



# MOḤAMMAD NĀDER SHAH

**MOḤAMMAD NĀDER SHAH** (b. Dehra Dun, 21 Ḥamal 1262 Š./9 April 1883; d. Kabul, 17 ‘Aqrab 1312 Š./8 November 1933), King of Afghanistan, first representative of the new Dorrāni dynasty (see [AFGHANISTAN x. POLITICAL HISTORY](#)) known as the Yaḥyā-*kēl* or Moṣāḥebān.

Through his father, Sardār Moḥammad Yusof, *Moṣāḥeb*, Moḥammad Nāder belonged to the Bārakzay Moḥammadzay family of Sultan Moḥammad. The latter had been the unfortunate rival of his half-brother, the [Amir Dōst Moḥammad](#), whose descendents occupied the throne of Kabul until the uprising and the short reign of the non-Paštun Ḥabib-Allāh Kalakāni (see [BAČČA-ye SAQQĀ](#)), whom Moḥammad Nāder succeeded in 1929. The offspring of a marriage between his father and a Sadōzay woman by the name of Šaraf Solṭān, daughter of Bahādor ‘Ali Aḥmad, Moḥammad Nāder had nine consanguine siblings.

Moḥammad Nāder was born in 1883 in Dehra Dun, and set foot in Afghanistan for the first time at the age of 18 when his grandfather, Moḥammad Yaḥyā, who had been deported to India by the British (1879), was authorized to return to Afghanistan with his family (Adamec, pp. 264-65) by Amir ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān shortly before his death in 1901. The Yaḥyā-*kēl* family held an eminent position at the court of [Amir Ḥabib-Allāh](#) (1901-19). Moḥammad Nāder embarked on a successful military career and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General (*nāyeb-sālār*) in 1912, and subsequently to General (*sepah-sālār*) in 1914 (*Serāj-al-aḳbār*, II/5, 1912, p. 5a; III/21, 1914, pp. 8b-9). His success continued throughout the War of Independence, when his ability to



rally the Mas‘ud and Waziri tribes of India secured Afghan victory over the British at Thal in Waziristan in May 1919, and earned him the prestigious *nešān-e almār-e a‘lā* medal (see [ANGLO-AFGHAN WARS. iii](#); *Amān-e afgān*, II/3, 1921, pp. 1-4).

MoḤammad Nāder became the first Minister of War (November 1919) in the government formed by Amir Amān-Allāh (1919-29; see [AMĀNALLĀH](#)), and in this capacity he was in charge of the administrative reorganization (*hay‘at-e tanzimiya*) of the Mašreqi Province (1920), then that of Qaṭaḡān and Badaḡšān (Nov.1923-Jan. 1924; Koškaki, 1924). However, relations between the two men soon deteriorated. The Amir became suspicious of MoḤammad Nāder’s contacts with the border tribes, developed as a result of his position, and the Minister found Amān-Allāh’s global policy of reforms to be inappropriate and overly radical. Nāder was forced to resign in November 1923 and willingly allowed himself to be replaced. He was appointed Minister of Afghanistan in Paris (July 1924-November 1926), a position from which he later resigned, officially for health reasons.

MoḤammad Nāder withdrew to the South of France, from where he decided to return to Afghanistan when he learned of the fall of Amān-Allāh and the capture of Kabul by the Tajik Ḥabib-Allāh Kalakāni (Dalv 1307 Š./February 1929). Upon arriving in India, with the discreet help of the British, he had no difficulty mobilizing the border tribes, once again including the Mas‘ud and the Waziri. After two failed attempts, Kabul was recaptured (21 Mizān 1308 Š./13 October 1929) and sacked. MoḤammad Nāder’s troops proclaimed him King on 23 Mizān/15 October (Shāh Wali). The following year, his enthronement was legitimated by a *Lōya jerga* (9-20 September 1930), whilst the final strongholds of *Saqawi* resistance were repressed in Kohdāman in 1930 (*Ešlāḥ* I/67-70, 1930), and in Herat in 1931. Nāder Shah restored political stability and worked to rebuild the socio-economic fabric and provide the State with a legal framework by enacting a constitution. However, his policy of eliminating his opponents, and the ensuing spiral of reprisals between his entourage and the Čarḡi of Lōgar, loyal to Amān-Allāh, ultimately cost him his life after a reign of only four years. MoḤammad Nāder Shah was assassinated in the garden of the royal palace by a student from the German-language high school who was close to the Čarḡi family (Gregorian, pp. 338-39). His mausoleum stands on Tepe Maranjān hill, overlooking Kabul.

