



NABIL-AL-DAWLA

NABIL-AL-DAWLA, 'ALIQOLI (Ali Kuli) KHAN (b. Kashan, ca. 1879; d. Washington, D.C., April 1966; [Figure 1](#)), Iranian diplomat and translator of Bahai scriptures. His father, Mirzā 'Abd-al-Raḥim Khan (d. ca. 1894), a member of the notable Żarrābi family of Kashan, had become a Bābi in 1866 and later a Bahai (Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, p. 67; Gail, 1991, pp. 22, 28). Mirzā 'Abd-al-Raḥim moved to Tehran in 1880, where he became counselor (*mostašār*) in the new-style police department (*naẓmiya*), hence his title [Kalāntar](#). He is the author of a history of Kashan entitled *Mer'āt al-Qāsān* (see pp. 5-8)

'Aliqoli Khan learned English and French at the Dār al-Fonun School (q.v.) and, with his older brother, Ḥosaynqoli Khan Kalāntar (later chamberlain to Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah when he was governor in Tabriz), frequented traditional Persian gymnasia (*zur-kāna*), where the latter was converted to the Bahai faith by a wrestler called Ostād Ğolām-Ḥosayn Kāši, and he in turn led 'Aliqoli Khan into the new faith in about 1895 (Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, pp. 24-67). After a period spent as a wandering Bahai darvish, 'Aliqoli Khan heard that the Bahai leader 'Abd-al-Bahā' needed Bahais who could translate for the new American co-religionists. Therefore, he left in 1899 for 'Akkā, where he served as secretary to 'Abd-al-Bahā', and then accompanied [Mirzā Abu'l-Faẓl Golpāyegāni](#) to Paris and America in 1901 as his translator (Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, pp. 97-148; Gail, 1974, pp. 351; Fāẓel Māzandarāni, p. 490). He settled in America, where he was known as Ali Kuli Khan and became secretary to the Persian minister in Washington in 1902. In 1904, he married Florence Breed, a



Bahai lady from Boston (Gail 1987, pp. 213-20).

‘Aliqoli Khan returned to Tehran in 1906/7 with his family, visiting the Bahai leader ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ on the way. On his return to Washington, he was appointed Iranian consul in Washington from 1907 (Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, pp. 220-84; Gail, 1974, p. 352; idem, 1991, pp. 1-126). He was firmly of the opinion that Persia should rely more on the United States, a country with no colonialist ambitions in Iran, rather than the European powers, for its development. In his efforts to establish economic ties between the two countries he made contacts with politicians, businessmen, industrialists, and financiers, including Henry Ford and President Woodrow Wilson (Gail, 1991, pp. 146, 148-53). During a visit to Persia in 1910, he argued against the appointment of a German to sort out the country’s finances and for the appointment of an American. On his return to America as *chargé d’affaires* with the title Nabil-al-Dawla, he was responsible for appointing William Morgan Shuster (on the recommendation of the American government) to manage Persia’s finances (Gail, 1991, pp. 72-76; Shuster, pp. 3-4; McDaniel, pp. 114-15). He was also in Washington when ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ visited that city in 1912. At the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, a world’s fair held in San Francisco in 1915, ‘Aliqoli Khan was in charge of the Persian exhibit, which consisted mainly of his personal collection of Persian art. Following this, he was in demand throughout the United States to deliver lectures on Persian art (Gail, 1991, pp. 78-85, 127-43).

After World War I, ‘Aliqoli Khan was appointed a minister in Persia’s delegation to the Paris Peace Conference (1918-20), where his knowledge of American politics and his ability to contact President Wilson and senior members of the American delegation was quite effective in advancing Persian interests. For instance, in March 1919, he hosted a dinner for senior members of the American and Persian delegations at the Ritz Hotel (Gail, 1991, pp. 157-86; *New York Times*, 8 March 1919, p. 12). Early in 1921, he was appointed minister to the Persian embassy at the Ottoman government in Istanbul, replacing Kān-Malek Sāsāni (Gail, 1991, pp. 187-93; Kān-Malek Sāsāni, pp. 293-95).

‘Aliqoli Khan was not to remain in Istanbul for long. Later that same year, Moḥammad-Ḥasan Mirzā, the crown prince, passed through Istanbul and was so impressed by ‘Aliqoli Khan’s managerial competence that he asked him to return to Persia and serve as his minister of the court (Gail, 1991, pp. 196-212; Fāẓel Māzandarāni, p. 491), but he does not seem to have ever served in that



position.

Frustrated in his attempts to bring about reforms and increasingly attacked by the clerics for being a Bahai, 'Aliqoli Khan took up the offer of becoming Persian minister to the five republics of the Caucasus at Tbilisi, where he observed the early stages of communism during 1923-24 (Gail, 1991, pp. 212-82). In 1924, after a stay with the new Bahai leader Shoghi Effendi in Haifa, the family traveled on to the United States and settled in New York. Here, 'Aliqoli Khan, no longer in Persian government service and having few financial resources, supported himself by lecturing and running a gallery of Persian art in Rockefeller Center. He turned increasingly to serving the Bahai community. He lectured on Bahai subjects frequently throughout the United States and was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of the USA in 1925-26 (Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, 1987, p. 352; Gail, 1991, pp. 282-98). His most important service as a Bahai, however, was translations of Bahai scriptures, since there were only a few good translations available at that time to the American Bahai community. He sometimes wrote under his pen-name Ishtael-ebn-Kalenter.

Florence died in 1949, while 'Aliqoli Khan was in Iran on business. After this, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he remained until his own death on 7 April 1966. He was survived by two daughters and a son. His elder daughter, Marzieh Gail (1908-93) initially helped her father with his translations and later became an independent translator of Bahai texts and a writer.

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