



MOḤAMMAD-‘ALI KHAN ŠIRĀZI, MIRZĀ

MOḤAMMAD-‘ALI KHAN ŠIRĀZI, MIRZĀ (b. Shiraz, ca. 1194/1780 d. Tehran, 18 Rabi‘ II 1268/9 February 1852; [Figure 1](#)), special envoy of Persia to France (August 1847-December 1847), envoy for the exchange of ratifications of the Second Treaty of Erzurum (March 1848) and the fifth foreign minister of Qajar Persia (July 1851-February 1852).

Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan Širāzi’s date of birth has been given as 1186/1772 (Bamdād, III, p. 445), but he himself said that he was seventy years old in 1264/1848 (in Šāleḩi, ed., p. 410), which would mean that he was born in 1194/1780. He was a son of Moḥammad Esmā‘il, the nephew of [Mirzā Abu’l-Ḥasan Khan Ilči](#) (see also [ELČI](#)), and he served as first secretary to Abu’l-Ḥasan Khan Ilči’s diplomatic missions to Russia in 1815 and to Britain in 1818-19 (Kāvāri, p. 807; Hellot-Bellier, p. 513). The purpose of these missions was to negotiate with Russia and Britain for the return of part of the territories lost to Russia, which [Gore Ouseley](#) had promised at the time of the treaty of [Golestān](#) in October 1813. On the way to Britain, in France, Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan was so impressed with Paris that he wrote a poem in praise of the city (Nategh, p. 123). He then resided in Paris for one year and traveled a great deal in Europe (Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan, p. 78).

In 1824, after returning from Europe, Mirzā Moḥammad-‘Ali was appointed secretary to the newly established Foreign Ministry (see [FOREIGN AFFAIRS](#)) in



Tehran, under the administration of Abu’l-Ḥasan Khan Ilči, with the responsibility for hosting foreign envoys (Kāvāri, p. 807). He was promoted to deputy foreign minister (*nāyeb al-wezāra*) under Moḥammad Shah Qājār (r. 1834-48). After the death of Abu’l-Ḥasan Khan in 1845/1262, Mirzā Moḥammad-‘Ali occupied Abu’l-Ḥasan Khan’s position at the shah’s public audience (*salām*, see [COURTS AND COURTIERS vii. In the Qajar Period](#)) and received the title of *khan* from Moḥammad Shah Qājār (Hellot-Bellier, p. 514; Bāmdād, III, p. 445).

In June 1847, Mirzā Āqāsi, grand vizier of Moḥammad Shah Qājār, sent Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan as special envoy to France in order to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. Moḥammad Shah, having conferred Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan with his credentials, also bestowed on him the Order of the Lion and Sun First Class (*nešān-e šir o qoršid*; see [DECORATIONS](#)) in order to elevate his stature as the Persian special envoy to France (Nategh, p.124). A *farmān* was granted to the French envoy in Tehran, Comte Eugène de Sartiges (1809-92), in May 1847 in favor of French merchants. According to this *farmān*, French citizens enjoyed commercial privileges of the most favored nation, while reciprocal trade concessions were not intended for Persian merchants (Ādamiyat, pp. 552-53). Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan’s main task was thus to take the necessary steps in France to obtain the same privileges for Persian merchants in France as their French counterparts in Persia (Nategh, annex 18, pp. 276-77). He was also required to address the living and studying conditions of five Persian students sent to France in 1261/1845 by Mirzā Āqāsi to study under the supervision of Alix Desgranges (1793-1854) (Hellot-Bellier, p. 125; Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan, p. 86). Finally, Mirzā Āqāsi officially requested, through his envoy, the authorization required for Comte de Sartiges, who had been sent to Persia without a formal title, to be able to act as envoy extraordinary in Tehran on behalf of the French government (Nategh, annex 18, pp. 276-77).

Meanwhile, because of the Second Treaty of Erzurum (see [BOUNDARIES i. With the Ottoman Empire](#)), which had been signed by Mirzā Taqī Khan Farāhāni on 31 May 1847 (but not yet ratified), Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan was also ordered to remain in Istanbul for two weeks to negotiate some issues regarding the tribes straddling the Ottoman-Persian borders, the condition of pilgrims and merchants who traveled through Ottoman lands, and commissions to delineate the borders as soon as possible (Šāleḥi, ed., pp. 239-40).

