



# MAJD-AL-MOLK I, MIRZĀ MOḤAMMAD KHAN SINAKI LAVĀSĀNI

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Qajar diplomat, official, and scholar.

**MAJD-AL-MOLK I, MIRZĀ MOḤAMMAD KHAN SINAKI LAVĀSĀNI** (b. Sinak, 1809; d. Tehran, 4 November 1881), Qajar diplomat, official, and scholar (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Majd-al-Molk Sinaki. Drawing by Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Moṭalleb Naqqāš-bāši in 1302/1884-85. From Nafisi’s edition of the *Resāla-ye majdiya*.

Very little information is available about Mirzā MoḤammad Khan’s early life. His paternal grandfather, Bābā Khan, had been a warlord controlling a stretch of territory extending from roughly the village of Sinak in the district of Lavāsānāt (see [LAVĀSĀN](#)), northeast of Tehran, to the vicinity of Nur district in the province of Mazandaran, bordering the territory controlled by the powerful warlords of Nuri family (see below). This was during the period of political and civil turmoil culminating in the fall of the Zand dynasty (q.v.;



1751-94) and the consolidation of power by [Āgā Moḥammad Khan Qajar](#) (q.v.; ca. 1742-97), the founder of the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925). In the armed conflict between Āgā Moḥammad Khan and the disintegrating Zand state, Bābā Khan sided with the Qajar claimant to the throne. It appears Bābā Khan's subsequent insubordination to Āgā Moḥammad Khan's successor to the Qajar throne, [Fath-'Ali Shah](#) (q.v.; r. 1797-1834), resulted in Bābā Khan's dispossession as a local warlord (Waqār, p. 10). However, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan's father, Fath-'Ali Beg Lavāsāni, was retained in Qajar service. Mirzā Moḥammad Khan's mother was a sister of Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri (see [E'TEMĀD-AL-DAWLA, ĀQĀ KHAN NURI](#)), a scion of the Nuri family of Mazandaran and the future second chief minister (*ṣadr-e a'zam*) of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96).

Mirzā Moḥammad Khan appears to have received a traditional education at home, being fond of classical Persian poetry and literature and excelling in calligraphy and eloquent prose composition (E'temād-al-Salṭana, *al-Ma' ā ter*, p. 196; Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, pp. h, v); skills he continually refined and which also proved advantageous in securing various official posts later in life. According to some later sources, he began his professional career as chief librarian of Qahramān Mirzā (d. 1835), one of the sons of crown prince 'Abbās Mirzā (q.v.; 1789-1833) in the city of Tabriz in Azarbaijan; other sources maintain it was his father, Fath-'Ali Beg, who held this post (Maḥbubi Ardakāni, in E'temād-al-Salṭana, *al-Ma' ā ter*, ed. Afšār, II, p. 485; 'Aqeli, p. 144). By 1846, at the latest, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was living in Tehran and serving as the steward (*piškār*) to Malek Jahān Kānom (1805-73), the first wife of [Moḥammad Shah](#) (q.v., r. 1834-48). He was now a high-ranking staff member in the service of Moḥammad Shah's senior and most powerful wife. Following Moḥammad Shah's death and the accession to the throne of crown prince Nāṣer-al-Din in 1848, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan accompanied Malek Jahān Kānom, now the mother of the reigning monarch and known as Maḥd-e 'Olyā III (the title meaning "Exalted Cradle"), on a pilgrimage to Mecca (Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, p. d). After this pilgrimage, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was commonly addressed as Haj Mirzā Moḥammad Khan [Sinaki].

Following the appointment of Mirzā Moḥammad Khan's maternal uncle, Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri, as chief minister in 1851, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan entered the service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see [FOREIGN AFFAIRS](#)). His first diplomatic post was that of the consul



