
This is a collection of papers that focus on one of the more interesting events in Iranian history. Divided into five parts with twenty-two chapters, the volume is comprised by scholars from across the world who attended a conference held on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution at Oxford University from July 30-August 2, 2006. Joanna de Groot, in her piece on historiography, explains that investigators themselves (of any discipline) cannot be divorced from their research, from the events and people they are investigating, as they themselves make choices on whom to research and what accounts to use (pp. 19-26). It seems to this end that, from a general overview of methodology to a discussion of specific proceedings and historical figures, the authors address several current questions related to the Constitutional Revolution that allow for the “open[ing] up [of] new avenues of interpretation” (p. xxi).

Of the events and figures discussed, several themes appear to reoccur that make this particular work noteworthy: the connection of Iran with other countries, the “Iranianness” of the Revolution, and the similarities with the 2009 Iranian elections. As the Constitutional Revolution happened during an age of world transformation and modernisation where uprisings were common, no one should be surprised that this period affected Iranian thought. However, this work does what few have done well: show that the interaction and influence of other countries on Iran was reciprocated—Iranians also impacted and/or supported other nations during this time. Iranians were encouraged by Irish reformers, collaborated (briefly) with Ottoman constitutionalists, and inspired Chinese revolutionaries. The Iranians also associated with those in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As one writer reminds the readership, Persian was the *lingua franca* of this area among the learned, and Iran, with its rich cultural and historical lineage, allowed for the discussion and adaptation of ideas (p. 355).

Much of *Iran’s Constitutional Revolution* is devoted to the internal nature of the Revolution and the effects it had on Iranian society. According to Stephanie Cronin, the Revolution helped to transform Iran’s modern history as it created important institutions and developed a

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means for popular politics (p. 83). During this period, merchants began
to become their own class, representative politics started with limited
suffrage, and municipalities and civic responsibilities grew. In short, the
Revolution seemed to be “an Iranian manifestation of an international
trend” (p. 97) that paved the way for modernisation. The inclusion of
nomadic and pastoral tribes, seen with the Bakhtiaris, into greater Ira-
nian society shows some of the acute struggles in the development of a
new paradigm into an established system; in the Bakhtiaris’ case, the
tension of balancing one’s ethnic identity with gaining representation
in the greater Iranian government.²

Notwithstanding Iran’s impact on other countries, some of the
authors address the weight of traditional powers (Britain and Russia in
particular), mention the influence of world thought (the Enlightenment
and social democracy), and explain the significance of the more known
revolutions (Turkey, for example) on Iran. Mangol Bayat’s interpreta-
tion of the importance of Freemasonry on Iran and Iago Gocheleishvili’s
analysis of Georgia’s involvement with Iran, add other perspectives that
help the reader’s understanding of the Revolution. While Islam has been
the predominant religion in Iran for hundreds of years, Bayat argues
that Freemasonry attracted not only intellectuals from across the
world, but from Iran as well. He maintains Freemasonry was an import-
ant bridge between the intelligentsia in the West and Iran, and Iran’s
modernisation. Its universalistic charm of religious tolerance seemed to
captivate Iranian intellectuals who shared with their European
counterparts the humanist value of faith in reason (p. 175). Bayat states
clearly the religion’s impact on the period: “It would be no exaggeration
to state that Freemasonry was one of the most important agents of
modernisation in the Middle East, serving not only the interests of
colonial powers but also those of the rising reform-minded regional el-
itês, which did not necessarily coincide” (p. 176). Regarding Go-
cheleishvili’s article, since Georgian source material on the Revolution
has not been examined thoroughly, and much of it has not been com-
piled or been translated into English (p. 51), a piece examining Georgian
involvement during this time is helpful. Aside from mentioning the
main sources that show the interaction of many different types of peo-
ple, the author argues that Transcauscians were more radical in their
thought than Iranians, and Armenians assisted greatly in prolonging
the Tabriz rebellion and instigating the Rasht invasion (pp. 48-59). Un-

² The article also challenges historiography that claims the revolution solely was
a byproduct of urban nationalism; many tribes, the Bakhtiari being one of the most
well known, participated in the process (pp. 131, 142).