Upon Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan’s arrival in Istanbul, the Russian and British



intermediary representatives urged him to remain longer for the exchange of the ratified treaty, which was not in his possession when he arrived in Istanbul. Under pressure from British and Russian ambassadors to Tehran, Mirzā Āqāsi sent the signed treaty to Istanbul, authorizing MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan to conduct the exchange (Şāleḫi, ed., pp. 290-91). As MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan was not supposed to remain in Istanbul for more than two weeks, however, Comte de Sartiges and his counterpart in Istanbul, François-Adolphe de Bourqueney (1799-1869), urged him not to delay in his mission to Paris (Ādamiyat, pp. 558-59; Nategh, p. 124). After a few months’ delay, MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan finally departed for France on 26 August 1847, before the royal courier brought the signed treaty from Tehran.

On 23 September 1847, MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan was summoned to an audience with King Louis-Philippe (r. 1830-48) at the Compiègne Palace in northern France, at which he presented the shah’s letter and royal gifts, including a portrait of the shah decorated with diamonds (MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan, pp. 76-77; Hellot-Bellier, p. 518). According to the instructions of Jules Richard ([Riṣār Khan](#)), a Frenchman in the service of the Persian government, MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan, during his stay in Paris, ordered a significant number of books on history, science, and literature, as well as encyclopedias, dictionaries, maps, and scientific instruments to be shipped to Persia (Hellot-Bellier, p. 520; Nategh, pp. 240-43).

Mirzā Āqāsi, under pressure from the British and Russian envoys in Tehran, repeatedly ordered MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan to return to Istanbul to finish the ratification process for the Second Treaty of Erzurum (MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan, pp. 96-97; Şāleḫi, ed., pp. 302, 331). After a four-month stay in France, MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan left Paris on 25 December 1847. Following three months of negotiations in Istanbul, he eventually signed, at his discretion, an explanatory note (*izāḥāt*) to the treaty that was supposed to fulfill Ottoman concerns regarding some provisions of the treaty, particularly relating to sovereignty over the [Shatt al-Arab](#) and its left bank, vaguely defined in Article 2 (Schofield, 2004, pp. 32-33; Ateş, p. 136). The signing of the explanatory note, which was not accepted by the Persian government, led Mirzā Ja‘far Khan Mošir-al-Dawla, the Persian delegate in the Erzurum delimitation commission in 1266/1850, to claim that MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan received a bribe of 4000 tomans, under the name of a royal gift, to approve the note as proposed by the Ottoman government (Mošir-al-Dawla, p. 40; Bāmdād, III, p. 445).

Nevertheless, MoḤammad-‘Ali Khan provided detailed reports of his



negotiations with Russian and British intermediary ambassadors in Istanbul to Mirzā Āqāsi and informed him of the fact that his refusal to sign the note would have run the risk of an Ottoman withdrawal from the treaty (Şāleḥi, ed., pp. 381-82). Furthermore, Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan warned the ambassadors that his adoption of the note was “a short-term measure to prevent the failure of negotiations” and that the recognition of the note was only due to the Persian government’s approval (Schofield, 1994, p. 79; Şāleḥi, ed., p. 382).

Under Nāṣer-al-Din Shah Qājār (r. 1848-96), Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan remained in the position of deputy foreign minister through the premiership of Mirzā Taqī Khan *Amir Kabir*, who assumed personal control of foreign affairs. In Ramaẓān 1267/July 1851, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah Qājār deposed Amir Kabir from the Foreign Ministry and appointed Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan in his place (*Waqāye‘-e ettefāqiya* 32, 14 Ḍu‘l-qa‘da 1267/9 September 1851). During his term of office, Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan was also the head of the *Dār al-fonun*. Amir Kabir himself selected Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan to be in charge of the college, and it was Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan who, in a letter to Maḥmud Khan Kalāntar dated 24 Moḥarram 1268/18 November 1851, mentioned *Dār al-fonun* for the first time (Ādamiyat, pp. 362-63). In the same letter, Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan declared that he had obtained the shah’s permission for thirty children of nobles and princes to study at the new college. Nevertheless, Moḥammad-‘Ali Khan’s office lasted for only a short period, because he died on 18 Rabi‘ II 1268/9 February 1852. His death was due to an illness that he had suffered from for some time (*Waqāye‘-e ettefāqiya* 54, 21 Rabi‘ II 1268/12 February 1852).

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