(*kārpardāz*) in the Russian Caspian port city of *Astrakhan* (q.v.; Ḥājji Tarkān) in the Caucasus. On 3 October 1852, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was awarded a *jobba-ye terma* state cloak of honor for excellent fulfillment of his consular duties. In October of the following year, he was elevated to the post of first secretary, or first deputy, (*dabir-e mahāmm; nāyeb-e a wwal*) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer'āt*, II, pp. 117, 134; Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, pp. d, h; Bāmdād, III, pp. 287-88; Maḥbubi Ardakāni, in E'temād-al-Salṭana, *al-Ma'ā ter*, ed. Afšār, II, p. 485). As first secretary at the foreign ministry, he was dispatched in late 1853 to Tabriz, Iran's largest city at the time and the seat of the Qajar crown princes, as well as the main location for European and Ottoman consulates. The province of Azarbaijan was also a main center of European and American Christian missionary activities in Iran. In Tabriz, he was tasked with monitoring Iran's relations with its northern and western neighbors, Imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire respectively, as well as safeguarding the welfare of foreign nationals and protecting the Iranian minority Christian communities in the province (*Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya*, 2 Moḥarram 1270/5 October 1853, p. 3; *ibid.*, 12 Rabi' I 1270/21 December 1853, p. 3; *ibid.*, 10 Ramaẓān 1272/15 May 1856, pp. 2-3; *ibid.*, 15 Rajab 1273/11 March 1857, p. 2; Bāmdād, III, pp. 287-88). He remained in Tabriz until early 1859, also overseeing the availability of affordable bread during a famine in that city in 1857-58 (*Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya*, 15 Rajab 1273/11 March 1857, p. 2; 17 Rabi' I 1274/5 November 1857, p. 2; 29 Rabi' II 1274/17 December 1857, p. 3; 3 Rajab 1274/17 February 1858, p. 2; 24 Rajab 1274/10 March 1858, p. 4; 23 Ša'bān 1274/8 April 1858, p. 4; 7 Ramaẓān 1274/21 April 1858, p. 4; 6 Šawwāl 1274/20 May 1858, p. 5). In recognition of his excellence in service, in late December 1855 Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was awarded the Order of the Lion and the Sun first class (see [DECORATIONS](#)), followed in October 1856 by a royal robe of honor (see [KEL'AT](#)), and then another *jobba-ye terma* in early 1857 (*Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya*, 15 Rajab 1273/11 March 1857, p. 2; E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer'āt*, II, pp. 183, 204; *idem*, *Tār iḳ*, III, p. 245; *Sepehr*, 4, p. 349).

In January 1859, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was invited to Tehran to meet the shah and was received at the court with official pageantry (*Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya*, 29 Jomādā II 1275/3 February 1859, p. 2). In April 1859, still serving as first secretary at the foreign ministry, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was dispatched to the Ottoman Empire for monitoring the implementation of treaties and other arrangements between the two countries as well as assessing the condition, and safeguarding the



treatment, of Iranian residents and pilgrims in Ottoman Iraq. On this mission, he was accompanied by his older son Mirzā ‘Ali Khan, a secretary at the foreign ministry at the time and the future *Amin-al-Dawla* (q.v.) (*Ruz- nāma-ye waqāye‘-e ettefāqiya*, 3 Ramaẓān 1275/6 April 1859, pp. 2-3; E‘temād-al-Saltāna, *Mer‘āt*, II, p. 239; idem, *Tār ik*, III, p. 262; Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, p. h). Following his return from Ottoman Iraq, Mirzā MoḤammad Khan was granted a private audience with the shah in recognition of the significance of his mission and its satisfactory fulfillment. An announcement of the royal audience appeared in the official Tehran newspaper *Ruz- nāma-ye dawlat-e ‘aliya-ye Irān* (2 Rabi‘ II 1277/18 October 1860, p. 3).

