



## ḤĀJĪ VĀŠANGTON

**ḤĀJĪ VĀŠANGTON** (Washington), epithet for Ḥosaynqoli Khan Mo'tamed-al-Wezāra (later Ṣadr-al-Saltāna; b. Tehran 1265/1849, d. Tehran 1316 Š./1937; [Figure 1](#)), Persia's first ambassador to the United States (1888–89). He was the seventh son of the ignominiously ousted Grand Vizier (*Ṣadr-e a'zam*), Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri, E'temād-al-Dawla (q.v.), and consequently spent his adolescent years (1275–81/1858–64) exiled from Tehran. His family received permission to return to the capital only after his father had died in Qom (Eqbāl, p. 414; *Šaraf*, pp. 1-2).

Ḥosaynqoli began his career in the Foreign Ministry (*Wezārat-e Kāreja*) under the supervision of Sa'id Khan. In 1292/1874, as an auditor (*mostawfi*), he headed the local Council of Reform (Majles-e tanzīmāt-e ḥasana) in Isfahan, and then continued to serve in Tehran at the Bureau of Accounting (*Daftar-e estifā*). He performed the Hajj in 1295/1877, and thereafter became known as Ḥāji. In the Foreign Ministry, he progressed through the ranks to the position of deputy minister (*mo'āwen*). In 1302/1885, he received the title Mo'tamed-al-Wezāra and set out for Bombay as Persia's General Consul in India. In 1305/1888, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah appointed him as the first Persian Special Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary to Washington. He traveled to New York with his retinue of three: W. W. Torrence (secretary), Mirzā Maḥmud Khan Širāzi (translator), and 'Abd-al-'Ali Khan Ājudānbāši (colleague). They landed on the West 22nd Street pier in Manhattan on Sunday 30 September 1888, and checked in at the Windsor Hotel (*The New York Times*, 1st and 2nd October 1888). They left New York for Washington DC, and upon arrival officially met



with the Secretary of State Thomas Francis Bayard. Accompanied by the latter, Ḥosaynqoli delivered his letter of credence to President Grover Cleveland at the Executive Mansion on October 3rd, 1888 (*Records*, p. 1365, Mujāni, 1996b, p. 59). His assignment in the United States lasted less than a full year, but the reason for the briefness of his tenure remains unclear. E'temād-al-Salṭana's allegation that local authorities had dismissed Ḥosaynqoli Khan is not substantiated in documents published by either the Persian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the US Department of State. E'temād-al-Salṭana's caustic reproach of Ḥosaynqoli Khan (E'temād-al-Salṭana, pp. 656, 661), lampooning him as a "lunatic," reveals personal animus rather than impartial observation. Secondary literature (e.g., Bāmdād, *Rejāl* I, pp. 459–60), especially non-academic material (e.g., Ḥātami's motion picture), has often satirized Ḥāji Vāšangton as fanatical, inept, and particularly unfit for his ambassadorial post, an image that can be dispelled in light of primary sources. For example, *The New York Times* reporter who interviewed him upon arrival in New York asserted that he appeared quite well-attired and, while speaking only a few words of English, he was fluent in French (*The New York Times*, October 1, 1888).

In his copious dispatches to Persia Ḥāji Vāšangton presented, sometimes in minute detail, information about the American political system and society (see Ghanoonparvar, pp. 240-43 for sample translations). He openly admired the Americans' disdain for Europeans and regarded Americans as "alert, intelligent, learned, polite, and wealthy." He stressed that all government dignitaries were "servants of the people," an acute observation that undermined the interests of Qajar courtiers like E'temād-al-Salṭana. He even insisted that "the essence of the religion of the Prophet [of Islam] is found in the United States" (Ghanoonparvar, p. 242).

Far from falling from grace on his return to Persia, the ambassador received the laudatory title Ṣadr-al-Salṭana from the Shah, and a few years later in 1310/1891 he was promoted to take charge of the Ministry of Public Welfare (*Wezārat-e fawā'ed-e 'amma*).

Idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, including his frivolous poems, Ḥāji Vāšangton belonged to the group of career bureaucrats consolidated in the late Qajar period. His eventual siding with the Constitutional movement (q.v.; Eqbāl, p. 415), specifically attests to his commitment, not as a courtier but as a bureaucrat, to the advancement of Persia.



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