-Raḥmān had founded "the workshop" (*māšin-kāna*), by means of a British subsidy which he partially used to construct and maintain it. An arms factory developed from the *māšin-kāna*. British technical specialists also helped in its construction and maintenance. The machinery was steam-operated which was expensive because of a scarcity of wood. One of Ḥabib-Allāh's first projects was the construction of a hydroelectric power station at "Jabol Serāj" (*Jabal al-Serāj*) in present-day Parwān



province. Built by the American engineer A. C. Jewett between 1911 and 1918, this was designed to generate electricity for the first time for his palace, but the *māšīn-ḳāna* continued to be operated by steam for decades into the twentieth century.

Initial steps in advancing public health were taken with the opening of a forty-bed civilian hospital (*šafā-ḳāna-ye molki*) in around 1910. Its Turkish director Dr. Münir İzzat Bey introduced a quarantine procedure and produced an anti-smallpox vaccine. A separate military hospital was run by Indian doctors.

The amir invited experts from the Ottoman empire and India as well as a number of westerners, mostly from Britain, to direct his development projects (Dupree, p. 439). Eventually the *māšīn-ḳāna* produced cannon balls, light arms, cartridges, shoes and complete uniforms. It included divisions for the minting of coins, glass-blowing, carpentry and stone and gem-cutting, including lapis lazuli. All production in the *māšīn-ḳāna* was a state monopoly but a number of private family workshops also existed at the time.

The first telephone line in Afghanistan connected the palace with governmental offices; it was expanded in 1910 to Jalālābād and in 1911 to Jabol Serāj and Paḡ-mān. The amir imported a number of automobiles for his own private use. By 1912, there were thirty cars in Afghanistan and eventually a number of “tongas” and “tumtums,” horse-driven carts, were imported from India. The construction of roads, which was initiated to serve the amir’s own needs, connected Kabul to Jalālābād and thence to the Indian border, and also to Paḡmān, Jabol Serāj, Ġazni and Qandahār. Nonetheless, elephants still continued to be used to carry machinery and equipment imported from abroad; it took two and a half months for elephants to carry electric generators from Jalālābād to Jabol Serāj. The first iron bridges were built over the Kabul river at Jalālābād and at Darunta, thus linking Kabul with the Laḡmān valley. An iron bridge across the Nilāb river at Golbahār was inaugurated in 1911.

The introduction of a modern printing press and the publication of a biweekly newspaper, the *Serāj al-Aḳbār-e Afḡāniya*, had far-reaching consequences. It was published in Persian between 1911 and 1918 under the editorship of Maḥmud Ṭarzi, and thus became the organ of the pan-Islamic and Afghani nationalist parties. Ṭarzi educated the reading public about international affairs and the importance of modernizing the country. Political cartoons were introduced, and the journal also included photographs taken by the amir, a



keen amateur photographer. Also named after Ḥabib-Allāh, was Fayz-Moḥammad Kāteb's *Serāj al-tawāriq*, a history of Afghanistan as far as the last decades of the nineteenth century. Ḥabib-Allāh personally supervised its composition and had it published in the governmental printing house.

Legal reforms included the abolition of *siāh čāh* ("the Black Well") in which prisoners had been thrown to perish, and prison sentences replaced the mutilation of felons. Specific regulations (*nezām-nāmahā*) governed administrative and military procedures, school curricula, the postal system, the issuing of travel permits and other public affairs.

In this way, modernization reforms began in the Kabul province and spread slowly beyond. The embellishment of the amir's residences (including the addition of golf courses) and the construction of a pipeline for potable water from Paḡmān, as well as the aforementioned public works, were the first steps in a process of modernization that emerged from the needs and interests of Amir Ḥabib-Allāh, and continued gradually thereafter.

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