In early spring 1862, Mirzā MoḤammad Khan was among a select group of foreign ministry and other officials granted a public audience with the shah. Around the same time, his son Mirzā ‘Ali Khan was awarded a *jobba-ye terma* in recognition of his outstanding service at the ministry, including for his excellent calligraphy (*Ruz- nāma-ye dawlat-e ‘aliya-ye Irān*, 12 Ramaẓān 1278/13 March 1862, pp. 5, 6). In July 1862, Mirzā MoḤammad Khan was awarded yet another *jobba-ye terma* for his service at the foreign ministry and was appointed minister of Pensions and Endowments (*waz ā‘ef wa awqāf*), with Mirzā ‘Ali Khan now promoted to his father’s former rank at the foreign ministry (*Ruz- nāma-ye dawlat-e ‘aliya-ye Irān*, 17 Šafar 1279/14 August 1862, p. 4; E‘temād-al-Saltāna, *Mer‘āt*, III, pp. 3, 45; Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, p. h; Ādamiyat, p. 106; Bāmdād, III, p. 288). On 2 Rabi‘ I 1279/28 August 1862, *Ruz- nāma-ye dawlat-e ‘aliya-ye Irān* (pp. 4-7) carried a detailed announcement of the new regulations, procedures, and duties of the Ministry of Pensions and Endowments, reflecting reforms at the ministry aimed at curbing corruption and misuse of funds. This was followed by similar announcements in the coming months (*Ruz- nāma-ye dawlat-e ‘aliya-ye Irān*, 3 Rajab 1279/25 December 1862, pp. 5-6; 17 Rajab 1279/8 January 1863, p. 8). Mirzā MoḤammad Khan remained at his new post until June 1865, at which date he was reappointed first secretary at the foreign ministry.

In 1867, at the shah’s request, Mirzā MoḤammad Khan wrote an account of his consular tenure at Astrakhan, with his name appearing in the manuscript as MoḤammad Khan b. Faṭḥ-‘Ali Beg (Majd-al-Molk, 1896, pp. 12, 18-19, 213, 214-15). The manuscript, titled *Mer‘āt al-arż* (Mirror of the world), commenced with a general survey of contemporary socio-political and economic world geography, including Iran, largely based on the available Persian translations of European sources. The primary subject of this manuscript, however, was



the detailed historical and geo-political and commercial description of Astrakhan up to 1851. The city was of great significance in shipping trade between the Russian Caucasus and Iran and was also the main Russian naval base on the Caspian at the time, as well as having a sizeable Iranian émigré community. The manuscript was only published posthumously in 1896, prepared by Moḥammad Šādeq ‘Aliābādi (Majd-al-Molk, 1896, p. 218; for the date of the composition of the text, its coverage of Astrakhan’s history up to 1851, and its date of publication, see *ibid.*, pp. 7, 152-53, 218).

In 1867, by which time Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was still serving as first secretary at the foreign ministry, he accompanied the shah on a pilgrimage to Mashhad as one of the many ministers and officials in the royal entourage (E‘temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer’āt*, III, p. 68; Šādeq-al-Mamālek, p. 505; Ḥakim-al-Mamālek. pp. 13). During this royal pilgrimage to Mashhad, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan received the title of Majd-al-Molk (Exalted of the Land) and was entrusted with the custodianship of the shrine of Imam Rezā (see [ĀSTĀN-E QODS-E RAŻAWI](#)) in Khorasan province (Ḥakim-al-Mamālek, pp. 223, 260, 296; E‘temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer’āt*, III, p. 89; Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, p. h). In the summer of 1868, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan was abruptly recalled to Tehran from Khorasan (Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, p. h; Bāmdād, III, p. 288; Solaymāni, p. 135). He was again reappointed first secretary at the foreign ministry and was awarded yet another order of the Lion and the Sun first class in March 1869 (E‘temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer’āt*, III, p. 108).

In 1870, Mirzā Moḥammad Khan completed a hand-written treatise titled *Kašf al-ġ arā’eb fi omur al-‘ajāyeb*, better known as *Resāla-ye majdiya*. Whereas *Mer’āt al-arz*, written in 1867 at Nāṣer-al-Din Shah’s behest, had been replete with platitudes about the shah and his administration of the country, the anonymously authored *Resāla-ye majdiya*, also notable for its elegant literary style, was an acerbic critique of many aspects of existing Iranian social, political, religious, and cultural conditions and practices, including an unequivocal denunciation of the country’s maladministration. This manuscript, initially exchanging hands among a small group of Mirzā Moḥammad Khan’s most trusted friends, soon gained considerable popularity in reformist circles, with multiplying hand-copied drafts circulating widely for years to come (Cole, pp. 43, 54-5; Sohrabi, pp. 260-62; Bahār, III, pp. 365-66; Ādamiyat, pp. 106-18; Ṭabāṭabā’i, pp. 127, 351-52, 433-92; Ārianpur, I, pp. 149-56; Mostawfi, pp. 44, 435). Future generations of Iranian reformists



