



KALIFA SOLṬĀN

KALIFA SOLṬĀN (Solṭān-al-'Olamā', b. Isfahan, 1001/1592-93, d. Māzandarān, March 1654), grand vizier under [Shah 'Abbās I](#) (r. 1588-1629) and then again under [Shah 'Abbās II](#) (r. 1642-66). Kālifā Solṭān, whose original name was Sayyed 'Alā'-al-Din Ḥosayn, was the son of Mirzā Rafī'-al-Din Moḥammad and a scion of a well-know family of Mar'aši sayyeds, claiming descent from Qawām-al-Din Mir Bozorg, who ruled Māzandarān in 1385-79. One of his ancestors, Amir Neẓām-al-Din, had settled in Isfahan in the 15th century. Afterwards the family moved up in the ranks of society, owning land in the vicinity of Isfahan, intermarrying with local notables, and attracting the attention of [Shah Esmā'īl I](#) (r. 1501-24) and Shah Ṭahmāsp I (r. 1524-76; see [Eskandar-Beyg Monši](#), I, pp. 147-48, II, p. 1040; [Naṣrābādi](#), I, p. 23).

During the reign of Shah 'Abbās I the prestige and standing of the family soared. In 1617, Kālifā Solṭān's father was appointed *ṣadr-al-mamālek*, the highest function in the Safavid religious administration. Earlier, in 1608-09 or 1609-10, Kālifā Solṭān himself had married into the monarchy when he wed 'Abbās I's third daughter, Kān-Āgā Begom ([Eskandar-Beyg Monši](#), II, p.1013; [Šāmlu](#), I, p. 201; [Ḥosayni-Astarābādi](#), p. 138; [Kātunābādi](#), p. 501). Known for his erudition as well as for his accounting skills, Kālifā Solṭān was appointed grand vizier (*e'temād-al-dawla*) in 1623-24. With these two exalted functions, the family reached a unique position of power ([Eskandar-Beyg Monši](#), II, p. 1090; [Naṣrābādi](#), I, p. 23; [Afandi-Eṣfahāni](#), II, p. 51; [Babayān](#), pp. 378-80).

Almost nothing is known about Kālifā Solṭān's activities during his first tenure as grand vizier. He does not receive much attention in the contemporary



Persian chronicles, nor does he figure in any of the foreign accounts detailing negotiations with the court. It is unclear, although likely, that this obscurity reflects a rather subdued role of his in the administration. Ḳalifa Solṭān was to retain his post of grand vizier into the administration of Shah Ṣafi I (r. 1629-42), but not for long, as in 1631-32 he was dismissed as part of the purges that marked the onset of that ruler's effective reign. His sons, born to Safavid princesses, were blinded in the process (Moḥammad-Ma'ṣum Eṣfahāni, p. 126; Qazvini-Eṣfahāni, pp. 104-8; Afandi-Eṣfahāni, II, p. 52).

Ḳalifa Solṭān spent the remainder of Ṣafi I's administration in exile in Qom, engaged in scholarship and writing commentaries on several important texts. According to the editor of the *Dastur al-wozarā'*, he was the author of that work, which was written between 1645-46 and 1653-54 (Moreen, p. 145; for a list of his writings see Tabrizi-Modarres, II, pp. 214-15; Afandi-Eṣfahāni, II, pp. 55-56).

Ḳalifa Solṭān may have returned to Isfahan in 1638-39 (Floor, p. 454). The circumstances of his return to royal grace remain unknown, but shortly after coming back from the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) in 1645 and following the assassination of the grand vizier Mirzā "Sāru" ('Blond') Taqi later that year, he was appointed grand vizier a second time on 14 October 1645, after initially declining the post (NA, Coll. Geleynssen de Jongh 283, fol. 194). His proven administrative skills and previous experience were no doubt the determining factors in this reappointment, although it is quite possible that Shah 'Abbās II called him back into service in part with the aim of tamping down the disgruntlement about the lack of positions offered to men of religion under his predecessor (Babayan, p. 409).

Ḳalifa Solṭān's activities during his second term as grand vizier are much better documented and reveal a complex personality. Living up to his reputation as a pious man and a cleric, he began his second term with an anti-vice campaign that targeted gambling, prostitution, and wine drinking—activities that were common in coffeehouses and taverns. This campaign was mostly directed against popular forms of Sufism and did not prevent Ḳalifa Solṭān from showing (more high-minded) mystical inclinations, or from becoming one of Shah 'Abbās II's boon companions after the ruler took to drinking in 1649-50 (Matthee, 2005, p. 55; Floor, pp. 458-59). Naṣrābādi (I, p. 24) plausibly suggests that he was forced to drink by the shah. Ḳalifa Solṭān also took measures targeting Armenian Christians as part of his purifying campaign, forbidding them to sell their wares in the center of



Isfahan and urging the shah to force them to wear distinctive clothing—confirming the impression among foreigners that he was an inveterate enemy of Christians. If he harbored any ill will toward Christians, he also was interested in Christianity as a philosophical system (*Chronicle of the Carmelites* I, p. 353; Richard, II, p. 208; Chardin, IV, p. 69, IX, pp. 516-17; Foster, p. 43). This was part of his more general interest in matters of philosophy. The *shaykh-al-ḥaram* of Mecca, whom Ḳalifa Solṭān met during his Meccan pilgrimage in 1645, described him as a “man of great scholarship and perspicacity,” and someone with whom he had had “many enjoyable sessions of learned discussions” (Riazul Islam, 1970, p. 179). Ḳalifa Solṭān also presented questions concerning the philosophy of Ḡazālī to Indian *foqahāʾ* (Riazul Islam, 1979, I, p. 295).

In contrast to the low profile he kept during his first tenure as grand vizier, during his second term Ḳalifa Solṭān was actively involved in the administration of the country. He thus took a great deal of interest and initiative during the Kandahar (Qandahār) campaign against the Mughals in 1648, accompanying Shah ʿAbbās II to the city. He is also said to have held frequent public audiences for people with requests and grievances, a practice that was discontinued under his successors (NA, VOC 1224, 3 September 1657, fol. 316). He further proved to be an astute negotiator with the agents of the foreign maritime companies (Speelman, *passim*; Matthee, 1999, pp. 157-58, 161-62). Ḳalifa Solṭān has been called a spokesman for the propertied and pedigreed Persian clerical elite (Abisaab, p. 101). He owned the village of Golnābād on the road between Isfahan and Yazd (von Poser, unpaginated), and he founded an important madrasa in Qazvin (Chardin, II, pp. 389-90). In 1651-52 one of his daughters married the son of *ṣadr-al-mamālek* Mirzā Moḥammad-Mahdi (Mollā Kamāl, p. 114).

Following a 40-day illness, Ḳalifa Solṭān died on 15 Rabiʾ I 1064/5 March 1654 in his ancestral homeland of Māzandarān. He was buried in Najaf (Afandi-Eṣfahāni, II, p. 52; Foster, pp. 271-72; Šāmlu, I, pp. XX-XXI; Ḳātunābādi, p. 519). His relatives continued to occupy prominent positions in the Safavid administration long after his death. His brother Mirzā Qawām-al-Din Moḥammad thus became *ṣadr-al-mamālek* in 1661, when Mirzā Moḥammad-Mahdi was appointed grand vizier. The post of *ṣadr* remained in his family under his descendants and, indeed, until the end of the Safavid dynasty (Richard, II, p. 268; Floor, pp. 466-67).



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