



RISHĀR KHAN

RISHĀR KHAN (Rišār Khan), the Persian name of Jules Richard (b. Autrey, France, 1816; d. Tehran, 11 Šawwāl 1308/20 May 1891 [Feuvrier, p. 158; Qazvini, p. 25]), a Frenchman in the service of Persian government as a language instructor at **Dār al-Fonun** College, court photographer, and translator. It has been said that he was the brother of Richard, Cardinal of Paris, but no evidence to confirm this rumor has been found (Adle and Zoka, p. 252). Little is known about his early life. He spent three years in England where he acquired some medical knowledge and learnt the English language (Wright, p. 11).

Rišār Khan left Paris for Iran on 18 July 1844 and, passing through Marseille and Istanbul, arrived in Tabriz on October 6 and in Tehran on October 29 (Rišār Khan, apud Ṭaqafī, p. 113). His objective in going to Iran is not known. Some weeks after his arrival in Tehran, he took up residence in a house where a French woman known as Madame Ḥāji ‘Abbās Golsāz also lived. Madame Golsāz came to Iran as an expert in artificial flower making, in which capacity she was hired at the royal court. In addition she was the beautician of the harem ladies and the tutor of the crown prince, Nāṣer-al-Din Mirzā, and his sister, ‘Ezzt-al-Dawla. Gradually gaining influence as an employee of the court, an interpreter, and a close confidant of the Queen Maḥd(-e) ‘Olyā, she also became close friends with Rišār Khan. In fact it was Madame Golsāz who arranged for Rišār Khan to take a silver plate photograph (daguerreotype) of the thirteen-year-old crown prince and his sister on 5 December 1844 (Ṭaqafī, apud Maḥbubi Ardakāni, I, p. 188; Eqbāl, p. 107-9; Hommaire de Hell, III, pp.



184-85). Rišār Khan was the first person to take a daguerreotype photograph in Iran (E'temād-al-Saltāna, 1984, I, pp. 130-31; Amanat, p. 77). Once his skills became known at the royal court, [Mirzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Ilči Širāzi](#), the foreign minister, took him on 9 March 1845 for an audience with Moḥammad Shah Qājār (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, p. 117). During the audience, the Shah told him that he had received as gifts two photographic apparatuses from Queen Victoria and Tsar Nicholas I, which no one knew how to operate, and asked him to put them in working order and take some photographs of him. After Rišār Khan took some photographs of the Shah and [Ḥājj Mirzā Āqāsi](#), the grand vizier, Moḥammad Shah issued an order (*farmān*) officially appointing him a government employee (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, p. 44). As a result, he decided to go to France to settle his affairs there. Moḥammad Shah gave him 700 tomans to buy various things in Paris for him, including the paper needed for making balloons (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, pp. 116-17). Rišār Khan left Tehran on 10 June 1845 and returned after over eight months on 27 January 1846, bringing with him one hundred different types of seeds for flowers and plants, including tomatoes. The king was very pleased with the purchases he had made, particularly the materials for making balloons (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, pp. 44-46). Moḥammad Shah summoned Rišār Khan to the Niāvarān palace on 21 July 1846 and ordered him to send up balloons in the air. It was a successful demonstration and he was rewarded by the king with a cashmere shawl (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, pp. 46-47). This event has been wrongly attributed by Abbas Amanat (p. 77) to the reign of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah. Rišār Khan continued to photograph Moḥammad Shah, the princes, and the members of the *andarun* almost daily and received gifts of money and cashmere shawls from the shah (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, pp. 47-48). He went on a second European trip in March 1848, but the purpose of the trip is not documented (Hytier, p. 83, n. 110).

Moḥammad Shah died on 5 September 1848 and was succeeded by his son, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah. In a letter to an unidentified friend, dated 29 October 1849, Rišār Khan wrote that Nāṣer-al-Din Shah was looking for someone to organize a display of lantern kites or fire balloons and also to operate a miniature steam-boat brought from Europe. Rišār Khan succeeded in doing both while others had failed. The successful demonstration of the steamboat, which took place in front of the Golestān Palace, aroused the interest of both the king and the grand vizier [Mirzā Taqi Khan Amir\(-e\) Kabir](#) in steam power and the possibility of bringing it to Iran (Amanat, p. 77). As a reward for the successful display, he was given a shawl and thirty tomans. In the same letter Rišār Khan

states that these small achievements were providential for him when Amir Kabir initiated a period of financial austerity and began to cut back the list of government employees. Seeing Rišār Khan's name on the list, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah insisted that he should stay on because "he is useful to us" (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, pp. 89-90).