consulted *Resāla-ye majdiya*, and it was extensively quoted by the constitutionalist press during the 1906-11 Iranian [Constitutional Revolution](#) (q.v.), as in the case of its ultimately incomplete, and occasionally abridged, serialized reproduction in *Majala-ye estebdād* until the paper ceased publication around the time of the anti-constitutional royalist coup of June 1908 (Gheissari, 2016, pp. 121-22, 159-60, 177-78, 191-94, 211-12, 227-30, 247-48, 264-66, 283-84, 344, 358-61, 399-400, 432-34, 451-52, 467-70, 502-5, 565-68, 584-86, 606-8; idem, 2005, pp. 364 n. 15, 371-76).

In 1858, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah had abolished the office of the chief minister after dismissing Mirzā Āqā Khan Nuri from that post. The shah instead entrusted the conduct of day-to-day affairs of government to the newly-founded Council of State (*dār al-šurā-ye dawlati*; renamed *dār al-šurā-ye kobrā* in 1871), with eleven members composed of princes, ministers, and high-ranking officials, along with, after 1859, a Consultative Assembly (*mašlahat-k āna*), composed of twenty-six officials and administrators (see [ADMINISTRATION IN IRAN vi. SAFAVID, ZAND, AND QAJAR PERIODS](#); E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer'āt al-boldān*, II, pp. 228-29, 249; Ādamiyat, pp. 53-63; Amanat, pp. 338-50, 355-56). Mirzā MoḤammad Khan was appointed a member of the Council of the State in March 1871 (E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer'āt*, III, p. 140; E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Tār iḳ*, III, p. 320; Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, p. h; Solaymāni, p. 135). In the same month, with the escalation of a nationwide famine (see [FAMINES](#)) that had broken out the previous year, Mirzā MoḤammad Khan was placed in charge of the national granary (*'amal-e jens-e mamālek-e ma ḥrusa*) (E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer'āt*, III, p. 139). By the summer of 1873, when the shah returned from his European tour, Mirzā MoḤammad Khan was again serving as minister of Pensions and Endowments (E'temād-al-Salṭana, *Mer'āt*, III, p. 186; Mostawfi, p. 129). He continued at that post until his death in 1881, albeit with a possible reassignment to another post and then a third reappointment to the ministry of Pensions and Endowments in the interim, given that according to E'temād-al-Salṭana he held that post on three occasions (E'temād-al-Salṭana, *al-Ma'ā ter*, p. 17; idem, *Mer'āt*, III, p.293 (p. 5 of appendix), 299 (p.11 of appendix); *Sāl-nāma-ye dawlat-e 'aliya-ye Irān*, n.p.; Majd-al-Molk, *Kašf*, ed. Nafisi, p. h).

Mirzā MoḤammad Khan died in 1881 and was buried at the shrine of Shah 'Abd-al-'Azim (see ['ABD-AL-AZIM AL-ḤASANI](#)) located in Ray, south of Tehran. He was survived by his wife, the sister of Pāšā Khan Amin-al-Molk, a former minister of justice, as well as by six children. These were two



sons—Mirzā ‘Ali Khan Amin-al-Dawla, the future reformist chief minister of Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah (r. 1896-1907), and Mirzā Taqi Khan Monši-e Ḥożur [Majd-Al-Molk II](#) (q.v.)—and four daughters: Ṭāvus Kānom, wife of Mirzā Ebrāhim Mo’tamed-al-Salṭana and mother of Ḥasan Woṭuq-al-Dawla and Aḥmad Qawām (Qawām-al-Salṭana); ‘Azamat-al-Dawla, wife of Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan ‘Alā’-al-Salṭana (q.v.) and mother of Ḥosayn ‘Alā’ (q.v.); Qamar Kānom, wife of Moḥammad-Bāqer Khan Šojā’-al-Salṭana, minister of war under Naşer-al-Din Shah; and Enbeşāt-al-Dawla, wife of Mirzā ‘Abd-al-Wahhāb Neẓām-al-Molk, governor of Tehran in the late 1890s (‘Aqeli, pp. 145-48).

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