



The
PERSIANS
ANCIENT, MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN IRAN
HOMA KATOUZIAN

The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran

Homayon Katouzian , Homayon Katouzian

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In recent years, Iran has gained attention mostly for negative reasons—its authoritarian religious government, disputed nuclear program, and controversial role in the Middle East—but there is much more to the story of this ancient land than can be gleaned from the news. This authoritative and comprehensive history of Iran, written by Homa Katouzian, an acclaimed expert, covers the entire history of the area from the ancient Persian Empire to today's Iranian state. Writing from an Iranian rather than a European perspective, Katouzian integrates the significant cultural and literary history of Iran with its political and social history. Some of the greatest poets of human history wrote in Persian—among them Rumi, Omar Khayyam, and Saadi—and Katouzian discusses and occasionally quotes their work. In his thoughtful analysis of Iranian society, Katouzian argues that the absolute and arbitrary power traditionally enjoyed by Persian/Iranian rulers has resulted in an unstable society where fear and short-term thinking dominate. A magisterial history, this book also serves as an excellent background to the role of Iran in the contemporary world.

The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran Details

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Zebardast Zebardast says

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Stephen says

Come, let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings. It'll take a while, because there's been a lot of them. The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern Iran is a sweeping political history of Persia, and of the modern Islamic Republic of Iran. The author quotes a Persian proverb which asks -- six months from now, who alive? Who dead? -- and argues that Persian history is established proof of the thin line between arbitrary authority and chaos. While technically a survey, its density and focus on a list of rulers rather than the general trends within Persian history makes it a formidable challenge to the beginning student.

The Persians is largely modern, reaching the 20th century in less than two hundred pages. What follows beforehand is essentially a long list of men killing men. It's nearly biblical -- just replace "begat" with "who was killed by", and you'll get an idea. Oh, there's some variety; sometimes the potentates settle for blinding one another instead of killing, which does get passé, and some Turkic and Mongolian fellows are offed, too. Although Persia looms in the background of western history, invading Greece and lopping off Roman consuls' heads, even marching on Jerusalem, those episodes of strength seem to be the exception rather than the rule. The tediously recorded butchery may actually be intentional, for the author's main contention is that arbitrary tyrants have been the norm of Persian history, and that not until the 20th century has any work been put into creating a state beyond the will of one man, in forming a civil society that checks the ambitions of a solitary tyrant.

Even once the text moves to the 20th century and becomes more fulsomely detailed and varied, it's still a little odd in what it dwells on. The author mentions, for instance, that the 1953 coup has been studied in detail, and so...he bypasses it. If you didn't know that coup was executed by Britain and America to shore up their client-king's absolute authority over the the Iranian people, too bad. If you're in the dark, you're staying there, because one minute Mossadegh is in power and the next he's in prison. Trends within Iran which bear significant fruit, like the development of the Shiite clergy, are barely present, or are like the poetry buried under the mounds of executed kings.

That's not to say there isn't material of interest in here. I didn't realize that Alexander the Great is actually claimed by the Persians as one of their own, a half-Persian lord who appears in the Shahnameh, a massive work of legendary history. The Great War and World War 2 take on a different light from Iranian eyes: because Britain and Russia spent the late 19th and early 20th century playing tug-of-war with an increasingly frayed Iran, Iranians admired and sympathized with the Germans in both conflicts. The closer the author draws toward the present day, the more communicative he is about Iranian culture in general: in the final hundred pages there is a good section on the evolving role of women in Iranian society, which -- while not as good during the Shah's forced modernization -- is not as bad as it was in the early 1980s.

While there's no shortage of useful information to be mined here, beginners should probably look for

something less mountainous and less dry.

Related:

Iran and the United States, Hossein Mousavian

<http://thisweekatthelibrary.blogspot....>

The War of the Three Gods: Romans, Persians, and the Rise of Islam, Peter Crawford

<http://thisweekatthelibrary.blogspot....>

Sanaz says

Masoud says

<http://download1.libgen.io/ads.php?md...>

Soha Ahangarian says

Hamid says

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Maaziyar Golriz says

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Nafise says

Mohammad Alijani Baee says

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Eric Randolph says

More of a textbook than a yarn, it's a little hard to stay interested in the long list of fratricidal kings in the first chunk. Flows better in the later parts with some nice details. There's a decent through-line about the Persian tendency to stubborn short termism and the persistance of arbitrary rule that just about holds water.

Hamidreza Mohammadi says

Totally unbiased...

Alireza Amrollahi says

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Raheleh Abbasinejad says

It is an eloquent and easy-to-read history text, suitable for those who want to get a sense of the socio-political history of Iran, but definitely not a thorough book. I read it as a required textbook for an Iranian Literature course and really enjoyed it as a start point to better understand the contexts, upon which the novels such as The Blind Owl was written. Though, in my point of view, the book was not convincing enough. His claims lacked references, in some parts, and needed more pieces of evidence. Unfortunately, I did not finish all the chapters (mostly read those about the years prior to Reza Khan), and hopefully will finish the last chapters in the near future.

Ali Amiri says

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