Rišār Khan was one of the first professors of the Dār al-Fonun in 1851 (E'temād al-Saltana, 1984, I, p. 403). In reply to a letter asking for his qualifications, he lists, aside from languages and photography, a wide variety of expertise ranging from geography to physics, mathematics, chemistry, and many others. It is not a modest letter (Ādamiyat, p. 362). He also worked for the Ministry of Publications and Translations (Wezārat-e enṭeb'ātāt wa Dār-al-tarjama; E'temād-al-Saltana, 1984, I p. 409) and taught French at the royal court. At least two princes, 'Abd-al-Ṣamad Mirzā 'Ezz-al-Dawla and Kāmran Mirzā Nāyeb-al-Saltana, are known to have been tutored by him (Mo'ayyer-al-Mamālek, pp. 19, 54). In 1852 Amir Kabir commissioned him to go to Kurdistan and study the mines there (Rišār Khan, apud Taqafi, p. 83; Ādamiyat, p. 389). The result of his research was stated in a pamphlet called "Tafšil-e m'āden-i ke Mosiyu Rišār Farānsa kod rafta wa sarkaši karda" and is attached to an unpublished manuscript by Mirzā Moḥammad-Ṣāleḥ Tabrizi, entitled *Ketābča-ye m'āden-e Irān*, which was commissioned in the reign of Moḥammad Shah (r. 1834-48) and finished in the early reign of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96; Ādamiyat, p. 389). The above trip or another one to Kurdistan led to a scandal; a Kurdish girl dressed as a boy was discovered at Rišār Khan's house in Tehran. She claimed that Rišār Khan had kidnapped her, whereas Rišār Khan claimed that he had bought her from her family. The authorities, including the head of police, the French chargé d'affaires, [Comte de Gobineau](#), the prime minister, and the shah himself all became involved. To avoid being expelled from Iran, Rišār Khan took sanctuary (*bast*, in the shrine of 'Abd-al-'Aẓim in Rey (April 1857), converted to Shi'ism, adopted the name Reżā, and petitioned for Iranian citizenship. The petition was accepted against the wishes of Comte de Gobineau (Gobineau, 1929, pp. 177-78; idem, 1961, pp. 700-8, 736-741; Hytier, pp. 83-87, 93-94; Wills, pp. 36-37). The scandal does not appear to have affected Rišār Khan's position or career in Iran, as he was honored in 1871 by Nāṣer-al-Din Shah with the title of khan (Bāmdād, II, p. 44; Dokā', p. 7).

Rišār Khan became a prominent figure in the community of foreigners in Iran. He served as the caretaker of the premises of the British mission during the



break of Anglo-Persian diplomatic relations in 1856-57 (Wright, p. 119, n.). He also served Nāṣer-al-Din Shah as his personal interpreter and translator, and accompanied him in this capacity on his first visit to England in 1873 (Wright, p. 122). According to whether it was reported by a detractor or an observer, Rišār Khan was a dealer of all things or a collector of antiques (Hytier, p. 87; Wills, p. 37; Helfgott, p. 175). In 1875, both through Robert Murdock Smith and directly himself, he sold to the then South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum, approximately two thousand items of Persian artifacts, including carpets, paintings, manuscripts, painted lacquer, and ceramics for approximately the sum of £1,778 (Wright, p. 119; Melikian-Chirvani, p. 444; Helfgott, p. 175). In 1889, he sold more objects to the museums of South Kensington, Edinburgh, and Dublin. The latter collection may have been the one which he displayed at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889, and which Nāṣer-al-Din Shah mentions in the account of his third European trip (Nāṣer-al-Din Shah, II, p. 203).

Rišār Khan seems to be the one who translated the second volume of *Le mémorial de Sainte- Hélène* by Comte de Las Cases as *Tariḳ-e St. Helen*, which was finalized with the Persian phraseology of Mirzā Šafi‘ (Ādamiyat, p. 382; Mošār, I, cols. 713-14). According to Faridun Ādamiyat, Rišār Khan also wrote for Nāṣer-al-Din Shah the life of Napoleon that included the Napoleonic Code as well as another book, titled *Qawā‘ed-e ḥokmrāni-e mamlakat-e Farānsa* (Rules for the governance in France; Ādamiyat, p. 380). It is not clear whether these are two titles of the same book or of different ones. According to Jacob Polak, Rišār Khan was ordered by Nāṣer-al-Din Shah to translate the history of Russia by Baron Korff (Polak, tr., p. 193). There are, however, two books that he definitely either translated or authored himself. They are *Gerāmer-e farānsa ba fārsi* (French grammar in Persian; Tehran, 1903), and *Naḥw o šarf-e jadid* (New grammar and syntax [of French]; Tehran, 1913; Mošār, II, cols., 2711, 3255).

In many ways Rišār Khan led a brilliant career at the Qajar court, was a major cultural influence, and made himself indispensable to the shah and the establishment. Unfortunately, his early daguerreotype photographs are lost. Aside from written accounts, the only visible evidence in existence of those photographs are the three portraits painted from his daguerreotypes by Mirzā Moḥammad Khan Kamāl-al-Molk Ġaffari, one of Moḥammad Shah and two of the young Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (Dokā’, p. 7).

Rišār Khan established a dynasty in Iran through his descendants most of

whom stayed in the country and for all intents and purposes became Iranians. He was married three times, first to a French lady who bore him no children. He had six children by his second wife Latchine Khanum and the third wife Koršid Begom Kānom (private communication by Nader Richard, grandson of Jules Richard). His oldest son Yusof Khan Mo'adeb-al-Molk followed in his father's footsteps and became a professor at the Dār al-Fonun (Bāmdād, II, pp. 44-45). Rišār Khan died in Tehran in 1891 and was buried near the Ābanbār-e Qāsem Khan on the road from Tehran to the shrine of 'Abd al-'Azim (Qazvini, p. 25; Bāmdād, II, p. 44; Maḥbubi Ardakāni, I, pp. 243-44; Doka', p. 7).

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