Nāder Shah’s accession to the throne of Kabul marked the end of the decade-long liberal *Amāniya* regime that is unique in the history of Afghanistan.



Afghan historiography has not yet shed light on the reign of this first Afghan ruler to come from both Afghan and Western cultures, but these four years are generally perceived as marked at once by an absolutist form of conservatism and by measured reformism.

In terms of foreign policy, Nāder Shah favored neutrality and friendly and broader diplomatic relations in order to counterbalance the rivalry between the USSR and Great Britain (Saikal, pp. 102-3). The Anglo-Afghan treaty of 1921 was renewed (May 1930) and the 1923 Trade Convention was confirmed, but relations between the British and the Afghan King actually benefited from a tacit mutual appreciation. On the other hand, there was no sympathy for the USSR, although Kabul did make the gesture of expelling the last remaining Basmachi resistance groups from Afghanistan, and signing a new treaty with Moscow declaring mutual neutrality and non-aggression (1931). Moreover, treaties of friendship and cooperation were signed with Iraq and Saudi Arabia (1932).

In accordance with his reform program (*kaṭṭ-maši*) (*Sāl-nāma*, 1931, pp. 2-4), and with the 1931 constitution (*oṣul-e asāsi*) (116 articles), Nāder Shah opted for a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament and separation of powers, as well as a judicial authority based on Islamic law. In addition, the Constitution made the Afghan monarchy hereditary (*Sāl-nāma*, 1934-35, pp. 3-16; Dupree, pp. 464-71). In practice, however, Nāder Shah did not renounce the traditional authority of the Paštun, and kept a tight reign over domestic affairs in general and the cabinet in particular, ensuring that it was a Moṣāḥebān cabinet (Shahrani, pp. 51-53).

Lacking the idealistic vision of Amān-Allāh, his modernization policy brought about gradual and selective changes. The reorganization and development particularly affected the army, the press and communications, and the bureaucratic administration (Gregorian, pp. 296-98, 311-14; *Sāl-nāma*), but the *Nāderšāhi* reign proved to be at its most innovative in the economic field, authorizing the establishment of the first Afghan bank (1932), and of import-export companies. The taxes levied on these companies provided part of the funding for the state budget (see [AFGHANISTAN xi. ADMINISTRATION](#); Gregorian, pp. 314-18).

The unity of the Moḥammadzay clan was strengthened during Nāder Shah's reign, but broke apart on his death due to rivalry between cousins. Although it did not reduce the newly restored Paštun preeminence, this rivalry was to



have a lasting effect.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

L. Adamec, *Historical and Political Who's Who of Afghanistan*, Graz, 1975, pp. 198-99.

*Amān-e Afġān* (weekly), Kabul, 1299-1307 Š./1920-29.

M. Ali, *Progressive Afghanistan*, Lahore, 1933.

M. Anis, *Bohrān wa nejāt*, Kabul, n.d.

L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton, 1973.

*Eslāh* (weekly), Kabul, 1308 Š/1929.

V. Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan. Politics of Reform and Modernization 1880-1946*, Stanford, 1969.

B. Koškaki, *Nāder Khan*, Kabul, 1931.

Idem, ed., *Rāhnomā-ye Qaṭaġān wa Badaġšān, molaġkass-e safar-nāma-ye sana 1301/1923 Š.H. – e Sepahsālār-e ġāzi sardār Moġammad Nāder Khān wazir-e ḡarbiya*, Kabul, 1924.

A. Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan. A History of Struggle and Survival*, London, 2004.

*Sāl-nāma*, Kabul, 1932-35.

*Serāj al-aġbār* (biweekly), Kabul, 1911-18.

Shāh Wali, *Yād-dāšt-hā-ye man*, 5 ed., Kabul, n. d.

M. N. Shahrani, "State Building and Social Fragmentation in Afghanistan: A Historical Perspective," in A. Banuazizi and M. Weiner, eds., *The State*,



*Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, Syracuse, 1986, pp. 23-74.