



## WAKIL-AL-RA'ĀYĀ

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**WAKIL-AL-RA'ĀYĀ**, well known regional title assumed by [Karim Khan Zand](#) (r. 1164-93/1751-79) after he established himself at Shiraz in 1179/1765. It is recorded in variants *wakil-al-ra'īya*, *wakil-e ra'iat*, and *wakil-al-ḳalā'eq*, all meaning “deputy of the people,” and marked a significant change of polarity in the wording of Karim Khan’s title from *wakil-al-dowla* (viceroy; Rostam-al-Ḥokamā’, p. 333; Donboli, II, p. 31; *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, I, p. 664; Perry, 1979, pp. 215-17).

The formula was not an *ad hoc* invention, but denoted an established office, that of a provincial magistrate, appointed by the ruler to promote harmony among the social classes and to investigate injustice, especially corruption or extortion by government officials. The term is first attested under the Safavids, in two manuals of administration, as an ex-officio post of the *kalāntar* (mayor) of the capital city of Isfahan (Minorsky, fols. 77b-78a, p. 82; Dānešpažuh, pp. 421-23; Lambton, p. 207, citing Du Mans, Le Brun, and Tavernier). The *wakil-al-ra'āyā* was thenceforth attested as an independent official, appointed by decree of the ruler, in a dozen of the provincial centers of Persia from at least the later Safavid era until the twilight of Qajar rule (approx. 1122-1328/1710–1910).

Thus, both a *kalāntar* and a separate *wakil-al-ra'āyā* were among eight administrative officials appointed in Isfahan by Karim Khan in 1165/1752, before he is reported to have assumed this title for himself (Rostam al-Ḥokamā’, p. 307). In other instances, in 1194/1780 [‘Ali-Morād Khan Zand](#) (r. 1781-85) issued a patent appointing one Āqā Moḥammad-Mahdi as *wakil-al-*



*ra'āyā* of Qom, with a fixed salary, stipulating that the governor and other civic officials, the *kalāntar*, and *kadkodāyān* (ward aldermen, see [KADKODĀ](#)), should recognize him as sole and autonomous *wakil* (*wakil be'l-esteqlāl wa'l-enferād*; Moširi, p. 192). This same formula is found in the letters patent appointing Mirzā Moḥammad-Ja'far as *wakil* of Tabriz in 1314/1896; the other functionaries, the nobles, and the subjects (*ra'āyā*) are exhorted to defer to his seal and signature and to heed his recommendations, “which are to the advantage of the state.” He himself is urged to devote himself to eliminating inequity between partners and oppression of the peasantry (Nāder Mirzā Qājār, pp. 235-36).

Mirzā Kāẓem of Tabriz (appointed *wakil-al-ra'āyā* in 1280/1863) figures in an anecdote which illustrates this official in action. During a riot in which several residences were looted, a merchant lost a wallet full of confidential documents. Someone reported to the Wakil that he had seen one of the looters of the merchant's house hide some loot at his brother-in-law's home. The Wakil sent his bailiffs (*farrāšān*), recovered the wallet from the miscreant's sister, and dismissed her husband (who was not involved in the theft) with a small reward (Nāder Mirzā Qājār, p. 200).

As a local magistrate, the *wakil-al-ra'āyā* in Qajar times was necessarily involved in local, and occasionally, national politics; e.g., Mirzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, *wakil-al-ra'āyā* of Kāšān, played a part in the struggle for succession after the death of [Fath-'Ali Shah](#) in 1250/1834 (Narāqi, pp. 248-49).

On the eve of the [Constitutional Revolution](#) in 1906, *wokalā'-al-ra'āyā* in cities all over Persia participated in the popular movement, one such being the *wakil-al-ra'āyā* of Kermānšāh (Zahir-al-Dowla, p. 43). Some were elected to the new parliament (*majles*). The first, and best-known, of these was [Ḥāji Shaikh \(Moḥammad\) Taqi "Irāni,"](#) the *wakil-al-ra'āyā* of Hamadān, who lived up to his remit as spokesman for the oppressed, in particular by proposing (unsuccessfully) that women be enfranchised (Browne, p. 131; *The Times*, 22 August 1911, p. 3 and 28 August 1911, p. 3; Afary, pp. 73, 76-77). He was joined by Mirzā Moḥsen of Jahrom, from a long line of *wakils*, whose son, Ḥosām-al-Din, adopted the surname Wakilpur and served in the 17th Majles (1952-53). A deputy from Mahābād in the 6th to the 12th Majles (1926-1941) was likewise the son of a *wakil-al-ra'āyā*. The early parliamentary history of Persia records a dozen names such as Wakil, Wakili, and Mo'in-al-Ra'āyā, who were most likely *wokalā'-al-ra'āyā* or their progeny (Šajī'i, pp. 293, 306, 320, 338, 343, 368, 378). The transition from *wakil-e ra'āyā* (people's deputy) to *wakil-e majles*

(parliamentary deputy, the term that preceded the modern *namāyanda-ye majles*, which is not recorded before 1925) was so natural as to go unnoticed. The equation was in fact registered as early as 1230/1815, when an Iranian visitor to London glossed the House of Commons in Persian as *kāna-ye wakil-al-ra'āyā* (distinct from *kāna-ye kawānin*, the House of Lords), and referred to an individual Member of Parliament as *wakil-al-ra'āyā* (Širāzi, pp. 17-18, 323).

It has been argued that the post originated in that of a Sasanian official, the *yātakgōw dātwar-ē drigōšān* or, as transcribed in more recent studies, *driyōšān-jādaggōw ud dādvar* (advocate-judge of the poor) attested in fourteen provinces (*šahr*) from Mesopotamia to Khorasan (de Menasce, pp. 282-87; Gyselen, pp. 43-64, map on p. 91; see also Perry, 1978, p. 205; Idem, 2007, pp. 48-50). The origin of the Arabicate phrase *wakil-al-ra'īya* can be seen as the nominalization of a significant verb phrase in a political testament of the year 286/821, attributed to the first independent Iranian dynast in 'Abbasid Khorasan, Abu'l-Ṭayyeb Ṭāherī b. al-Ḥosayn Dūu'l-Yaminayn (r. 821-22); in this he instructs his son and successor designate, 'Abd-Allāh (r. 828-45): "Appoint as agents [*wakkil*] in this work of seeking out the oppressed, reliable people from among your subjects [*min ra'iyatika*]" (Bosworth, p. 39). Subsequent urban officials such as the Saljuq *ra'īs*, the Āq-qoyunlu *parvānači-e 'ajaza wa masākin* ('secretary of the powerless and indigent'), and eventually the *kalāntar*, may be seen as continuing this tradition (Lambton, pp. 383, 387; Woods, pp. 122, 267; Perry, 1978, p. 208).

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