



## ḤĀJI BĀBĀ AFŠĀR

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**ḤĀJI BĀBĀ AFŠĀR**, son of an officer in the army of the Crown Prince ‘Abbās Mirzā (q.v.) and one of the first Persian students sent to study in Europe. Ḥāji Bābā, together with Moḥammad Kāẓem, the son of the same prince’s court painter, left home in the company of the British envoy to Persia, Sir Harford Jones, and arrived in London in October 1811 (Wright, p. 70).

Ḥāji Bābā Afšār was assigned to study chemistry and medicine, but it took a long time for the British authorities to make proper arrangements for the education of the Persian students. The complete program for Ḥāji Bābā’s education started only in April 1813, a month after the death of his companion, Moḥammad Kāẓem (Wright, pp. 73-74). Ḥāji Bābā remained in England until May 1819, mainly at the expense of the British government. He became a friend of Mirzā Šāleḥ Moḥammad Širāzi, a member of the second group of Persian students sent to England in 1815, and returned with him to Persia. Mirzā Šāleḥ often mentions Ḥāji Bābā in his diary (*Safar-nāma*, ed. E. Rā’īn, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, *passim*).

On his return to Tabriz, Ḥāji Bābā was appointed chief physician (*ḥakim-bāši*) to the Crown Prince, a position that he kept after the death of ‘Abbas Mirzā and the accession of Moḥammad Shah. The date of his death, like that of his birth, is uncertain (Bāmdād, *Rejāl* IV, p. 193 says he died in 1252/1836-37, but Ḥabībābādi, *Makārem* IV, p. 1409, gives other sources which indicate he was still alive in 1254/1838-39 and died in Ša’bān 1258/September 1842).

As well as being the first Persian to be educated as a physician in Europe, Ḥāji



Bābā Afšār is remembered thanks to James Morier’s mischievous adoption of his name for the eponymous hero of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. An English traveler who met Ḥāji Bābā in Persia in 1835 noted his flawless English as well as his displeasure with Morier both for abusing his name and for mocking the national character (Stuart, p. 169; quoted by Wright, p. 182; Minovi, p. 183).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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